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ONE magazine

DECEMBER–JANUARY 2025

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of Bad Luck?

Coping With Grief
(and Helping Others Cope)

Leading in Crisis

Calvinball and the
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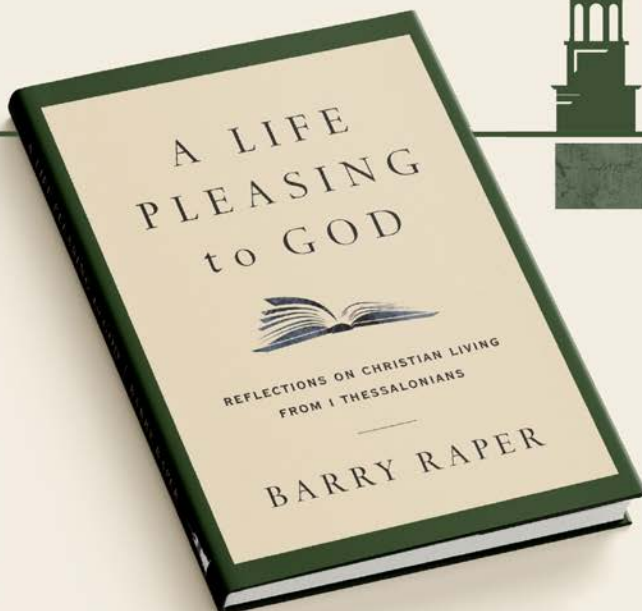
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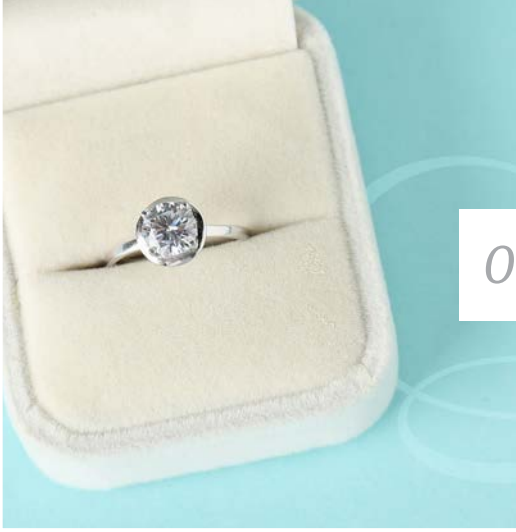
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No Fakes Here!

BY ERIC K. THOMSEN

“Your fraudulent post has broken our community standards. Further attempts to sell imitation or fake items as genuine articles will result in suspension or even permanent removal of your account.”

I read the message from the online marketplace in stunned silence. Then my mind exploded. “Fake! Whadda they mean fake? I bought it myself. And I paid good money for it at a reputable store. No way it’s fake!”

Red-faced and sputtering like an old tractor with bad fuel, I fired off a response, appealing the decision and requesting a review. Within an hour, I received a polite but terse answer, with pictures to show the difference between my bag and the real thing. The genuine: made in Spain. Mine: made in France. Otherwise, identical.

Their message concluded with a repeated warning: No more fakes!

“Ugh.” I groaned to myself. “Not only did I pay too much for a fancy-dandy handbag for my wife that was too small to hold all her stuff, but now I’ve got to tell her it was fake, too. Merry Christmas to me!”




No one likes a fake, whether product or person. In fact, in a December 2022 survey of adults nationwide,* non-Christian respondents identified “the hypocrisy of religious people” as the top reason they question Christianity. It seems the collective behavior of believers has “broken the community standards” of the faith. And the world has taken note. Sadly, the One they reject is the Savior who loved them, gave His life for them, and is the real thing without question.

In a world fed up with fakes, I want to be more like Timothy. In the opening sentences of Paul’s second epistle to the young pastor, he described Timothy’s faith as “unfeigned,” like the faith of his mother and grandmother before him. I believe Paul used this Greek word *anupokritos* deliberately. Used only six times in Scripture, the word describes something real, sincere, and genuine, without pretense or hypocrisy. It was used to communicate sincerity, authenticity, and integrity in the areas of love, wisdom, and lifestyle.

No fakes!

As I ponder Paul’s compliment for his young friend, I can’t help but wonder: Is my own sincere faith obvious to everyone around me? Do I model genuine faith for my family to follow? In the balance of 2 Timothy 1, Paul shared several characteristics of genuine faith:

- Prayer (verse 3)
- A right spirit (verse 7)
- Faithfulness through suffering (verses 8-12)
- Willingness to help others who suffer (verses 16-18)

Perhaps it’s time to lay the picture of our lives beside the real thing and ask, “How do I measure up?” 

*Access the survey results: <https://www.barna.com/research/doubt-faith>

About the Columnist: Eric K. Thomsen is managing editor of *ONE Magazine*. Email: eric@nafwb.org.

About the Redesign

“I really can’t imagine changing anything!”

This emphatic statement made during our first redesign meeting brought a smile to the faces of those in attendance. However, the sentiment is on-point. *ONE Magazine* continues to uphold the standards of design excellence embraced from its premier issue in 2005: simple yet beautiful layout intended to draw readers into the text while providing a refreshing visual break from the noise and clutter of our culture. In short: beauty and simplicity.

This dedication to excellence is the reason we continue to push forward, and I am excited to share highlights from our most recent redesign found in the pages of this issue:

- **Typography.** New, updated fonts have replaced outdated technology. If anything, these fonts are even easier to read than the previous. (As an aging editor, my eyes are grateful.)
- **Structure.** Columns and margins have been optimized to enhance layout, readability, and word counts.

- **Table of contents.** A fully redesigned page puts everything you need to know in one place: titles, publishing information, and credits, along with editors and designers.
- **Columns and editorials.** Redesigned color tabs in the margins will help you locate these pages quickly and easily. Once there, enjoy the larger, easier-to-read font.

I hope the fresh, new look of *ONE Magazine* retains the comfortable design ethic you have come to love. As always, we welcome your feedback.

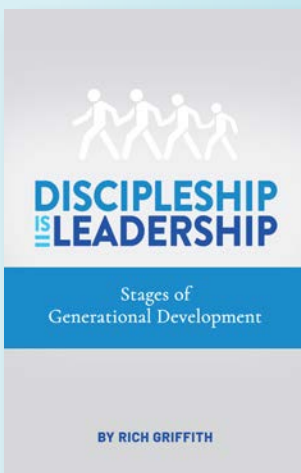
—Eric Thomsen,
Managing Editor **ONE**



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Discipleship Is Leadership

by Rich Griffith

Geared toward parents, grandparents, youth workers, teachers, etc., *Discipleship Is Leadership* unravels the intricate connection between leadership and discipleship. Based on Erik Erikson's psychosocial development stages, this book offers theoretical guidance and practical tools for effective discipleship of children and youth.



The Sharing Trees

by Tyler Penn

The Sharing Trees is a powerful discipleship tool that lays a foundation for deep, impactful spiritual conversations and connections between parents (or teachers) and children about their thoughts, feelings, and emotions as they navigate life's experiences.



Seven
years

of
Bad
Luck?

Faith, Fear, and
Superstition

BY JUDY LYTTLE

Break a mirror, and you will have seven years of bad luck. Step on a crack, and you will break your mother's back. Walk under a ladder; you will have bad luck. Throw salt over your shoulder for good luck. What about all the weird superstitions of many sports players — lucky socks, lucky underwear, rituals before a game? We've heard them all.

Most of us don't place much stock in these superstitions, but we might be surprised by the number of people who believe these or something similar. I've even caught myself saying, "Deaths come in threes. If you go to one funeral, you will go to three."

Do you have a lucky number? Is 13 unlucky? What about Zodiac signs? Truth or superstition? What exactly is superstition?

Britannica Dictionary describes *superstition* as a "belief or way of behaving based on fear of the unknown and faith in magic or luck" or a "belief certain events or things will bring good or bad luck."

Notice the interesting use of *fear* and *faith* in that definition. These words are included in the subtitle of this article. But I refer to genuine faith in God versus "faith" in magic or luck. The dictionary definition does remind us superstition is based on fear.

Virtually every country or culture, including the United States, has its own superstitions. Some of our missionaries shared a few from other countries with me. In Japan, the number four is bad luck because it sounds like the Japanese word for death. Most hotels and apartment buildings do not have a fourth floor but go from third to fifth.

In Spain, eating grapes on New Year's Eve as the clock strikes midnight is said to bring good luck and ward off evil. In Côte d'Ivoire, West Africa, riding the bicycle of someone with AIDS is thought to lead to contracting the disease. One missionary noted superstitions consume much of life in Africa. Many Uruguayans believe if you step outside on a very cold day without being bundled up, you will die instantly.

And, in my former mission field of Panama, natives are reluctant to put ice in a drink if they are hot or have a cold. They

place matches (not lit) on top of a baby's ears to cure hiccups. They don't shower or go outside after ironing clothes. Many Panamanians believe a baby should be baptized in the Catholic church soon after birth to protect it from evil spirits. In years past, children could not play outside on Good Friday because it was believed evil spirits would get them. Many people buy lottery tickets twice a week and have a lucky number they rush to purchase before other people can get it.

Every culture has its superstitions. Some overlap while others are peculiar to that culture. No matter the culture, a certain amount of fear manifests itself in these superstitions, even in the United States.

Some of these ideas have roots in ancient civilizations. For instance, Egyptian Pharaohs were buried with everything they thought they would need in the afterlife: food, clothes, transportation, jewelry, games, sometimes even pets and servants.

In India, widows were sometimes, willingly or unwillingly, burned along with their deceased husbands. In ancient Rwanda, eating goat's meat supposedly made women hairy and stubborn. Turkish chewing gum was believed to turn into human flesh if chewed at night.

Left-handed things and people were considered untrustworthy or unlucky. (My husband Steve and myself, along with two of our sons, are all left-handed. Yikes!) This superstition dates to ancient Rome, and even today, the left hand is considered unclean in some cultures.

Whether ancient or modern, superstitions are rooted in fear. As Christians, we don't want our lives to be controlled by fear and superstitions. In contrast, the Bible is our rule of faith and practice. We weigh what we believe and do according to God's Word. This even applies to old wives' tales and superstitions.

We've reviewed some common and not-so-common superstitions. Now, let's look at the Word of God and a few of the many Scripture passages dealing with superstition, mediums, and spiritists.

- **Isaiah 8:19-20.** "And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."
- **Leviticus 19:31.** "Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them: I am the Lord your God."
- **Leviticus 20:6.** "And the soul that turneth after such as have familiar spirits, and after wizards, to go a whoring after them, I will even set my face against that soul, and will cut him off from among his people."
- **1 Timothy 4:7.** "But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness."

Scripture makes it clear that God does not condone consulting mediums or fortune tellers. His Word speaks against these practices, including planning our lives around our Zodiac signs and astrological calendars. Instead, we should seek God and what He tells us through His Word.

In 1 Chronicles 10:13-14, King Saul was killed, and his kingdom taken from him and his descendants because he was unfaithful and consulted a medium for guidance. God considered it a serious offense when Saul replaced Him and put an idol in

His place. You may say, "What idol? I don't pray to a statue."

Remember: anything, anyone, or any belief we hold as more important than God is an idol. This includes superstitions. They may seem small and insignificant, but they become idols when we put our faith in them rather than in God. God hates this.

Since superstitions are founded on fear, let's look to God's Word for clarity. Fear should not control us. God's Word repeats this truth often and gives us the things to replace fear in our lives: love, faith, power, and the ability to reason.

They may seem small and insignificant, but they become idols when we put our faith in them rather than in God.

- **1 John 4:18.** "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love."
- **Psalms 56:3.** "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee."
- **2 Timothy 1:7.** "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."
- **Psalms 34:4.** "I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears."
- **Psalms 118:6.** "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?"
- **Proverbs 29:25.** "The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe."

God's Word reminds us repeatedly we should not fear but trust God. But how do we turn fear into trust or help someone struggling with this?

Filling our minds with good things rather than fearful or mystical things is essential. When our minds enter a room of fright or mysticism, reflect on God's Word. In Philippians 4:8 — a great verse to memorize — the Apostle Paul instructed the Philippians to keep their minds on things that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, that is things of virtue and praise. Our minds should be focused on these things and not concerned about our horoscope or the black cat crossing our path, or any other superstition. God's Word is true, and our faith is grounded there, not in the ideas and inventions of man.

As we start a new year, when you are tempted to believe one of the thousands of superstitions, ask yourself if you are leaning into the experience because you fear there may be a little truth in it. Stop! Remind yourself of the warnings in Scripture. Reassure yourself: fear should not be part of your life. God can replace our fear with love, faith, and sound thinking (2 Timothy 1:7). Yes, reason it out. God has given us the ability to think clearly and not be taken in by every fearful falsehood.

Superstitions will always be with us, but we don't have to fall prey to their influence. God has given us the power to be victorious over any fear threatening to control us. When we reflect upon His Word, we will find the answers. **ONE**

About the Writer: Judy Lytle served as a missionary in Panama with her husband Steve for three decades. Today, Judy helps her husband in his ministry to seniors and to Spanish speakers at Cofer's Chapel in Nashville, Tennessee. Judy and Steve are proud of their three sons, three daughters-in-law, 11 grandchildren, and a granddaughter-in-law.



Maybe This Year?

The CONSISTENT LONGING of a SINGLE WOMAN

BY ELIZABETH HILL

We're coming up on a new year. The arrival is often accompanied by feelings of hope, expectation, and eagerness to see what's in store for the next twelve months. On the flip side, negative emotions and fears can accompany this otherwise exciting blank slate. Instead of optimistically thinking of all the possibilities the year could bring, you might be thinking, with a note of dread, "I wonder what's in store for this year?"

For many years, I was on the hopeful side. A new year held so much promise for exciting things to come: "I wonder what trips I'll go on. I wonder what memories I'll make. Maybe THIS

is the year I'll meet 'the one.'" That last thought — that's the one I dreamed about most. "Surely, it's got to happen this year," I told myself.

The years went on, and that same hope dominated each new year. But with each calendar change, that once exciting hope became a feeling of discouragement. "Okay, it's another new year. Maybe *now* it will happen?" Eventually, it turned into downright pessimism. "It's not happened yet. Why should I think this year will be any different? It's better not to get my hopes up this time."



I'm so thankful I can bring all my thoughts, fears, longings, and prayers to a caring, omniscient God whose plans are always perfect.

I daresay I'm not the only person who's felt this way, but sometimes, it sure feels like I am. I see friends date wonderful, godly men and eventually marry them. I often feel frozen in time, watching my peers move to the next life stage of marriage while I'm stuck in a perpetually single stage.

The older I get, the weirder that single stage feels. And it's true, I'm getting older. (At least, I'm old enough to see fashion trends from my childhood come back in style!) I'm no longer in the college/young adult group of singles, but I'm also not in the young family group like most people my age. I'm somewhere in the middle, and it sometimes feels like a black hole. I'm kind of out of orbit, feeling like I'm being sucked away from the joys of married life. I'm lost in my own little category, without a place to land or plant roots.

While I'm hanging out in this black hole, my mind gets filled with less-than-happy thoughts: "What am I doing wrong? What things should I have done differently to keep me from ending up like this? Is this God's way of saying I'm not ready to be married? Is there something wrong with the way I look or interact with others?" These thoughts are only a few steps away from a nasty comparison game, a game which I hate to admit I've played all too often. I'll think, "If only I could change _____, then maybe I'll get married."

In these moments of despair, I must remind myself what I know is true. While natural reactions, some of these thoughts can be self-centered. We know the adage, "Being selfless

means you think of yourself less."

When I let my mind camp out on "what's-wrong-with-me," I divert my attention from the One who is my sufficiency.

On the flip side, I also must remember that being single is not a punishment. God is not withholding marriage because I make wrong decisions or still struggle with my sin nature. I am in no way perfect, but if the Lord does indeed bless me with marriage, I know I won't be perfect when that happens, either. While I do have a responsibility to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18), I don't have to live under the weight of my failures and shortcomings. Jesus already took care of those.

Even though I joke about getting older, some life lessons and experiences help me face those emotional battles. At times, I was sure my experiences were leading to a seemingly obvious conclusion. For example, after I graduated from college with an elementary education degree, I applied for teaching jobs with Metro Nashville Public Schools. I had long heard they were desperate for teachers, so I thought finding a teaching job would be a piece of cake. I had a few interviews but no offers. I thought, "If they are desperate for teachers, why am I not getting hired? What am I doing wrong?"

But then, I was approached about a receptionist position at Welch College. Looking back, I'm able to see God orchestrating

my life in His perfect timing and plan. My first full-time job out of college prepared me for all the jobs I've held since. Although I didn't get what I was asking for, God gave me even more than I imagined.

I know the same will be true in my desire for a husband. At times I have tried to metaphorically "peek behind the curtain" and ascertain how God is working everything out for my future marriage. Like a detective, I piece together clues and signs. I take the smallest happenings and try to imagine how God might use them, together with my life experiences, to bring about His plan for my life. "If I could only see and make sense of the bigger picture, then the waiting wouldn't be so hard!" I think to myself.

But then, I return to the lessons I've learned. So far, my detective skills have not been that great. I've not been able to figure out why things have worked out the way they have, and I don't know what's in store. But just like with my job, I know God

"is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20). When I reflect on the things the Lord has graciously taught me, I'm reminded of the words of one of my favorite hymns:

*Jesus, Jesus, how I trust Him!
How I've proved Him o'er and o'er!
Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus!
O for grace to trust Him more!*

I'm so thankful I can bring all my thoughts, fears, longings, and prayers to a caring, omniscient God whose plans are always perfect. He has guided my life using circumstances I could not understand at the time to lead me to a better end than I could have chosen myself. With such a track record of faithfulness, how can I do anything but trust Him? **ONE**

About the Writer: Elizabeth Hill graduated from Welch College in 2015. She is a member of Immanuel FWB Church in Gallatin, Tennessee, and is a member of the Free Will Baptist Executive Office team.

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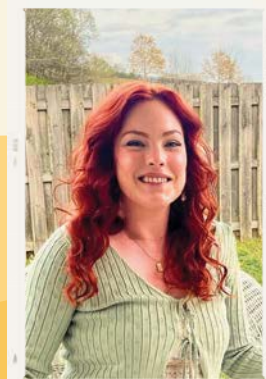
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The Highest Calling

FINDING PURPOSE IN EVERY STAGE OF LIFE

BY ALLANA WALKER

When my pastor announced this year's Mother's Day breakfast, he informed us there were "no mothers allowed in the kitchen!" that Sunday.

