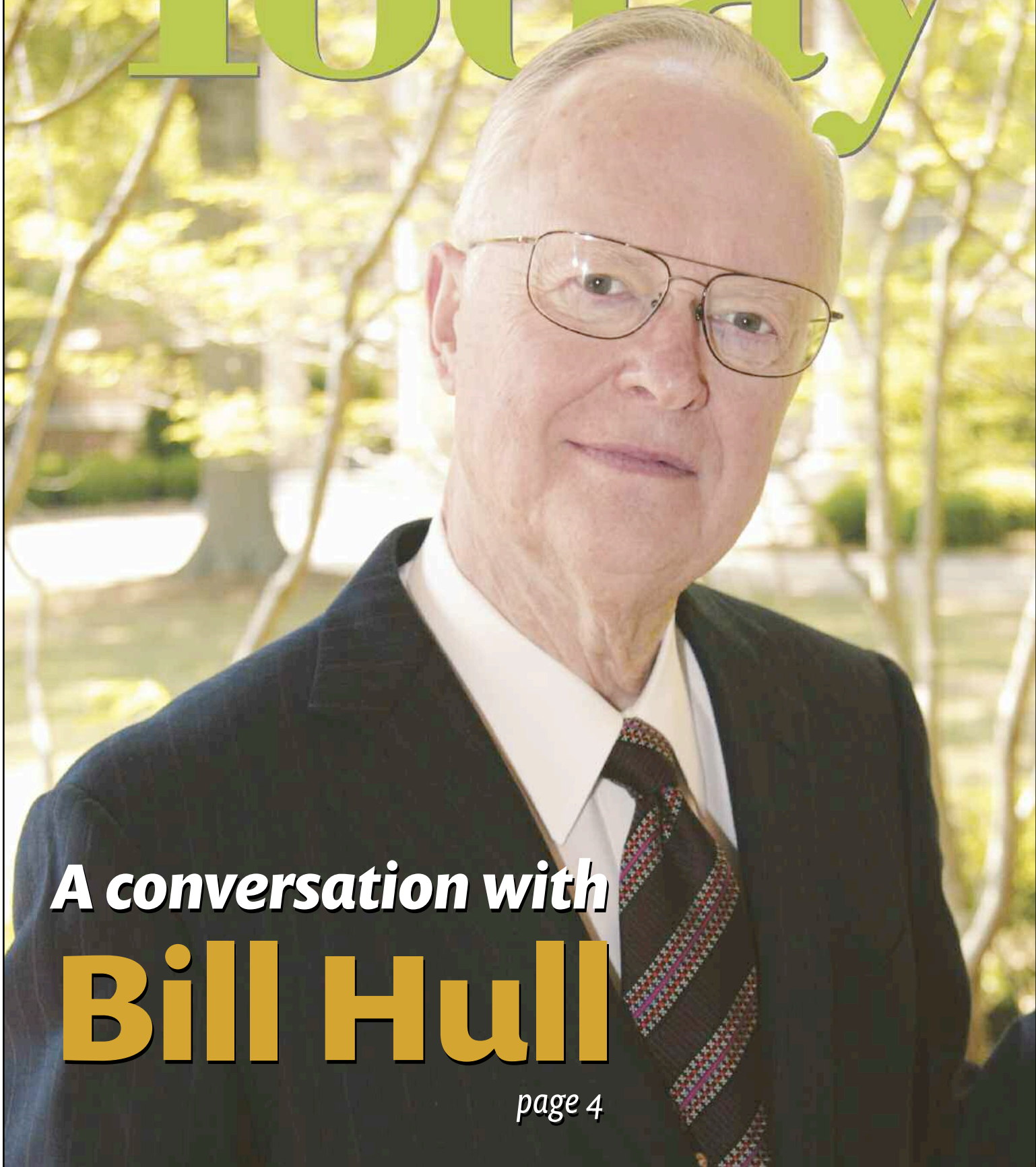


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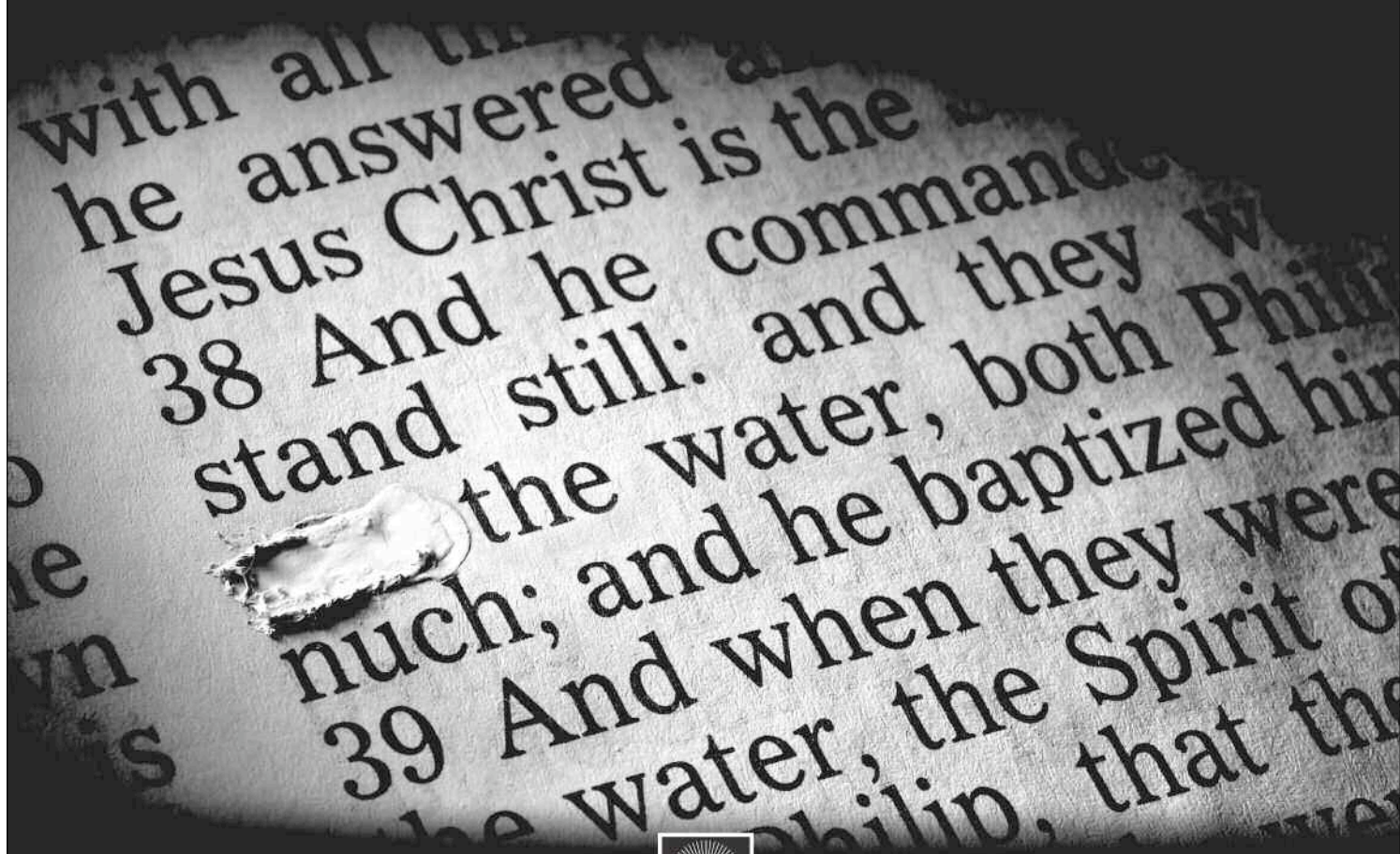


A conversation with

Bill Hull

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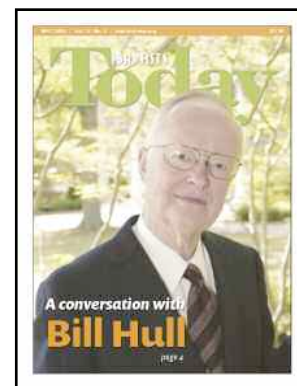
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'Why are Baptists always trying to save people?'

By Daniel Vestal



Cover photo of Dr. Bill Hull provided by Samford University.

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welcome

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A conversation with Bill Hull

One of Baptists' brightest minds, William E. (Bill) Hull is research professor at Samford University and theologian in residence at Mountain Brook Baptist Church in Birmingham.

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — Dr. Hull had a long career at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary as New Testament professor, department chair and dean of the School of Theology. At Samford he served as provost (1987-1996) and university professor (1987-2000) before assuming his current role.

His pastoral ministry includes serving the First Baptist Church of Shreveport, La., from 1975-1987. He has given numerous lectures and has preached at many Baptist gatherings.

His extensive writings include the books, *Strategic Preaching: The Role of the Pulpit in Pastoral Leadership* (Chalice, 2006) and *Harbingers of Hope: Claiming God's Promise in Today's World* (Samford, 2007), and the booklet, *The Meaning of the Baptist Experience* (Baptist History and Heritage Society, 2007).

In October 2008, Dr. Hull preached a sermon at Mountain Brook Baptist Church titled, "The Darkness that is Light," in which he reflected on his diagnosis with ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease). Video and text copies of the sermon are available at www.fbchsv.org.

He and his wife, Wylodine, have two children: David Hull, pastor of First Baptist Church of Huntsville, Ala., and Susan Hull Walker, a minister and master weaver in Charleston, S.C.

In mid-January, *Baptists Today* editor John Pierce visited with Dr. Hull in his Birmingham home. This conversation is adapted from that interview.

BT: You have been able to balance theological scholarship and practical ministry better than most. How and why?

WEH: I've done it by putting myself under the discipline of dual assignments. That is, since 1955 I have had both an academic responsibility — teaching or administrative — and a congregational responsibility.



As a young instructor, I was pastor in New Castle, Ky., and teaching at Southern [Baptist Theological Seminary]. And then, for my many years at Southern, I was out every weekend in a church.

Then in Shreveport, when I was full time in a church, I was an adjunct professor at LSU — both at the med school and the other. Then I'd go to Southern and teach in their [January] term.

And at Samford I have been a university professor and research professor and theologian in residence — which is the teaching minister — at Mountain Brook Baptist Church.

So every week I would turn something into either sermon or teaching, or take a sermon idea and dig into its academic roots. That's the way I've lived for 50 years. It almost makes you bi-vocational — or to have dual-responsibility.

I think one of the great problems of my generation was that religion began to go in its academic expression away from congregational relevance. The guilds, the Society of Biblical Literature, in order to make the Jewish members feel at home and the Buddhist members,

pretty much ruled out the kind of paper that sharpens the personal relevance of a biblical passage. You could talk [only] about it historically and critically.

And the American Academy of Religion just became avowedly secular in the sense that the papers were to be non-partisan. So I felt the scholars reading the journals and going to the meetings — it was hard not to fall into that game plan.

[The guilds] determine whose stuff gets published. That's how you get tenure. They determine who gets to read a paper at the annual meeting and who gets invited to do lectures. There is a power structure behind this.

So I wanted to build a bridge between [academics and congregations] because other people were chopping down the bridge.

One other thing, the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) moved from the B.D. to M.Div. and then moved to launch the D.Min. In both of these cases, they tried to emphasize the addition of congregational leadership.

The B.D. was a British degree. You had this European tradition where you were born into the church. That doesn't work in this country. We have to get our own every generation. We're always one generation from dying.

I worked very hard on that when I was dean and provost at Southern. And I saw the tremendous pressure on faculty to so specialize.

I had some [professors] say, "Dean, I know all about the Hebrew language or archaeology or the medieval church, but I don't know how to guide a D.Min. student." Some of them had never been pastors because they had concentrated so much.

So I worked on what I thought was the greatest single issue. That was, how to make good Christian scholarship relevant to good practice.

The ATS called it: “To integrate the knowledge of theology with the practice of ministry.” So that became my theme song.

BT: That leads into — and maybe partially answers — my next question. You have witnessed and participated in various shifts in Southern Baptist higher education and theological education. Will you identify and evaluate some of them?

WEH: I’ll divide my answer into colleges/universities and seminaries. The seminaries were always Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) related, and the colleges were state convention related. They had different historical origins.

Clearly the SBC seminaries have been profoundly affected by the so-called SBC controversy — which meant that ideological issues and the like came to have a very dominant effect. I happen to be writing on that, and what that has shown is the enormous diversity within Baptist life.

For example, in the mid-’80s, Southern Seminary had a golden age. Enrollment soared to 3,500. It had been about 1,500-2,000. Faculty soared up to almost 80. Endowment soared.

By every measure, people said the moderate understanding of religion is relevant. Students wanted to study that way. It was Camelot for those people.

But by the last few years, you have a very different group — sometime called conservatives or fundamentalists or whatever. Now they are flourishing.

Counting the extensions, they’ve got 4,400 people at Southern and are raising money right and left. They’ve got all kind of publications to their credit.

Moderates used to say, “These fundies are just a fringe element out here on the corner; we don’t need to pay any attention to them. That’s like Bob Jones and Tennessee Temple [universities]. We’ve always had that — it will go away.”

Obviously, it didn’t go away. People like Jerry Falwell shrewdly politicized it to make it a juggernaut.

Now on that side they want to say, “The moderates were just a bunch of liberals. They are going to die. There’s nothing to it.”

But in Baptist life there has been an

enormously strong moderate movement. When I go to non-Baptist churches, for example, John Claypool used to have me at St. Luke’s [Episcopal Church] right up the street here.

When I’d go for a Wednesday series or something, I’d say, “OK, let’s see the alumni club. All you former Baptists raise your hands.”

It would be a third of the people. That was partly John’s attraction. But good Baptists are seated at Presbyterian, Episcopal, Lutheran and other churches all over — with moderates who didn’t find the kind of Baptist church they were looking for.

So the real question in the seminaries is the one [James P.] Boyce (1827-1888) raised in his original manifesto to start [Southern] Baptist seminaries: How do you teach in such a polarized and diverse constituency?

In his day, the problem was that on the eastern seaboard you had “gentleman theologians” — as Brooks Hollifield called them — and you had people who wanted to study at Princeton or Andover. Then, west of Nashville you had Landmarkers who were hostile toward the coastal people. And Boyce proposed learning to do it together.

So the great issue in seminary education has been: Are we going to go toward the strongly academic, scholarly Ph.D. and leave out the others, or are we going strongly toward the evangelistic and spiritual and all of that and leave out moderates?

So I have seen the seminaries be torn apart by the diversity. Some of it is geographical, regional. Some of it is ideological. Some of it is theological.

Now the colleges were better able to do this — to meet diversity — partly because their curriculum is so much more diverse. They don’t just major on religious themes. They teach law and nursing and pharmacy and music and on and on.

Their trustees are mainly laypeople who know the diverse world and the give-and-take of hostile takeovers. They [some Baptist colleges] have been able to roll with the punches, to be more independent and to not become captive to an ideological persuasion.

Therefore, [many] have remained almost unchanged. I’d say, open and broad, but there are plenty of strong conservatives in the student body and on the faculties of these

schools. But they don’t make it a matter that God is on their side.

I think one of the great changes that hasn’t been recognized is ... our [historic Southern Baptist colleges and universities] have grown more than any other facet of our activity. Now they are rated tops in *U.S. News and World Report* — you’d find lots of them, Furman, Wake Forest, Richmond, Stetson, Samford, Mercer right at the top in their regions and, in Wake Forest’s case, nationally.

They are one of our hopes for the future, partly because campuses have been so secularized that to offer an environment where at least faith has a chance to flourish is a precious asset that many parents are willing to pay the difference to secure for their children.

Now a [Samford] kid can get in his car and drive down the road to the honky-tonk and get drunk. But he’ll be swimming against the Samford stream if he does it. Whereas, binge drinking in most secular schools is epidemic.

[Many Baptist] colleges have been buffeted by the tension in the denomination, but have done pretty well. The seminaries are our problem children right now.

BT: From your perspective as a New Testament scholar, what do we seem to miss or misunderstand about Jesus?

WEH: That’s an intriguing question. I think until recently we failed to understand how radically he addressed the burning political issue of his day, which was: “Should religious passion be harnessed to fight a live war with Rome over God?”

The Jews were clearly bent on that. The Maccabees had started it. In other words, they had sanctified war as a holy war — driving out the Seleucids.

In Jesus’ time during the Roman occupation, the Zealots were neo-Maccabean. Jesus came along and said, “We don’t kill them. God’s house is big enough for all of them.”

And he used very clear metaphors — not only in his Gospel to describe servanthood but in what he said about Roman centurions and the like. He essentially picked the worst scab in the life of his day by offering free grace, by universalizing his message of unlimited grace and forgiveness.