"Come and be served," he said, smiling warmly at the mothers in our congregation.

"No mothers?" I thought, with a bittersweet smile. "Well, that doesn't include me."

Because my church is small and consists mainly of senior citizens, I approached my pastor after church and volunteered to help serve the breakfast. I had to be there early for worship team practice anyway, so showing up half an hour earlier would do me no harm.

The following Sunday, I arrived at 8:45 a.m. as promised to serve eggs and toast to mothers and grandmothers who relished the opportunity to let someone else wash the dishes for a change.

When I finally sat down to eat with the lovely ladies of my church, only one other girl at the table was like me, neither a wife nor a mother. As the group chatted over homemade pancakes and glasses of orange juice, I felt a mix of emotions stirring in my chest.

I didn't begrudge these women for having something I didn't. I loved them for becoming spiritual aunts and grandmothers to me. Nor did I delude myself by thinking their lives were somehow better than mine because they changed their last names. Nevertheless, a nagging question niggled in the back of my mind: will I ever join the ranks of these wives and mothers, or has God determined I am better off remaining single?

The question did not keep me from enjoying breakfast, nor did it overshadow the rest of my day. I love my little church, and I find tremendous joy in serving there every Sunday. Still, I had to fight back tears during the morning sermon as I imagined what it would feel like to hold a child in my lap. My heart

ached for a son or daughter to call my own as I wrestled with the discrepancy between the life I envisioned and the one I'm currently living.

What Is a Woman's Highest Calling?

Because marriage and family are integral to our society, I see no lack of articles, blogs, and podcast episodes on the topics of motherhood and parenting. As a teenager and early twenty-something, I never gave them a thought. Until recently, I would simply shrug, thinking, "That's not relevant to me yet... maybe in a few years."

Within the last few months, however, these "mommy blogs" and marriage-related articles have begun to elicit new reactions: a pang in the chest, a churning of the stomach, an indescribable ache of the heart. Of late, when I see publications geared towards mothers, I feel irrationally embarrassed, as if I've been caught at Costco without a membership card.

"Where are *your* children?" nags an accusatory little voice. "You ought to have some by now, Little Miss 26." Then I'm reminded the LORD says He will extend peace like a river and comfort as a mother comforts her child (Isaiah 66:12-13).

Recently, I read a short story about Christian women describing motherhood as "a woman's highest calling."



Quite frankly, I think this is painfully unfair and downright unbiblical, doing an injustice to the many women who, for a multitude of reasons, never had a baby of their own. Are you really telling me those of us who have never given birth have missed our calling?

I beg to differ.

Yes, marriage and motherhood are sacred commitments and should be celebrated as such. To be clear, I don't think they're revered highly enough in our egocentric, consumeristic culture, but biblically speaking, they are not the only calling a woman may have.

A Role for All

The Bible affirms the holiness of marriage and motherhood, but it also applauds the invaluable roles of unmarried, widowed, and childless women.

I believe a woman's highest calling is not marriage or motherhood but faithful obedience to Christ in whatever ministry He gives. Naturally, this may include marriage and motherhood. Most of the central female characters in the Old Testament were wives and mothers. In the New Testament, however, we see a greater mix of married and unmarried women playing key roles in the biblical narrative.

Aside from Mary and Elizabeth, the mothers of Jesus and John the Baptist, most women in the Gospels and the book of Acts are not remembered for their status as wives and mothers but for their roles as evangelicals, apologists, and followers of Christ.

Consider Mary Magdalene, for example.

The Bible never mentions whether she was married or not, but we learn Jesus delivered her from seven demons (Mark 16:9), and, more importantly, she was the first person to see Jesus after His resurrection (John 20:11-18).

In ancient Jewish culture, only men were considered competent witnesses in a court of law. Women were hardly considered persons, let alone legitimate witnesses. But guess who Jesus chose to testify about the most significant event in history?

A woman.

Consider Priscilla from Acts 18. Priscilla and her husband Aquila were Jews who befriended the Apostle Paul during his time in Corinth (verse 1). As tentmakers (verse 3), Priscilla and Aquila were numbered among the "working class" of Corinthian society, but they were knowledgeable about the gospel and partnered with Paul in church planting. The three of them got along so well the couple even accompanied Paul when he left Corinth to preach in Ephesus (verse 18).

After a time, Paul decided to visit Jerusalem while Priscilla and Aquila continued their work in Ephesus (verse 19). During Paul's absence, a man named Apollos arrived from Alexandria and began speaking boldly in the synagogue (verse 26).

Apollos was a smart cookie. Coming from Alexandria, one of the intellectual capitals of the ancient world, he was an educated man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures (verse 24). He taught about Jesus accurately (verse 25), with one major problem: he only knew about the baptism of John.

In other words, he was a little behind the times.

When Priscilla and Aquila heard Apollos speak, they invited him to their home and explained to him the full message of the gospel (verse 26).

Note that order again: Priscilla and Aquila.

The fact Priscilla's name precedes her husband's in the original text, and the fact Paul refers to both as co-workers in Christ Jesus (Romans 16:3; 1 Corinthians 16:19; and 2 Timothy 4:19), make it clear Priscilla was equally instrumental in spreading and teaching the gospel.

Did Priscilla have any children?

Scripture never tells us, but we know she had an invaluable role in the formation of the early church, for which she is still remembered today.

God Loves Women

I could write a book on the roles of women in the Bible (and Lord willing, someday I will) but for now, let me share one final example.

In the second half of Luke 2, Luke described Mary and Joseph presenting Jesus in the temple for the first time. While there, the new parents were approached by two strangers: prophets of the Lord patiently awaiting the coming of the Messiah. One was a woman named Anna.

Continued on page 59

When Your Plans Change, God Doesn't

BY BARRY RAPER

2 CORINTHIANS 1:15-22

As we turn the corner on another year, graduation from high school or college will become reality for many students and their parents. Often, graduates hear the age-old question: "What are your plans?"

It is a logical question I suppose. Sometimes, however, the answer doesn't come immediately after graduation. And while some students have a definite plan for life, we all know plans often change for various reasons. That's why, in this ever-changing world, it is wonderful to know God never changes!

In this passage, the Corinthian church had leveled criticism toward Paul because he changed his travel plans. He had planned to visit the Corinthians on his way from Macedonia, but plans changed. Perhaps the Corinthian believers came up with this criticism on their own, or perhaps false teachers and opponents of Paul planted the idea in their minds. In any case, the Corinthians accused Paul of making plans and promises and not following through.

Paul had good reasons for changing his plans. (He goes into detail about his reasons in later chapters.) Paul chose not to come for the benefit of the Corinthians. And these believers never should have questioned the man responsible for bringing the gospel to them and establishing the church. Rather than mounting a personal defense, Paul simply explained his change of plans by offering three reminders about the character of God.

1. God is faithful (verse 18). Like Paul, I am glad to remind you God is faithful. I lean heavily on that truth myself. The Bible stresses the faithfulness of God to His people repeatedly. Consider a few examples:

- *Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations (Deuteronomy 7:9).*
- *He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he (Deuteronomy 32:4).*

- *For thy mercy is great above the heavens: and thy truth reacheth unto the clouds (Psalm 108:4).*
- *Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering (for he is faithful that promised) (Hebrews 10:23).*
- *If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself (2 Timothy 2:13).*

Paul's emphasis in this passage was on God's covenant faithfulness to us. The only way faithfulness is demonstrated is over time, in good times and in bad times.

At the beginning of a marriage when the couple says their vows, much is said that can be boiled down to "I am going to be faithful to you." But those vows are tested or proven in the future. "The proof is in the pudding," as the old saying goes.

Old Faithful geyser in Yellowstone National Park was named in 1870 by an expeditionary group after they observed the geyser's predictable nature. Each year, millions of visitors watch Old Faithful in action. However, the activity of the geyser has altered slightly over time. These days, the geyser erupts twenty times per day. But prior to an earthquake in 1959, Old Faithful erupted 21 times per day. While it still provides a pretty good example of consistency and faithfulness, this natural wonder doesn't compare to God's faithfulness.

When it comes to God, His faithfulness is never in question. He is always present, always keeping His Word.

2. Jesus fulfills God's promises (verses 19-20). Perhaps the clearest demonstration of God's faithfulness is found in Christ's fulfillment of *all* the Old Testament prophecies. In essence, the entire Old Testament anticipates the coming of Jesus. This goes beyond predictive promises fulfilled by His life, death, and resurrection. The entire sacrificial system pointed the people to Christ's once-and-for-all sacrifice. Jesus fulfills all the prophecies and promises offered in the Old Testament. He not only fulfilled past promises, but he also *secures* present and future promises for believers. Promises like:

- † In Christ I have the promise of forgiveness of sins.
- † In Christ I have the promise of eternal life.
- † In Christ I have the promise of peace.
- † In Christ I have the promise of the Holy Spirit.
- † In Christ I have the promise of a glorified body.
- † In Christ I have the promise of seeing my loved ones again.
- † In Christ I have the promise He will never leave me nor forsake me.
- † In Christ I have the promise of being in His presence forever.

Paul did not elaborate or enumerate the promises of God fulfilled in Christ. He simply asserted they find their “yes” in Jesus.

We live in an age of passwords. We all have email accounts, billing accounts, banking accounts, and online shopping accounts. Have you ever forgotten a password? Of course you have; we all have. You’ve had the experience of being denied access after entering an incorrect password. When it comes to the promises of God, access is always granted through one name — the name of Jesus. Through His sinless life, His substitutionary death, and His resurrection, He has secured the “promises of God in him” (verse 20).

3. The Holy Spirit establishes us (verse 21). This is stated in the present tense. God is presently working to establish us in Christ, to strengthen our faith, to give us an even firmer footing. Of course, when it comes to sanctification and spiritual growth, we have a role to play. Yet, any growth we see in our lives, any deepening of our roots and strengthening of our faith, is a result of the gracious and steady work of the Holy Spirit within.

As Free Will Baptists we believe in the possibility of apostasy — the teaching that it is possible for genuine believers to reach a point through the deceitfulness of sin where they walk away from the faith altogether. We believe this based on clear warning passages in the Bible. In my judgment, Free Will Baptists have often emphasized the warning passages while downplaying or minimizing the other side — passages about the keeping power of God. We find one here, where Paul encouraged the Corinthian believers that God establishes us in Christ.

His words call to mind passages such as Philippians 1:6: “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

Continued on page 41



Coping With Grief

(and Helping Others Cope)

BY JON AND SUSAN FORLINES

It was December 1985 at the UNC Children's Hospital in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The ICU neurologist explained he had diagnosed our two-month-old son Stephen with a deformity called Fatal Infantile Mitochondrial Myopathy with a Cytochrome C Oxidase Deficiency.

We transferred our baby back home to Pitt Memorial Hospital in Greenville. Seven months later, July 5, 1986, Stephen was gone. Both of us reflect on those days, how God worked to help us cope and hold on to those memories in healthy ways, how others ministered to our needs. These are the reasons we didn't lose hope in God and His promises.

When we have tried to use the knowledge gained from our experience to help others, sometimes it seems as though we learned nothing at all. Grief is complex, with no pat answers. Pastor Wayne Bess recounts trying to cope with the death of his son Matt: "Even though I was a pastor and thought I understood and could relate to people going through [grief], I was wrong. Like most people, I didn't know how to respond, or what to say."¹

Grief stems from many causes: health crisis, miscarriage, job loss, dashed dreams, serious accidents, ended relationships, abortion, financial instability, moving, and violence, to name a few. However, the most common trigger of intense grief by far comes from the death of a loved one. This fierce pain is caused by death's completeness and permanency. In *Living Beyond Grief*, Roy Harris describes his experience after the death of his wife Diana: "I remember entering the house with a terrible sense of emptiness and loss. I knew my life had changed, but little did I know that my whole world had been turned upside

down."² In this article, we focus on grieving the death of a family member. However, these simple principles apply to most situations.

Grief Is Natural. Grief does not result from lack of faith. Grief is experienced by everyone, but we as believers should grieve with God's promises in mind (1 Thessalonians 4:13-15). However, some grief is not normal. Understanding the difference between healthy grief and abnormal grief is important as we minister to others and process our own losses.

1 Wayne Bess. "Five Things Not to Say to a Grieving Parent." ONE Magazine, December 2017.

2 Roy W. Harris. *Living Beyond Grief: How to Survive and Thrive*. Lebanon, TN: RHM Publications, 2017.



There Is No Normal Grief. Healthy grief recognizes the significance of our loss while helping us identify and manage the full extent of this life transition. By this process we learn to live with grief, not overcome it. There is no *normal* grief. No normal way or set timetable for intense sorrow to end. Grief is deeply individualized and depends on many variables. In *A View From Grief's Window*, Neil Gilliland observes, "I find the 'cookbook' approach to grief problematic....Just as individual personalities exist, so does the way in which we grieve....I think the important issue is not *how* we grieve but that we allow ourselves to grieve....There is no fixed time limit....Life moves forward. It never is in reverse. So, allow yourself to grieve in whatever form that takes for you, *but grieve.*"³

While we agree there is no such thing as normal grief, we think it important to identify typical behaviors associated with healthy grief: depression, loneliness, crying, guilt, anger, confusion, trouble concentrating, fatigue, health complaints, apathy, relationship problems, crises of faith, and feelings of hopelessness.⁴

To better understand the reason for these intense behaviors, remember the brain must suddenly reprocess everything (in every way) without the other person. The brain is overwhelmed. Stress hormones release in massive and continual doses as the brain responds to extreme feedback. Yet, we are not left alone in our sufferings. In 2 Samuel 12:21-23, healthy grief was modeled by David after the death of his son. He exclaimed his hope by saying: "I shall go to him." David expressed the hope of Heaven.

3 Neil Gilliland. *A View From Grief's Window: Ten Lessons I Learned From the Death of My Parents*. Nashville: Randall House, 2020.

4 Edward E. Moody. *First Aid for Emotional Hurts: Helping People Through Difficult Times*. Nashville: Randall House, 2008.

There Is Abnormal Grief. Abnormal grief, also known as *complicated grief*, can sometimes be triggered by sudden death, suicide, murder, death of a child, or death after an especially prolonged illness.⁵ We see an example of abnormal grief when we read about Jacob's decades-long journey through complicated grief that began when his sons lied to him and told him Joseph died. He lamented, "I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning" (Genesis 37:35).

This type of grief produces a dangerous state of mind where a person is trapped in unchangeable mourning, experiencing prolonged hopeless despair, relentless unnatural yearning to be with the deceased, episodes when images/voices of the deceased are experienced as intrusive or troubling, unyielding denial, being sure the loved one is still alive, extreme avoidance/anger/emptiness, or clinical depression defined as *persistent hopelessness, suicidal thoughts, deep sense of helplessness, prolonged slowed motor functions, or an inability to function at home or work.*⁶ Complicated grief signals the need for professional help. In these cases, it is time for friends and family to lovingly intervene.

HEALING HANDS FOR THE HURTING

During visitation the night before Stephen's funeral, the one thing that stands out most in our memories was a friend who stood in front of Jon. Overcome with emotions, he couldn't say what he wanted to say and finally fell on Jon's shoulders, crying uncontrollably.

To best help others cope, Eddie Moody offers these simple suggestions: attend the funeral, sit and grieve with them, let them cry, and reassure them.⁷ Next time you are standing in a receiving line, try to think of what to say in advance. You might tell the family how the deceased person touched your life by sharing a specific example.

5 Edward E. Moody. *First Aid for Emotional Hurts: Grief*. Nashville: Randall House, 2010.

6 Smith, Robinson, and Segal. (n.d.). *Coping with grief and loss: Stages of grief and how to heal*. <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/grief/coping-with-grief-and-loss.htm>

7 Moody, 2008.

Don't try to stop the person from grieving by saying things like: "Be strong. Betty wouldn't want you to cry. She's skipping on the streets of gold." In fact, words may not always be the best first option. "Understand that no words can take the pain away. Letting the person know you are there for them is more than enough."⁸

MANAGING OUR OWN LOSS

After the funeral flowers have wilted, and the loving casseroles are no longer appearing at your doorstep, the long road of grief can go in one of two directions. It can move into a lonely, harmful phase, or you can make choices that lead to healthy grieving. Despite all others may say and do, you are the best manager of your own grief. Left to itself, grief is likely to take the unhealthy path. For this reason, look to God for strength and pray for wisdom to make healthy choices. "Understand that grieving takes time. It took more than an hour to draw close, and it will take more than an hour to come to terms with the death of your loved one. We grieve at different rates. Take your time. The most intense feelings could take

8 Bess, 2017.

one to three years before a person emerges from the emotional abyss of grief."⁹

WHEN TO REFER OR SEEK HELP

Seeking professional help for yourself is not a sign of weakness. Doing so simply acknowledges God has made us interdependent. Referring others for help through unhealthy grief shows competent caring. Failing to refer when grief gets complicated can put a person at serious risk. Do refer when: a person demonstrates an unyielding sense of guilt, hopelessness, or worthlessness; expresses suicidal thoughts; demonstrates slow speech or body movements, disfunction at work or home, or significant problems with hallucinations. Never leave a person alone if they are a danger to themselves or others. When in doubt, call a grief specialist. Immediately!

Because grief is so overwhelming, it calls for careful, overwhelming support. **ONE**

About the Writers: Jon and Susan Forlines serve together at Welch College, where Jon is dean of students and vice president for Student Services, and Susan is dean of women. Learn more: www.welch.edu.

9 Harris, 2017.

Writing her legacy...

Though **Dr. Mary Ruth Wishart** may be best remembered as the long-time executive secretary of WNAC, she also taught 30 years in the English Department at Welch College, chairing the department for much of that time. She began her three-decade stint in 1955 as a speech instructor, recalling, "I was scared to death!"

Wishart shifted to English in 1956. The class she enjoyed teaching most was "John Milton." Her favorite poet was always Robert Frost. And the road **Dr. Wishart** chose made all the difference in the lives of her students.

Why not establish your own legacy with an endowment for Welch College through FWB Foundation?



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Read more about Mary Ruth Wishart in ***At the Feet of Jesus: A Year in God's Word***. Made possible by a grant from the FWB Foundation, this limited-edition, 365-day devotional book will be released at the 2025 convention in Kansas City.