See HULL page 14 >

Quotation

“ r e m a r k s ”

“The evangelical investment in moral, social and political issues has depleted our resources and exposed our weaknesses. Being against gay marriage and being rhetorically pro-life will not make up for the fact that massive majorities of Evangelicals can’t articulate the Gospel with any coherence. We fell for the trap of believing in a cause more than a faith.”

—Writer Michael Spencer of Kentucky, predicting the demise of U.S. evangelicalism (Christian Science Monitor)

“Choose a gospel and read it all the way through. Keep a pen and paper handy so that you can jot down details you were unaware of or had not noticed in previous study. You will be amazed at how many new things you can learn reading an old, familiar book.”

—Ed Sunday-Winters, pastor of Ball Camp Baptist Church in Knoxville, Tenn. (ethicsdaily.com)

“Just with this group out there, people are realizing that being Christian does not always equal Republican. Your faith should direct your politics, not your politics directing your faith.”

—Heather Carr, a divinity student at Pat Robertson’s Regent University in Virginia Beach, who helped form Regent Democrats (RNS)

“It has been my (apparently quixotic) conviction that Christian ethics is measured not just by the correct substance of one’s moral beliefs, but also by the respectful way they are communicated.”

—Mercer University ethics professor David Gushee (ABP)

“The point is, the church doesn’t really call people into ministry. We help people discern God’s call on their life.”

—Curtis Freeman, director of Duke Divinity School’s Baptist House of Studies, speaking on women in ministry at Mount Olive College, a Free Will Baptist school in N.C. (ABP)

“The receding tidal wave of religion is revealing empty rural churches and thriving urban coffee shops. I’d like to see some data regarding how many Americans spend their Sunday mornings in their favorite coffee shop.”

—Bruce T. Gourley, online editor for Baptists Today and interim director of Mercer University’s Center for Baptist Studies (Baptist Studies Bulletin)

“For most Baptists, a festival is one of those anti-Halloween parties that churches throw to get the little gremlins and goblins to the Family Life Center for apple-bobbing and beanbag-tossing.”

—Columnist Benjamin Cole, who attended his first Maundy Thursday service this year, on observing the Christian festival calendar beyond Christmas, Good Friday and Easter (ABP)

“My first Bible was a red King James Version New Testamanet given to me by the Gideons when I was in the fifth grade ... I asked my parents what ‘begat’ meant, but they wouldn’t tell me. So began my experience with the word of God.”

—Jim Denison, theologian in residence for the Baptist General Convention of Texas (ABP)

“Many church marketing schemes, often proffered as outreach strategies, seem to be veiled attempts at proselytizing (encouraging believers to leave their church to come to your church) and I unapologetically believe that proselytizing is a sin. We should be colleagues, not competitors, with other churches in our community.”

—Barry Howard, pastor of First Baptist Church of Pensacola, Fla.

“On Sept. 11, 2001 ... it was very important to us (at the mosque) that Mike helped show that we were part of the community at large, that the attacks on the Twin Towers hurt us too and was not something we condoned. When you’re part of the dominant religion in town, you don’t have to pay attention to the little guys. But he always did.”

—Anwar Khalifa of the East Texas Islamic Society when hearing that pastor Mike Massar of the First Baptist Church of Tyler was moving to Sugarland, Texas, to serve as executive pastor of Williams Trace Baptist Church (TylerPaper.com)

In the news, 25 years ago . . .

Peace advocates from American Baptist and Southern Baptist churches and the Baptist World Alliance met in Louisville, Ky., and formed the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America.

—SBC Today, May 1984

editorial

Confessions of a mainstream liberal conservative

By John Pierce

Christians in general — and Baptists in particular — are such a varied lot. So it is not surprising that an endless and ever-changing list of descriptive terms has emerged by which various persons or groups are identified.

Fundamentalist (big “F” and little “f”), conservative, progressive, moderate and liberal are but a few more common ones in Baptist circles.

Understandably, there is a growing chorus expressing disdain for the use of such labels. Their valid point is that labels are not fully adequate and often are used in derogative ways.

Agreed. However, for writers, descriptive terms are an essential part of our communication. Otherwise, readers will get less than the fuller understanding of the issues about which we write.

So rather than avoiding labels, a more careful use of them may be in order. But applying labels is always a challenge.

For one, labels change in meaning. Evangelical, for example, has continued to be redefined to the point that many Christians are not sure whether the latest pejorative meaning applies to them.

In a divided Southern Baptist (and ex-Southern Baptist) world, a tug-of-war over the term “conservative” has continued for decades. For a brief time during the heat of the convention battle of the ’80s, some writers tried to use

the cumbersome “fundamentalist-conservative” and “moderate-conservative” to describe the two camps.

That was pretty short lived. But of course the two parties had no problems identifying the other as either “Fundamentalist” (or “Fundy”) or “liberal.”

And whatever happened to the old charge of “secular humanist” for anyone who didn’t agree with the most conservative interpretation of Scripture?

Did you catch my use of “most conservative”? One of the ways I try to navigate the label maze is by referring to degrees and giving comparisons. Often I will describe someone or some group as “more conservative” or “less conservative” than the other.

Interestingly, the term “Fundamentalist” is embraced by some and viewed as derogative by others. It is a legitimate term but must be applied with some caution.

For example, the current entrenched leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention fits any reasonable definition of Fundamentalism in terms of both belief and attitude. Therefore, I have no hesitation in using that term to define those who run the big SBC machine.

However, not everyone or every congrega-



tion connected to the SBC could be rightly labeled as Fundamentalist. Therefore, I would never identify Southern Baptists in general — which still have significant diversity, though less so than in the past — as Fundamentalists.

Non-fundamentalist Baptists (a broader term I sometimes use as well) — including former Southern Baptists — seem to have trouble with self-identification. They have tried on multiple tags such as moderate, traditional, progressive, mainstream and centrist.

Yet, Fundamentalists will always know them (us) as liberals — unless “secular humanist” makes a late return.

Some in the “emergent conversation” (big “E” or little “e”) claim that all these labels — and perhaps even the term “Christian” — have picked up too much baggage on Christianity’s worst days. So they are referring to themselves as “Christ followers.”

Certainly that should be our defining mark of identification.

Having been called a heretic, fundamentalist and liberal — among many things — has made me pretty insensitive to taking offense over labels directed my way. But, then, even Billy Graham was called a liberal by some for his mere kindness toward Communist leaders.

Moderate is the most widely used term for Baptists of my stripe. Some reject it as meaning lukewarm in commitment or wishy-washy about where one stands.

On the other hand, I like the term and embrace it heartily as describing a strong, unwavering commitment to avoid the ditches (of deadly legalism and definitive liberalism) on both sides of the road.

My first graduate seminar at a Presbyterian seminary in the late ’80s helped me better understand both the limitations of labels and the place where I fit along the theological spectrum.

The person on one side of me introduced himself as a Unitarian-Universalist minister. The person on the other side was an Assembly of God pastor and a teacher at Jimmy Swaggart Bible College.

Whether I was more or less conservative depended on which way I shifted my chair that day. **BT**

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'STREET QUESTIONS ABOUT BAPTISTS'

Editor's note: This is the fifth article in a series titled "Street Questions about Baptists," in celebration of 400 years of the Baptist movement.

'Why are Baptists always trying to save people?'

This question takes us to the very origins and core beliefs of Baptists — who, in their earliest days, were a despised sect within Christianity.

I grew up in a Baptist culture where salvation was primarily about getting to heaven. I have since come to believe that the Gospel is much more grand and glorious than what happens to a person after death.

The good news that Jesus proclaimed, demonstrated and embodied is that the Kingdom of God has come, is coming and will come. Jesus invited people to believe this good news with one of the results being personal salvation, both in this life and the next.

I'm not sure how much Baptists have understood the Gospel of salvation in these terms, but I do believe that Baptists have been "a Jesus people." We have believed Jesus died for our sins and that he was raised from the dead. We have come to know this crucified/living one as Savior and Lord.

What we have experienced of Jesus we desire for others.

Baptists have also been "a Bible people." We read the Scriptures and see how Jesus changed people, forgave people and gave them new life.

So we genuinely desire for everyone what is described in the New Testament. Our understanding of salvation may at times be truncated or narrow, but as we read the Christian Scriptures we hear its clear message that Jesus is Savior.

Also, Baptists have been "a salvation people." We can see a world that desperately needs a Savior. We see ourselves as sinners, and we see a humanity that is broken, even ravaged by sin.

We don't need to be reminded of the frailty and folly of human nature. We only need to look in the mirror and then look at the fragmented fabric of every society on

earth and the violent history of those societies to recognize the need for salvation. The evil that is in the world is in us, and the evil that is in us is in the world.

Baptists have unapologetically been seekers of salvation and messengers of salvation. We have looked to Christ and pointed others to Christ who can and does save.

But just what does this salvation mean?

Salvation as reconciliation

The human condition is that we feel separated and alienated from the Other and from others. We experience distance and even displeasure when we think of God as well as isolation from one another.

We are competitive and compulsive, angry and anxious. We work incessantly to accumulate, achieve, accomplish so that we can prove our worth and value. We feel estranged from the source and ground of our being, and we also feel lonely.

A famous story Jesus told was that of a father who had two sons. One was a prodigal, and one was self-righteous. The purpose of the story was to show how much the Father loved both sons and offered reconciliation to both.



Daniel Vestal is executive coordinator for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship based in Atlanta.

God is like that father, who loves each of us and offers us love and forgiveness. We need only accept that love and receive that forgiveness.

The good news of salvation is that in Christ our sins are forgiven. We need not feel God is angry or distant, but compassionate and close.

In Christ we are not separated from the Creator. Rather we are "at one" with the Creator.

What relief and release all this gives to one's conscience. What sense of well being all this gives to one's consciousness. What worth and value all this gives to one's ego.

This is salvation, and it is by grace. God's love is unconditional. God's work in Christ is accomplished and completed. God's offer of reconciliation is free.

To experience it, we need only accept it. When a person — however tentatively or hesitantly — whispers "yes" to the love and grace of God, the reality of reconciliation becomes the experience of reconciliation.

Through the centuries theologians have struggled with how to understand and explain the Christian claim "that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself." All kinds of theories and models about the atonement have been put forth.

But many an ordinary person, though unable to comprehend, has shared the experience and emotions with the one who wrote:

*Amazing grace how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now I'm found
Was blind, but now I see.*

Salvation as transformation

Within every one of us is a longing to be different and better than we are. That desire is matched by an inability to change old habits, an inadequacy to think in new ways.

We are stuck in our patterns of bad behavior and poor choices. We need someone or something to rescue us from ourselves and our inclinations to sin.

During his ministry Jesus encountered demon-possessed people. He was able to deliver them by a power that prefigured the power that raised him from the dead. The health and wholeness of those delivered were signs of what life in God's Kingdom is like.

Jesus was able to rescue them from crippling and controlling powers that deformed human personality. He was able to transform them into new persons. And he still is able.

I am reminded of the woman who stood in a worship service to say, "I am not what I ought to be. I am not what I'm going to be. But thank God, because of Christ I am not what I used to be."

The testimony of a multitude of folk is

that in Christ we experience a power and presence that delivers and changes us. In Christ we find ourselves becoming less possessive and more giving, less spiteful and more forgiving, less envious and more generous.

Scripture describes this transformation in a number of ways. This is my favorite, "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18).

Salvation as participation

Deep within all of us is a desire to be a part of the world's transformation, yet we know that we live within limited confines of family and friends. We recognize that we have little to offer, yet we sincerely desire to be a part of the making of a new world order where there is justice and peace.

Jesus offers us the opportunity to participate in the coming of his kingdom. That opportunity is a part of salvation.

On numerous occasions Jesus would say

to someone he had healed or delivered, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you." When he called his first followers he said, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men."

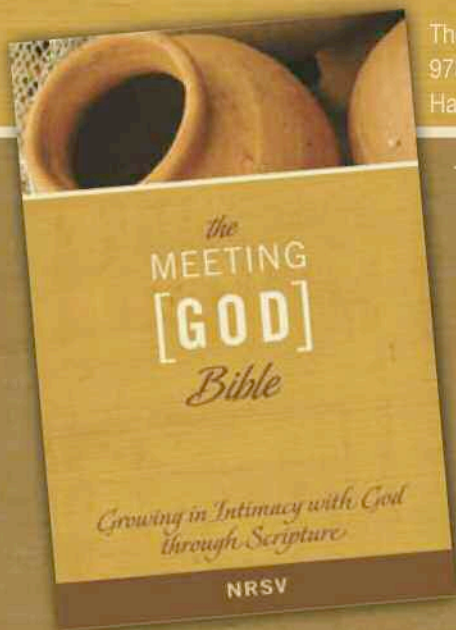
In one of his parables he said that if we ministered to people in need, we did it unto him. All of this was his way of showing us how we can be included in the redemptive mission of God to make all things new.

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Including more scripture in worship may be antidote to biblical illiteracy

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) — Last year, sacred music composer Christopher Teichler noted a disturbing paradox.

The widely observed decline in biblical literacy among American Christians has paralleled a growing interest in developing new and enriched ways of worshipping.

Some ministers are saying a bracing dose of Scripture in worship is the antidote to widespread biblical illiteracy.

“How can these two events — biblical illiteracy and a great passion for worship — be happening at the same time?” asked Teichler. “If biblical literacy is so low at this point in Western history, then the God of the Bible is not the god being worshipped but rather a shallow and incomplete version of him.”

Many church leaders who share Teichler’s concern believe they’ve found an antidote — injecting worship with a bracing dose of Scripture, through systematic readings, carefully selected musical texts and thoughtfully crafted sermons.

“I gained a new perspective on the problem when I was teaching religion to college freshmen,” said Jim Somerville, pastor of First Baptist Church in Richmond, Va. “Even at a Baptist college, there was a high rate of biblical illiteracy.”

The trend isn’t new. In his 2007 book, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know — And Doesn’t*, Stephen Prothero traces the decline in biblical knowledge not to the cultural upheavals of the late 1960s or the Supreme Court’s prayer rulings of the early 1960s but to the postwar Christian revivals of the 1940s and 1950s.

For the spiritually fervent, the unprecedented leap in church — and synagogue — membership represented a distinctive kind of American identity, especially in the face of godless Communism. Seeking common ground to face the threat, church members jettisoned content, and the result was a sort of nebulous common faith that President Dwight Eisenhower called “the Judeo-Christian concept.”

Eisenhower encapsulated the spirit exactly when he famously said, after meeting with a Soviet official in 1952, “Our form of government has no sense unless it is founded in a

deeply felt religious faith, and I don’t care what it is.”

The result was a loss of biblical memory and that legacy of illiteracy continues, in part, Somerville believes, because churches present Scripture “in bits and fragments throughout the year.”

“One Sunday you might hear Hebrews 13 in Sunday school, then the next week it’s Jeremiah, chapter 1,” he said. “You’re not building any kind of synthesis, or any constructive way to understand how the pieces fit together.”



Somerville tries to correct the trend by following the lectionary, both in public readings in worship and as a basis for his sermons.

“When you flip through the readings, you can get a sense of how the lectionary committee was trying to get the full story of Scripture into the congregation,” he said. “It’s like a nutritionist trying to put together a balanced biblical diet for the church.”

At Preston Trail Community Church, in Frisco, Texas, pastor Jim Johnson finds his youthful congregation successfully absorbs Scripture through both an exposure to large portions of it in a relatively short time and smaller segments over a longer period.

“We’re trying to be culturally relevant in all that we do,” said Johnson, whose church worships in a contemporary style. “As we

started reaching people, we realized we were attracting not just Baptists but people across the board denominationally. Now we have a ton of people who don’t know the [biblical] story. We had to ask how do we help people get the stories?”

Last summer, he and co-pastor Paul Basden used each Sunday’s worship to relate stories from the Old and New Testaments.

“We went through all the narratives of the Bible,” Johnson said. “People found it fascinating and discovered models of discipleship.”

This year the two pastors are spending five months on the Sermon on the Mount, “couching it in a contemporary package that will meet people at their point of need.”

Keith Herron, pastor of Holmeswood Baptist Church in Kansas City, Mo., thinks congregations’ retention of Scripture would increase if pastors would “step up to the plate more in the way we handle it.”

“There have been some taboos we’ve stayed away from — complicated things we’re afraid to address,” he said. “Our congregation won’t go anywhere we’re not already headed.”

The Old Testament especially is where pastors “shy away from an adult reading of the Scripture story,” Herron said. “The Noah narrative is one that we continue to tell and teach as if we were speaking to preschoolers. ... We just don’t handle it in a way that’s challenging and speaks to adult needs.”

Biblical literacy also will increase when Scripture is sung, agreed the ministers, but vetting the texts is essential.