Who Giveth This Woman Away?

BY PAUL V. HARRISON

“My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away” (Song of Solomon 2:10).

When aspiring missionary Adoniram Judson proposed to Ann Hasseltine in 1810, she said he would have to secure her parents’ approval. He therefore wrote her father, a deacon, asking for his blessing:

I have now to ask, whether you can consent to part with your daughter early next spring, to see her no more in this world; whether you can consent to her departure, and her subjection to the hardships and sufferings of a missionary life; whether you can consent to her exposure to the dangers of the ocean; to the fatal influence of the southern climate of India; to every kind of want and distress; to degradation, insult, persecution, and perhaps a violent death. Can you consent to all this, for the sake of him who left his heavenly home, and died for her and for you; for the sake of perishing, immortal souls; for the sake of Zion, and the glory of God? Can you consent to all this, in hope of soon meeting your daughter in the world of glory, with the crown of righteousness, brightened with the acclamations of praise which shall resound to her Saviour from heathens saved, through her means, from eternal woe and despair?

It would have been easy for Mr. Hasseltine and his wife to say no, but they left it up to their daughter. Ann admired Adoniram, but her decision was more spiritual than romantic. He had warned her of hardships she would experience if she married him. She struggled to decide.

The twenty-year-old wrote to a friend:

My mind has still been agitated for two or three weeks past....But I have, at all times, felt a disposition to leave



Photo from Wikimedia Commons

it with God, and trust in him to direct me. I have, at length, come to the conclusion, that if nothing in providence appears to prevent, I must spend my days in a heathen land. I am a creature of God, and he has an undoubted right to do with me, as seemeth good in his sight. I rejoice that I am in his hands — that he is everywhere present, and can protect me in one place as well as in another. He has my heart in his hands; and when I am called to face danger, to pass through scenes of terror and distress, he can inspire me with fortitude, and enable me to trust in him. Jesus is faithful; his promises are precious. Were it not for these considerations, I

should, with my present prospects, sink down in despair... But whether I spend my days in India or America, I desire to spend them in the service of God, and be prepared to spend an eternity in his presence. O Jesus, make me live to thee, and I desire no more.

Ann accepted Adoniram’s proposal, and the couple sailed off, offering their lives to the Lord. Trials pursued them throughout their ministry, but God blessed their efforts. Ann passed away at 36 and is buried under a tree in Burma.

God calls His children to obey. Sometimes that means going to some far-off place; other times witnessing in your home or workplace. Sometimes it means giving away hard-earned money to send others. Whatever God asks, we are to obey.

ONE

About the Columnist: Paul V. Harrison has pastored Madison FWB Church in Madison, Alabama, since 2015. Previously, he pastored Cross Timbers FWB Church in Nashville, Tennessee, for 22 years. He was an adjunct professor at Welch College for 17 years, teaching church history and Greek. Paul is the creator of Classic Sermon Index, a subscription-based online index of over 66,000 sermons, with clients including Harvard, Baylor, and Vanderbilt, among others: classicsermonindex.com.

Our Greater Deliverer

BY ALEJANDRO JOHNSON


Recently, my wife and I played a board game with her brother. It was a complex game with too many rules to explain. So, brother-in-law let us play a round while he explained the mechanics. We often do this with new games: we play a “practice round” to get our bearings. We do not go all out, and the rules are clarified by playing the game.

Othniel is the first judge described by the book of Judges. At first glance, Othniel does not seem very interesting. Few details about his life are recorded. In fact, most people probably cannot name many things about him. Nevertheless, this first judge is essential for our understanding of the rest of the book. Othniel provided a paradigm or “type” for every other judge. He is like a “practice round” for the book of Judges. His life provides the rules in the introduction to the book, and Othniel demonstrates how those rules play out. Before reading further, perhaps take a moment to read Judges 3:7–11.

Foolish Israelites?

As Judges opens, we quickly learn Israel abandoned God within a single generation from Joshua. They should have remembered Joshua’s declaration that he and his house would serve the Lord. They should have recalled the wilderness wanderings. And yet, they quickly turned to serving foreign gods.

“Foolish Israelites!” we scoff. “How could they be so forgetful?”



But turn this story back to us. “Foolish Christians,” we should say, because we have the Scriptures, the written, complete Word of God, telling us all He has done and continues to do for us. And yet, we often go astray. We know sinning is wrong, and yet we go on sinning. We give ourselves over to the idols of our own culture. We may not serve idols of wood and stone, but we serve idols of ideas and desires.

How do we identify these idols in our lives? Ask yourself these questions: what am I delighting in more than the Lord? What am I giving my life for more than God? Is it my job? Do I want to climb the ladder at work and be in charge? Do I want to make more money and store up riches for myself? What are we doing instead of reading our Bible? Is it going to work? Playing video games? Why are we not waking up thirty minutes early to pray? Or staying up thirty minutes later to read? Are we too busy for God? Is comfort our idol?



Idolatry is a serious matter. God judges idolaters. The people of Israel were not special, exempt from God's judgment. God's people will be judged along with the rest. When God's people abandon Him, we too can expect judgment. God's anger was kindled against Israel.

He sold them into the hands of their enemies. First Corinthians 10:6-7 says: "Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play."

That is my encouragement to us as well: flee from idolatry. Do not just cohabit with your idolatry, like the people of Israel did with the Canaanites, but make every effort to flee from idolatry and toward the only One who can deliver us. Therefore, let us turn to the deliverer.

Who is this deliverer?

Who is Othniel? Verse 9 says Othniel was the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. You may remember Caleb was of the tribe of Judah. Nor was anything negative said about Othniel. Ehud was sneaky, Barak was a coward, Samson was sexually immoral, but Othniel was, as far as we know, noble. Obviously, he was not perfect. He was human after all. But the author gives no reason to think bad of him.

The first two verses of the book indicate the Israelites asked Yahweh who should go up first to attack the Canaanites, to which God replied: "Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand" (verse 2). Judah was supposed to be first. We know the ideal ruler of Israel would be from Judah, and that Judah was the only tribe to fully drive out the Canaanites, as Yahweh told them to do. Even among the judges, Othniel was the only one from Judah, and everything went downhill after him. It's a good reminder: the further God's people get from God's plan, the worse it goes.

While Othniel is presented as a noble figure, he is far from the main character of this story. It is Yahweh's Spirit that comes upon Othniel and empowers him to do what he is going to do. By God's grace, He sent His people a deliverer when they cried out to Him. It was God who gave Mesopotamia into Othniel's hand, just as He had given Israel into Mesopotamia's hand. Othniel was the instrument, but God was the agent.

Like Israel, in our world today, and especially in the Church, God is the One who can and will accomplish His sovereign

will. God calls us to do many things, whether that is sharing the gospel, leading our homes, or serving the poor, but He never expects us to do them on our own. It is only through God's grace working in and through us that we can accomplish what He calls us to. Thankfully, God chooses to use imperfect people like us, and like Othniel, to accomplish His will.

Unfortunately, Othniel died. After giving Israel the longest rest in their immediate future, he also finds his rest. Israel's rest in the book of Judges is tied to the life of the judge. As we will see repeatedly, Israel soon returned to idolatry. This fulfilled what the author said in 2:19: "And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way."

Peace and rest were tied to the lifespan of the judge, but judges kept dying. The pattern of this book makes us desire a Judge who does not die and can give eternal rest. Who is this Judge that we desire? He, too, is of the tribe of Judah, the proper authority over God's people. He is our Deliverer.

In fact, the word used for Othniel, *deliverer*, could also be translated *savior*. Jesus is our perfect Judge and Ruler, whose Kingdom will never end. He has delivered us from our enemies and will grant us eternal rest. Human rulers cannot save us. God's appointed Deliverer, empowered by His Spirit, is the only One who can save us.

Look to Jesus, our greater Deliverer. He has saved us from our sins. We find eternal rest in Him. It is not enough to flee idolatry, but we must also run to Christ, the Ruler of the tribe of Judah. We cannot cast off the idols that often keep us bound in our own strength; we can only cast them off through reliance on Him. Let us long for Him more each day and pray for His deliverance from the sins that entangle us, so we may run the race He has set before us and reach our eternal rest. **ONE**

About the Writer: Alejandro Johnson and his wife Breanna are preparing to serve as missionaries to France. The couple met at Welch College where Alejandro earned a B.A. in Intercultural Studies and Worship Ministry and completed his M.Div in May 2024.

Peace and rest were tied to the lifespan of the judge, but judges kept dying. The pattern of this book makes us desire a Judge who does not die and can give eternal rest.

Leading in **CRISIS**

BY TODD PARRISH



“The only thing certain in life is death and taxes.”

Ben Franklin is credited with making this terse statement, and most leaders understand few things in life are assured. Many of life's uncertainties are merely bumps on the road, but sometimes a church or organization experiences a cataclysmic event. Leaders must be able to navigate through these moments of crisis.

Dr. Reggie Ogea suggested it is important to distinguish whether an event is a *critical incident* or a *crisis*. He defines a *critical incident* as a dramatic, destabilizing development that presents apparent danger and uncertainty. A *crisis*, however, is different; it does not precede the critical incident but is defined as a “response condition.” According to Ogea, crises catch us off-balance, and our usual coping mechanisms are perceived as inadequate.

In these moments, leaders experience a high level of distress that often impairs their normal ability to lead. Crises differ from critical incidents in that they threaten the stability of the organization and must be addressed with urgency. What makes leading through a crisis more difficult is the ambiguity that often accompanies crisis. A crisis event may be hard to define. People in the organization are often confused or overwhelmed, and leaders are stressed and emotional. But amid it all, leaders find opportunities for growth.

The Chinese character for *crisis* or *danger* also contains the character for *opportunity*. Technically, the character for *opportunity* might be better defined as a “crucial point during which things can change.” To turn crises into opportunities, leaders navigate between *doing the right things* and *doing things right*.

Ogea notes it is more important for the leader to help people discover the transforming potential in their suffering during a crisis rather than merely leading them in ways to alleviate their pain and discomfort. To lead effectively during times of crisis, remember the following suggestions.

1. **Get past the shock and denial. Face the facts.**

When leaders press through their initial reactions and see a crisis as an opportunity for growth, they will lead others to do the same. View a crisis as an opportunity to prepare, not despair.

2. **Accept responsibility for the response.** Although leaders cannot always prevent a crisis, they can always

decide how to respond. Life will be different, but opportunities will be present.

3. **Show caring concern. Demonstrate a heart for the people you lead.** This concern for people must be shown *before* a crisis hits. Remember, what you do *before* a crisis often determines what will happen *after* a crisis is over.

4. **Act quickly and decisively.** People look to leaders to lead. Believe in your vision and why God has placed you there. Serve where God has placed you and prepare yourself and your leaders in crisis management beforehand. By doing this, you will weather the storm more effectively.

5. **Be present and rally response.** Trust the leaders God has placed around you and give them opportunities to lead alongside you *before* the crisis happens. Prepare your leaders by letting them lead with you *now*.

6. **Communicate effectively and continuously.** Resist the urge to communicate only when there is new information to share. Engage your people with words of affirmation, hope, and vision to calm and reassure them and help them trust your leadership through the crisis.

7. **Lead as an instrument of God to restore sanity and order.** Commit yourself to be an ethical leader and lead with integrity. If a leader displays personal integrity and a Christ-like spirit during a crisis, its effects are contagious.

Finally, a leader must prioritize two essential things. Seek to build a biblical culture beforehand. A church or organization steeped in the Word of God will be better equipped to view the crisis through a scriptural lens and respond in a manner that pleases and glorifies God. Remember the words of Psalm 119:165: “Great peace have they which love thy law.”

Remember self-care is also important. A leader who has not prioritized his spiritual, mental, and physical health will soon be of little use to those who depend on his leadership through crisis. Jesus encouraged His disciples to “Come apart and rest awhile” (Mark 6:31). Vance Havner once said, “If you don’t come apart and rest awhile, you’ll come apart.” **ONE**

About the Writer: Todd Parrish is vice president for institutional advancement at Welch College. Learn more: welch.edu.



Divinity School Completes Third Year

Welch Divinity School recently completed its third year. The program began with six students in the Accelerated B.A. to M.Div. program and two M.Div. students during the 2021-2022 academic year. Entering the 2024-2025 academic year, the program celebrates twenty students in the program. The number accounts for graduations, departures, and new students in the program. As of May 3, 2024, three M.Div. students have graduated.

At Welch College, we understand the importance of being well-prepared for pastoral ministry. We believe a quality biblical-theological education is essential in equipping students to serve Christ, His Church, and His world. The Accelerated B.A. to M.Div. program is designed for students pursuing God's call to Christian ministry and can be completed in five to six years. (This makes completion at least two years sooner than traditional M.Div. programs.) Faculty and administration are intentional about mentoring students. The average student to faculty ratio is 10:1.

Furthermore, faculty often spend one-on-one time with students.

The school and students rely on your prayer and support. Please pray for current students as they navigate personal lives, academics, and spiritual growth. Ask God to continue sending students to Welch College and to provide the means for them to come.

If you know a potential student who might benefit from the Accelerated B.A. to M.Div. program or M.Div. degree, contact Dr. Martin Sheldon at msheldon@welch.edu or M.Div. recruiter Jacob Johnson at jacob.johnson@welch.edu. We look forward to hearing from you soon. **ONE**



College Announces Fall 2024 Enrollment

Welch College enrolled 399 students for the fall 2024 semester, similar to last fall's enrollment of 393, according to Matthew McAfee, provost.

"We are so delighted to welcome this promising group of new students to Welch College," McAfee said. "We pray the Lord will grant His richest blessings upon them as they



pursue their vocational preparation for life and ministry."

College officials reported 142 dormitory students (ten graduate students), 33 commuter students, 39 non-residential graduate students, 60 Adult Studies/Online students, and 125 dual enrollment students. Full-time equivalency (FTE) was 251 students. Total enrollment statistics indicate students from 25 states, one territory, and ten other countries.

"It's such a wonderful thing seeing students back on campus," Welch President Matt Pinson said. "We have a great group of committed students this year. Only one other year, 25 years ago, did Welch have as many other countries represented in the student body. On-campus enrollment is not quite as high as it was last year, but we're holding steady and gradually building up after our enrollment took a plunge in the wake of COVID."

"Also, ministry enrollment is up, with a larger number of pastoral ministry students in the freshman class," Pinson added. "In a few more years, we project we'll be back up to the 40-year record enrollment the college experienced the year before COVID." **ONE**



Welch College Ranked Among Best Regional Colleges–South

Welch College has been ranked first in social mobility and tenth overall among “Best Regional Colleges–South” in the 2025 edition of *U.S. News and World Report’s Best Colleges*, according to President Matt Pinson.

The social mobility ranking measures the percentage of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds who go on to graduate. The Regional Colleges–South category comprises 96 other colleges and universities in the South.

“We’re excited that Welch has climbed to tenth overall and first in social mobility,” President Pinson said. “This shows students, parents, and alumni our commitment to academic excellence and that Welch’s academic program is competitive and has recognition in the academic community.”


The Best Regional Colleges category includes institutions that focus on teaching undergraduate students. These schools offer a range of degree programs in the liberal arts and in professional fields.

“Colleges go up and down in these rankings each year,” Pinson said. “When we first entered the rankings 14 years ago, we were ranked 52. In the past six years we’ve consistently reached the top 20. Our ranking this year at tenth is exciting.”



“To put our ranking in perspective,” Pinson said, “the other top ten institutions in our category have an average enrollment more than five times higher than Welch and an average endowment more than thirty times higher than Welch. We’re striving to be good stewards of the resources God has given us.”

Out of the 97 institutions in the Best Regional Colleges–South category, Welch received especially high marks in five strategic areas, ranking as follows:

- **1st** in social mobility
- **2nd** in graduation rate
- **2nd** in student-faculty ratio
- **4th** in ACT/SAT scores
- **5th** lowest among private colleges in student debt after graduation 

Save the Date for Forum25

Welch College will host the annual Forum25 conference March 9-11, 2025. Speakers will include Dr. Carl Hargrove, associate professor of Pastoral Ministries at The Master’s Seminary; Eliza Huie, director of counseling at McLean Bible Church in Vienna, Virginia; Nicolas Serrano, senior pastor of Grace Family Church in Rosaria, Argentina; Josh Baer, pastor of Cramerton FWB Church in Cramerton, North Carolina; and Welch Provost Dr. Matthew McAfee. Registration is open at Welch.edu/Forum25 for this free conference.



Navigating the “Caring for Your Parents” Phase of Life

BY MERINDA PARRISH



Traveling across our denomination and sharing with other ministry families this past summer made me more aware of the large number of people providing support care or long-term care for their parents. People face various scenarios at this stage of life: independent parents just beginning to need assistance with bills, transportation, or overseeing medical needs; semi-independent parents needing assisted living or someone close by to check on

them daily; parents moving in with family; and parents who need sustained help due to medical or mental issues requiring nursing homes, regular home health, or living with family members who provide consistent care.

While no situation is the same, conversations this past year revealed several common challenges for family members caring for parents. Here are a few of the messages shared by families on this stage of their life journey.

1. Grieve. Allow yourself and your parents the opportunity to grieve the changes occurring. As the “child,” seeing your parents struggle to do things they have always done and realizing your superhero image must be adapted can be devastating. Allow the parent to grieve as they come to terms with changes in their abilities or independence.

Grieve together but then focus on the blessings of what they *can* do and make the most of those abilities.

2. Honor, respect, and provide dignity. With many changes occurring in the caregiving stage, strive to demonstrate honor and respect, even when you must be assertive about medications or necessary tasks. Let them know you love them and want them to have the most productive life possible. Never embarrass or belittle. Help your parents by balancing assistance with enabling them to complete tasks themselves.

3. Know and accept their routine. This is crucial during the “supporting” phase, so you recognize changes in behavior or attitudes as a signal of an underlying medical issue. Understanding their schedule is also helpful when a parent moves in or relocates to assisted living or a nursing home. You can help them maintain routines, establish “normalcy,” and be aware of issues that may arise.

4. Prepare the paperwork. Make sure the caregiver, whether you or someone else, is listed on medical release forms at the doctor’s office. Go to appointments when possible and take notes or record information (ask for permission) and advice given by the doctor for review. Have access or create a patient portal to read health reports and send messages to the doctor.