Tom Ingram of the Virginia Baptist Mission Board, who serves on a committee developing a new hymnal to be released next year by Mercer University Press, said singing “gives people an opportunity to remember something much longer — to internalize it.”

But he added, “I would certainly be very aware of the texts that are sung. Sometimes the texts of musical pieces used in hymns or choruses, or choral anthems or duets or solos just have very poor theology. And sometimes they aren’t biblical at all. They just express a nice sentiment.” **BT**

—Robert Dilday is associate editor of the *Virginia Baptist newspaper*, *Religious Herald*.

Alliance adds Dempsey, reshapes staff

WASHINGTON, D.C. — As longtime leader Stan Hastey neared retirement this spring, the Alliance of Baptists reshaped its staff, employing Paula Clayton Dempsey as minister for partnership relations. In this new position she will provide internal coordination for the work of the organization whose staff members will be scattered across the eastern United States.

Dempsey, director of the Advent Spirituality Center in Mars Hill, N.C., and a former campus minister at Mars Hill College, served as president of the group from 2000-2002. She will transition into a full-time role by July, working from Mars Hill. As team leader, Dempsey will be the only full-time staffer, with other team members working on part-time contracts.

Chris Copeland, minister for leadership formation, will shift to part-time work from his new location in Durham, N.C. Susan Burgess Parrish will continue serving part time as minister of development from her home in Oak Ridge, Tenn.

Carole Collins, who has been handling finances on a volunteer basis, will become the Alliance's part-time director of finance, working from Stone Mountain, Ga.

Mary Andreolli, part-time minister of outreach and communications, will be the only staffer remaining in Washington, D.C., where the Alliance offices have been housed at First Baptist Church since 1989.

Dempsey said she accepted "with great joy" the "call to be a part of a competent team of ministers who are charged with leading the Alliance of Baptists."

Dempsey said she is "especially excited



Alliance team (front row l-r): Paula Clayton Dempsey, Carole Collins, (back row l-r) Susan Burgess Parrish, Chris Copeland and Mary Andreolli.

about working with our missions partners, our ecumenical partners, a new project focused on students and continuing the interfaith conversations nurtured by Stan Hastey."

Under a concept developed two years ago when Hastey stepped down as executive director to become minister for mission and ecumenism, the Alliance staff has sought to operate as a peer-oriented rather than a hierarchical team.

While acknowledging that "the model of team leadership and the varied geographical locations of our staff present challenges," Dempsey said "the opportunity to embody the equality we espouse and to daily interact with Alliance partners and members that are geographically widespread far outweighs the challenges."

An Alliance press release described the reshaped staff as "a team with strong skills,

high energy, creative vision and an impressive commitment to the history of the Alliance and its continuing story. They are equipped and determined to take the Alliance into the future, building on the foundation and accomplishments of all those who have brought us this far."

The Alliance is a movement of progressive Baptists that counts 125 congregations and a number of individuals as members. It was founded in 1987 in response to the rightward shift within the Southern Baptist Convention, and was known as the Southern Baptist Alliance until 1992. The Alliance describes itself as "inclusive, ecumenical, interfaith, and justice-minded." **BT**

Editor's note: A story on Stan Hastey, longtime Alliance leader, will appear in the June issue.

The Alliance staff has sought to operate as a **peer-oriented** rather than a hierarchical team.

Personal invites most effective for churches

(RNS) — An invitation from a family member or friend is the most effective way to get people to attend church, a new survey shows, casting doubt on several time-tested methods used by churches to attract new members.

The other approaches — from broadcast commercials to information packets left on door-knobs — are far less effective, LifeWay Research reports.

A majority of respondents — 67 percent — said an invitation from a family member was either somewhat or very effective. Likewise, 63 percent said an invitation from a friend or neighbor was effective.

In contrast, just 33 percent said an invitation left on a door hanger would be effective, while 31 percent said door-to-door visits from a church or faith community member would be effective.

Ed Stetzer, director of the Southern Baptist Convention-affiliated LifeWay



Research, said the research shows people are open to invitations to church — but they need to be personal.

“Unbelievers next door still need a simple, personal invitation to talk, to be in community and to church,” said Stetzer, whose researchers were commissioned to do the survey by the denomination’s North American Mission

Board. “Clearly, relationships are important and work together with marketing.”

Researchers reported the following percentages of respondents thought these other modes of invitation were effective:

- letter in mailbox: 41 percent
- weekly religion section of a newspaper: 40 percent
- billboard or outdoor sign: 38 percent
- newspaper or magazine ad: 36 percent
- TV commercial: 34 percent
- radio commercial: 33 percent
- Web site listing or ad: 31 percent
- e-mail message; 30 percent
- social networking site: 30 percent

The survey, conducted in December, included a sample of more than 150,000 respondents and had an overall margin of error of plus or minus 1 percentage point. **BT**

Southern Baptist activist organizes confab on church and environment

ATLANTA (ABP) — An upcoming national conference on churches and the environment features several well-known evangelical speakers, including some prominent Southern Baptist leaders who will be speaking for the first time on the increasingly high-profile theological issue known as “creation care.”

The gathering is scheduled May 13-15 at Cross Pointe Church near Atlanta, where former Southern Baptist Convention President James Merritt is senior pastor. Merritt is scheduled to speak, along with other Southern Baptists including Al Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; Ed Stetzer of LifeWay Research and Mark Liederbach, professor of ethics at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.

Merritt’s 26-year-old son, Jonathan Merritt, is organizing the gathering, called the Flourish National Church Leaders Conference on Creation Care. While still in seminary, the younger Merritt spearheaded “A Southern Baptist Declaration on the

Environment and Climate Change,” which was signed by 550 Southern Baptists, including the SBC president at the time.

Other Southern Baptist leaders quickly distanced themselves from the initiative. A Baptist Press headline declared “Seminary student’s climate change project is not SBC’s,” while Richard Land, head of the SBC Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, released a statement explaining why he did not endorse the statement.

Land said Southern Baptist public-policy advocacy “is most effective when it is supported by the broadest possible consensus among Southern Baptists.” He cited a 2007 SBC resolution that urged Southern Baptists “to proceed cautiously in the human-induced global warming debate in light of conflicting scientific research” and to support only policies that “improve the stewardship of the earth’s resources without resulting in significant negative consequences” on the economy.

During that time Merritt met Jim Jewell, who has worked more than 30 years

with Christian causes and organizations including World Vision, Trinity Forum, and Prison Fellowship; and Rusty Pritchard, a volunteer lay leader for three decades who taught environmental studies for seven years at Emory University in Atlanta.

Last year Jewell and Pritchard started Flourish, a ministry aimed at helping churches and families build environmental stewardship into their Christian commitment and witness. The May conference is the organization’s inaugural event, but plans include a quarterly magazine, Web-based communications and other resources.

The intent of Flourish, Jewell says, is to bridge the chasm between those who prescribe only political solutions and those who would do nothing at all. He says there are plenty of good reasons for Bible-believing Christians to care about the environment.

Jonathan Merritt told the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* he hopes the conference will be a starting point for change in how churches think about their God-given responsibility to care for the world. **BT**

➤ HULL from page 5

It was [seen] in his disciple band. Here was Levi — a quisling, a collaborator, a money changer who did the dirty work of Rome — and here were the Sons of Thunder ...

So I think scholars are now beginning to understand the imperial issue that for years we missed: the revolutionary importance of Jesus' universal appeal and how he universalized the most particular faith.

For 1,500 years, ethnicity, the way you were born, the way you were circumcised, dietary laws, everything about the Jewish culture was calculated to keep it an in-group, a chosen people. It was simply brilliant the way [Jesus] took their prophetic teachings and made it available for everyone.

They wouldn't let anyone in the temple outside the outer vestibule. He threw open the temple as a house of prayer for all persons. In all of those ways he was transforming his ancestral faith.

And that's good enough for us today — because of polarization, religious enmity, political strife. We're living when people are madder at each other than at any time — liberal/conservative, Democrat/Republican, Muslim/Christian.

His message of how to create an inclusive, accepting community is, to me, what we didn't realize.

And we didn't do it because we became over-focused on how do *I* get saved by this person. But he called people not into an isolated one-on-one with him but into a redeeming fellowship.

But we got off on ... trying to explain *exactly* how the cross saves you. But Jesus didn't do that. He didn't say if you get this point down then you can follow me.

I'm not minimizing the centrality of the cross. I'm just saying when you focus on that too narrowly you miss the way he's throwing the door open to everybody.

BT: You served on the Southern Baptist Convention's "peace committee" in the 1980s. How do you reflect on that experience?

WEH: I was glad to do it. I had been involved in interpreting the controversy and leading our church to a clear position on it.

If the peace committee could have done any good — and there was precedent for that. The Presbyterians had a terrible split back in

[the '20s]. They had a major peace committee and it worked.

Our committee was different. There were 22 people including chairman Charles Fuller. They divided it very skillfully: seven pretty clear moderates, seven very clear fundies or strongly conservative or whatever, and then seven unaligned — mainly laypeople.

The difference, though, was that the conservatives — I'll use that [term]; it's the nicest — controlled the platform. Charles Stanley on the committee was the SBC president; Adrian Rogers was the past president.

It was a good fellowship. I stayed in rapport with everyone on the committee including my strongest detractors.

A good way to put it, I would say: "Adrian [Rogers], the way you say the gospel helps people. You've built big churches. If nobody was saying it like you do in Shreveport, I'd want you to come down and offer that option. Why don't you want me to say it the way I say it?"

He'd say: "Bill, I love you to death. I just wish you'd say it in a Methodist church." In other words, "I just want the Baptist brand to be narrower."

It was near enough to Bold Mission Thrust [evangelism emphasis] that I could say: "But our passion has been to offer the gospel to everybody, and you are just picking out a little ideological segment." So we had those arguments constantly.

And I realized they had a powerful case [for control]. They had won the presidency then seven straight times, from '79 to '86 — when we were meeting. They had the [SBC] Pastors' Conference in the palms of their hands — a caucusing of 10,000 to 15,000 people before we went in to vote.

And there really were a lot of people who thought the convention had gotten too elitist, too egg head, too intellectualized, not compassionate enough.

The agency heads had a real problem because we [moderates] had been in charge so long that they wanted to please everybody. The conservatives didn't have but one group to please: their own group. They never wavered; they were all together on the same page.

But we never spoke with that same clarity because the agencies always tried to make concessions right and left.

For example, Paul Pressler went around to all his grassroots meetings. He came to Shreveport, and I went to hear him and to see exactly how he did it.

When [Southern Seminary president Duke] McCall offered a sum of money for agencies to send people out to tell their side of the story, they said: "You can't use mission money to politick." So the other side was politicking from daylight to dark, and we weren't doing a thing.

When the seminary presidents came to Glorieta [Conference Center in October 1986 and issued] the Glorieta Statement — which was their effort to use words that would please the other side — moderates didn't even know they were going to do that. In other words, there was no communication.

So it was frustrating how we could not make our case more persuasively. But I would say, at the time with everything happening, we were almost certain to lose — peace committee or not.

I don't think a committee could have redirected the passions that led to the changes we have seen. So I don't feel a deep sense of failure.

I don't think the moderates have been honest about what happened. We were in charge — we had every agency and most of our critique has been the bad things the other side did.

Sure, they did some bad things. But that didn't tell us how we missed the ball. How did we fail?

I've just written an essay on that. I think moderates need to ask more deeply: How did we let this sneak up on us? How did we so badly misjudge?

I heard one agency head say, "I can lick them with one hand tied behind me." He was the first to be fired by them.

So [the peace committee] was very instructive. It told me a lot about where people get their religion.

And not many of them get it out of books. A persuasive, rhetorically astute pulpiteer can sell a bill of goods to an awful lot of people if he senses the currents of fear in their lives that have people's attention.

BT: Let's move to the present. What should Baptists be paying less attention and more attention to at this time?

WEH: I think there's been a lot of generational tension.

We've been paying a lot of attention to institutional survival. But institutions are renewed by a dynamic understanding of the relevance of what they hold in trust.

Some people say, “The [Cooperative Baptist Fellowship] is going to die when the gray-heads are no longer there.” Or they would say, “Clearly this contemporary versus traditional worship is going to split us.”

But I think what we’re really doing is rethinking the gospel for a new generation that is truly global.

By that I mean, not to depart from biblical norms or anything like that. But there is a tremendous amount of gospel in the Bible that we have never developed.

Specifically, most of our gospel has been the individual, personal passages in John and Paul. Well, there’s a lot more to it than that.

There is a tremendous emphasis on ethical integrity that we haven’t paid attention to. So how can we deal with ethics and not appear to have any works salvation?

I think our music is largely out of date because of the themes it sounds. I mentioned earlier the problem of polarization.

Just look in the hymnbook. If you want to preach on reconciliation, how many hymns are you going to find?

Essentially zero. Maybe you could count *Once to Every Man and Nation*, maybe one Fosdick hymn — but almost nothing.

So, anyway, I don’t think we need to chase after a lot of reliving the past and blaming people for what has happened. We need to pay more attention to the way the gospel engages people living in today’s world.

And I find a terrible lack of concern for preaching. I am constantly besieged by pulpit committee chairs saying, “We’ve been out there working for about a year and can’t find anybody who knows how to preach.”

And, yet, that’s what we still do. We get together on Sunday and sit there to hear a sermon.

We’ve got to somehow pay more attention to the kind of preaching that tells people how to live in this kind of world: where more parents are working; latchkey children; the pressures we are under today.

The authentic note of strong, relevant preaching is, to me, almost not being heard. So that’s a start.

BT: What word — other than give attention to strong, relevant preaching — would you say to moderate Baptist pastors who feel like they are juggling so many issues, even conflicts, and often deal with the fact they are not the biggest show in town?

WEH: I want to hitchhike on that. In my own experience I’m finding there is a hunger for unvarnished honesty — candor in the pulpit.

People think they’ve been given a kind of “preacher talk” — sort of pious phrases that preachers have always used. But people don’t use it on Tuesday or Thursday. Talk about the kind of things that don’t get mentioned.

I’ll give a personal example. I’ve got this ALS — which is a life-threatening disease. It will kill you.

I’ve been theologian in residence at Mountain Brook [Baptist Church] all of these years. They said: “You’ve been telling us all of this theology, how are you going to deal with what has happened to you?”

So I preached a sermon on it. It’s amazing how many people said, “You have talked about what you really feel like in the dark — when you know you’re going to die. No one has ever talked to me like that.”

They may say their parents or grandparents are facing that or that they are facing that. People get pancreatic cancer diagnoses every day.

So one thing I’d say is to be very honest and don’t spend all of your time making the church look good. The church’s almost greatest asset is its ordinary people struggling through mistakes to be a people of hope embodying a better future.

Go ahead and talk about it. Paul does. We just so easily mess up and never admit how we mess up.

I’d say to pay more attention to realistic hope. What can we do to take one, two or three baby-steps from the way we are doing things to a way of doing better?

Clearly we messed up race relations. We just ran slavery and segregation — they both were horrible.

Well, why did we do it? How do we get over that — radically, deeper?

How do we get over mistreating women — putting them down, subordinating them? Saying: “You work in the kitchen and nursery, and we’ll do all the important things.”

How do we get over the way we stereotype ethnic groups?

If we could be honest and figure out how to call a church to take realistic steps, people could say: “We can do that.”

So to the moderate Baptist pastor [I would say], get very open with a handful of key people. Go ahead and tell the people where you hurt and where you’re disappointed.

Tell them how the last deacons’ meeting teed you off. Be honest but let them know you’re fighting through it and you want them to.

One thing I do, but don’t recommend it to everybody, is I’m reading a biography all the time. The biography tells how a *person* passed the complex strains of life through a single experience, wrestled with complexities, made uncertain decisions about things to do, got over mistakes, learned to admit them and moved on.

From biographies we learn how to creatively handle failures. Ministry is very much after affirmation, and you can get too much of it. If I preach a sermon and everybody who comes out the door pats me on the back and says, “Greatest sermon I ever heard,” then I don’t learn a thing.

Those who study management and leadership say you learn far more from your mistakes — if you get it out as a mistake and if you have an honest peer group where you can share your mistake.

If I were that moderate pastor, I would find two or three kindred spirits, four or five at the most, in the ministry — and they all don’t have to be Baptists — for a sharing group that I could really be honest with. I’d level with them and they with me. I’d have a way, if necessary, to just go in and cry.

Then I would have a core in the church — not a power kitchen cabinet — that you could really let down your hair with. Some believe if we ever admit failure then we haven’t done it right because this is such a wonderful thing. But we are treasures in earthen vessels.

BT: You made reference to the failure of Baptists and other Christians regarding race and women’s roles. A few years ago, in *The [Alabama] Mainstream Baptist* newsletter, you wrote: “You tell me why you no longer believe what the Bible teaches about slavery and I will tell you why I no longer believe what you think the Bible teaches about women.” Can you play that out a little bit more?