- **Have the tough discussions early about personal care.** Will your parent allow you to assist in dressing and helping with hygiene, or do they prefer a nurse? Where do they prefer to spend their last years if possible? What are their funeral and burial wishes? Have final arrangements been made?
- **Address legal issues before they arrive.** Know what your state requires regarding personal assets and long-term care. (Some states require liquidation of most assets to place in long-term facilities. Moving deeds or titles to other family members often must be done five years prior to admittance.) Make sure your parents — and you for that matter — have a will or estate plan, power of attorney (economic as well as medical), and a living will for medical wishes (such as DNR or life support measures).
- **Keep a list of all medications (name and dosage).** It also helps to record the appearance and identifying numbers on pills in case they are dropped. Get to know the pharmacy. Some pre-package meds for daily dosages, and others may deliver.
- **Keep a list of “issues” daily.** Make notes on mental ability (foggy or clear days and their duration), weight (often twice each day if having fluid issues), blood pressure, and water intake. A detailed record will help you and the doctor establish a better picture of what is going on.

5. Check daily nutrition. Ensure the parent is eating. (You may have to check both refrigerator *and* trash can to determine whether food is being eaten.) Dehydration is an enemy; it causes many health and mental issues, so push the water. When possible, eat with your parents. Everyone enjoys a meal better when it is shared! Challenge each other to finish a bottle of water by a certain time. Make it a game, something fun to do.

6. Take them out. Getting out of the house, even just to sit on the porch, can make a world of difference in perspective. During the pandemic, we learned that being cooped up all the time is difficult mentally and emotionally. If they don't feel like going to a store, just take them for a drive (especially if you are close to places they remember and love).



Sit outside and look at the stars or FaceTime distant family members. If they want to go to a store, take them; even if they only pick up one thing, do as much as they feel like doing.

- 7. Take time to visit as well as serve.** Supporting your parents, especially if they live with you, goes beyond caregiving. It involves sharing and spending time together. Laugh together as much as possible. Sit and listen (even if you hear the same story ten thousand times). Ask questions about their past (and write it down). If your parent lives in a care facility, regularly visit at different times in the day to be with them (and to keep a check on what is occurring). Get to know the staff and let them know you are there to see how things are going.
- 8. Stay in the Word.** God strengthens, comforts, and guides us through all the changes we face. Schedules can be busy during this time of caring, so read or listen to Scripture with your parent as you complete your daily routines. Talk about your thoughts on a Scripture verse and ask them to share what they think about it. Make a list of your parents' favorite songs and hymns to play throughout the day.
- 9. Take care of yourself.** Take a break, sleep, and develop a network of support. Make things simple by ordering groceries online for pickup or having them delivered (unless the store gives you a valid opportunity to leave the house; if so, enjoy the moment and grab a coffee or ice cream while out).



Create a broad network of support from family members, neighbors, and church family. When providing support for your parents who don't live with you, get to know their neighbors. See if the neighbor will share his or her phone number in case you need a quick check on your parent (who isn't answering the phone).

Many online resources and blogs offer support for the sometimes-difficult journey through this stage of life. SeniorLifestyle.com offers 13 organizations, seven blog sites, 12 government resources, and eight apps to help track and manage care. EldercareLocator.com finds support services in your specific area, and the National Caregiver Network offers lists of support organized by medical conditions, with an instant chat support.

Caring for parents is a journey family members have navigated throughout human history; it is just new to us. Ask your parents about their own experience as caregivers to older family members. Sharing can provide insight for both of you.

Ask the Lord to help you be a picture of Him throughout your caregiving journey. Ask others for prayer and encouragement when you get discouraged or feel overwhelmed. This time of service is only another season of our lives. Let's use it to make some precious memories, honor our parents, and glorify God together. **ONE**

About the Writer: Merinda Parrish is adjunct instructor of education and clinical coordinator of education at Welch College. Learn more: welch.edu.




Do you know what Free Will Baptists *believe*?

Every Christian denomination has unique beliefs and practices that give it identity and define its heritage. For Free Will Baptists, this heritage includes the topics discussed in the **Free Will Baptist Heritage Series** published by the Historical Commission. Each pamphlet gives the reader a deeper understanding of our historic doctrine and practices, including:

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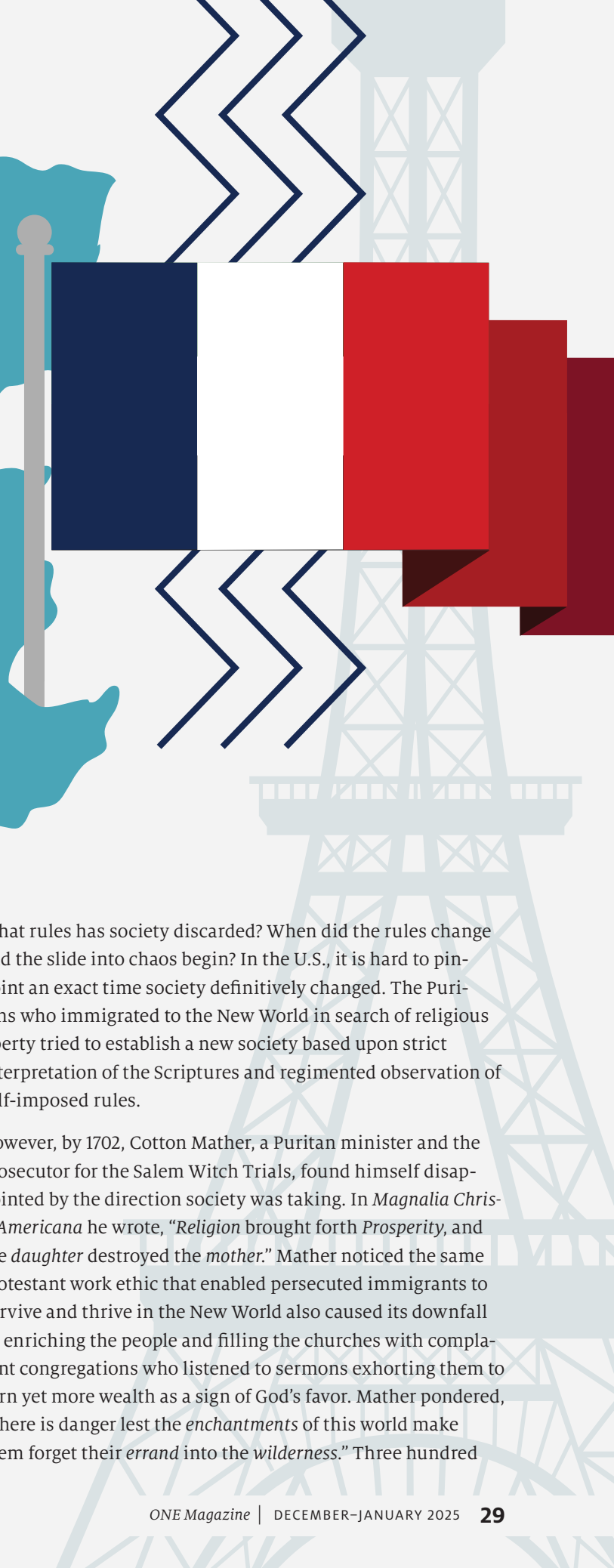
Calvinball and the Olympic Games

BY CRISTINA PRICE

Growing up, my parents had the newspaper delivered every day. After supper, I'd make a beeline for the comics and spend a joyful ten minutes chuckling over the adventures of Hagar the Horrible, Dagwood, Charlie Brown, Dennis the Menace, and — my favorite — Calvin and Hobbes.

One of my favorite storylines involved Calvin and his trusty stuffed tiger Hobbes playing Calvinball, a game made up by Calvin. The game only had one rule: you never play the same way twice. In other words, they made up the rules as they went along. While Calvin and Hobbes certainly enjoyed their crazy game, it made it almost impossible for anyone else to join them.

Society today resembles Calvinball more and more. At one time, most people knew and understood the rules of society, what the goal was, and how to get there. But over the past several generations, Western culture has thrown off the morals and values of its predecessors and started to make up the rules as it goes along.



What rules has society discarded? When did the rules change and the slide into chaos begin? In the U.S., it is hard to pinpoint an exact time society definitively changed. The Puritans who immigrated to the New World in search of religious liberty tried to establish a new society based upon strict interpretation of the Scriptures and regimented observation of self-imposed rules.

However, by 1702, Cotton Mather, a Puritan minister and the prosecutor for the Salem Witch Trials, found himself disappointed by the direction society was taking. In *Magnalia Christi Americana* he wrote, “Religion brought forth Prosperity, and the daughter destroyed the mother.” Mather noticed the same Protestant work ethic that enabled persecuted immigrants to survive and thrive in the New World also caused its downfall by enriching the people and filling the churches with complacent congregations who listened to sermons exhorting them to earn yet more wealth as a sign of God’s favor. Mather pondered, “There is danger lest the *enchantments* of this world make them forget their *errand* into the *wilderness*.” Three hundred

years later, it appears our errand into the wilderness has been almost entirely forgotten.

In France, where we live and work, it is easy to pinpoint an exact time society turned its back on God: July 14, 1789. The storming of the Bastille prison is regarded as the spark that lit the wildfire of the French Revolution. It terminated a decade later, after tens of thousands of deaths, with Napoleon Bonaparte's *coup d'état*.

Unlike the American Revolution, based primarily on the desire for freedoms of religion, press, speech, and self-representation, the French Revolution was an explosion after centuries of pent-up frustration with the monarchy and the Catholic Church. French revolutionaries were so desperate to throw out anything smacking of monarchy or popes, they executed their own king and queen, killed thousands of Catholic priests and nuns, changed their calendar to a secular one with no relation to the liturgical calendar, and took over churches and cathedrals, turning them into temples of reason and destroying priceless works of religious art. This hatred for anything religious stemmed from the close ties between the Catholic Church and the monarchy, and the control the church wielded over taxation, forced tithing, and land ownership.

Many factors propelled both the American and French Revolutions. If I were asked to summarize their primary difference, it would be this: while both revolutions had the goal of separating church and state, the reasons behind the goal were completely different. The American Revolution was fought to obtain personal liberty and to protect, among other things, the right to practice religion without interference from the state. The French Revolution was fought to free the peasantry and middle class from an oppressive monarchy, heavy taxation, and a state-sanctioned church that imposed a heavy financial and moral burden on the people. The French wanted to protect their secular state from interference by the church.

France kicked God out of their country 235 years ago and slammed the door. And they have never let Him back in.

But France is not the only country in Europe adrift from its moorings. According to the Joshua Project, “post-Christian Europe is home to the fewest Christ-followers and is the most unreached continent on the planet.” Less than 3% of Europeans have a personal relationship with Jesus. Considering the greatest Christian movements our world has ever known originated

in Europe, this statistic is gut-wrenching.

In the space of only a few centuries, the continent that produced Martin Luther, John Calvin, Protestantism, Count Zinzendorf and the Moravian missionaries, William Tyndale, and John Wycliffe, now prides itself on its secularism and tolerance. In

Europe as a whole, 461 unreached people groups reside, 37 in France alone. Over the past 19 years, the share of French people not believing in God has risen from 44% to 56%.

The current cultural mixture of hedonism, nihilism, and tradition led us to the divisive display during the opening ceremonies of the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris. I watched from my living room, eager to see how France would show off its contributions to the world in the realms of art, music, food, language, architecture, fashion, and *joie de vivre*. Instead, we were treated to a disjointed, somewhat chaotic display of hedonism.

The feedback from French friends the following day was mixed. Some were proud of the unique format. Others were disgusted by what they regarded as a missed opportunity to flaunt their country's good points. This seems to be the reaction shared by many American Christians, some who even went so far as to boycott the entire games. An extreme reaction, I think, that stems from a fundamental misunderstanding of the current state of Europe.


I've lost count of how many times Matt and I have been asked why we work in France. “Surely,” someone exclaims, “a country as cultured and beautiful as France doesn't need missionaries!”

Au contraire, mon frère!

France has not been remotely Christian for three centuries. The many cathedrals are mostly empty and struggle to find enough priests to fill their pulpits. The gods of science and reason have long sat on the throne of people's hearts and minds. The God of the Bible has disappeared into the annals of history, dismissed as artifacts of a less-enlightened era.

As of 2023, France's population of evangelical Christians was





1.23%. That is about 795,000 people in a nation of 64 million. This is fewer than the citizens of Charlotte, North Carolina. Given the unreached state of most French people, the unavoidable question confronts us: *what did we expect?* As our own country slides faster and faster toward secular hedonism, producing more and more “art” that makes us shudder, why on earth would we expect a largely atheist society like France to produce anything less? We are right to be disgusted, but we should not be surprised.

I have heard the argument that we Christians have the moral obligation to be indignant when we see sinners behave in ways that violate Scripture. That we need to insist upon a standard of behavior that applies to all people in a culture. I wholeheartedly agree crimes against the innocent must be punished. But I don't think that is the issue here. No crimes were committed during the opening ceremony, only behavior on display that goes against God's revealed will for our lives.

The crux of the problem is when we get offended because someone violates what we consider a cultural standard of behavior.

Who decides that standard of behavior? From where does a culture obtain its landmarks and boundaries? In our American Judeo-Christian worldview, traditionally, we have taken our cues from Scripture. Our standards for decency, respect, appropriateness, value of life, and behavior all stem from belief in a Creator God who made us in His image and revealed to us His design for living holy lives.

Sadly, this foundational belief is being gradually chipped away, and today, much of what Americans consider “Christian” is merely cultural acceptance of behavioral norms. It is “normal” to go to church, get married, rear children, and love your country. While I love all these aspects of our culture, following these “norms” does not make someone a Christian. It does, however, allow a culture to maintain a veneer of godliness that covers up a stinking morass of evil.

When a culture strays so far from the Standard, it must make up its own rules to continue functioning as a society. Just like Calvin playing Calvinball.

Cultures like France, which rejected biblical standards centuries ago, have essentially made up their own rules to the game. Fortunately, the Catholic Church's influence on family values and morality did not disappear immediately after the revolution. Obviously, today their Judeo-Christian impact has mostly evaporated.

Since nature abhors a vacuum, when society rejects one set of values, another set naturally takes its place. Thus, in France and much of Western Europe, that void was filled with the “gifts” of the Enlightenment: the gods of reason and science, skepticism of religion and religious hypocrisy, and reliance on self. In 2024, those “gods” reign supreme.

Tom McCullough and his wife, Patty, were missionaries in France for ten years before they returned to the States for health reasons. Tom became my professor of missions at Welch College. One day, during a cultural anthropology class, we discussed the link between cultural beliefs and behavior. Tom said something I have never forgotten: “People believe what they want to believe, so they can behave how they want to behave.”

That, I believe, is the root of the matter. All people *everywhere* are sinful. Unless they follow a standard of behavior beyond themselves, they will find ways to shape their beliefs to accommodate their sinful behavior.

This is why we are in France. This is why IM has been sending missionaries to Europe for more than sixty years. We want to show the French people the God-shaped hole in their hearts can only be filled by one Person, Jesus Christ.

We are not here to guilt them into following a man-made standard of behavior. We want to introduce them to the holy One who loves them and wants the best for them, and whose rules for living are both logical and life-giving. We want to see France transformed from the inside out. **ONE**

About the Writer: Cristina Price, along with her husband Matt and daughters Madeleine and Emilie, live and minister in France. They have served in St. Nazaire since 2018 after spending 12 years in Nantes. Learn more: www.IMInc.org



Kenya — On Wednesday, October 16, 2024, Pastor Francis baptized five Samburu believers in northern Kenya.

Panama — August 25, 2024, two people were baptized at the FWB church in Parita, Panama.



Cuba — “Free Will Baptists in Cuba are at the forefront of providing chaplaincy training for candidates from various denomi-

nations,” stated Global Partnerships Director Kenneth Eagleton. In mid-September, a new class of chaplains who will work in jails, prisons, and hospitals graduated.

India — Pastor Stanley RajKumar reported South India Free Will Baptist youth held a one-day conference on October 2, 2024. Almost 200 young people gathered. More than 50 gave their lives to Christ; 20 dedicated themselves for full-time ministry. The theme was “Be Strengthened” from 2 Timothy 2:1.



Côte d'Ivoire — Sunday, September 1, 132 young people from the five FWB churches in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, spent their afternoon in three hours of prayer, worship, teaching, and fellowship.



Brazil — Pastor Paulo César and his assistant Tiago baptized eight people August 25, 2024, at the Nova América FWB Church in Campinas, Brazil.

Cuba — “Encuentro con Dios,” the FWB Church in La Lisa, Cuba, baptized 12 people, celebrated the Lord’s Supper, and held a special children’s presentation on Sunday, September 7, 2024. Pastor Ramón Sanchez, president of Cuba’s national convention, attended the festive occasion.



Cuba — The eastern campus of the Cedars of Lebanon FWB Seminary in Bayamo opened its 2024-25 academic year

in September, adding an extension class in Cuba’s second largest city, Santiago de Cuba. FWB Bible and ministry training in Cuba now occurs from the most western province of Pinar del Río (the main campus) to the most eastern province of Santiago de Cuba, with many churches in between serving as extension locations. Kenneth Eagleton urges, “Pray for these students and teachers as new leaders are trained for the growing number of churches.”



France — An estimated 280 people packed the September 28, 2024, JPense event in France. IM missionaries gave away Bibles, many attendees joined discussion groups, and families heard the gospel.



Brazil Celebrates 10 Years of National Meetings

Campinas, Brazil — The Alliance of FWB Churches held their tenth annual meeting August 30-September 1, 2024, in Campinas, Brazil. The First FWB Church of Campinas and the Nova América Church jointly hosted the meeting.

Eleven churches — from the states of São Paulo and Minas Gerais, and from Brasília (the capital of the country) — participated. Organized as a sequel to a previous association of churches which had dissolved, the Alliance celebrated their tenth anniversary with a live transmission of the event.

On Saturday evening, the group also celebrated 20 years of the current Bible college with the graduation of two men with a B.A. in Bible and ministry. A video played during the celebration providing a historical overview of the school. **ONE**



Sakamotos Move to Career Status Missionaries



Antioch, Tennessee — The IM Board approved Osam and Emily Sakamoto’s transition from missionary interns to career missionaries in Tokyo, Japan.