WEH: Mark Noll, the fine evangelical historian, has done some excellent work on how and why the South “missed it” on slavery. They had the Bible, believed it was inerrant, and followed it slavishly.

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➤ HULL from page 15

And, of course, the Bible didn't condemn slavery. It allows it in the Old and New Testaments. Paul said if you're a slave, stay a slave.

So they accused the abolitionists of being liberals. As Noll put it: "What [Southern Christians] would not learn from their Bible they learned from those relentless theologians called Grant and Sherman."

In retrospect, what we have done is come to a post-slavery position not from the Bible but because slavery lost. Now, we made a mistake. We butchered the way we should have used the Bible.

The answer is you have to be Christocentric. Jesus viewed humans in such a way that obviously makes no place for one person to own another person.

So I would say to [SBC leader] Paige Patterson — in fact, I've said to Paige: "You are not advocating slavery, but it is in the Bible. By your hermeneutic, how do you keep from doing that? If you will tell me how you can dispense with slavery, I will tell you how I can dispense with female subordination."

Because they both belong to the same worldview, which is hierarchal. They bow to the view that there are masters and those under them.

That was the view in the ancient world and for 1,500 years: The king, pyramidal, as head of the government; the pope, pyramidal, as head of the Church; and the father, pyramidal, as head of the family.

Then all of the sudden you begin to turn the pyramid upside down. Finally, we came to what you can call "the right of the people." But Jesus called it "being servant of all."

The people who want to cling to [women's] subordination verses — for every one of those verses I can show them a verse that says it's OK to have slaves. You tell me how you get rid of that and I will tell you how I get rid of the other.

BT: I have read your sermon, "The Darkness that is Light," that you preached at Mountain Brook Baptist Church. It was very moving and insightful. I won't ask you to rehash that sermon, but I would like to talk some about that experience. When were you diagnosed with ALS?

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Beyond the Barriers



WEH: Aug. 11 [2008], and then preached the sermon on Oct. 19.

I had been under doctors' searching for my problem since early summer. Really, I'd been having balance problems since about April or May [2008].

They sent me eventually to [University of Alabama at Birmingham's] med school. It is hard to diagnose. You have to have a muscle biopsy. I was three months getting a clear diagnosis.

BT: How have you dealt with that spiritually and theologically?

WEH: Theologically, I've gone to the Psalms — a tremendous treasure — and to the rest of the Bible, which is very realistic about the fact that death is an integral, essential, inescapable part of life.

Everything lives to die. This world is an apprenticeship or a journey within limits. So I came to terms with that.

I would like to have lived longer. I'm 78, and I'd love to live to 88 or 98. But I've tried to see death as a closure.

In the Bible there is a tremendous correlation between birth and death, beginning and ending. Jesus, in John, calls it "whence" and "whither."

"... [F]or I know whence I came, and whither I go" (John 8:14 KJV).

Well, birth is a death to the womb. It's traumatic; you cry. They cut a cord and you bleed a little.

And, is earth a womb? And will we be expelled into a vastly greater world?

So I rest in the fact that God in his wisdom made us to die and, therefore, we are to seek a good death.

How do you cope? Because there is tremendous pain in leaving behind a wife and children. Leaving work unfinished.

But I've been amazed at the capacity of people for sheer goodness. I have been

swamped with letters, phone calls and visits from people I haven't seen in 50 years.

There are seven 90-year-old women in a Sunday school class at Crescent Hill Baptist Church in Louisville who are praying for me. I knew them when they were 40-year-old women. That was 50 years ago.

I've had people get in the car — one drove from Charlotte, one drove from Louisville, one's coming from Bowling Green. They just want to sit for 30 minutes ... and to affirm the meaning of friendship.

Up close, the number of people who have brought food or said, "I'll drive you somewhere," is just incredible.

So I have to ask, "Are the fears, frustrations and even regrets over a terminal illness as great as the love and acceptance and support I have found?"

Which is stronger: love or fear? "Perfect love casteth out fear" (1 John 4:18 KJV).

I have been loved royally. And I'm not going to destroy that in frenzied bitterness.

When I think of what to live for — if I were to use this to become relentlessly selfish, it would deny something bigger than me. Call it the Spirit of God. Call it Christian commitment.

I'll give you one illustration. I had a student who got a terminal cancer when he was in his 30s. He knew he had just two or three years to live, and he went berserk.

He abandoned his wife and little children. He wanted an orgy of physical stimulation. I ran into him and he said I'm just going to snatch what I can in the little time I have.

Anyway, I thought of that — and I can't do that. It would betray what my wife thinks of me, what my church thinks of me.

So, am I coping by just living up to expectations? No. These expectations were created by some hopes to which I gave myself, and I'm not going to abandon them in the 11th hour.

BT: What are you seeing from the perspective of your illness that you may not have before?

WEH: One thing is, I'm very alert. You have no cognitive impairment with ALS. Your mind is sharp even when you can't swallow or breathe. I will die with a clear mind and a totally wasted body.

One thing I realize is that people don't tell you so much of what they really feel. I've had people write me letters — that reduced me to tears — about what I had meant to them. I had no earthly idea.

One student from Louisville said, "All of my ministry I've carried on the course I took from you. The themes recur in my preaching. It's almost as if I've lived out my ministry as a stewardship of what I've learned."

I didn't know any of that.

BT: And that person would have never shared it otherwise ...

WEH: Oh, he would have never told me. But he thought, "This guy is going to die and I want him to know it."

So this gets back to the earlier question. What it tells me is that the struggling moderate Baptist preacher is doing better than he thinks. People aren't telling him.

When I resigned from Shreveport [First Baptist Church], my members could walk up and tell me whatever they wanted to — hug me or fuss over me face-to-face.

But I was engulfed with letters from non-members. I had been a civil advocate of trying to help the city reach its potential. All kinds of people wrote me.

I was holding a revival for Cecil Sherman in Asheville and took a briefcase full of letters. I was put in a hotel with two double beds and, in my spare time, organized my correspondence and answered those letters. I called it my invisible congregation.

And I got a letter yesterday from a doctor in Shreveport who said, "I never knew you very well, but you helped me realize the claims of the Christian faith."

We tried to clean up a ghetto — substandard housing.

BT: Was it primarily a racial issue you were dealing with?

WEH: It was primarily a class issue. I basically had the well-to-do in my church. I was loaded with the establishment.

And I told them: "You are basically interested in yourself and you spend the year going through the rituals of reaffirmation. You're letting the rest of the town go without benefiting from what you have to offer. You need to get busy and contribute sweat equity in building this city."

It offended them, but they listened to me. And I said if we don't throw the town open to more than a handful of rich folks, we are going to pay for it. And they did pay for it.

But I'm learning now that this stuff we call ministry — even when you don't have much to show for it — you are making a profound influence on human lives.

There is nowhere else where you can get the agenda of: Why am I here? What do I want to pass on to my kids?

People are searching and, if you give them some clues, they will love you for it.

BT: In your Oct. 19 sermon at Mountain Brook you talked about the "two worlds." Can you give us a little sense about that?

WEH: I knew that would probably be my last public sermon in terms of my voice giving out. So I thought: whatever I'm going to say, I better say it — last chance. So, as the sermon neared the end, I began to pack it too tightly.

But what is called neuroscience is just the hottest thing out. Two pages in *Newsweek*; cover story in *Time*.

It is evolution carried to the next stage. That is, chemical firings in the brain are responsible for love, courage, honesty, everything. It's almost like a pinball machine.

You can just talk about some subject — like happiness — and they are able to see what part of the brain activates it. It lights up and turns red like a pinball machine.

They say: "Ah-hah, happiness comes from the upper left lobes in the brain" — and they use a lot of big words.

But *why* does it come from there? Who put it there?

So, what I saw was that the world is being squeezed into a kind of one world. It's just pragmatism and empiricism with a vengeance. Reality is only what you can see or experience in this world.

What I wanted to say was that Jesus was constantly aware of the interplay of two worlds. Everything he saw was emblematic of another world — a world of God.

He said there is a kingdom of God and a kingdom of Caesar. And he taught very clearly

about that [other] world.

He said that you can begin to glimpse it in little things. But someday you can maybe see it expressed in power. The kingdom will come in power.

If there really is just one world, you can't make any sense out of the teaching of Jesus.

So the question is: Do what we call spiritual virtues just come out of the gray matter? Are we hardwired to be good or bad?

It is the most deterministic thing in the world. I made the argument that if religion is just latent in our genes, why don't we just naturally accept it?

Why do we kill the prophets? Why did we crucify Jesus? Why is it so hard [to live lovingly]?

The answer is because it's a voice from another world. It is a world challenging our world. It's a world in conflict with our world.

Jesus said there are people who seek to take the kingdom by violence and misuse it. But I began to basically say [to the Mountain Brook congregation] that I've seen a different kind of world.

And I wanted to say to them: "You are taught to be greedy, to be selfish. Look at Bernard Madoff. Look at all the people that just want to make a buck. Look at the politicians who would do anything to get elected. But you haven't been treating me that way. You have been loving me without any reward. You've been good to me when I was not able to be good to you. Why are you living like that unless there are signals of transcendence bouncing off your radar screen?"

I basically said: I dare to believe that this new world in the making is the real world that I will inherit when I put this world behind me.

Now that's not the same as pie-in-the-sky. I'm saying: Whatever it was that led us to overthrow slavery, and led us to honor little children instead of putting them out, and led us to care for the handicapped and afflicted, and led us to touch the leper — whatever this everlasting mercy is — I sure didn't invent it and too often turn it down to my dismay.

And if it is so wonderful, why do I not live at my best? It's because I'm a citizen of two worlds.

... If I could speak to the National Congress of Scientists, I'd say: "You want to be a religion. Let's talk about your doctrine of the church. Where do you assemble people and teach them to live by the highest summoning of the human spirit? Where do you do that? What do you read that we would call scriptures? How do you sing? How do you celebrate?" **BT**



Charting intentional discipleship with children

Any journey by land or sea is more successful when a route is charted. You decide where you want to go and then plan how you will get from your starting point to your destination, whether it is a place or an experience.

The same is true of the spiritual journey. It begins at birth, but we sometimes wait until the journey is half over before we give it intentional direction and attention. If we are clear about what a fully committed follower of Christ is, then we must start at birth to chart a route rather than just hoping children will simply find their way somehow. The Holy Spirit is a capable guide, but trustworthy adults who are “God in skin” can help children to perceive God’s prompting much as Eli helped young Samuel. Here are five tips for charting intentional discipleship with children.

1. Teach and model discipleship practices prior to a child’s conversion or commitment to becoming a Christ follower.

Even in the preschool years we begin to develop the habits of a disciple as we teach children to talk to God — not in rhymes or rituals, but with conversational prayers. They learn that they can say anything to God and God listens to them anytime and anywhere. Later they will learn that they need to listen as well as talk to God. Listening prepares them for the prompting of the Holy Spirit in their lives that can lead to a commitment decision.

An appreciation for the Bible, its stories of people and God, and the wisdom it has for our lives begins from birth. As we teach or read the biblical stories to children and make learning verses engaging, we are encouraging lifetime Bible readers who will hunger and thirst after its truths.

The missing element in establishing these life-long practices as habits in the lives of our children is intentionality. Whether it is stew-

ardship, worship, service, prayer or Bible study, discipleship practices can be established early.

2. Assist parents in practicing faith disciplines personally and with their children.

Discipleship is demonstrated most effectively in the home because of the amount of time children are in relationship with their parents, but most churches provide little assistance for teaching parents how to be intentional in their “disciple making” role. Churches can help parents in a number of ways:

- Offer seminars on how to incorporate faith practices into daily routine.
- Provide print, book and DVD resources that give specific suggestions such as bedtime rituals for all ages, family service projects, sex education or the impact of television on children’s value formation.
- Design opportunities for parents to grow in their own faith, which will help them to live and communicate their faith more effectively with their children.

3. Design a church curriculum that has discipleship as a priority.

Curriculum is more than a program or series of programs offered on a certain day or time. It is an overall educational and experiential design that focuses on equipping children to become Christ followers. In all church programs leaders are aware that their goal is to inspire and engage children in disciple-making experiences. This is more than indoctrination; it is encouraging children to choose to become a Christ follower of their own free will.

4. Offer new member classes or inquirer classes for children to have clarity about their commitment to becoming a Christ follower.

Often parents and churches assume that children who “join the church” understand what it means. Unfortunately, many children respond

to emotion, coercion or even expectations rather than the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Leaders and parents should provide a series of sessions to help children clarify their understanding and response. These classes can be for children who have indicated they have made their commitment to Christ or for children who are asking questions and need more direction.

5. Teach children personal faith practices after their commitment decision.

After children commit their life to following Christ, most parents and church leaders forget that these children more than ever need guidance to grow into men and women who love God and love others. Here are some ways churches and families can assist them:

Parents can continue to read Bible stories and pray with their children even after the children can read themselves. As children hear the familiar stories, they will begin to hear them with the “new ears” of their growing faith. Rich dialog and prayer experiences can grow out of these bedtime, mealtime or anytime experiences.

Involve children in worship leadership, not just worship “performance” on special days. As they pray, read scripture, lead in a litany or engage in other worship experiences, children grow in their ability to understand that worship is more about giving than consuming.

Give children opportunities to grow in their service to others. Quarterly church mission projects or family mission experiences will help children to live in service to God and others — just like Jesus. **BT**

Note:

Becoming Like Christ: Helping Children Follow Jesus is a series of six sessions to help children understand the unique role of Jesus in God’s redemptive plan for people and how they can choose to become Christ followers.

2009 Formations Commentary

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LESSONS FOR:
Sunday, June 7-28,
2009

Written by Ron Grizzle
of Birmingham, Ala.



June 7, 2009

The sinner's prayer

Luke 18:9-14

It seems that genuine humility no longer exists. Rarely do we see anyone expressing anything resembling the characteristic of humility. On the other hand, it is quite easy to see persons' displaying arrogance, for example, the football player who makes a touchdown dancing frenetically in the end zone or the Wall Street tycoon jutting his jaw as the handcuffs are placed on him for cheating his clients.

Jesus applauded an authentic sense of humility and disdained arrogance. In the parable from Luke 18:9-14, Jesus contrasted these two attitudes by giving us prayers from two different individuals, a Pharisee and a tax collector. Perhaps you have read this passage a number of times, and can see in your mind's eye the proud Pharisee who prayed, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people ... even this tax collector."

Fred Craddock wrote, "No one can doubt [the Pharisee's] disciplined adherence to the moral and ethical code of his faith" (p. 211, *Interpretation: Luke*). But Jesus seemed to shake his head sadly at other parts of the Pharisee's behavior.

I see the puffed-up Pharisee saying these words and almost spitting the words "tax collector" out of his mouth and sneering. Apparently, the Pharisee's attitude in prayer is hardly one of being conscious of God — the Pharisee seems to be conscious only of himself and the tax collector, and all he can do is speak proudly of his own accomplishments and speak disparagingly of the tax collector.

On the other hand, the tax collector "would not even look up to heaven" as he prayed, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." Imagine what might unfold today in our churches were more persons to pray with that kind of honesty and transparency.

We have read it in our Bibles, the verse from 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." We have attended enough Bible studies to be able to quote Romans 10:13, "For 'every one who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'"

We know what is right. We know what God expects. Our problem is that we know, but are afraid to do as the tax collector did. We are afraid to come clean.

Note the first verse of the parable, in which Jesus spoke to "some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous." Likely, Jesus had noted the way some of the religious people in his day looked down upon the broken members of society. The religious folks had perhaps been very successful in keeping score of the do's and don'ts of their faith — fasting, tithing, praying loudly. However, Jesus would not let the Pharisee's allegiance to the strictures of his faith trample over others.

Jesus also spotlighted the attitude of the tax collector as he dared not even look upward to heaven. The tax collector, a man who received taxes while Roman soldiers stood nearby ready to assist him, admitted the sordidness of his life. The only thing upon which this tax collector could depend, in terms of God, was the Almighty's being "merciful."

Odd, isn't it? The man willing to admit his foolish actions and his atrocious decisions cries out to God for mercy, while the other man is unwilling to own up to anything immoral in his life and is confidently throwing out his chest in comparison to his neighbor's failure. However, as we know, God isn't impressed with how we may act in comparison to others around us. God has in mind a standard he holds for all to emulate.

Years before Luke presented this incident from the life of Jesus, Isaiah wrote of a time

when "the haughty eyes of people shall be brought low, and the pride of everyone shall be humbled" (Isa. 2:11). Yet with Luke's telling us the way Jesus felt about haughty and insolent behavior, and with Isaiah's words as well, we note those persons who make up their lives with continued arrogance. It is almost as if the Bible writers never even spoke of this sinful, selfish attitude.