Raised in the city of Nerima, on the outskirts of Tokyo, Osam has worked with the Hope Alive Church for the last three years. He serves as the associate

pastor and is currently working toward a master’s degree at Welch College. Emily joined the Hope Alive team in

2022. She ministers with English outreach, Bible studies, and social media.

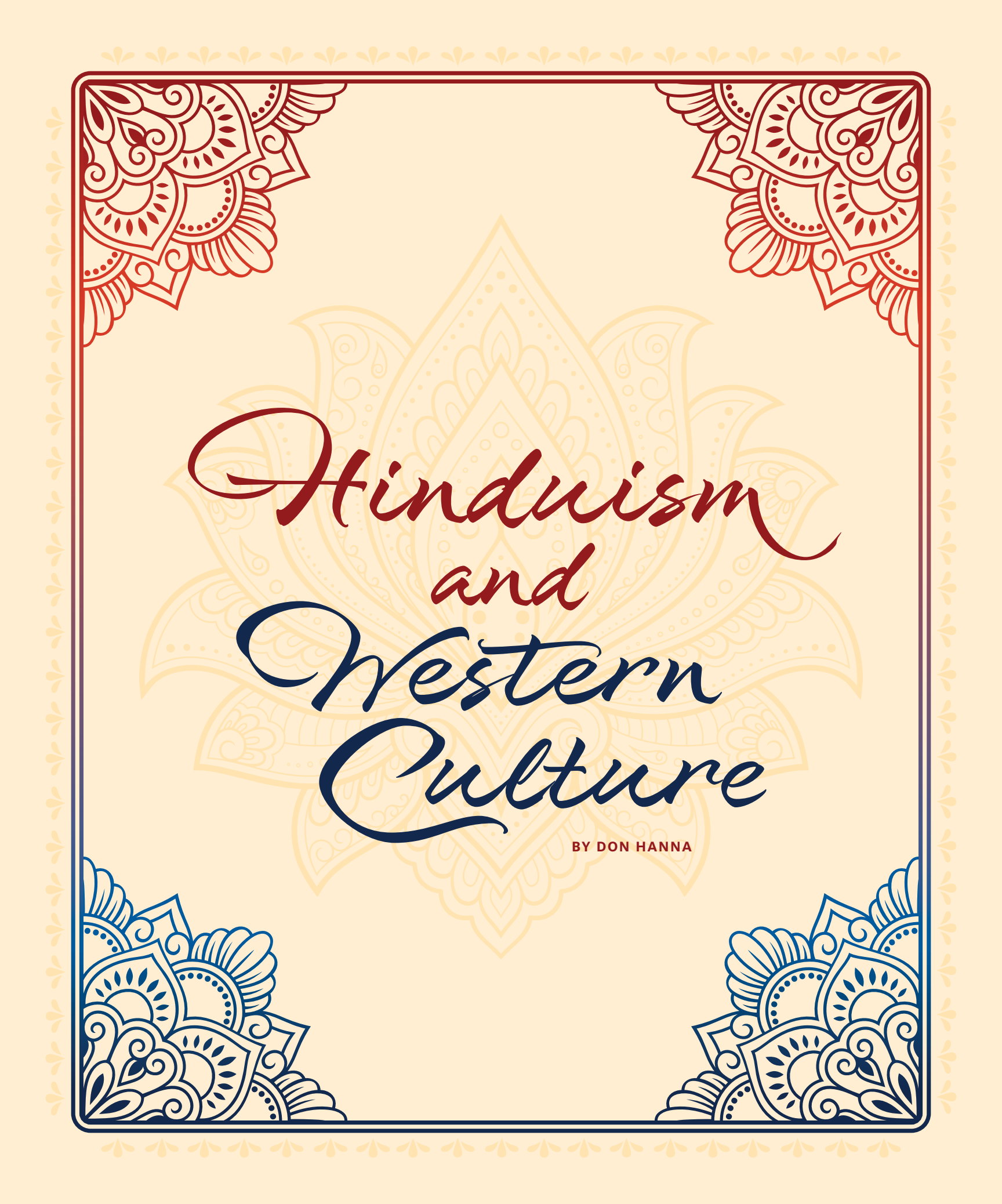
The couple is passionate about mentioning the gospel early and often. Married in December of 2023, they plan to work with Hope Alive Network and their efforts to plant churches among the 99% of people in Japan who still don’t know Jesus.

“I have a burden that my country knows who Jesus is,” said Osam. “We feel God’s hand moving in our ministry, and we are excited to be a part of it and partner with others so they can be a part of it, too.”

Don Matchett, IM’s director of development, urged, “Join us in praying for Osam and Emily as they return to the States in the next few months to share about their future ministry with Hope Alive Network. **ONE**

Bulgaria — Over 100 people representing seven churches participated in Bulgaria’s FWB national conference in Tryavna, Bulgaria, September 21-23. Pastor Mike Cash (East Valley FWB Church, Mesa, AZ) spoke, encouraging and challenging believers.





*Hinduism
and
Western
Culture*

BY DON HANNA

Technology and immigration enrich us as we learn about and celebrate various world cultures. Our palates expand as we taste new cuisines. Our imaginations are sparked by intriguing traditions, ethnic dances, and colorful clothing. Yet, with the richness these cultures add to society, they also bring their false religions. We must be alert and not allow false ideas — things contrary to Scripture — to seep into our minds, our lives, and even our churches. We should critically examine our own beliefs and practices to make sure they remain true to God's Word.

The complex Hindu belief system is practiced in a myriad of ways in India and around the world. Several tenets of Hinduism have crept into western society, increasingly so in recent years. Pop icons such as the Beatles, people who travel to India to learn about Hinduism, and Hindu teachers known as gurus have been instrumental in spreading the ideas of Hinduism.

Estimates indicate as many as 55 million Americans practice *yoga* today. I am often asked whether I think this is acceptable for a Christian. If you only do the stretching exercises, it is unlikely you are harming yourself. However, meditation (transcendental meditation) is often taught along with yoga. This is not acceptable for a Christian. This type of meditation involves Hindu worship and demonic influence, including inviting evil spirits (demons) to enter you. The word *mantra* has come into common use in today's western society, but mantras or chants are part of Hindu worship.

In the West, we often refer to "New Age" thought, which is simply Eastern Mysticism in disguise. This complex thought system espouses the concept that God is everywhere, in everything, and we are all a part of and are becoming gods. Many beliefs regarding climate extremism are rooted in Eastern Mysticism or New Age thought. The mystic's spiritual goal is to achieve unity and harmony with the world around him. He is to become nothing, and his individuality is lost. This directly counters the teachings of Christ, who died in our place to pay our sin debt, and our names are written on His hand. We are taught God cares for us as individuals and has a plan and purpose for our lives.

Reincarnation, another part of the Hindu belief system, teaches the soul can be reborn in a new person or animal. How a person is reborn — whether animal or human, whether poor or wealthy — is based on how that individual lived. In Hindu thought, the soul is not only eternal, but also a part of God. The concept of *karma* fits with this belief system; one deserves a station in life based on previous existence. By implication, I should not seek to intervene and help change a person's circumstances; the condition is his or her own fault.

I am also convinced reincarnation is taught and believed so one may have a faint glimmer of hope: if a person has enough

chances to live, he *might* gain salvation. Hindu salvation is the escape of the soul from the cycle of birth and rebirth to the state of *nirvana*. Hinduism teaches multiple paths to salvation: good works, self-denial, gifts to the temple, and devotion in Hindu worship.

I believe this Hindu tenet has helped foster the belief many paths are available to God, and whatever way you choose is acceptable. Many Hindus accept some Christian beliefs. They even agree Jesus was a good teacher or accept him as another god. However, they will *not* accept Jesus Christ is God and the only path to salvation.

Aryurvedic medicine, often called alternative medicine, has become quite popular in certain parts of the western world. This includes the use of herbal medications (with which I have no quarrel, if not used in a harmful way). However, chants and charms involving demonic forces are also entangled in the practice of aryuvedic medicine. Occultic powers are invoked to obtain healing.

My purpose in highlighting these tenets of Hindu theology is not to denigrate another system's beliefs but to help us, as Christians, see the wonderful truths revealed to us in God's Word, the Bible. God gave His Son, Jesus Christ, as a sacrifice to pay the penalty for my sin. It is through my belief in His finished work God gives me the gift of salvation. He created me. He gave me life. He wants a relationship with me so I can live with Him forever. Jesus said, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me" (John 5:39).

This brief and superficial overview of how Hindu beliefs have infiltrated Western thought may raise questions for some of you. I can try and answer your questions if you wish to contact me. **ONE**

About the Writer: Don Hanna, son of Carlisle and Marie Hanna, spent many years living and working in India — first as a missionary kid and then as a frequent visitor to encourage and minister to the needs of Christians living in a hostile environment. Don, as president of Friends of India, currently leads the Free Will Baptist work in India, Nepal, and Bangladesh. He and his wife Milly have three children and four grandchildren. They live in Charleston, South Carolina, where Don continues his medical practice.

Embraced by

grace

An illustration of a woman with a serene expression, eyes closed, sitting in a meditative lotus position. She is wearing a light pink long-sleeved top and dark blue pants. A large, vibrant red heart is positioned on her chest, with her hands resting on its sides. The background is a light pink color with scattered, faint pink hearts. Above her, a dark blue, cloud-like shape contains the title text. The overall style is soft and illustrative.

BY TAMMY MILLER

When a young woman in our church met with my pastor husband and me to discuss a new ministry opportunity, I did not know what to expect. Rita, who was saved through the ministry of church planter Mark Thomas (Pueblo, Colorado) is married to Jacob Lynch, a longtime, faithful member of our church, Highland Hills, in Greeley, Colorado. Rita had an important burden on her heart, a ministry to young, single, pregnant moms.

With three children, the youngest only three months old, Rita easily connects with young moms and felt burdened to reach them. She asked if we would consider partnering with a national program called Embrace Grace. The program connects young, single moms in need with local churches. Their desire is for young women to find hope and salvation in Jesus and then become part of the local church hosting the Embrace Grace program.

After meeting with Rita, we agreed our church should participate and welcome these moms in need. We began the Embrace Grace ministry last January. Out of the many women who contacted the local pregnancy crisis center and were referred to Rita, only one young woman named Robyn came. Robyn began classes with Rita and me.

Rita showed pre-recorded videos provided by Embrace Grace. The videos shared testimonies of God's love, care, and redemption from young women who had been lost and felt unloved and unwanted. God rescued them and brought them into His family. We taught Scripture and answered questions. We listened to and loved on Robyn.

Robyn came to us with a newborn. Her baby was already two weeks old when she joined us for classes. Robyn also was living with her boyfriend. They struggled with work and making rent. Our church helped as much and as often as we could. At first, the Embrace Grace meetings were private. However, after a few classes, Robyn and her boyfriend attended church services, and our church welcomed them with open arms. They

knew we loved them. They loved us back.

After several weeks of lessons, Rita threw Robyn a baby shower, which is one of the delightful requirements of the Embrace Grace program. Again, the ladies at church showered her with gifts and love.

One Wednesday evening, Robyn came to church upset. She wanted to talk to me privately. We met in my husband's office, and I listened to her concerns. It was clear her greatest need was a Savior. There in Terry's office, I prayed with her and led her to pray and ask Jesus to forgive her sins, to be her Lord and Savior. Such an awesome privilege!

Her boyfriend later met with Terry. He claimed to have been saved as a child but had not been following Jesus. He prayed a prayer of rededication with Terry. God was truly blessing this ministry.

Unfortunately, due to job and financial stress, Robyn moved out of state to be with her mother, but we stay in touch. She is so thankful she met Jesus and our congregation through Embrace Grace. Robyn is looking for a new church family in her home state. Please pray for her success in finding a church home that will help her grow in her life as a new believer in Christ.

We can reach people in many ways. I am thankful Rita has a heart for reaching out to other young women through Embrace Grace. I am thankful for lives touched and changed through the gospel of Jesus Christ. We have begun a new session with a new young lady. Please pray for her, and pray for us as we minister the grace of Jesus to her and her family.

We have been embraced by God's amazing grace! **ONE**

About the Writer: Tammy and Terry Miller are NAM church planters in Greeley, Colorado. They are currently serving two churches: Highland Hills FWB Church in Greeley and Waypoint FWB Church in Fort Collins. Learn more: FWBNAM.com.



“I want women to know that Embrace Grace opened my heart to Jesus and changed my life. After my family shunned me for being pregnant, I felt like I had been left alone in the world to figure things out by myself. Rita, Embrace Grace, and my new church family helped me tremendously. It felt like God had been watching over me the whole time and I never knew.”

— Robyn's Testimony



Dylan and Katie Brazil to Serve as Associate Planters at Ho’omana Church in Hilo, HI

Hilo, HI — Dylan and Katie Brazil have been approved to serve as two-year church planting interns at Ho’omana Church in Hilo, Hawaii. The Brazils will minister alongside lead planters Armon and Yvette Jordan and fellow associate planters Russell and Aileen Hylton. After two years of gaining valuable church planting experience, they will reevaluate and possibly join another church planting work in a different location.

Dylan is no stranger to NAM or church planting. His parents, Rodney and Ashley Brazil, are former NAM church planters currently ministering in Vernon, Alabama. Before joining the work in Hilo, the Brazils served at Lakeview Fellowship in Bowling Green, Kentucky, where Dylan was a student intern. They have one son named Asher.

The Big Island of Hawaii is one of the most culturally diverse locations in the United States. Though this diversity

encompasses various religious beliefs, Hawaii is increasingly secular, with over half the population claiming no religious affiliation at all and only 5% identifying as evangelical believers. The Brazils feel called by God to reach this vast mission field with the truth of the gospel bringing hope and light to Hilo. Please pray for them as they begin raising funds and transitioning into their new role as church planters.



Brazil Family

Visit fwbnam.com/brazil to learn more about the Brazils and Ho’omana Church or financially support their work in Hilo. **ONE**

Mission North America Offering

Thank you to every church, group, and individual who gave to the Mission North America Offering last November! Your generous support enables North American Ministries to continue serving church planters, chaplains, churches, and communities throughout the denomination, across the nation, and around the world. Thank you! **ONE**

NAM Family Grows



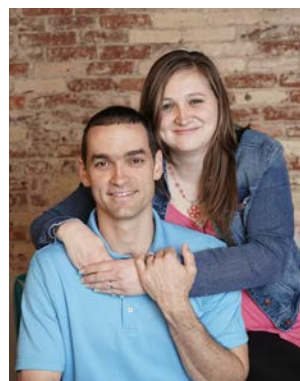
Myla Hanshaw

We are thrilled to welcome Myla Ruth Hanshaw to the NAM family. Myla was born October 22 to Ardmore, Oklahoma, church planters Matt and Becky Hanshaw and big sister Jovie. Congratulations and may the Lord richly bless your growing family. **ONE**

Garrett and Huff Resign as Associate Church Planters

Adam Garrett (Champaign, IL) and Jonathan Huff (Hickory, NC) have resigned as associate church planters with North American Ministries. We are profoundly grateful for both families and their service to NAM.

Please pray for them and their families as they transition to new chapters of life and ministry. **ONE**



Garrett Family



Huff Family

Former Church Planter and Field Secretary With the Lord

Noble, OK — John “Mark” Vandivort, of Noble, Oklahoma, was called home July 18, 2024. Mark grew up on a dairy farm in Mountain Grove, Missouri, and studied agriculture at the University of Missouri. During his senior year, Mark attended a revival meeting with friends where he fully surrendered to the call to preach, profoundly shaping his life’s journey.

Mark studied Bible at Welch College and was deeply impacted by a mission internship to Cuba in the summer of 1959. In December of that same year, he married Lora “Louise” Underwood, and the couple enjoyed a beautiful 64-year marriage, with 40 years of full-time ministry together.



John “Mark” Vandivort

Mark served as a pastor in New Hampshire, a church planter in both Arizona and Missouri, interim pastor at The Donelson Fellowship in Nashville, Tennessee, and traveled the country as a field secretary with North American Ministries. After retiring from full-time ministry, the Vandivorts left Arizona and moved to Oklahoma where Mark continued teaching and serving the Lord.

Mark’s life was a testament to his faith, his love for family, and his commitment to serving others. His memory will be cherished, and his legacy of faith and love will continue to inspire all who knew him. **ONE**

NAM CELF Administrator Kathy Brown Retires



Antioch, TN — Congratulations to NAM CELF Administrator Kathy Brown on her recent retirement. For 42 years, Kathy Brown served church planters, chaplains, and Free Will Baptists through her work at Home Missions, now North American Ministries. Her unwavering dedication to our department, her wonderful family, and her local church is a testament to her faithfulness to the Lord and His calling on her life.

NAM enjoyed celebrating Kathy with friends and family at a reception in her honor at the National Office Building in Antioch, Tennessee. Teresa Womack, former NAM accounting administrator, has assumed Kathy’s role at CELF, and Kylah (Kivette) Walker will continue as the NAM accounting administrator. **ONE**

First Mid-South Golf Tournament a Success

Amory, MS — The first Master’s Men Mid-South Golf Tournament teed off this October in beautiful Amory, Mississippi. Twenty-four golfers enjoyed a great time of fellowship and friendly competition. Championship Flight winners were the father/son team of James “Pop” and Shane Stidham, with a two-day score of 131. Tim Baumgarten and Riley Young finished second (only one shot back), and third place went to the father-son team of Larry and Dwayne Brown. David Crowe and Adrian Nottonson took first place, First Flight with second place going to John Brummitt and Chris Compton.



Shane Stidham and James “Pop” Stidham

Master’s Men looks forward to the upcoming Deep South Tournament in Albany, Georgia, and plans to return for another Mid-South Golf Tournament in Mississippi next year! **ONE**



Master's Men Disaster Response Offers Help to Hurricane Victims

From Ken Akers, National Director, Master's Men: The Free Will Baptist response was significant as volunteers from Kentucky, Ohio, Illinois, Alabama, Georgia, and Tennessee served in the East Tennessee and North Carolina cleanup efforts following Hurricane Helene. Because of the generosity of supporters, we were able to distribute thousands of dollars to hurricane victims. East Tennessee pastor and response coordinator Noah Taylor expressed his appreciation for the volunteers, supplies, and financial donations given through Master's Men.

Free Will Baptist disaster response will continue in Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina, and wherever needed. **Please note:** because of the overwhelming amount given already, Master's Men will no longer accept supply donations but will continue to accept and distribute much needed monetary gifts. To date, more than \$100,000 has been given.

Skilled volunteers are now being requested. The Swannanoa FWB Church in North Carolina received heavy damage and will need financial help and volunteers to rebuild. If you have a team interested in volunteering, contact Reuben Cason, North Carolina state promotional director.



Once again, we appreciate those who have given of their time and funds to assist our disaster response to those in need.

From John Reynolds, Kentucky State Director, Master's Men: Ready to work, we drove to Evergreen FWB Church in Erwin, Tennessee, with hygiene kits and supplies. Pastor Noah Taylor directed us to Riverview Baptist Church where the fellowship hall had washed away, the basement flooded, and water reached a depth of three feet on the second floor.

We went to work in the basement. Soon, children from the church joined us. They had pry-bars and began pulling nails from the walls where drywall had hung. I was so impressed by their love for their church, their Sunday School, and most of all their love of Jesus. We spoke about how, someday, they may teach their own children in these rooms, tell them about the flood, and how they helped rebuild.

From Daryl Grimes, Pastor, Meadowbrook FWB Church, Black Mountain, NC: Since Hurricane Helene arrived in Western North Carolina, Meadowbrook and Homer's Chapel FWB Churches partnered to aid the Swannanoa Valley and surrounding communities. We shared a wide range of relief, from providing bathrooms and "flushing water" to opening our gym as a distribution center for needed supplies, giving away untold gallons of water, and delivering supplies and food to the community. We have tried to do whatever we can to show the love of Jesus to this area.

So far, we have been able to pray with several individuals and know of four who confessed Jesus as their Lord and Savior since the flood. Please continue to pray for this area as they deal with the devastation of losing people and possessions. **ONE**



Deep South Golf Tournament

APRIL 2-4, 2025

Learn more and register: fwbmastersmen.org/deepsouth

Continued from page 15

Or remember Philippians 2:12-13: “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

Throughout the New Testament, we find descriptions of what the Holy Spirit has done and continues to do in our lives:

- **He anointed us** (1 John 2:27). His presence equips us for life, ministry, and service. He has made us a kingdom of priests, meaning we can all approach God through Christ; we no longer need an earthly priest. Through His anointing, we all have been gifted by the Spirit to serve Him in the world.
- **He sealed us** (2 Corinthians 1:22). In Paul’s day, authorities would place a wax stamp or seal on something to authenticate it or to make it official. Today, we think of going to a notary; you walk away with a document bearing a visible seal. Through His Spirit, God put His stamp of ownership upon us.
- **He secured us** (2 Corinthians 1:22). In essence, the Holy Spirit made a down payment, a guarantee of our place in

God’s eternal Kingdom. Each year we tend to go on vacation — we love the beach — right after school is out. To secure a good spot, we make reservations early in the year, sending a deposit to secure our place. Recently, I caught myself looking up a restaurant to try, even though our vacation is still two months away. The down payment has me looking forward to what I will enjoy soon.

In a much greater spiritual sense, the Holy Spirit is our guarantee, our downpayment on our future possession of eternal glory, where we will fully understand what it means to be one of God’s children.

Paul had good reasons for his change of plans. However, when accused of being unstable, wishy-washy, and unreliable, Paul didn’t jump immediately to a personal defense. Instead, he pointed the Corinthians toward the unchanging nature of God.

Your plans may change, but God is faithful, Jesus secures God’s promises, and the Holy Spirit works within us in anticipation of eternity. When your plans change, remember God doesn’t. **ONE**

About the Columnist: Dr. Barry Raper is associate dean of Welch Divinity School and pastor of Bethel FWB Church near Ashland City, Tennessee.

Retired?

I DON'T THINK SO!

BY DAVID TROGDON CH (LTC-RETIRED)

Retired? In the immortal words of *The Princess Bride's* Inigo Montoya, “You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means.”

In 2015, I was “medically retired” after 25 years of active service in the U.S. Army, including 16 years of service as a Free Will Baptist chaplain. My retirement paperwork stated tersely, “You are no longer fit to continue service as a soldier.”

The transition from military life to a strange civilian world turned out to be far more painful than the injuries and wounds which made me “unfit” to continue serving in the Army. I remember praying, “Lord, what now?”

WHILE OTHERS, AND MAYBE EVEN OURSELVES, MAY CONSIDER US TO BE TOO OLD AND TOO BROKEN, GOD NEVER CONSIDERS US AS “UNFIT” TO CONTINUE IN HIS SERVICE. The word *retired* is not found anywhere in Scripture. Believers never retire from Christian service and will even serve God forever in glory. Though we may be physically unable to do all the things we once did, God still has a plan and a place for us in His service.

After several months of prayer and seeking, I received God’s “PCS” (Permanent Change of Station) orders to start the HOPE Project. What is the HOPE Project? The acronym HOPE stands for “Healing Our Patriots with Equines.”

True healing can only take place in finding *hope* in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 6:19). The idea for the HOPE Project came seemingly

out of the blue in a conversation with some friends who told me you could help wounded warriors and veterans with horses. I was in! We moved to the Florida Panhandle and helped start the HOPE Project. You can’t be a paratrooper without “jumping out of a perfectly good airplane,” and you can’t walk on water if you don’t get out of the boat.

I really am proof of God’s sense of humor. I knew how to be a chaplain to the broken, wounded, and hurting, to those suffering from the scars of combat and countless other traumas. But I knew little about horses, equine therapy, starting and running a nonprofit, and fundraising. The good news is we serve an all-knowing God. I became certified to do equine therapy and am constantly amazed at all God is doing and has done for the last eight years. While I never claim to know what I am doing, God always does.

Why live in Florida and, unlike millions of others, *not* live “the retired life” on a beach or golf course? Why *not* spend time traveling the world and taking it easy for the years we have left? Why serve as the director/chaplain at the HOPE Project?

First, I am totally convinced this is God’s will for my life. Also, a recent study revealed that the suicide epidemic among active military and veterans is raging. As many as 44 take their own



lives every day. Veterans desperately need the hope of Christ, which the VA and most other professional therapists cannot or will not share openly. Many see themselves as broken, useless, and “unfit.” All need a community of fellow veterans and believers who understand, and who help them find a true purpose for their lives in Jesus Christ.

OUR “UNRETIRED” SERVICE HAS ETERNAL SIGNIFICANCE, AND SOULS HANG IN THE BALANCE.

While I have learned much about horses, I have learned much more about God’s amazing grace as He continues to grow us and use us, even though we can’t do all the things we used to do. **I’ve seen firsthand how God uses our scars to help others who are still bleeding.**

Last month, God used us to share HOPE with 496 active military, veterans, first responders, their family members, and others. While I still don’t claim to know what I’m doing, I know God is at work doing what only He can do. I may be “Army old and Army broken,” but I am far from being retired! I can’t go AWOL during the fight. Daily, I’m reminded this life is truly just a vapor, but eternity is forever. As I constantly say to my struggling veterans, “Move out! Draw fire!” **ONE**

About the Writer: Former chaplain Dr. David Trogdon retired from the U.S. Army in 2015 after 33 years of military service, including 25 years of active duty. He currently serves as the director of the HOPE Project, which serves soldiers and families, wounded warriors, and veterans. For more about the HOPE Project, visit hopeprojectinc.org.



Honor Your Team

BY JEFF GOODMAN

Volunteers are the heartbeat of the local church. Without them, the efforts of every church would simply collapse into inefficiency and failure. Exodus 18:13-23 describes Moses surrounded by people all day long. Morning to night, he spent all his time helping people. *Wow!* As a pastor, *that feels oddly familiar.* However, one day Moses' father-in-law Jethro told him (in my words), "Hey, this isn't good. You need help, so train some folks to help you." What amazing advice!

"YOU NEED HELP."

You see, Moses had become the bottleneck, like on a highway when traffic merges to a single lane, and everything slows down. If we want to grow as a church, we must *grow people* to do the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:12). I was once told you can have control, or you can have growth, but you cannot have both.

To become a fully functioning body, we must take the focus off a few and put the ministry into the hands of many. Then, the bottleneck is broken, and real growth can take place, both spiritually and numerically. Isn't that what we have been called to do? Train disciples who train more disciples to go and tell others about Jesus.

HOPE VERSUS GUILT

At The Springs Church, serving is part of our DNA and culture. It is an expectation repeated often, but we never want to get on stage and "guilt" people into serving. We've all heard the saying, "What you get them with is what you keep them with." Guilt is a horrible master, and people who begin serving out of guilt will one day stop serving because their motivation was misplaced. Honor your team by sharing the

"why" behind service. Make it clear in your recruiting that serving is what Jesus did on earth, and serving is what He has called His people to do.

When we use guilt to fill needed roles, we send a message of desperation, but when Jesus is lifted high, and people see what God is doing, they will join your team motivated by *hope*. Think about the mom who is saved because her children are being cared for in the nursery. Or the outsider who now serves in the children's wing because he or she was welcomed and feels a true sense of belonging. Hope brings the most amazing volunteers you have ever met!

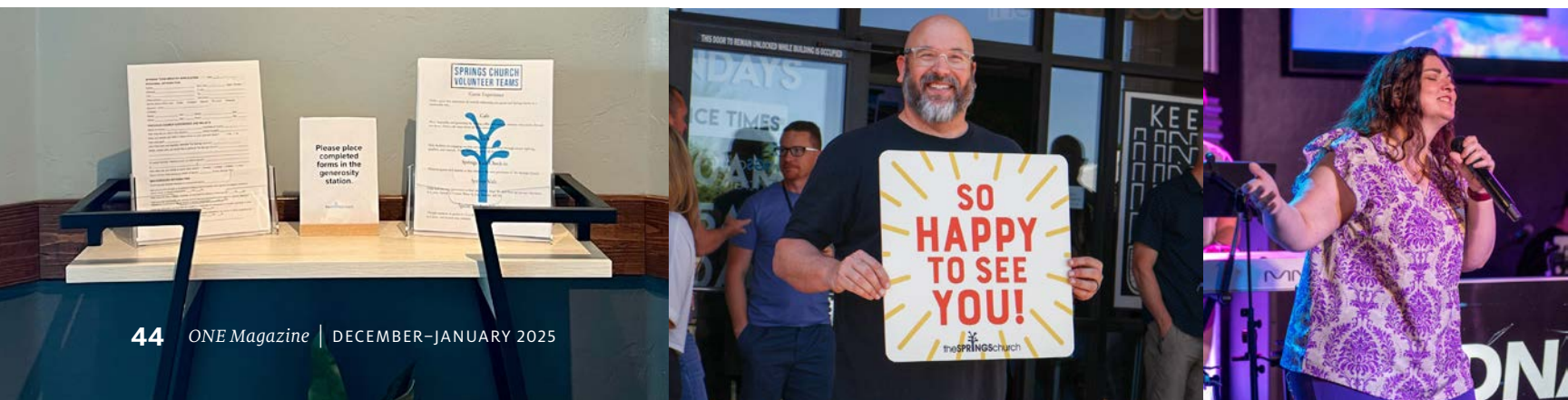
HONOR IN ACTION

We must also honor our volunteers. So love them as souls and not as worker bees. The average lifespan of a worker bee is around six weeks. (That might be close to the average "lifespan" of a church nursery volunteer.) I was told long ago, "People do not care what you know until they know that you care." So love them and let them know you love them.

You will not only lose people as volunteers, but also as church members if you only treat them as worker bees.

Honor them by **seeing and acknowledging their God-given potential.** Some of my best volunteers felt they had no place or were unworthy to serve on the team. By having conversations, listening to what God is doing in their lives, and discovering what they love to do, we get to know them and find a good fit for them.

Sometimes, we have to see what Jesus sees when He looks at them, and perhaps things they do not even see in themselves. We also honor them by **praying for them to grow**





spiritually. We must pray for God to work in lives, to save them and call them to fulfill His plan for them. We also honor them when we **free them to lead.** If people are simply commodities to get things done, they will never move from participants to owners. We must free volunteers to lead and allow them to dream, make changes, and create.

Perhaps the greatest way we honor our team is by **allowing them to make mistakes.** People are going to make mistakes! Use those moments to teach, not to “bring down the hammer.” Anytime I have made a mistake in ministry, I beat myself up; I don’t need help. When people make mistakes, help your team members analyze, learn, and move on.

Many years ago, my youth pastor called to tell me the fire department and police were evacuating the Twin Peaks Veterinary clinic next door. My heart rate went through the roof! I said, “Why are they there?”

He said, “We set the fire alarm off using the smoke machine during a youth group party.”

I could tell he was nervous about how I would respond. When I arrived, he already had apologized, and I did too (and gave them free church merchandise). Then, I went to talk to him. I said, “Man, what did you learn?”

He replied, “Well...not to use a smoke machine!”

I laughed with him and said, “Sounds like you learned your lesson; shake it off and go have fun! Twenty years from now, your students may not remember what you preached, but they will *never* forget this night!”

Finally, we honor our team by letting them **be who God created them to be.** We are created uniquely with different personality styles, strengths, and weaknesses. We help people serve by allowing them to live how God created them. At The Springs Church, that may mean someone tries serving in an area that’s not the best fit. They know we want them to tell us if it’s not working.

Locking people into volunteer roles without flexibility means, after a while, they may quit in frustration. We must

encourage openness about changing volunteer roles. Also recognize that during certain seasons of life — financial stressors, illness, pregnancy, caregiving — people need a break. We can’t take it personally; it’s not about us. If our volunteers know they can talk and we will listen, it gives them grace to take needed breaks. They come back later and get involved again. By giving them space, we leave the door open.

CELEBRATE GOOD TIMES!

Honor your team and love them well and often! At The Springs Church, we praise our volunteers, but we do more than talk. We hang up signs thanking them. We give them small gifts and gift cards throughout the year. We provide coffee, drinks, and snacks for them. Weekly, our staff goes through every area of the facility to greet volunteers and thank them personally.

We also hold an annual volunteer appreciation dinner to honor them and celebrate all God has done through them that year. We have a big meal hosted and served only by church staff — no volunteer help! They are the VIPs that night. We have fun skits or Christian comedians or entertainers, and we give away prizes! *Never underestimate the excitement when you announce there are prizes!* At the heart of the event, we express sincere appreciation for all they have done.

We want people to be generous with their time, talents, and treasures. This is an opportunity for the church to give back to the most generous people they have — volunteers! We make sure they know they are seen, that what they do matters to us. Without volunteers, we cannot effectively do what God has called us to do. We want them to feel energized, appreciated, and part of the team, because they are! Volunteers are an integral part of the Body of Christ, and we are family serving Him as one. **ONE**

About the Columnist: Jeff Goodman is the founding pastor of The Springs Church in Marana, Arizona. He ministered in North Carolina and Georgia before moving to Arizona in 2010. A NAM church plant, The Springs Church reached self-supporting in January 2020.



48 Hallelujahs!

BY BRENDA EVANS

The first time I heard the 48 hallelujahs, it was a dark and stormy night, as Edward Bulwer-Lytton famously said — 1960 in downtown Nashville, Tennessee, at War Memorial Auditorium. The 48 were in Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus," but it seemed like more, 100 or 200 maybe. I can't remember.

Rain came down in sheets on Richland Avenue at the old Welch College campus. Winter lightning flashed. I was wearing my sister Grace's brown mouton coat and black three-inch high heels. Dr. Mary Ruth Wisheart was the driver, but her blue headstrong Henry J. car would not start. My friend and I jumped out into the storm to push. Dr. Wisheart popped the clutch, the Henry J. coughed, bucked, and got going. So, we chugged into downtown Nashville to hear Handel's *Messiah*.

My friend and I were squeezed into the tiny back seat of the willful Henry J. when she sniffed and held her nose. "I smell a wet dog!"

“Shhhh! It’s me,” I whispered, and pointed to my sister’s mouton coat.

I loved Grace’s brown mouton — a luxurious garment of lamb-skin straightened, chemically treated, and thermally set to be water-repellant and look like beaver or seal fur, or so they said. I had no clue what beaver or seal fur looked like. No matter, I loved that mouton coat. But that night, it *repelled* all right, but not water. As my friend said, it stunk like a wet dog.

The mouton coat was one of Grace’s few luxuries she lent me, along with big clip-on costume-jewelry earrings. She also had a real leather purse her husband John bought her. She didn’t lend me that, but I had the mouton and big earrings for the weekend. That was how Grace was, gracious like her name, always giving or lending. A good sister who took care of her wet-behind-the-ears naive sister who didn’t know how to stay in out of the rain when wearing mouton.

Forty minutes later, we four — Dr. Wisheart, her teaching colleague, my friend and I — wedged ourselves into hardwood balcony seats. Thirty or so horns, strings, percussions, and a grand piano warmed up on stage. The chorus and soloists filed in. The conductor bowed, raised his arms, and the grave-sounding Overture to Handel’s *Messiah* began.

The instruments transported me. Pianos I knew — at least old upright ones like the ones I played at home and church. But this was a *grand* piano and a full orchestra: strings, woodwinds, brass, organ, bells, kettledrums. They raised me to highs of exaltation.

Two hours later came joy upon joy, the “Hallelujah Chorus.” Scores of hallelujahs in all parts — soprano, alto, tenor, bass — repeated over, under, and between the other voices. Again and again. Glorious four-part harmonies like a grand hymn, then single, unison hallelujahs, and finally multiple melody lines with 40 voices bursting out in a glorious jumble of repeated hallelujahs from all four parts. My spirit soared. My soul grew wings. It seemed as if heavenly saints and angels sang of Christ’s resurrection, ascension, and his reigning power: “Forever and ever. Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hal-le-lu-jah!”

Applause was thunderous. Tears streamed down my face, running black with mascara. I blotted with my handkerchief.

That night more than 60 years ago, I was enthralled. The *Messiah* was the most beautiful sacred composition I had ever heard. The program gave German-born George Frideric Handel

the credit for the astounding oratorio, composed in just 24 days in the year 1741.

Much later I learned that, yes, Handel composed the musical score and set the words in their place. But Handel did not write the Hallelujahs or the other 1,800 words of the *Messiah*. The hallelujahs that made my soul sprout wings in 1960 were penned by Charles Jennens.

My old 245-page copy of the *Messiah* never acknowledges Charles Jennens as the librettist — not in the three-page introduction by Max Spickler written in 1912, nor in the four-page compilation of the libretto that precedes the musical score. But Jennens’ words in the *Messiah* are 53 Bible passages drawn directly from seven Old Testament and seven New Testament books — a “Scripture collection,” as Jennens described his libretto.