Of course, in each of our communities and in each of our life experiences, we have noted the foolishness of those persons who esteem themselves too highly and others who are willing to own up to their failures. The news teems with persons, organizations, corporations and governments who unwisely set their course of direction without regard for consequences to others. Their motto seems to be, "Me, me, me."

St. Louis Cardinals slugger Albert Pujols was featured in *Sports Illustrated* as saying, "There is something more important to me — my relationship with Jesus Christ and caring about others. More than this baseball. This baseball is nothing to me." Many observers will say Pujols is just like other athletes, spouting off about their faith and then living in ways that undermine what they say. But Pujols appears to be different. He's giving himself to the men and women of St. Louis who have Down's syndrome, and his wife Dee Dee (who has a daughter with Down's syndrome) says, "He really cares. He wants to be a hero to people" (pp. 30-34, *Sports Illustrated*, March 16, 2009).

Whether or not we are ever called "a hero" like Pujols should not be uppermost in our minds. However, to be known as a man or woman who is honest enough to call on God for his mercy in our lives is a goal we all should have. The sins of our lives cannot be cleansed away merely by taking a brush to them, but will require the action of God. And God is not impressed with whether we are "like other people" or how much of our income we offer him or any other thing we seem to regard as important. What seems to matter is our attitude about God's grace and mercy.



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June 14, 2009

The struggler's prayer

Mark 9:14-29

During these harsh economic times, some of us may describe our prayers as those of someone who is struggling. How do we pray for God to aid us in times when we are weak, frustrated and fearful? Are our words sensible to the Father, or do they sound more like whines?

Certainly in our text we see one person who owned up to being a struggler. His struggle is not related to the economy. He is the dad whose son cannot be helped by Jesus' disciples. Beyond that, we hear the pitiful confession the man makes to Jesus: "I believe; help my unbelief."

Haven't we been in similar circumstances at some point? Maybe our child did not suffer as this man's son suffered, but we have been engulfed by a severe crisis. Our faith wants to stand stoutly on its own legs, but instead those legs are clipped from beneath by a measure of doubt, of fear, of unbelief.

It is intriguing to note that this incident follows the story of the transfiguration of Jesus. Immediately following the account of Jesus being transfigured by the glory and power of God is the disciples' impotence. What a contrast! You would think that some measure of Jesus' glorification would have spilled onto Jesus' disciples as they have been with him on that mountain. However, as the father of the troubled young man announces, "I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not" (v. 18). It is tempting to ask who really is the person challenged by personal unbelief in this moment — the disciples of Jesus or the father.

The father described his son's condition: "He has a spirit that makes him unable to speak; and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid ..." (v. 18). Some have said the young man suffered with epilepsy. Others prefer to say the spirit that affected the young man was a demonic one. At any rate, the condition deprived the young man from having a normal life and caused much shame.

Of course, when the father turned to Jesus' disciples, they were unable to do a thing for the young man. Perhaps they attempted to say some of the things they had heard Jesus say on other occasions. Maybe they prayed with the young man. But whereas the disciples may have thought they possessed some of Jesus' power, they obviously were empty-handed.

It was a different matter altogether as Jesus came on the scene. The young man's difficulty was explained to Jesus. At first, Jesus seems to have rolled his eyes and then asked of his disciples, "You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you?" (v. 19). These words from Jesus must have crushed the egos of each one of those who sought to emulate their Master.

Finally, Jesus voiced the words everyone may have been hoping to hear: "Bring him to me" (v. 19). There was no drum roll or clashing of cymbals — just four words in the English text. I can imagine that Jesus even spoke those words rather softly.

The disciples brought the boy to Jesus. However, before Jesus was to do for the young man what he planned, the force directing the life of the boy "convulsed" him again. The young man fell on the ground, rolled around in the dust and foamed at the mouth. No doubt some of the bystanders jumped back. This was what they had seen in the past. However, what had been true in the past was not to hold true for the future. The presence of Jesus made that much clear.

At that moment, Jesus and the boy's father conversed, with the dad explaining to Jesus that his son had suffered these experiences "from childhood." The father went on to explain that from time to time, the young man had fallen into the fire, and into water. In exasperation, the dad said, "If you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us" (v. 22).

This sounds like the appeal of a frustrated, weary father. Each time the young man had collapsed into the fire, it probably had been his father who dragged the boy out. In times when the child had fallen into water, it was most likely his dad who had to rescue the young man. Day and night, this dad protected, rescued, watched over his son, and the demands were wearing him down.

Jesus interrupted the dad's plea, saying, "If you are able." It is almost as if Jesus said, "What do you mean telling me this bit about, if I am able? Of course, I am able. I am the Son of God." But instead, Jesus said, "All things can be done for the one who believes." Jesus did not shout disdainfully at the dad. Jesus did not shove the dad and his needy son away. "Immediately the father ... cried out, 'I believe; help my unbelief.'"

Unable to say it any other way, the father expressed what many of us might have said in the same situation. ... "I am confused, Jesus. I

don't know what I need to say. My life is one huge question mark most days." Thankfully, we trust Jesus to do what only he can do.

A friend of mine is a frequent soloist in worship. One of the pieces he sings is "No One Ever Cared for Me Like Jesus." Written by Charles F. Weigle, it says something our hearts may often want to say:

*No one ever cared for me like Jesus;
There's no other friend so kind as he;
No one else could take the sin and darkness
from me. Oh, how much he cared for me.*

I don't think it's too far from the mark to imagine this father in our text singing these words had he known them.

June 21, 2009

The servant's prayer

1 Samuel 3:1-10

Can a child hear the voice of God? Some experts may think it foolish that one of our sons or daughters could actually hear and understand the voice of the Almighty. Our text in 1 Samuel 3 tells us that "the boy Samuel" experienced God's voice — not once, but repeatedly.

The late Dr. Ben Philbeck, who taught me Old Testament at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in the late 1970s, noted that the biblical use of "boy" is *na'ar*, which could refer to persons from infants to adults (p. 19, vol. 3, *The Broadman Bible Commentary*). Samuel evidently had not reached physical or mental maturity. He is serving at this time as a personal attendant to the priest Eli.

The tone of the passage starts out a bit harshly: "The word of the Lord was rare in those days." Frankly, that goes against the grain for some of us who want to believe that God speaks in all times and in all kinds of experiences. However, we must remind ourselves that there have been several occasions in history when persons have honestly questioned whether or not God was present.

What about Jews who survived the Holocaust? As they watched sons and daughters and wives and husbands and parents die in the ovens, was God present? Or what about those persons who watched the Twin Towers crumble in New York on Sept. 11, 2001? Some of those men and women had friends, business associates, even family members to die. Was God simply looking the other way while all that tragedy took place?

Our text gives a hopeful note in verse 3:



“The lamp of God had not yet gone out.” This is in one way an explanation of the day’s chronology — it is bedtime for Samuel. But it is hardly time for God to sleep! Instead, God disturbs Samuel — and ultimately all of Israel — by calling Samuel’s name. Not once, but repeatedly, the Almighty calls to Samuel. Samuel thinks the priest Eli is calling him. Yet, each time Samuel goes to Eli, the older man declares that he has not, in fact, called.

Finally, Eli gets it. “Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy.” The old priest communicates to Samuel that he should await the voice once again, and when the voice comes, Samuel should say, “Speak, for your servant is listening.” Doing as he is told, Samuel will now encounter the authentic voice of God.

Not overpowering Samuel, God patiently calls once more and Samuel responds. God apparently waits and waits until someone willingly opens heart and soul to the thing the Almighty wants to declare. Perhaps it is not only so in ancient Israel, but also in our culture today.

God may speak to a younger, less mature person, as in the case of Samuel. Or God may speak to others we do not sometimes sense as the person who should hear the voice of the Lord. Is God speaking to the person whose national background is different from ours? Is God declaring his intention to us through an individual whose language is not the one we speak? And who gets to decide who is the individual through whom the Almighty may speak?

Imagine the commotion if God chose today to speak through a black child in the urban environs of New York or Miami. Imagine what an uproar would unfold if God were to speak through a Mideastern woman wearing traditional garb. Imagine if a Hollywood actor showed up on the David Letterman show saying that God had given him a message for modern America.

We do not laugh at our text, however. Samuel declared forthrightly and clearly, “Speak, for your servant is listening.” This is the prayer that characterizes Samuel’s willingness to put himself before the will of God. Nothing else matters now to Samuel — not his bedtime routine, not the needs of Eli, not the nearby lamp that causes smoke to fill the room. Only God matters. Only the words from God matter.

God’s words to Samuel that night meant punishment for Eli and for his family. However, Samuel made himself available to listen to God, and God chose to honor the

obedience of Samuel.

Maybe you are like me in that you don’t cherish the role of being forced to serve as someone else’s servant. How would you like it if someone else made each decision for you as to how you spent your time each day? How would you handle the demands placed on you by others? What if you were unable to call any portion of the days yours?

In some cultures through the years, that has been the pattern. People are told by others what to think, what to eat, what to avoid — this is “servanthood.” But God calls his people to accept a different mindset toward servanthood. He does not wish to bully us into doing his will. Rather, he wants us to choose to follow what he says because he understands that it will benefit us and his Kingdom.

In this text from 1 Samuel 3, we see Samuel exhibiting authentic servanthood. First, he serves the priest Eli. He makes himself available to Eli, doing whatever the older man requires. Even as Samuel hears the voice in the night, he hastens to Eli, thinking Eli needs something. But, as the story unfolds, the one crying Samuel’s name indeed needs something. Or should we say, the one crying Samuel’s name needs someone.

As the one crying your name makes his will known to you, the wisest response may be the same as Samuel’s on that odd night long ago: “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

June 28, 2009

The Spirit’s prayer

Romans 8:12-17, 26-27

In Romans 8, it seems the apostle Paul climbs to the top rung of his spiritual ladder. From his vantage point, Paul can see some of the ways of God in their clearest expression.

For example, in this chapter is part of Paul’s remarkable grasp of prayer. In verse 12, Paul uses the language of family and of intimacy to lay out something of his goal for prayer. Paul Achetemeier notes the sentence, “They treated us just like family,” in calling attention to the way Christians are to treat one another, and how God treats us (p. 137, *Interpretation: Romans*).

The apostle refers to the Romans as “brothers and sisters,” speaking with warmth and affection to those connected with him to Christ. In verse 14, he continues with the language of relationship, saying the Romans are “children.” Paul intends his audience to know that God is much more than a rock or tree or

any such impersonal item. God is so close to the Romans, they (and we) can call him “Father.”

The use of “Abba” in our text reflects something of the language of Jesus. In Mark 14:36, Jesus refers to God as Abba. This is the Aramaic word for father, and some say it is very intimate language, perhaps comparable with our saying, “Daddy.”

Again Paul uses family imagery when he speaks of “a spirit of adoption” (v. 15). He explains that God has not demanded of his sons and daughters “a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear,” but has allowed us to experience adoption. One of the thoughts that emerges here is that God has chosen us to be close to him. The Eternal God has reached to humanity and has brought us to his heart. He has adopted us, not the other way around.

In verses 26 and 27, Paul lifts up the notion of the Holy Spirit and his helping us to pray. Against all the background of family and personal relationship to God, Paul notes that humankind is afflicted with “weakness,” which hinders our ability to pray “as we ought.” Up steps the Spirit to aid us in ways that perhaps we could never imagine.

Paul tells us the “Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.” What does Paul mean by that expression? Some observers think that perhaps Paul here was writing about “praying in tongues” (see vol. 10, p. 220, *The Broadman Bible Commentary*).

Paul may be describing something of the nature of a mom who attempts to assist a child who is in trouble with the dad. Mom doesn’t even have to say some things out loud for her husband to understand. She communicates to the heart of the father what the upset child may be unable to put into words.

I can recall how my own mom “interceded” with my dad on my behalf or on the behalf of one of my three brothers. In a family with four boys, it seemed that one or the other of us was often in trouble. Whereas Dad might have wanted to react quickly and strongly to our foolish choices, Mom — sometimes without saying a word — could let my dad know that the problem had already been dealt with.

Of course, all of our scratching and clawing with these verses in Romans 8 are prelude to what is given in verse 27. Paul focuses now on the partnership of God and the Holy Spirit. He acknowledges that God “knows what is in the mind of the Spirit.”

Most married couples can catch the significance of what Paul is saying. Hasn't every husband "read the mind" of his wife at some point? Hasn't every wife spoken the same words as her husband simultaneously at some time? Is that perhaps akin to what is being noted in this verse? Can God and the Holy Spirit be in such close linkage with one another that they work together in understanding some of our prayers?

One of Baptists' best minds in terms of Romans was Dale Moody, the well-known professor at Southern Seminary for years. He noted in the *Broadman Bible Commentary* the Old Testament sense that God searches human hearts (1 Sam. 16:7; Jer. 17:10; Psalm 139:1, 23; 1 Chron. 28:9). However, Moody noted that the idea of intercession of the Spirit with God is a concept found where the New Testament moved toward trinitarianism.

Isn't it remarkable that there is such progression in our Bible? In the centuries of the Old Testament, God was at work seeking to know and to communicate with the heart of humanity. He offered his people covenant relationship. He led them out of bondage in Egypt, and into the Promised Land.

There developed later an intimate partnership involving God the Father, God the Spirit and God the Son. Perhaps one way to understand what was developing is that God sensed a desire not only to partner with human beings in relationship, but that the Father also desired a deep relationship with the Spirit and the Son.

It is that personal sense of God's nature that some find most appealing. Our God is not like the deities of other cultures who had names and attributes given to them by men and women living in that particular culture. Instead, our God is a personal, sensitive deity who desires to know us by name, to know the inclinations of our personalities and the like. And beyond that, our God has the distinct desire to unite with others in developing partnership.

Could it be that our God seeks to experience the same kind of "family" relationship with others that Paul sensed in writing about our family connections? **BT**

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First Baptist Church is an American Baptist Church located in Topeka, the capital city of Kansas. We are seeking a full-time **senior pastor** to lead our 700-member congregation and 10-person professional staff into a new phase of growth and ministry. The senior pastor's responsibilities include preaching, spiritual and administrative leadership of the ministerial staff and lay membership, teaching, pastoral care, and community outreach. Candidates must have completed a master's degree from an accredited seminary, with a doctorate degree preferred, and have significant experience as the senior minister of another Baptist church. We desire that the person called to join us will evidence a deep devotion to Christ, possess exceptional preaching skills, exercise strong leadership and visionary qualities that will enable our church to grow, and have a heart for evangelism through missions. To read our church profile, visit www.fbctopeka.org. Submit résumés to: Walter Schoemaker, Chairman, Pulpit Committee, First Baptist Church, 3033 SW MacVicar Ave., Topeka KS 66611.

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Azalea Baptist Church in Norfolk, Va., a moderate church affiliated with the BGAV and the CBF, seeks a full-time **director of Christian ministries** to develop, implement and oversee educational programs. For a detailed job description, send résumé along with work history and official school transcripts to: J. Francis, Search Committee, Azalea Baptist Church, 3314 E. Little Creek Rd., Norfolk, VA 23518.

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PEOPLE

Charles B. Bugg will retire from Gardner-Webb University June 30 where he serves as professor of church ministry and leadership and as director of the Center for Transformational Leadership. Earlier he was dean of the university's divinity school. He now serves as intentional interim pastor of Grace Crossing Church in Charlotte.

John Campbell died March 4 in Abilene, Texas, at age 73. He was retired professor of organ and church music at Hardin-Simmons University. His wife Lillie described him as a "perfectionist musician" who was modest about his talent, according to a local newspaper. He also served as organist for the First Baptist Church of Abilene for several years.

Peter JB Carman will become pastor of Olin T. Binkley Memorial Baptist Church in Chapel Hill, N.C., on May 15. He comes from the pastorate of Lake Avenue Baptist Church in Rochester, N.Y., and has previously held ministry positions in the First Baptist Church of Pittsfield, Mass., and Lime Rock Baptist Church in Lincoln, R.I.

Thomas Stewart Field died March 12 in Springfield, Mo., at age 93. He was president of William Jewell College from 1970-1980. Also he held pastorates in New Jersey, New York, Georgia, Louisiana and Missouri. He served two terms as president of the Missouri Baptist Convention while pastor of First Baptist Church of Springfield.

Susan Gunby will retire as dean of Mercer University's Georgia Baptist College of Nursing on July 1. She has worked at the school for more than 40 years and served as dean for more than 20. She will return to the classroom full time.

Michael Handy is minister of music and senior adults at First Baptist Church of Sanford, N.C. Handy previously served at First Baptist Church of Pine Bluff, Ark.

Dick Lewallen is director of spiritual services and chaplain at Abbey Delray retirement community in Delray Beach, Fla. He has had a long career in campus ministry and chaplaincy.

Hal Marchman died March 15 at age 89. For 28 years he was pastor of Central Baptist Church in Daytona Beach, Fla. He was also cofounder of a substance abuse treatment center there and longtime chaplain at Daytona

International Speedway. He was featured in the October 2005 edition of *Baptists Today*.

C. Ben Mitchell will become the Graves Professor of Moral Philosophy at Union University in Jackson, Tenn., this fall. A biomedical ethicist, Mitchell comes from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Ill. He is the editor of *Ethics and Medicine: An International Journal of Bioethics* and a consultant to the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

H. Franklin Paschall died April 10 at age 86. He was pastor of the First Baptist Church in Nashville, Tenn., from 1956 until his retirement in 1983, and served as president of the Southern Baptist Convention (1966-68).

Woodrow M. Pinson of Orlando, Fla., died Feb. 21 at age 92. He did mission work in Chicago and served churches in Kentucky, Tennessee, South Carolina and Florida. Among his Florida pastorates were First Baptist of Inverness, Eastside Baptist in Orlando and Starke Lake in Ocoee. He is survived by his wife of 68 years, Edna, along with two daughters and their families.

Lev Herrington Prichard III died April 7 in Corpus Christi, Texas, at age 72. An active Baptist layman and supporter of numerous causes, he was honored by Baylor University with a honorary degree and the Herbert H. Reynolds Award for Meritorious Service. A memorial service was held at Corpus Christi's First Baptist Church where he was a longtime member.

Eileen Campbell-Reed is associate director for the Learning Pastoral Imagination project of Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn. She is a Nashville-based Baptist minister who received

her doctorate from Vanderbilt University.

William J. Reynolds died March 28 in Nashville at age 88. He worked for 25 years in the church music department of the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention and edited the 1975 Baptist Hymnal. He composed hundreds of hymns including "Share His Love" and "People to People." He taught at Southwestern Seminary from 1980-1998.

Sid Smith died April 8 in Jacksonville, Fla., at age 65. He was the first director of the Florida Baptist Convention's African-American ministries division from May 1994 until his retirement Oct. 31, 2005. Smith began his work among Southern Baptists in 1968 as the South Central Los Angeles director of Christian social ministries for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board (now known as NAMB). In 1979, he began an 11-year tenure with the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board (now known as LifeWay), first as a consultant and then as manager of the black church development section, as well as serving as part-time pastor of several African-American congregations in the Nashville area.

J. Carroll Trotter died March 12 in Concord, N.C., at age 91. An Alabama native, he taught preaching at Southeastern Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., from 1955-1983. He served as interim pastor for more 50 N.C. churches.

John Wells will join Mars Hill College this summer as vice president for academic and student affairs, following the retirement of **Nina Pollard**. Wells currently serves as an administrator at Young Harris College in Georgia. **BT**

Central Seminary receives \$2 million gift for new chapel

SHAWNEE, Kan. (ABP) — Central Baptist Theological Seminary will be able to build a chapel on its new Shawnee, Kan., campus thanks to a \$2 million gift from a prominent Baptist family foundation.

The John and Eula Mae Baugh Foundation of San Antonio pledged the money toward the seminary's \$8 million "Cultivating Excellence" campaign, school officials announced March 12.

The gift from the foundation — which has provided support to several moderate

and progressive Baptist organizations, brings total pledges in the campaign to \$6.2 million.

It will fund Central's proposed Baugh-Marshall Chapel. The building's name follows Baugh Foundation practice in memorializing the charity's founders and honoring the president of the institution to which the building is donated, in this case Central President Molly Marshall. Construction on the Baugh-Marshall Chapel will begin this summer or fall. **BT**

readers' responses

A champion lost

EDITOR: With the death of Philip Wise on March 30, the moderate Baptist cause lost one of its champions.

Even before 1979, Philip took seriously the campaign to change the leadership in the Southern Baptist Convention and began to work to prevent that change. In the '80s he saw that the new leaders were going to prevail, and in 1990 threw himself energetically and unselfishly into the work of the movement that became the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

As is evident in the book *Fundamentalism* which he co-authored, his motive for this was theological and pastoral: he believed deeply that the moderate Baptist way is a truer and better way to be a follower of Jesus in our world than the way of Fundamentalism. It puzzled him that moderates are sometimes diffident about that.

In high school, Philip had been a National Merit Scholar and an all-state basketball player. He completed his undergraduate degree at Samford University with honors. His master's degree at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary was an honors degree, and later he earned his doctorate there after three years of advanced studies in theology at Oxford.

Since his youth Philip had been a natural leader, and he placed his spiritual gifts for leadership in the service both of the churches he served in Alabama and Texas and also of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, the Baptist World Alliance and other good causes.

He was a theologian of the church with a gift for extraordinary clarity in his writing and speaking. He was a pastor-teacher; in his counseling he was helpful in a practical way; in his preaching and teaching he was profoundly biblical; in his administrative work he was a visionary who understood how to get things done.

As was evident at a memorial service for him held at Samford University on April 3, Philip was an intensely loyal friend. One of the last things he wrote was a lovely and thoughtful essay on friendship as a theological virtue.

A group of Philip's friends has written a book honoring him; it is titled *For Faith and Friendship* and will be published later this year.

A few days before he died I asked Philip if his dying had led him to adjust his faith in any way. He said, "No, everything is all right."

Indeed it is; we celebrate the reason on Easter. *Requiescat in pace.*

*Fisher Humphreys, Birmingham, Ala.
(Dr. Humphreys is retired from Samford University's
Beeson Divinity School where he taught theology.)*

Veteran pastor concurs with challenges at hand

EDITOR: I just read "Pastorate Is Tougher Now" (April 2008, Reblog, page 37). No truer words were ever written.

I have been a pastor since Adam and Eve were thrown out of the Garden, and it's a lot more difficult now than it was in the early days. We faced a few social issues, but we had a culture that gave us support.

The church and its pastors are the early warning system of our culture. We are the canary in the mineshaft.

Most of us were visiting AIDS patients years ago, before the newspapers and the culture realized what kind of issue it was. We were dealing with families in crises after the no-fault divorce came into being, long before anyone wrote editorials about families in crises.

We were dealing with teenage pregnancies, abortions and all of these crises before any sociological studies were made about them or before the culture took it seriously.

In the '50s we were blessed to have only three channels on our television sets and, thank the Lord, we didn't have email that gives instant communication.

In the early days our people had not heard three star-studded television evangelists with their Grammy Award-winning music on their programs before they arrived at church. They had not heard the preaching of masterfully crafted but theologically lame sermons by television evangelists who had a staff of writers.

These evangelists had not spent their time trying to visit the sick, hold marriages together and keep a church from going under. Nevertheless, the local church is still the best game in town and the best thing God has going.

It's tough but the church *is* worth the effort. Thanks for noticing. Keep up the good work.

*Bill Self, Alpharetta, Ga.
(Dr. Self is pastor of Johns Creek Baptist Church.)*

This forum gives readers a chance to participate in respectful, though often passionate, dialogue on important issues. Your opinion is welcomed. Please include your name, address and phone number, and limit your letters to 200 words. Send by e-mail to editor@baptiststoday.org, by fax to (478) 301-5021, or by mail to Editor, *Baptists Today*, P.O. Box 6318, Macon, GA 31208-6318.

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guest commentary

On marriage, time to separate civil from ecclesiastical

By Jonathan Lindsey

ASSOCIATED BAPTIST PRESS

In this 400th-anniversary year of Baptist history it's time for Baptists to take the lead — and invite other ecclesiastical bodies to join them — in removing one of the final vestiges of theocracy in the United States.

From the earliest days of the settlement of this country by Europeans, the theocratic practice of clergy functioning as civil officials has been practiced notably in the performance of marriage ceremonies.

Baptists who truly believe in separating the functions of church and state should have long ago protested this unholy alliance. But, becoming acculturated and benefiting from certain forms of cultural dominance regionally, we along with our Protestant colleagues have continued to practice this joining of a religious act with a civil act.

When a clergy person performs a wedding ceremony, he or she often announces — as is sometimes required — that he or she is acting by the authority granted by the state or other jurisdiction in which the wedding is being performed. Even if the minister does not explicitly cite the civil authority they've been given, the act of signing the marriage license (a civil document) makes the pastor, priest or rabbi an agent of the civil authority.

Thus, you have a mixture of civil and religious authority in the act.

In this country, marriage is a civil relationship, governed by the laws of the state or federal territory in which the marriage occurs, and recognized by the mutual consent of other states. Domestic affairs have been the purview of the states, normally regulated at the state and local levels.

But, as a civil relationship, there are federal rights, responsibilities and benefits that accrue to persons who are married. And

there are clear legal and civil procedures to engage in order to dissolve the civil relationships and responsibilities of marriage.

If we treat marriage as a civil relationship in all instances, the civil nature of the relationship would function under the authority of civil servants duly elected and/or appointed to exercise the function of declaring two persons married. Removing the civil authority from clergy would clarify the ecclesiastical authority under which clergy perform marriage.

Thus, persons seeking a civil relationship only would choose a civil ceremony. Couples who desire both a civil union and the recognition or blessing of a religious relationship by an ecclesiastical authority or community would have that option. However, to choose only an ecclesiastically recognized relationship would mean to forego the protections and benefits accorded in a civil relationship.

It may be necessary that one of these relationships be declared as primary on an official basis. This is already the case to



some extent, since only the civil nature of the relationship can be dissolved by civil authorities and the religious nature of the relationship can be dissolved by ecclesiastical authorities where annulment is an option.

So, it's time to change. Where states specifically require clergy to register, that should no longer be required. In states where clergy have been accorded de facto authority, that practice should be discontinued.

Marriage would then be clearly understood as a relationship defined and governed by civil laws. Where ecclesiastical blessing is sought, whether for social or religious reasons, that too would be clear.

I think Roger Williams would approve this change based on his articulation of the limits of political and ecclesiastical powers in *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution*. Now, more than 350 years later, it's time for Baptists who truly believe in the separation of church and state to help put an end to this holdover from 17th-century theocratic behavior. **BT**

—Jonathan Lindsey is a retired administrator and faculty member at Baylor University.

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Kentucky seminary honors Hinson for his half century of teaching Baptists

By Bob Allen
Associated Baptist Press

LEXINGTON, Ky. — The Baptist Seminary of Kentucky honored one of its founding professors for 50 years of teaching by launching an endowed lecture series in his name in March.

The free-standing Baptist school on the campus of the Disciples of Christ-related Lexington Theological Seminary established the E. Glenn Hinson Lecture Series to honor the life and work of its senior professor of church history and spirituality. Future lectures will build on Hinson's legacy of study in spiritual formation, church history, ecumenism and Baptist history.

Baptist Seminary of Kentucky President Greg Earwood said knowledge of his field, experience in the classroom, passion about teaching and love for Christ and the church made Hinson a natural choice when the school set out to hire its first faculty members in 2001.

But Earwood said Hinson, a lightning rod for attacks from the right during the Southern Baptist Convention controversy in the 1970s and 1980s, feared he might hurt the seminary's reputation and attempts to raise money.

"Of course none of that has come to be," Earwood said. "Dr. Hinson has been a valuable representative of our seminary, faithful in his commitment to us, a blessing and encourager to me, and we are grateful."

Hinson's teaching career nearly ended as soon as it began. Near the end of his first year at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1959, Hinson noticed trouble hearing some of the questions of his students. That began decades of worsening deafness, which continued to dog him throughout his career.

Not much later, due to working 20 hours a day completing a dissertation while carrying a full teaching load, he wore down and also lost his voice.

"The loss of one vital faculty is difficult, but the loss of two in quick succession can be overwhelming," Hinson said. "I felt

the floodwaters roll over me."

Supported by family, colleagues and friends, Hinson said he finally came to accept what the apostle Paul wrote in First Corinthians about his "thorn in the flesh," hearing a message from the Lord, "My grace is sufficient for you."

One of the things Hinson, 77, said he learned over 50 years of teaching is "that you have to play the hand you are dealt." That means teachers "should take account of your limitations."

"I wouldn't give you a nickel for deafness," he said, "but, let me say, I wouldn't take a million dollars for what I have learned because I have had to cope with this handicap."

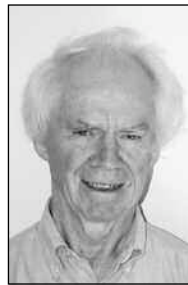
Hinson said he probably would have been a better teacher with good hearing, but he benefited from improving hearing-aid technology that allowed him to continue his work. Once more at the point of being unable to function in a classroom, Hinson soon will have cochlear implants installed.

Hinson said a second lesson he learned while teaching came in 1960, when he took his first church-history class on a field trip to the Abbey of Gethsemane. Their host was Thomas Merton, a Trappist Catholic monk who wrote more than 60 books on spirituality. To Hinson's horror, one of his students asked why someone with Merton's intellect would waste his life in a monastery.

Hinson said that, rather than rebuking the student, Merton smiled and answered: "I am here because I believe in prayer. That is my vocation."

"You could have knocked me over with a feather," Hinson said. "I had never met anyone who believed in prayer enough to think of it as a vocation."

Hinson pondered Merton's words alongside the Protestant rubric, "God has no hands but our hands, no feet but our feet, no voice but our voice."



"If that is true," he concluded, "our world has to be in an awful mess."

Inspired by the encounter and subsequent trips to Gethsemane, Hinson introduced a course on Classics of Christian Devotion that quickly became one of the most popular classes on campus. It also began to influence a generation of Baptist church historians to integrate spirituality into their teaching about church history.

One of Hinson's former students, Loyd Allen, now a professor at McAfee School of Theology in Atlanta, said all 15 of the moderate Baptist seminaries, divinity schools and houses of studies started since the 1980s have an emphasis on spiritual formation. Each individual teaching those classes has some personal connection with Hinson.

"Glenn started a good work of spiritual formation among us, but it is far, far from over," Allen said. "If we truly wanted to honor him, then what we would do is put our energy and our resources into seeing that his work of contemplation and action on spiritual formation for ministers and laity continues."

John Inscore Essick, recently named assistant professor of church history and Hinson's successor at the Kentucky seminary, introduced a panel of Hinson's former students responding to his remarks.

"Seminary professors are often, for better or for worse, like a stone dropped into a calm pool," Essick said. "Ripples, endless ripples, go out from that point."

"You," he said to Hinson, "have been like a very fine stone dropped into a very needy pool, and you have left many ripples as a result of that."

The Baptist Seminary of Kentucky began classes in 2002 with 14 students and held its first commencement with three graduates in 2005. To date the seminary has graduated 13 students. The school offers two master of divinity degrees, taught by three full-time and 15 adjunct faculty.

Before coming to the Kentucky seminary, Hinson taught at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond from 1992 until retiring in 1999. **BT**

Reconciliation, collaboration echoed at Baptist Border Crossing celebration

Story and photo by Bill Webb
Word & Way

LIBERTY, Mo. (ABP) — Speakers challenged nearly 1,000 ministers and laypeople from several Baptist denominational groups and Midwestern states to become agents of reconciliation, collaboration and justice during the Baptist Border Crossing April 2-4 at Pleasant Valley Baptist Church in Liberty, Mo.

The event was the second of four regional New Baptist Covenant celebrations set for 2009 — the outgrowth of a national meeting held in Atlanta in 2008.

President Jimmy Carter was present during the Friday morning worship session, sharing the platform with African-American preacher and evangelist Carolyn Ann Knight. Referencing his unsuccessful efforts to bridge divisions in the Southern Baptist Convention, Carter called listeners to come together, especially setting aside racial differences.

Jim Hill, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Missouri, co-chair of the event with Wallace S. Hartsfield II, senior pastor of Kansas City's Metropolitan Missionary Baptist Church, said organizers "felt we needed to get to know each other in the communities where we live."

"It really is our prayer that God starts something among us that we can't control," he said.

Hartsfield outlined the three-point goal of organizers.

"We challenge you to meet at least one person at this meeting and forge a relationship," he said. "We challenge churches to make a commitment with another church." After forming those relationships, he said the next step would be to collaborate on ministry projects.

North American Baptist Fellowship president David Goatley, who also is executive director-secretary of the Lott Carey Foreign Mission Convention, told participants, "I have a hunch that God is not particularly concerned about the lines we have drawn."

Preaching about Peter's unexpected



Carolyn Ann Knight urged diverse Baptists to bring others to Christ.

experience of crossing the border between Jews and Gentiles to evangelize Cornelius, Goatley observed, "It wasn't Peter's idea to color outside the lines; it was God's revelation.