Handel liked the dramatic arc of Jennens’ libretto so much he started at the beginning of Jennens’ Scripture passages and worked consecutively through them. The words of the *Messiah* begin where Jennens began, with the prophetic “comfort ye, comfort ye my people” from Isaiah 40 and continue through Jesus’ birth, life, death, resurrection, and end-time reign “for ever and ever. Amen.” The narrative arc belonged to Jennens, the musical score to Handel. The duo deserve double billing.

Handel and Jennens were lifelong friends. Before the *Messiah*, Jennens wrote at least three other librettos for Handel. A wealthy Christian bachelor, country squire, art collector, and musician, Jennens quibbled with Handel more than once over certain elements of the *Messiah*. It is said he sent Handel several revisions made directly on Handel’s autograph score. (Of course, it is also said that Handel mostly ignored the suggestions.)

Jennens’ harshest complaints were voiced by letter to another friend, Edward Holdsworth, where he grumbled Handel’s oratorio contained a few “grossest faults.” Eventually, I am told, Handel did a few touch-up revisions.

In the balcony, December 1960, I heard no faults. For two hours, as Grace’s mouton coat dried and lost its wet-dog smell, I was swept up into Jennens’ Scripture and Handel’s musical score.

Not knowing why, when the hallelujahs began in the “Hallelujah Chorus,” I stood with thousands of other concertgoers. By its end, I supposed we stood in praise of the Omnipotent One who “shall reign for ever and ever....Hal-le-lu-jah!”

Later, I learned the standing began in London in 1743 with British King George II. At least that's the legend.

Hallelujah! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

*The kingdom of this world is become
the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ:
and he shall reign for ever and ever*

King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, Hallelujah!

Since that December 1960 in Grace's mouton coat, I've heard the *Messiah* many times — live concerts; on record, cassette tapes, and CD; and on British radio. I've even sung in the *Messiah* once or twice. Every time, Scripture and music co-mingle in glorious praise and honor of our Savior.

But too often, in the hurry-and-scurry of December and approaching Christmas celebrations, I bypass the *Messiah*, even the hallelujahs. Busyness takes precedence. Decorating a tree, a house, a yard. Sending dozens of greeting cards — though, thankfully, we no longer must lick stamps. Buying gifts, wrapping, bagging, and tagging them. Cooking — hours, days, even weeks of culinary concoctions. All must be perfect. And, so, the 48 hallelujahs are pushed aside and forgotten.

Too many Decembers, I stumble along and swerve away from joy and praise. Today, I shudder at that failure, that preoccupation with the trivial, the superficial, the artificial. The unnecessary.

I shudder and bury my face in Jesus' shoulder, my Messiah's shoulder. I grieve and repent that I've neglected the hallelujahs. That I've forgotten the 53 Old and New Testament Scriptures in Jennens' libretto and Handel's score that first raised joy and hope and grief all jumbled together in my soul 64 years ago. There in the balcony of War Memorial Auditorium in my sister's mouton coat, black tears streaming down — that time when I first wept and stood, both empty and full, before the Lord because of those 48 hallelujahs.

Lord, this December, help me not to neglect praise. Not sit, stumble, swerve, or forget that first time, that first place where I met you in the hallelujahs. Remind me. Take me back, Lord, this December, take me back to the emptiness and fullness of all those hallelujahs. Amen and amen. ONE

About the Writer: Brenda Evans lives and writes along Rockhouse Fork, a creek in Ashland, Kentucky. You may email Brenda at: beejayevans@windstream.net.

DISCIPLESHIP Should Not Be Difficult

JAN/FEB 2025 BLOCK

Featured Books: Judges - 1 & 2 Corinthians

Character Study: Samson

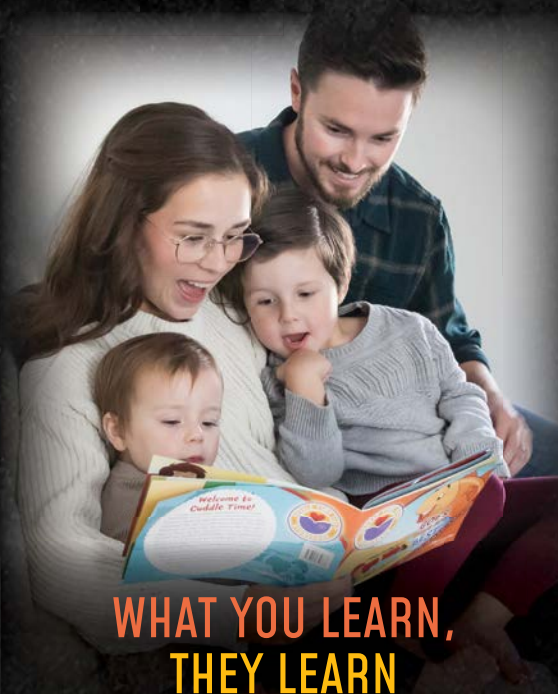
Special Topic: God's Design on Purity

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SCAN ME



WHAT YOU LEARN,
THEY LEARN



The “Alphabet Soup” of Retirement Distribution

BY DAVID BROWN, CPA

When it comes to retirement distributions, many acronyms are used. RMD or Required Minimum Distributions describes the percentage of money an individual is required by law to withdraw every year according to age. For instance, someone born before July 1, 1949, must make distributions at 70½ years old; but for someone born after July 1, 1949, but before December 31, 1950, the age is 72. Someone born after January 1, 1951, but before December 31, 1959, must make RMDs at age 73. You must begin distributions at 75 for anyone born after January 1, 1960. Exciting stuff, right?

It can be. The penalty for not taking the proper amount of an RMD is 25% of whatever amount you are short of your RMD. Obviously, this makes it important to take your RMD every year. The amount required is based on the government’s life expectancy tables, and the amount you must withdraw will rise slowly over your lifetime.

For instance, anyone required to withdraw from retirement starting at age 72 will divide the IRA by 27.4 (projected life expectancy) or withdraw 3.65% of the balance at the ending balance of the year he or she turns 72. When that money is withdrawn from a regular IRA, all of it will be considered taxable income.

The minimum distribution goes up dramatically through the years. For instance, the same 72-year-old today will be required to withdraw 5.41% at 82, almost 7% at 87, and 9.26% at 92. The system is designed to gradually reduce the principal.

That brings us to more alphabet soup regarding retirement accounts: Qualified Charitable Distribution or QCDs. As previously discussed, we all must pay taxes on Required Minimum Distributions. However, we can use a QCD and direct our RMD be given to a qualified charitable organization, which includes churches, colleges, missionary organizations, and other ministries.

While you do not receive a tax deduction for a QCD, the amount gifted also doesn’t count as taxable income. Many

retired people do not have enough to itemize their deduction on their income tax return anyway. For these people, using a QCD may be the best way to give to a church or ministry. Even though they don’t receive a charitable tax deduction, they do avoid having to report RMD as income. The QCD must be distributed from your IRA trustee directly to the ministry to avoid tax, but the church or ministry will be aware it came from your IRA.

If you “like the taste” of this financial “alphabet soup,” contact Free Will Baptist Foundation for assistance in making a Qualified Charitable Distribution. [ONE](http://www.fwbgifts.com)

About the Columnist: David Brown is director of Free Will Baptist Foundation. To learn more about the grants program, visit www.fwbgifts.com.



Your Christmas Checklist



BY CHRIS COMPTON



By now, your December calendar is probably filling up (or full already). This is the time of year when we are busy with Christmas shopping, church functions, parties, and family gatherings. While you might be busy with Christmas preparations, this is also the perfect time to review your financial health, particularly your retirement account.

A financial review may not be part of your annual calendar, but adding a retirement account checkup during the holiday season can be one of the best gifts on your list, setting the stage for a financially secure future. This period allows you an opportunity to ensure you are on track toward your retirement. As you plan for this year-end checkup, consider these steps.

Review your account balance and contribution rate.

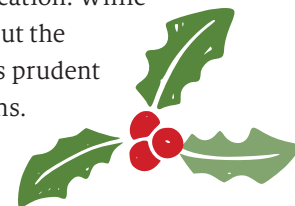
Start by checking the balance in your retirement accounts. Knowing where you are will help you assess whether you are on track to reach your retirement goals. Look at your contributions for the year. If you haven't reached the maximum contribution for the year and have extra funds, consider making an additional contribution. Not only will this reduce taxable

income, but it also can move you further along toward your retirement planning goals.

Also, make sure your regular contribution amount is what is needed to meet your retirement goals. If you're behind, now is the time to strategize how to catch up and increase your contributions.

Evaluate retirement goals. Retirement goals change as we go through life based on life changes. Employment, marital status, health — all can impact how and when we retire. It is crucial to consider life changes and update your goals accordingly. As your goals are updated, be sure your current savings rate and investment strategy are aligned with updated goals.

Assess your investment portfolio. The end of the year is a great time to determine how your investments have performed and your overall investment allocation. While it is true investors shouldn't over obsess about the market, markets do fluctuate. Therefore, it is prudent to review any shifts in investment allocations.





A financial review may not be part of your annual calendar, but adding a retirement account checkup during the holiday season can be one of the best gifts on your list.

A year-end review allows you to make needed adjustments to your investment ratios and rebalance your current investments to align with risk tolerance and retirement goals. If you are unsure about the state of your retirement account, or need guidance on ratio adjustments, consult with a financial advisor.

Update account information and beneficiaries. Review all your account information — address, phone numbers, and email address — for the security of your account. It is also a good time to ensure beneficiaries are up-to-date. This step is often overlooked, but it is crucial for protecting retirement assets and ensuring they are distributed according to your desires.

As you celebrate this holiday season, consider taking some time to review your retirement account. A quick retirement plan checkup can have lasting benefits. This year-end checkup is not just about ensuring you're on track for a secure financial future; it's about making sure you can be and do all the Lord has for you in the last quarter of your life.

So, this Christmas season, set aside time for this essential checkup. Think of it as a Christmas gift to yourself! [ONE](#)

About the Writer: Chris Compton is accounting administrator for Richland Ave Financial (Free Will Baptist Board of Retirement). Chris graduated in 2007 with an M.A. in Bible exposition from Columbia International University. A 1998 graduate of East Tennessee State University, he has over 15 years of administrative/financial experience in varied fields, as well as seven years of pastoral ministry experience.

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R

E ENGINEERING

V E R S E

A POWERFUL PROCESS FOR ADDING VALUE

BY JOHN BRUMMITT

Growing up in the East Tennessee hills, I was exposed to the concept of reverse engineering. Reverse engineering is the process whereby something is deconstructed to extract design information. Common examples include building legacy replacement parts for obsolete products, repairing or servicing items without a replacement part, analyzing a failed part or making an improvement, or replicating a system or product.

The reverse engineering process adds value because of the knowledge gained from understanding how the pieces work together to make that item. It also adds value to the owner because you know you are the reason it remains functioning and valuable.

Like many other areas of the country, in East Tennessee, we spent much time repairing tools and equipment. If something broke down, finding a replacement or purchasing a new item was the last option. For example, while working for my uncle's mowing service, my cousins and I snapped the handle off a walk-behind mower. The parts had been discontinued, so my uncle grabbed a few washers and a welder and crafted a new handle for the mower himself. We had many tools and equipment "MacGyvered" to keep them running or useable. While we enjoyed having something new, a tool wasn't yours until you had to reverse-engineer a part that made it uniquely yours.

These days, culture has shifted from repair to replace. Part of that is the convenience of the "Amazon culture," where you can have almost anything in two days or less. It is simply easier to replace items than to repair them. Global manufacturing also has driven down the quality of products to the point it is easier to discard an item than reverse-engineer it for repair. You are likely to destroy the item you are trying to repair in the process.

Sadly, this mindset isn't limited to the "stuff" we purchase but also has become ingrained in other areas of our lives. "Throwaway culture" has become relevant not only to consumer items but also to social lives. Unfriending and cancel-culture impact our interactions with one another, as



well as the value placed on relationships and careers. We simply replace relationships rather than work to repair them. What about ministry? If we have a ministry that isn't going well, are we more likely to reverse-engineer the situation to repair it, or will we simply move on to another opportunity? The same could be asked in our marriages, finances, or other areas of our lives.

Applying principles of reverse engineering to other areas of life places emphasis on repairing broken or damaged areas. When we gain knowledge regarding that area of life, it enables us to find suitable options to repair what has been broken. The understanding gained from analysis and diagnosis provides options for correcting the broken situations that arise in other areas.

Easily discarded or replaced "disposable items" keep us from getting too attached or investing too deeply. The amount of time and work we put into those items is shallow and limited. Even though the item could be essential for living, it may not hold the proper value because of our lack of understanding about how it works.

Reverse engineering provides stewardship over what has been entrusted to us. Being willing to repair rather than replace relationships and situations in our lives — while difficult — helps us be more deeply invested in important things. [ONE](#)

About the Writer: John Brummitt, the son of a Free Will Baptist pastor, has been with the Board of Retirement since spring of 2006. He became CEO in January 2016. John graduated in 2004 with a business degree from Welch College and graduated with honors with an MBA/Finance degree from Tennessee Tech University in 2011. John and his wife Ashley have two sons, Jude and Parker.

Reverse engineering provides stewardship over what has been entrusted to us.

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WHY NOW?

BY RON HUNTER JR., DEREK ALTOM, AND DAVID WILLIFORD

When a major operating shift occurs, people ask, “Why?” or “Why now?” Sometimes, the answer is obvious. During World War II, Americans faced rationing so vital elements could be used in the war effort. Our people understood and rallied around the effort. The events of September 11, 2001, showed the need for greater airline security and resulted in the formation of TSA and security checks for passengers boarding commercial aircraft. The need for these changes was obvious and immediate. Other times, however, an explanation is needed.

For the first time in our history, D6 Family Ministry has begun a fundraising effort. Since its founding, the organization has operated from income generated through sales of curriculum, books, and other services. That leads to questions: “Why now? What changes have led the leadership to make a significant paradigm shift?”

D6 Family Ministry began as two departments in 1935: the National League Board and the National Sunday School Board, directed by the National Association of Free Will Baptists. In 1957, the National Association approved the launch of a Free Will Baptist Sunday School literature program, but the effort was short-lived and closed in 1959. The Sunday School literature program was revived in 1962. The Free Will Baptist League became the Church Training Service (CTS) in 1964, and

expanded the existing Sword Drill and Declamation, adding Bible Bowl and Bible Tic Tac Toe. Music and arts competition was added in 1972.

In 1978, the Sunday School Board merged with the CTS Department to provide literature and resources for both the morning Sunday School and evening training session at churches. Through the years, the department provided biblically-sound Sunday School material and practical training.

Randall House Youth Ministries was developed in 1983, launching Student and Children’s Ministries. Youth training events like Truth and Peace and YET developed during this time. In 2012, these ministries transitioned into what is now called Vertical Three.

To partially offset the cost of these programs, Randall House charged admission fees to participants in the various activities. *It should be noted the National Youth Conference and the competitive activities were never self-sustaining.* The conference and all its ministries were, from the beginning, subsidized by Randall House through the sale of curriculum and books.

Vertical Three and its predecessors have been spectacularly successful. Thousands of young people have received ministry and leadership training, and many remain in leadership positions across our denomination. Tens of thousands have competed on the national level, and many more have studied and developed Bible knowledge and arts training on the local church, district, and state levels.

In his report to the National Convention in 2024, Executive Director Eddie Moody noted that 99.25% of young people who participated in denominational programs like YET, Truth and Peace, and Vertical Three activities are regular church attenders. *It is apparent a major key to long-term denominational viability and strength requires we continue to focus on youth development through training in Vertical Three.*

D6 has invested heavily in generational discipleship tools, including the development of D6 Curriculum and two D6 Conferences in the United States. We are also working internationally to carry the message of intergenerational discipleship to churches in countries like France, Singapore, and Malaysia.

D6 provides resources free of charge to military chaplains, new church plants, and missionaries, all to provide materials that can strengthen discipleship training in the home, in churches, on military bases, and across cultures.

Because of our sales of literature and books, D6 has sometimes been

viewed as a business. However, it is obvious we are a ministry, regularly investing in areas where our cost exceeds our income. If we were a business, we would simply cut areas that do not generate sufficient income to support themselves. But we are not a business. We are a ministry, and we exist to serve

We are not a business. We are a ministry, and we exist to serve the people of our denomination.

the people of our denomination.

As stated earlier, throughout our history as an organization, D6 subsidized these areas of ministry through curriculum and book sales. We have reached a point (like many other publishers) where sales alone cannot support all we do. Most major publishers today are either downsizing, closing their doors, or finding new ways to fund their ministries.

Some of the largest Christian publishers in America are facing significant challenges. Lifeway Publishing, the denominational publisher for Southern Baptists, experienced significant downsizing. Publishing houses for General Baptists and the Nazarene Publishing House have greatly reduced their size, and some no longer publish material unique to their denomination.

D6 is not exempt from the challenges facing the publishing world. According to Dr. Eddie Moody, Free Will Baptists lost 87 churches in 2023. The resulting loss of curriculum sales due to church closures is \$1.2 million since 2019.

We are faced with a decision: find new ways to generate income or cut programs. Four years ago, we decided to add a fundraising component to our ministry. By adding this, we can continue to fund the programs of youth discipleship and training and subsidize the free literature we provide our chaplains, mission churches, and other ministries that, though vital, are not self-sustaining. The coming months will reveal a rollout of different programs designed to communicate where we are and give you the opportunity to invest in lives and ministries that touch the world.

Prayerfully consider a partnership with D6 Family Ministry. It is no stretch of the imagination to say the future existence of us as a movement is tied to D6. Together we can impact churches, members of our military, new church plants, and the next generation of leaders. I hope you'll join us. **ONE**

To view the D6 Family Ministry report from the 2024 FWB National Convention, scan the QR code.



About the Writers: Ron Hunter, Derek Altom, and David Williford are the D6 Family Ministry development team. To make a one-time or recurring gift, visit d6hero.com. For more information about how you can partner with D6 Family Ministry, email us at giving@d6family.com.