"At the times God colors outside our lines, some of us are stressed," he added. "[But] God is in the habit of calling us outside the lines we have been coloring inside."

"My life is made up of border crossings," Baptist World Alliance president David Coffey of Great Britain said, noting he had visited Egypt in January, Jamaica and Cuba in February and Jordan and Romania in March.

Coffey credited Carter with "rehabilitating the good name of Baptist people."

Citing the experience of Philip in bringing the gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch, Coffey reminded listeners to be sensitive to God's calling, be prepared to make sacrifices ("it goes with the gospel") and not to be judgmental.

"Some of you have been wounded" by disinformation, denigration and discrimination, he said. "But you have to stand against

judgmentalism; God will reward you for that."

The example of Philip and the Ethiopian was a classic example of border crossing, Coffey said, noting it called for an Arab Christian to share the gospel with a black man — high up in government — who had been castrated.

Like Philip, be creative, know how to apply the Bible and trust the providence of God, Coffey said.

Knight, also founder of Can Do Ministries, reminded listeners of the imperative to cross borders to engage in the simple act of bringing others to Christ.

Pointing to the account of a paralyzed man being lowered to the feet of Jesus by four determined friends, she suggested everyone present could relate to the paralytic.

"Someone, somewhere, took you to church, told you about Jesus.... Someone prayed for you," she said, noting the helpless man received healing and salvation because Jesus noted the faith of the man's friends.

As the four friends discovered, "getting people to Jesus is not easy," she said. "Being a Christian is not easy. It is not comfortable and smooth.... God wants to use you — your faith — to lift someone up."

In an animated closing sermon, speaker, author and professor Tony Campolo compared the fall of ancient Babylon — destroyed by materialism — to America.

In Babylon, almost anything was available for purchase, he said, including people. "There is growing up in Babylon another city; it is the church of Jesus Christ."

"We have sought the welfare of ourselves, not the welfare of others," he charged. "The church has got to be different" and pursue justice for those in their communities who are most vulnerable, he said.

Wallace S. Hartsfield Sr., now retired as pastor of Metropolitan, the church of which his son is pastor, reinforced Campolo's call to seek justice for the vulnerable. **BT**

—Bill Webb is editor of *Word & Way*, the historic newspaper of Missouri Baptists.

the lighter side

Saving Jesus an aisle seat

By Brett Younger

When I was nine years old, I heard a preacher at a revival say, “Before you buy a ticket, ask yourself, ‘Is this a movie I would be proud to be watching if Jesus comes back in the middle of it?’”

You might think this would curtail my movie going, but I took it wrong. I figured that if Jesus was coming back soon I didn’t need to study or clean my room. I should go to the movies. I’ve seen a lot of movies waiting on the second coming.

Admittedly, some films prove the evangelist’s point. I would be a smarter person if I had not seen most of Will Ferrell’s movies. (I did have the good judgment to miss *Step Brothers*.) I realize that I should stop attending movies involving vampires, aliens or Adam Sandler. I imagined hearing Jesus laughing at me during *Mamma Mia*.

There are movies, however, that have more to say than some revival preachers. These films usually don’t mention Jesus by name, but they are about the kind of truth Jesus proclaimed. They help us understand what it means to love, hate, suffer and celebrate.

I could have done without the out-house scene, but *Slumdog Millionaire* isn’t just about money, fame and fortune; it’s about faith, hope and love.

Crash portrays people who are a mixture of saint and sinner. Who knew an obnoxious racist could also be a loving son? Or that Matt Dillon — who also starred in *Herbie Fully Loaded* — could play both?

Field of Dreams makes me want to call my father, play catch with my son and forgive Kevin Costner for *Waterworld*.

Hoosiers may look like it’s about tiny Hickory High’s Indiana state basketball championship, but it’s really about second chances and the gift of grace.

Robin Williams plays a messianic teacher in *The Dead Poets’ Society* who implores his students,



“Carpe diem. Seize the day. Make your lives extraordinary.” His preaching isn’t far from “have life and have it abundantly.”

Jesus has to have a soft spot for any movie that helps us walk in the shoes of strangers.

My guess is that Jesus doesn’t care for most of the films that are supposed to be about him. He seldom challenges anyone in the movies. Jesus is usually depicted as too boring for us to imagine religious people wanting to execute him.

In *Jesus Christ, Superstar*, Jesus acts more likely to tie-dye a T-shirt than clear the temple.

In *The Passion of the Christ*, Jesus is a superhero who withstands more torture than the audience can watch.

In *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Jesus seems too confused to be capable of writing any portion of the Sermon on the Mount.

There aren’t many, but some wonderful movies take faith seriously.

In *Doubt*, Philip Seymour Hoffman and Meryl Streep personify doubt and conviction. Hoffman’s priest raises the question of whether doubt can hold a church together.

In *Tender Mercies*, Robert Duvall gets sober, gets baptized, sings in the choir and puts his life back together. Since the story is set in Texas, he writes country songs about it.

In *Shadowlands*, Anthony Hopkins plays C.S. Lewis coming to grips with the heartbreaking death of his wife Joy — who should not have been played by Debra Winger.

The Mission presents the tragic story of a Jesuit priest in Brazil destroyed by the church’s greed.

In *Babette’s Feast*, the main characters have substituted religion for life, but in the middle of a supper paid for by lottery winnings, they discover communion.

Susan Sarandon’s nun in *Dead Man Walking* has real faith as well as real doubts.

Gandhi didn’t memorize the Four Spiritual Laws, but as a turn-the-other-cheek Hindu, he puts Christians to shame.

If Jesus comes back in the middle of one of those films, I’ll suggest that we stay for the rest of the movie. **BT**

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

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A visit with Doug Maag

By John Pierce,
posted March 14, 2009

www.bteditor.blogspot.com

How's this for commitment? Doug Maag taught a college Sunday school class at Wieuca Road Baptist Church in Atlanta from 1964 until 1998. And it was more than a Sunday morning duty.

"Those were blessed days," the 90-year-old Texan told me one recent afternoon when I stopped by his current residence in Macon, Ga., where he's known as the "Mayor of Morningside" (Assisted Living). During the 13 years I did campus ministry in metro Atlanta, Doug was someone to know and emulate. He simply loved helping young adults grow into maturity.

"Do you ever see ol' Cow Lot?" he asked, quickly reminding me that his nickname for former student Don Lott — my first Baptist Student Union (BSU) president at Southern Tech and an active Wieuca — came from a Western wear store back in Texas.

It seems that everyone in Doug's sphere has a nickname. The Wichita Falls native himself has long been known as "Horns."

Digging back in his mind through the decades, Doug went on to name dozens of other students — some I knew and many I did not.

Year after year, Doug and his late wife, Norma — lovingly known as "Maagie" — participated in the once popular adopt-a-student program in which students going



off to college were taken under the wings of a local church family.

Sandra Meeks, ironically from Macon, Ga., where Doug now lives to be close to his daughters and their families, was the first student he and Maagie "adopted," he told me. But there were dozens of others including Mark Pike who played football for the Buffalo Bills after finishing at Georgia Tech. And I loved it when this 90-year-old would fill in my mental blanks.

"Doug, remember the time in the early '80s when I took a group of Wieuca students to New York City?" I asked. "It was initiated by a Georgia State student ... Todd ..."

"Todd DuBose," he snapped back. "He ended up moving to New York ..." (Indeed, Todd is now a psychology professor in Chicago, my Internet search revealed.)

In a sense, every student the Maags encountered felt somewhat adopted. A school administrator once asked Doug if someone from Wieuca might visit the students at Bauder Fashion College once a month.

"Once a month is not enough," Doug told her. So he and Maagie would pay the young women a visit every Monday. Many became active in his college Sunday school class.

Countless students who bumped into Doug along the way are forever grateful — including Dave Stewart, a Georgia Tech alum who now serves as Baptist campus minister for Southern Polytechnic State University and Kennesaw State University in Marietta, Ga., (a position I once held).

"I am a Christian today because of Doug Maag's teaching and witness," Dave told me when learning of my recent visit. "I don't have a lot of heroes, but Doug Maag is way up on my short list."

It's been a long time since Sears & Roebuck transferred Doug to Atlanta. But hundreds of students are grateful they did.

After Maagie died in 2005, Doug came down to Macon where his loving family is nearby. And "Tex" the terrier keeps him company as well.

My afternoon with Doug inspired me. There are lessons to be learned from such a faithful example.

Among them: Find a place of ministry that fits your interest and gifts — and dig in for the long haul. Thanks for being such a good example, Doug. **BT**

Desiring for de-baptism

By Tony W. Cartledge,
posted April 2, 2009

www.tonycartledge.com

A friend pointed me to an article at Breitbart.com that describes a growing trend among European atheists to seek "de-baptism."

The writer reports that more than 100,000 Britons have downloaded "certificates of de-baptism" as a way to renounce the faith that was chosen for them by their parents.

Londoner John Hunt, who holds the

very Baptist idea that he wasn't old enough to make his own decision at five months, sought to have his name removed from the rolls of the Anglican church, and was advised that he should post a renouncement announcement in the *London Gazette*, a newspaper that carries official records.

So he did.

Other Britons have made even stronger complaints. Michael Evans, 66, branded infant baptism as "a form of child abuse."

Similar movements have sprung up in Spain and Italy, where most of those seek-

ing "de-baptism" want to withdraw from the Catholic Church. The Italian Union of Rationalists and Agnostics says about 2,000 people per month download "de-baptism" forms from its website.

On the one hand, it's sad to see such hostility toward churches, and so many people turning away from their family's faith traditions. On the other hand, the movement powerfully illustrates the wisdom of the Baptist principle that it should be up to all individuals — not their families — to choose whether or not they will follow Christ in the waters of baptism. **BT**

Baptists Today offers gift, naming opportunities

For 25 years, *Baptists Today* has been a trusted voice and guiding light for Baptists. As the publication begins its next quarter century of service, *Baptists Today* is solidifying its base of support and expanding its outreach, especially to young Baptists.

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Support the centerpiece of the Fall Board of Directors meeting that will bring in a prominent figure to dialogue with directors and to engage a select group of honorees/supporters. A new award will be created and presented annually at this event to individuals and/or representatives of organizations to honor their contributions to the ministry of *Baptists Today*.

- \$30,000 to fund the event for three years
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For additional information, to discuss these opportunities and to make a gift, contact John D. Pierce, Executive Editor (jpierce@baptiststoday.org / 877-752-5658 / 478-301-5655), or Keithen Tucker, Marketing and Development Director (ktucker@baptiststoday.org / 478-330-6223 / 478-361-5363).

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Baptists Today
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The changing place and face of missions

MONROVIA, Liberia — Ricks Institute, a K-12 school that is part of the Liberian Baptist Convention's work, and the First Baptist Church of Christ in Macon, Ga., have forged a partnership that shows the changing place and face of missions.

The modern mission movement, especially for Baptists, is rooted in the heroic work of William Carey, missionary to India, and Ann and Adoniram Judson, missionaries to Burma. Carey and the Judsons were bearers of a distinctly Western religion to equally distinct Eastern cultures.

Inevitably, Carey and the Judsons and the generations who followed their models carried more than the Gospel. They carried the West along with their Bibles and their zeal to share Christ. For at least two centuries Christian missions to Asia, Africa and South America increasingly became a component of colonialism too. With colonialism also came a spirit of paternalism that benignly assumed the West is best.

Late in the last century, attitudes of missionaries and students of missions began to change in important ways. Colonialism and paternalism, rooted in the West, have begun to give way to authentic partnerships between Christians in the East and West. The transformation — “conversion” is not too strong a term — has important implications for the future of Christian missions in our world.

At Macon's First Baptist Church, that change began with the arrival of Liberian refugee Olu Menjay in the early 1990s and is maturing through his work in post-war Liberia as the principal of the Ricks Institute.

Menjay, who came to Macon to attend



The Ricks Institute choir processes in for a dedication ceremony. Photo by Richard Wilson.

Mercer University, was a refugee of war, fleeing the horrors of a bloody coup d'état in 1980 that sowed the seeds of an even bloodier civil war that raged in Liberia from 1990 until 2004. In retrospect, his arrival was the planting of a small providential seed with the potential to undo the horrors of strife in Liberia and with the potential to transform one congregation's idea of missions. No one thought that Olu would return years later and challenge the congregation to live out the Gospel that is proclaimed week by week. But the quiet presence of a refugee of war in our midst was a small seed — like in Jesus' parable — that grew in ways no one ever imagined.

After graduation from Mercer and graduate studies at Duke University and Boston University, Menjay returned to Liberia in 2005 at the pleading of the Liberian Baptist Convention to begin the restoration of Ricks Institute, which before the wars had been the premier boarding school in the nation.

Mercer professor Richard Wilson reintroduced his former student to the Macon congregation when he learned that Menjay was committed to creating Gospel Partners as a new way of doing missions. Menjay made a brief presentation in 2006, and the church responded by sending school supplies,

computers and a wide variety of tools that could be used in the school's agricultural emphases.

The next year, Menjay visited Macon again and spoke to the congregation about the challenges Ricks Institute faced. A church member asked, “What is one tangible need our congregation can meet?”

Olu answered: “A 15-passenger van. We need a way to transport the work teams that come to help us.” Before the lights were turned off that night, pledges for nearly \$7,000 toward a van purchase had been offered.

The congregation rallied around that project and, in January 2008, a gently-used passenger van emblazoned in Ricks' school colors — burgundy and gold — was loaded into a shipping container and sent to Liberia. The van's interior was filled with linens and bedding to stock the recently renovated boys' dormitory at Ricks.

The physical and spiritual distance between Ricks Institute and First Baptist Church began to shrink in dramatic ways. Children from the church began corresponding with Ricks students through pen-pal letters. Books were collected for the Ricks library.

A turning point in our youth group's interest in Ricks came when they attended Passport Camp in Wingate, N.C., in the summer of 2008. Their camp pastor for the week was James Blay, dean of students at Ricks Institute. The students' eyes were opened to how much they could learn from someone in another part of the world.

Ricks Institute now had a face for the youth group: James Blay, a new friend and role model. The place and face of missions were indeed changing. Two Liberians had come to the States and touched the lives of our church members. Both gently challenged our understanding of missions and partnerships.

With the deepening of relationships and the churning of energy around Ricks

Institute, the next step was obvious. We needed to go and witness first-hand what was going on in Liberia. We needed not only to collect and send things, but we also needed to go and be a part of the story.

On a hot Liberian evening in June 2008, Menjay and Wilson mused about how the school and congregation could cement their partnership. Could it be that the two communities of faith could work together, side-by-side, on repairing that dismal auditorium at Ricks? A trip was born.

Ricks' auditorium, the location of daily assemblies and the primary gathering place for the school, needed work. The tile floor laid in 1963 had suffered the damage of occupation during the civil war and was a safety hazard. Sunday school classes and individuals at First Baptist bought boxes of tile and, in November 2008, more than 6,000 square feet of tile were shipped, along with all of the necessary tools and materials for the preparation work.

Then, in March 2009, five church members — Wilson, Julie Long, Cathy Logue, Charles Matson and Jason Todd — went to Ricks Institute to lay the new floor. During the time at Ricks, the team was impressed by

the work ethic and school pride shown by the Liberians who worked alongside them and humbled by the hospitality received.

Students, faculty and staff expressed sincere gratitude. We were moved by the integrity set as a high standard for the Ricks community, and how they refused to be influenced by the corruption that exists in their country. We learned from their ingenuity as they solved problems in the work by creatively using what they had. Most of all, we were changed by the picture of hope we saw there. We had the conviction that we were, indeed, partners.

Our church's experience in Liberia became for us a new way of doing missions.

When we think of missions, we now think of actual people whose names we know. When we pray, we can pray for Mr. Robert and Mr. Isaac, master carpenters at Ricks. We pray for Marcus, who tends his garden after school so that he can grow food for the poor. We pray for Sabrina, a budding journalist who interviewed us for the school newspaper. When we give money, we can see how our gifts are being used to do Kingdom work.

Teaching and learning is a two-way street; each community has something to

offer to the other. The most memorable part of the journey was the sense that this project was our common goal.

The First Baptist workers had come to that auditorium from halfway across the globe. The Ricks workers had come from across campus. But we both were there for the same reason. We saw in that place, in that very room we were tiling, a picture of hope and an expression of love.

We have the memories, too, of the faces of those who worked side-by-side. Both the place and the face of missions have changed.

"Not for self, but for others," is the Ricks Institute's motto. It is also the confession that drives our global partnership and knits us together as brothers and sisters in the worldwide community bound together through the faith, hope and mutual love of people united by Christ.

We hope to build upon our shared commitments for years to come. **BT**

—Julie Long is minister to children and families at Macon's First Baptist Church, and Richard F. Wilson is chair of the Christianity department at Mercer University.



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Part one in a two-part series on David and leadership

King David: leadership guru

Ancient Israel's greatest leader never wrote a book on leadership, but his life was a model of solid, innovative leadership — until it devolved into unfocused failure. Today's leaders and would-be leaders could learn from him.

The biblical story reveals two Davids. The first is an upward David who is focused and faithful and demonstrating everything wanted in a leader. In the book of First Chronicles, that is the only David we meet.

But the author of First and Second Samuel reveals David warts and all, so we know the downside, as well. We can learn from both Davids.

Positive lessons from the upward David (1 Sam. 16 – 2 Sam. 10)

David's ascension to power is related with great admiration in 1 Samuel 16 – 2 Samuel 10, along with some retrospective notes in 2 Samuel 21 – 24. The Chronicler relies heavily on the same traditions (1 Chron. 11 – 29). In these stories, David exhibits a number of notable leadership qualities.

1. *David was well-rounded.*

When Saul's counselors sought a musical therapist for the troubled king, one of them knew of David, and described him as being "skillful in playing, a man of valor, a warrior, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence; and the LORD is with him" (1 Sam. 16:18).

Could one ask for a better letter of reference? This is no child, but a grown man who has demonstrated both practical and artistic skills as well as a pleasant personality and insightful speech. Most impressive, however, was the conclusion that God's presence could be discerned in the young warrior.

David, in short, had multi-dimensional skills and a magnetic personality that drew others to him.

2. *David had impressive relationship skills, and used them.*

Good leaders are good with relationships. David was not only very personable, but also intentional about the kind of



"David", Caravaggio, 1606-07, Oil on wood, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

relationships he cultivated. He was loyal to Saul even though the paranoid king wanted to do him in.

He maintained a close friendship with Saul's son without using it to undermine the king. After being forced from the court, David built an army from outcasts who were longing for a leader, carefully choosing captains within the group.

David could forge strategic alliances with influential families in Judah and even build a mutually beneficial relationship with a chief among the rival Philistines. He could negotiate with political opponents within the nation and with hostile kingdoms without.

Effective ministers learn to identify the traditional leaders in a church, along with the obstructionists and the emerging leaders — and they work extra hard to build positive, productive relationships with them.

3. *David surrounded himself with quality people and depended on them.*

One can't help but be impressed by the number of people involved in David's life. As an adult he was constantly befriending people, recruiting supporters, building networks and delegating responsibilities.

He assigned three nephews to become chief lieutenants, looked to Abiathar the priest and Nathan the prophet as spiritual counselors, recruited Hushai and Ahithophel as government advisors, and placed other

people in significant roles (2 Sam. 8:15-18).

David understood that good leaders know how to delegate responsibilities. Good leaders understand that they can't do everything, and don't have to do everything. They do their part, and do it well, and generally work longer hours than anyone else — but they also recognize when someone else can do something better than them, or at least instead of them, so that they can focus on other things.

4. *David exhibited courageous confidence that inspired others.*

The story of young David defeating the giant Goliath remains popular not only because it is a delightful story, but also because David exhibited the kind of courage and trust in God we would all like to have. When David arrived in the Valley of Elah, he found a boastful enemy and a demoralized army: he appears to have been the only one present who believed in a power greater than his own.

When David challenged the imposing enemy and then backed up his words with actions, the other soldiers were inspired and encouraged to believe that they could also succeed, and they routed the Philistines.

It's hard to over-emphasize the importance of confidence and courage in a leader. That does not mean leaders have to always win the first time or make it look as easy as David did with Goliath. But when others see leaders persevere and push ahead in the face of obstacles, tough times or even doubts, they realize they can be confident and courageous, too.

5. *David made careful, strategic decisions.*

But there's more to leadership than inspiring people to follow. Leaders also need to know where they are going, and how to get there. In David's life we see evidence that David knew how to make careful, strategic decisions that contributed significantly to his leadership.

David knew when it was time to step forward (as he did in challenging Goliath), but he also knew when it was time to leave. When Saul turned against David, he could have remained and challenged the king, but chose to step aside.

Sometimes the smartest thing a leader can do is to recognize that it's time to go. When that happens, there's no shame in realizing the time has come to move on, to learn from the experience, and to find a new place of service, even if it's starting a new enterprise altogether, as David did when he left Saul's court and went south to Adullam.

David made several strategic decisions as he stood on the cusp of becoming king. In 2 Samuel 1, he was careful to make it clear that he was not complicit in Saul's recent death, and publicly mourned the fallen king. He chose not to seek leadership but to let others call him into it (2 Sam. 5:1-5), and this put him in a much stronger position.

Being called to a pastoral role is not like being named king (though some might like to think of it that way). Nevertheless, we recognize the value of having a church seek out a leader, rather than the other way around.

Once David became king, he showed brilliant leadership through several strategic decisions. He built important ties of friendship by praising Saul's valiant supporters from Jabesh Gilead, and by showing unexpected and unprecedented kindness to Saul's grandson Mephibosheth. Through both of these actions, David built bridges to those who might be most likely to oppose his leadership.

David understood that having opposition is a part of reality, and the best way to deal with it is to reach out to opponents by building bridges, by offering friendship and kindness even if it is not returned.

Perhaps David's most brilliant political decision was his choice of Jerusalem as his capital: it was midway between the feuding tribes in the north and south, and had never been conquered by the Israelites. David led his army to take the city and established it as a politically neutral and geographically central seat for his government.

Good leaders make good decisions time after time, which leads to growing trust from others and even stronger ability to lead.

6. David often led by consensus rather than command.

Good leaders make good decisions, but they rarely make them alone. For example, the story about David's desire to bring the

Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, according to 1 Chronicles 13:1-14, says that David involved all of Israel's leaders in making the decision.

Involving other people in decision-making serves at least two purposes. The first is that getting input from other people may well lead to an even better idea or one that is more acceptable.

The second purpose is that getting others involved helps them to take ownership of the decision — it's not only the leader's idea or ministry, but also something the church or organization owns and supports as its own decision. One can talk *ad infinitum* about the pastor being the "vision-caster" of a church, for example, but if the church doesn't buy into the vision, it won't become reality.

7. David trusted God for leadership, and followed.

Abundant evidence suggests that the upward David intentionally trusted in God to lead him, and actively sought God's leadership.

While David and his men were at Keilah as Saul was pursuing David and trying to kill him, the text tells us no less than three times that David "inquired of the Lord" by asking the priest Abiathar to seek an answer from God (1 Sam. 23). Later on, we read that David sought divine guidance before pursuing the Amalekites who had razed his city of Ziklag (1 Sam. 30:8).

In 2 Samuel 2:1, we learn that he inquired of the Lord before going up to Hebron to be made king over Judah, and later he sought God's guidance before attacking the Philistines after he had become king of Israel (2 Sam. 5:17-25). A story in 2 Samuel 21:1, which is chronologically out of place, tells of how David sought God's guidance during a time of great famine.

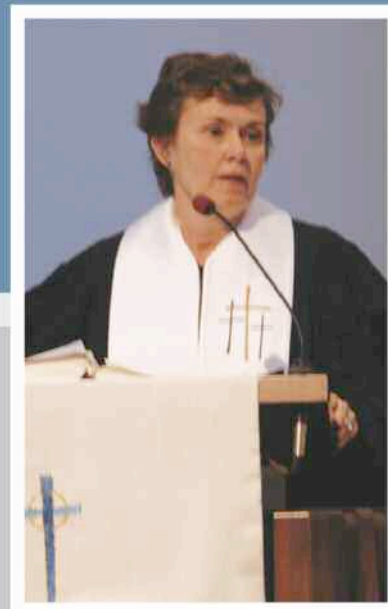
The frequency of stories about David seeking divine guidance suggests a pattern in which he sought to live in keeping with God's will. He sought God's way, rather than David's way, and as long as he did so, he exhibited model leadership.

Sadly, there came a day when that changed, and a lot of other things changed with it. **BT**

Editor's note: The second article on David and leadership, titled "King David: warts and all" will appear in the June issue. These articles are adapted from a series of lectures presented to the Smoky Mountain Institute of Christian Studies.



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Reviews by Jackie Riley

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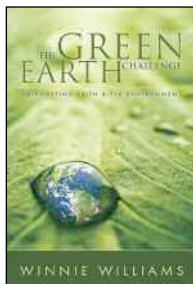
Integrating Faith & the Environment

Winnie Williams

The American lifestyle is devastating the earth's natural resources. For example, Americans make up 2 percent of the world's population, but use 25 percent of the world's fuel.

Christians are major contributors to the abuse of the environment, but unfortunately have been late in connecting morality and ethics to ecology. Winnie Williams believes it is our moral and spiritual obligation to protect creation, however. To encourage Christians to integrate their faith with care for the environment, Williams has written a layperson's guide to ecology and creation care.

Writing with her typical brand of passion for a cause, Williams ably weaves biblical insights with research, personal reflections with challenge. In an interesting fashion and with appropriate photos, she introduces readers to topics such as acid rain, deforestation,



global warming, melting icecaps, soil and air contamination, non-native plants in forests, war, erosion and overfishing.

A long-time educator who is well read and well traveled, Williams is uniquely qualified to write this layperson's guide, having visited five continents and lived among the native inhabitants in several countries. Her personal experiences and convictions will inspire either individual readers or study groups.

"Questions for reflection" at the end of each chapter and lists at the end of the book on ways to promote creation care in all areas of life can make for meaningful personal application.

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Legacies of Care

The Center for Family and Community Ministries of the Baylor University School of Social Work is committed to helping congregations become more involved with/be of greater service to their neighbors. And, the Center teaches a broad concept of who our neighbor may be: "The one who walks beside us on this journey of life may not be one we recognize or know. ...



Look more deeply, and you will see Christ."

To assist congregations in community ministry, the Center has developed the "Walking Alongside" curriculum/resources. One part of this series is *Legacies of Care*, a CD containing reproducible lesson plans and teaching leaflets. This six-week study addressing poverty is designed to help individuals and churches think about these questions:

- Who is my/my church's neighbor?
- What is my/my church's responsibility toward my/our neighbor?
- How have others responded, and what does that teach me/us?
- What do scriptures say about my/our neighbor and what my/our response should be?
- How does that affect me/us, and what can I/my church do?

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Families

Redeeming the time



DALLAS (ABP) — In tight economic times, families should recognize making memories doesn't mean breaking the bank, family ministry experts agree.

Dream vacations to Disney World can be meaningful memory-building times for families, but so can shared trips to a store or afternoon drives down country roads.

The times that just happen can be as meaningful as the fancy vacations — and maybe more so, said Diana Garland, dean of the Baylor University School of Social Work.

“Fun does not have to be expensive.”

Sometimes, carefully planned trips fail to live up to expectations, but time spent together eating a meal, doing household chores, shopping at the grocery store or learning some new skill — like playing a musical instrument or a new game — offers unbeatable family memories, she noted.

“Quality time is not really scheduled as much as it is something that happens in the middle of the quantity of time spent together. Some of the most precious moments happen in the middle of just living life together,” Garland said.

Meaningful family times don't require big budgets or elaborate timetables, but they do demand some intentionality, said Cathy Anderson, children's minister at First Baptist Church in Marietta, Ga.

“I'm a big fan of the designated family night,” Anderson said. Scheduling a night each week for a family activity and

sticking to that schedule demands discipline when coaches call extra practices, extra-credit school assemblies are offered and opportunities for overtime at work arise.

“Parents have to decide they really want to do it,” she said, pointing to one family she knows who designated 6 p.m. Saturday to 6 p.m. Sunday as their family Sabbath time.

“That's the time they committed to turn off all the electronics and spend time together without all the background noise,” she said.

Parks, museums and historical sites offer opportunities for families to have fun and learn things together at little or no cost, Anderson added.

“Pretend like you're a tourist in your hometown,” she suggested.

Significant time together as a family may be accomplished by something as simple as setting one evening each week as “family night in the kitchen,” said Diane Lane, pre-school and children's ministry specialist with the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

“Choose something easy like spaghetti,” she suggested. “Give each member of the family some assignment — cooking the main dish, preparing a side dish or dessert, setting the table and cleaning up after the meal. And then rotate the

“Quality time is not really scheduled as much as it is **something that happens** in the middle of the quantity of time spent together. Some of the most precious moments happen in the middle of **just living life together.”**

assignments so nobody has to do the same thing two weeks in a row.”

Time spent making simple crafts together also can be precious, Lane noted. Parents with young children can find easy craft projects with spiritual applications at no cost online from BaptistWay Press (www.baptistwaypress.org), she suggested.

Some of the time-management principles in Stephen Covey’s *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* apply directly to busy families who struggle to find ways to spend time together, said Keith Lowry, BGCT family ministry specialist.

Lowry quotes Covey: “The key is not to prioritize what’s on your schedule but to schedule your priorities.” That means paying attention to crucially important matters — like family — first when making plans.

“If you want to be happy with the life you’ve built, you’ve got to be in charge during construction,” Lowry said.

“If you don’t decide, and decide now, someone or something else will decide for you. Don’t look back at the end of your life and wish you had made different decisions. Make those decisions now. ... Leave a path you won’t be sorry to see your children and grandchildren follow you down.”

Ministry experts agreed family service projects strengthen faith development and family relations.

“Children develop faith and character in relationships with the adults in their lives,” Anderson said.

Parents do well when they set a good example for their children, modeling service to others. But they do even better when they involve their children in working alongside them, Garland stressed.

“It’s important for children to learn about serving outside themselves. It’s especially important for children and adolescents to realize the importance of who they are and what they do now,” she emphasized. “Too often, we ask children what they want to do when they grow up, as if we don’t value who they are now.”

Service activities can be as simple as an older child reading to a preschooler or families visiting nursing home residents, she noted.

Family mission trips — whether to a remote location or close to home — require some advance planning, said Chris Boltin, short-term assignments and partnerships manager with Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Global Missions. Families should begin by discovering their passions and interests, he recommended.

“Spend some time as a family discussing things that you already like to do together,” Boltin said. A family that enjoys working outdoors might do the yard work for an elderly neighbor, or a family that enjoys playing board games might volunteer for an activities time at a local convalescent center, he suggested.

Family mission trips may involve international travel, but they also may be to an unfamiliar part of town, he noted.

“Something as simple as traveling across town may be a difficult cultural journey,” Boltin observed. “You want this to be a fun, productive and meaningful time together. By taking the time to truly know your family, potential problematic issues can be avoided.”

Obviously, a full-fledged mission trip to a remote location demands participants do their homework — checking age restrictions, requirements regarding special expertise and estimated costs.

Families should have a clear understanding of expectations and responsibilities in advance, he added.

“Be sure every member of your family understands their individual roles and importance to the trip,” Boltin said. “Nothing can replace the feeling that you have been a part of something greater than yourself and have made a difference in the world around you.”

Richard Singleton, a counseling program supervisor with STARRY, part of Children At Heart Ministries in Round Rock, suggested several ways families can create meaningful memories:

- *Focus on Scripture.* “God loves to shower families with blessings built on the foundation of his word,” he said. “Take a familiar passage for a test drive under the summer skies. ‘The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his

hands’ would be a great verse for a picnic in the park. Dole out the bologna sandwiches and lemonade, recline on the checkered blanket, stare into the sky. Recite your verse and play the old tried-and-true game of finding shapes in the clouds. Truly, the heavens will declare glory.”

- *Don’t spend a lot.* “Good memories come in all shapes and sizes — and mostly without the need for money,” he stressed. “Take pictures, play board games, create a scrapbook, share walks, build a temporary fort out of some of that stuff you’ve been threatening to throw out of the garage. My grandpa made me a dilapidated little tree house one summer. I thought it was the best tree house on the planet. I still do!”
- *Worship together.* “Creating family memories doesn’t demand that families miss church,” he observed. “Many families check out of church for the summer. But church is an especially important component of a healthy summer.”
- *Serve side-by-side.* “Volunteer for meaningful service projects that allow you and your child to spend valuable summer time together,” he advised. “Participate in backyard Bible clubs, vacation Bible school and other endeavors that promote knowledge, fellowship and an opportunity for saving faith to be sparked by the Spirit of God. For many, summer has often been the most formative time for faith to blossom and flourish.”
- *Take it easy.* “Plan for significant times of rest and relaxation,” he said, remembering fondly an old porch swing that served as an informal gathering place for his family. “Each summer, our family would gather, clutching sweet tea in mason jars, feet swinging in the air and stories flowing as if from the land of milk and honey. We paused. We rested. We grew closer to God and each other.
- *Unplug.* “Bless your children or grandchildren with a Sabbath away from all the gadgets, gizmos and games,” he recommended. “Go slow. They won’t like it at first, but if you find a way to make it meaningful, they’ll remember it for a lifetime.” **BT**

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