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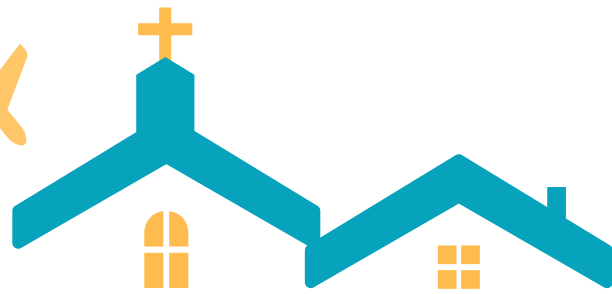
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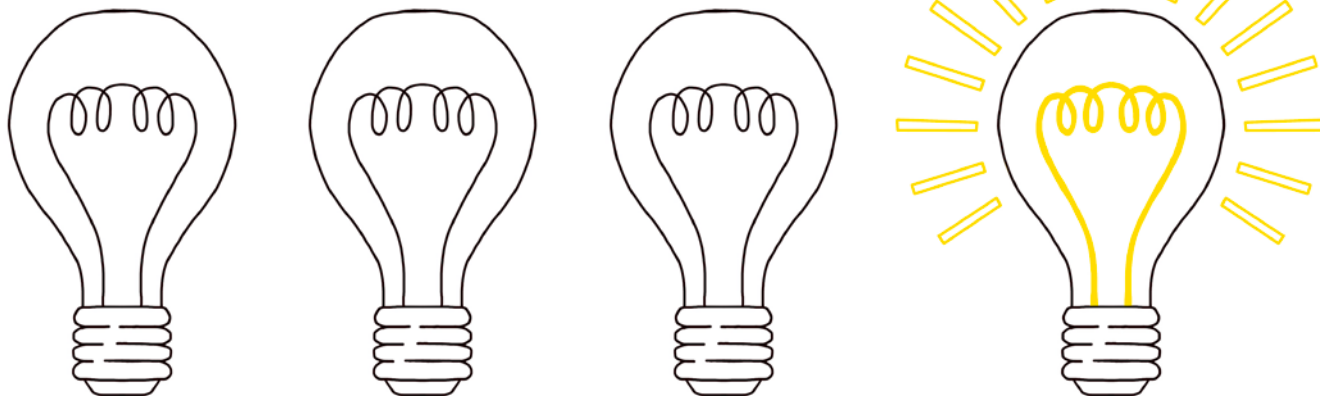
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How Failing Builds Stronger Leaders

BY RON HUNTER JR., PH.D.



Many great leaders experienced early setbacks or outright failures. While “failure” may sound harsh, it doesn’t define a person. Failing doesn’t mean you’re a failure. George Washington lost more battles than he won while leading the Continental Army, and early in his career, he surrendered Fort Mifflin. His poor public speaking and spelling made some question his abilities. Yet, Washington overcame these challenges, eventually becoming who many consider our greatest president.

Abraham Lincoln, who joined the military as a captain, ended his service as a private due to demotions. Later in life, as President, he faced the death of his son, his wife’s mental health struggles, and his own battle with depression. Lincoln once said, “My great concern is not whether you have failed, but whether you are content with your failure.” Setbacks often serve as catalysts for growth.

Thomas Edison was told he was too stupid to learn. Yet, he went on to hold over a thousand patents and is remembered as one of history’s greatest inventors. Similarly, a newspaper editor told Walt Disney he lacked imagination and good ideas. Wow! Reflecting on his early failures, Disney said, “I think it’s important to have a good, hard failure when you’re young. It makes you aware of what can happen. Because of it, I’ve never had any fear in my life.”

Michael Jordan was cut from his high school basketball team. Instead of giving up, he credited his coach’s decision as the catalyst to push himself toward greatness. Reflecting on his career, Jordan said, “I’ve missed more than 9,000 shots. I’ve lost almost 300 games. On 26 occasions, I was entrusted to take the game-winning shot and missed. I’ve failed over and over again. And that is why I succeed.”

Setbacks, failures, and difficulties appear in the lives of many leaders. In fact, these moments are often pivotal, pushing them toward greatness. I’ve had my share of failures, which some call “stupid tax” or “tuition.” Properly evaluated failures can build resilience and offer a path to greater success.

Failure teaches us more than success ever can. Don’t dwell on the negative. Remember, failing and being a failure are not the same. Setbacks shouldn’t define you. Instead, let them refine you. Learn from them, and share those lessons with others. **ONE**

About the Columnist: Ron Hunter Jr. has a Ph.D. in leadership and is CEO of D6 Family Ministry. Contact him at ron.hunter@d6family.com.



BIBLE VERSES

Proverbs 24:16
2 Corinthians 12:9
Psalm 73:26
Psalm 37:23–24

LEADERSHIP QUOTE

“What would life be if we had no courage to attempt anything?”

—Vincent Van Gogh

D6 Conferences Meet Throughout Asia

Singapore — More than 350 pastors, ministry leaders, volunteers, and parents assembled in Singapore July 26-27 for the ninth annual D6 Singapore. The conference was headlined by speaker Dr. Scott Turansky, the founder of the National Center for Biblical Parenting.

The conference also saw a panel discussion highlighting cultural issues such as progressive Christianity, the deconstruction of faith, and the LGBTQ agenda. Another highlight of the conference included a video presentation of a talk from the 2023 D6 Conference (USA) by Brian Haynes called “War in the Wilderness.” The presentation was followed by the testimony of a local woman whose powerful story highlighted a real-life example of how to fight for your family when life is not as it should be. D6 Singapore also included breakout sessions with topics ranging from biblical grandparenting to faith at home, parenting parents, and marriage.

D6 Singapore would not be possible without the partnership of The Bible Society of Singapore.

Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia — Over 250 ministry leaders, volunteers, and parents assembled in East Malaysia August 1-3 for D6 Malaysia. The conference was highlighted by three general sessions led by Dr. Scott Turansky, the founder of the National Center for Biblical Parenting. In addition, three rounds of workshops focusing on topics such as sexuality and genderism, biblical grandparenting, a biblical vision for family ministry, how to have creative faith conversations at home, handling the teenager challenge, and shaping the worldview of the digital generation. Another session provided for pastors and ministry leaders



D6 Singapore Conference Staff (L-R): Chris and Fung Fong Chea (co-director), Derek Altom, Scott Turansky, Simon Say, Eric Chan (co-director)



focused on how to parent the parents of children and teens.

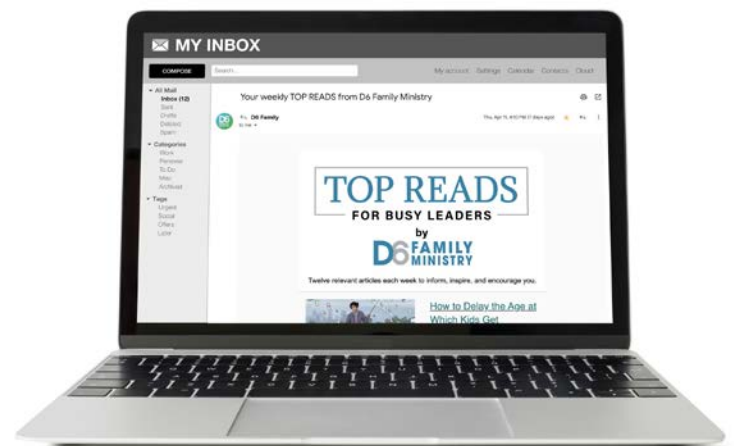
Thailand — D6 Thailand also launched this year making it another country in Asia where God keeps expanding family ministry. Translators are already working on producing core generational discipleship books. Thailand makes the fourth annual Asian conference location, and we have opportunities to host single events in three other countries: Indonesia, Japan, and China. In addition, D6 Asia offers an online conference each year in 13 countries.

D6 Family Ministry Director of Events Derek Altom noted, “It is truly amazing to see how the Lord is using His Word (Deuteronomy 6) in other cultures and contexts. May God use what was planted in the hearts of the attendees at these conferences to impact the faith of the next generation.” **ONE**

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If you are interested in being part of the reading team, please email TopReads@D6family.com. **ONE**



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Continued from page 13

I love Anna.

Luke records that at the time of Jesus' birth, Anna was very old. She had been married for only seven years before her husband died (verse 36) and then remained a widow until she was eighty-four. Given that girls in ancient Jewish culture were typically married at a young age, it is likely Anna was a widow for fifty to sixty years.

Instead of seeking another spouse, Anna never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying (verse 37).

How was she rewarded for her devotion? She was one of the first people to meet Jesus — a.k.a. God in the flesh, the long-awaited Deliverer who brought redemption to Jerusalem and, ultimately, the world.

No, she did not enjoy a long and prosperous marriage. Nor did she raise a household of children. But God honored her.

God Loves You, My Friend

If you are currently in the throes of motherhood, I applaud you. Marriage and family are beautiful blessings not to be taken for granted. You are doing the Lord's work.

If, however, you find yourself single longer than you expected,

and if your heart yearns for marriage and family, you are not alone. Marriage and family are God-given desires. It is natural and healthy for us to crave these things. But please, my sweet friend, don't let anyone look down on you because of their absence.

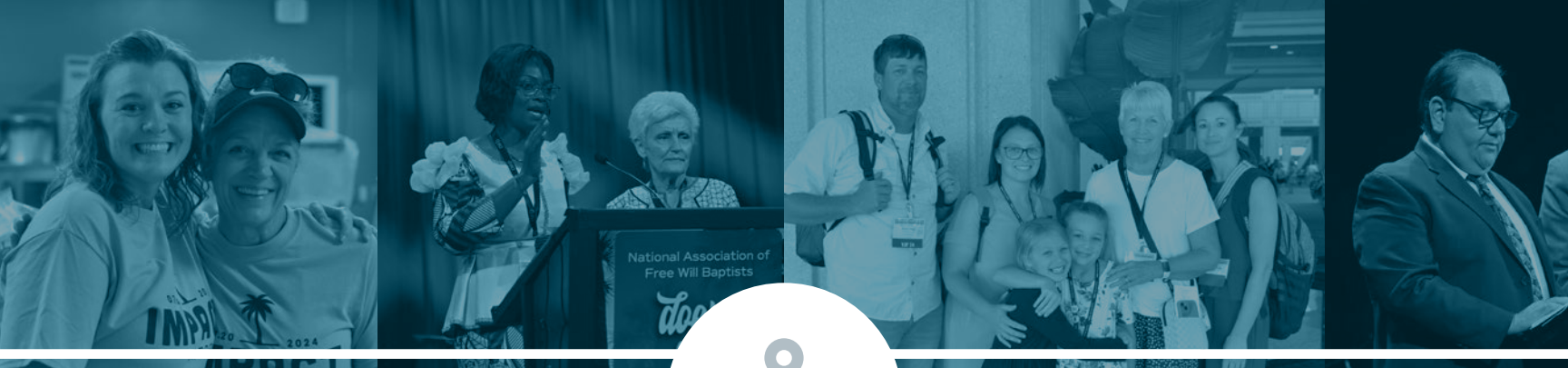
As the ultimate source of satisfaction, God can and will satisfy every longing of our hearts (Isaiah 55), but He often does so in ways and times that don't make sense to us.

In your waiting, remember this: marriage and motherhood are beautiful callings, but they are not the only roles for which we were created. As women, we have many opportunities to serve and love. We are more than just brides and birthmothers. We are daughters, aunts, sisters, cousins, friends, teachers, coworkers, mentors, and so much more.

Best of all, through Jesus we have been crowned princesses, daughters of God, and co-heirs with Christ (Galatians 4). We are ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20) and members of a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9), and we are called to serve our Lord in marvelous ways.

You, my sister, are a daughter of the King. ONE

About the Writer: Allana Walker is a freelance editor and writing coach from the Canadian East Coast. She is a member of Serenity FWB Church in Fredericton, New Brunswick. Read more at allanawalker.substack.com.



There Is Nothing Like the *National Convention!*

BY EDDIE MOODY

The NAFWB Convention is a special event. In 2023, 5.1% of Free Will Baptists (based on the 2022 Statistical Report) gathered in North Carolina for the National Convention. That may seem small, but compare that to the percentage of reported attendees to the much larger Southern Baptist Convention of .13%. Clearly, we Free Will Baptists view our convention as a big deal. Why does the convention matter so much to us?

WORSHIP. The convention gives us the opportunity to worship with those we cannot join every week. We pray and sing and hear preaching with brothers and sisters in Christ from near and far. As a 2023 attendee put it, “There is nothing like worshipping our Savior with thousands of brothers and sisters in Christ...just a glimpse of what Heaven might be like.”

FELLOWSHIP. Meeting friends we see only once a year, making new friendships, enjoying time with others who share similar goals and purposes — such fellowship keeps us going for another year as we serve in a harsh world. Irvin Scarberry (WV) put it this way after the 2023 Convention, “I attend a small Free Will Baptist Church. It was such a great time of fellowship and encouragement with so many fellow Free Will

Baptists....What a joy to renew some old acquaintances!”

EQUIPPING. Through the more than 90 seminars in English and Spanish we are challenged to live better, be better witnesses, be better stewards, and reach further with the gospel message. A first-time attendee put it this way: “This was my first NAFWB Convention, but it will not be my last....The seminars were helpful, providing very timely information that can help address current needs in our church.”

REJOICING. Attending a National Convention should cause us to *rejoice*. *Rejoice* because God’s blessings have brought us this far together in nine decades. *Rejoice* when missionaries report new believers and *rejoice* to see how many God has called from among us to preach the gospel at home and abroad. *Rejoice* as we see so many young people serving and using their gifts for the Lord. As this long-time attendee put it, “I have participated in the annual NAFWB Convention for many years; this may have been the best I have ever attended. The preaching was excellent. The music was superb. The business sessions were gracious. As a denomination, we may be healthier than at any time in our history.”



BUSINESS. Notice the above attendee also mentioned business! Meeting yearly helps delegates have an active role in making decisions to guide and direct the denomination. Business sessions provide current information about departments, projects, ministries, and direction. After all, this is what a convention is for: to consider and make decisions together to further God's Kingdom.

UNITY. It's great to enjoy meals and hallway conversations. It's a blessing to unite in giving so the convention can continue, and so the gospel can extend to the world. A 2023 attendee summed it up like this: "The 2023 National Convention truly highlighted the growing diversity among our churches. Free Will Baptists of various ages, races, ethnicities, cultures, and backgrounds were united in worship and working in unity. I'm more encouraged about the future of our denomination than ever before!"

Plan now to attend the Convention. Put July 20-23, 2025, on your calendar and plan to join us in Kansas City. As one 2024 attendee put it, "I know many are unable to attend a National Convention, while others may simply not be interested. I don't get it. Do they know what they're missing? There's something here for everyone!"

Plan now to participate. Arrive the Saturday before the convention and participate in Impact (fwbmastersmen.org). This is a way to serve alongside other Free Will Baptists to impact the Kansas City community. Another attendee put it this way, "As Free Will Baptists, we believe we are 'Better Together.' Our National Convention embodies that statement, and I encourage all Free Will Baptist to make it a priority to attend next year in Kansas City, because we are Better Together!"

Plan now to give. The convention is expensive, and inflation has made it difficult to make ends meet. If we all come

together, we can do it. What can you do to help?

- **Give an offering to the Convention.** Last year we received \$80,000 in offerings to the Convention. Note that \$50,000 was from North American Ministries. This was very helpful. Church dues are used to pay for the Convention, and we had an \$83,000 deficit.
- **Give to the Executive Office,** which covers convention shortfalls. A financially stable office provides a cushion when sharp cost increases occur.
- **Give to D6 Family Ministry,** which underwrites expenses of the Vertical Three Conference. Although Vertical Three charges a fee to attend youth activities, these fees do not come close to covering actual expenses.
- **Challenge your church to give an offering** directly to the convention. If 16 churches gave \$5,000 each, the \$80,000 would go a long way toward supporting the convention. Please consider what you or your church can do to help us continue to have National Conventions.

For many of us, the National Convention is the highlight of our church year. We are renewed, refreshed, and reinvigorated for another year of ministry. Let's work together to fund the convention and continue to enjoy this event we love for generations to come. As an attendee from last year put it, "Just when you think it cannot get any better than the previous year, it does!" **ONE**

**Portions of this article were adapted from the July 1989 issue of Contact magazine, which reported on the same challenges facing the convention.*

About the Writer: Eddie Moody is the executive director of the National Association. For updates about the 2025 convention in Kansas City, Missouri, visit nafwb.org/convention.

This Is What Life Is About!

BY EDDIE MOODY

My wife Lynne and I had anxiously awaited “the call” as we anticipated our grandson’s arrival. It came via a text from my daughter in Morehead City, North Carolina, late on a Friday afternoon. She had gone to the hospital but wrote, “Don’t worry! I will probably be here a long time.”

Still, I tried to step it up through Nashville traffic after leaving the Free Will Baptist offices in Antioch to head toward Hendersonville, just north of Nashville. Lynne was there, finishing up class with her students. We received a second text: “Feel free to come when you can.” That meant *really* step it up. We packed quickly and began the 675-mile journey.

As we drove toward Eastern North Carolina throughout the night, it was a bad feeling to know the earliest we would arrive would be 7:00 a.m. We were very excited but also a little worried. Our son-in-law Caleb did a great job keeping us up to speed on what was happening. First, he texted “Mackenzie is doing wonderful” and “A baby should be here soon.” So, encouraging!

At 2:30 a.m., he told us the baby had arrived. We were excited, but then we started wondering, “What was his Apgar score? Was he okay?” As though Caleb could hear our anxious thoughts, he texted a picture. Once we saw the picture, all our worries melted away.

When we finally arrived and saw Jameson for the first time, I thought: “This is what life is about.” Those were the words Lynne’s late father uttered when he saw Mackenzie for the first time.

Life is about babies. There is no denying this little life was “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14) by the hands of God (Job 10:8-12). **Life is about families.** Jeremiah told the exiles of his day to build and plant (Jeremiah 29:5), get married, have children, pray, and try to bring peace to their community (Jeremiah 29:6-7). **Life is about churches coming around families,** helping new parents acclimate to their roles while helping disciple children (Titus 2). How fitting that one of the first to bring food to the family was Gaye. A single lady, she is an integral part of Caleb and Mackenzie’s life. It is also fitting that one of Jameson’s first outings was the teen church activity. He loved it, though he did seem a bit tired afterward (see picture at left).

In a world upside down in its values and priorities, life — babies, families, churches — are living object lessons about what really matters. When you see them, it is as though God is whispering, “This is what life is about.” **ONE**



Eddie Moody
Executive Secretary,
National Association of
Free Will Baptists





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