

ONE LORD ONE VOICE ONE VISION

ONE magazine

AUGUST-SEPTEMBER•2023

Changing
World...

Unchanging Mission

**Missions and
Worship in
Perfect Harmony**

*Changing Lives
Through the WMO*

Training Military Missionaries

God Has a Plan

Dancing Through Difficult Days

God Speaks

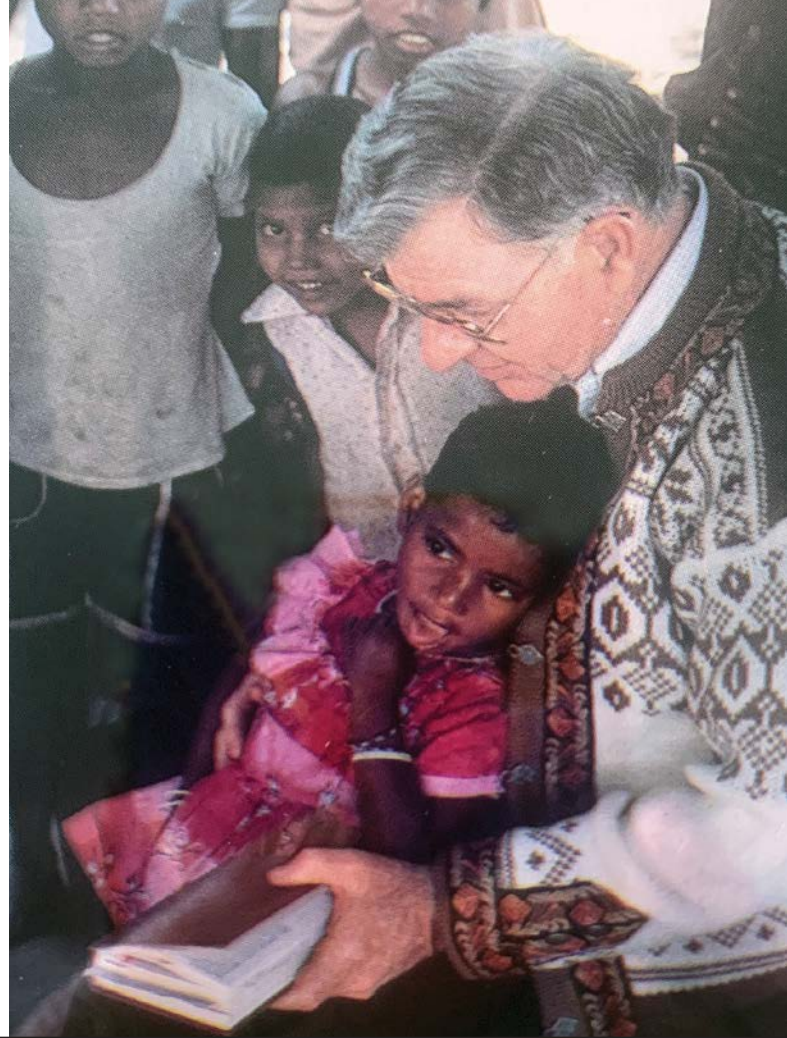
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Born August 3, 1929, in Lake City, South Carolina, **Carlisle Hanna** began reading the Bible before he ever went to school. On August 15, 1948, as a young man, Carlisle answered the missionary call to India. While studying at Welch College, he met Marie Wright, who also felt the call to India. The couple married May 30, 1949. They were appointed to the field two years later, during the 1951 Bible Conference. A year later, the Hannas left their family and friends and embarked for the country they came to call home. Hanna served in India from 1952-2022, even after the death of his beloved Marie—70 years of faithful service. Today, the nearly 20,000 believers in India remember him as "Uncle," or literally, "one of us."

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*To communicate to Free Will Baptists a unifying vision
of our role in the extension of God's Kingdom*

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Are You “Wearing” Your Faith?

BY ERIC K. THOMSEN

The cross-shaped pin could only be described as ornate: large, with hand-trimmed silver inlaid with various bright gemstones. I don't think I ever saw the elderly deacon in our Central Florida church without it. Sometimes on his tie. Sometimes on his lapel. But always present.



As an imaginative second grader, I found the ornate piece fascinating. After reading (and re-reading)

Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, I couldn't help but picture the bejeweled cross on a tri-cornered pirate's hat. And, if I squinted just right at the deacon, with his seamed, granite-like face and stiff, waxed mustache, I could almost picture him at the wheel of an old sailing ship like Long John Silver, face to the wind, staring off into the horizon, tie pin sparkling in the sunshine. (Yep, I had—and *still* have—a vivid imagination.)

One Sunday, after working up my nerve, I asked him why he always wore the pin. His craggy face broke into a smile as he said, "I'm wearing my faith."

As a good preacher's kid, I nodded and smiled. But I certainly didn't understand. Years later, as my own faith grew and developed, and I began to share the gospel myself, I began to understand what this faithful man was saying. His cross pin was a constant symbol of an ever-present faith. A faith he shared openly with anyone who would listen.

It's a good reminder. Sharing the gospel and making disciples is a biblical mandate for every Christian:

- Without apology (Romans 1:16)
- Everywhere we go (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:16-20)

- With everyone we meet (1 Corinthians 9:18-23)
- In every situation (Colossians 4:5-6)

Recently, a designer friend illustrated how this looks on a practical level when she shared the following in a group email:

Guess what? Today's my birthday! And not just any birthday—my 40th. Many people, it seems, dread this birthday, but me? I've been looking forward to it. My 30s were great: married, welcomed two handsome baby boys, bought our first house, bought our second (and, Lord-willing, last) house, adopted two dogs, began working for myself. It's been a good decade! Not every day was sunshine and roses (here's lookin' at you, sleepless nights with newborns), but mostly, life has been good.

That said, I'd planned to write a blog post to commemorate the day, something eloquent and heartfelt about life's lessons. Well, LIFE got in the way, and the blog post wasn't written—not even an outline. Working at home with preschoolers is indeed a blessing, but it also means prioritizing. The blog post simply hasn't been a priority. So, here's a brief email instead. I hope your week is going well and hope to talk to you all soon.

P.S. Those life lessons? *Any anecdote I could share boils down to this: I can do nothing without Jesus Christ. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Anything good in my life is a direct gift from Him, and He's used the bad things to reveal more about Himself and to shape me to look more like Jesus. I'm very much a work in progress, but oh so grateful!*

Wow! Her simple, powerful testimony stopped me in my tracks and made me thank God for the gospel, both to save and sustain through every stage of life. Everywhere, everyone, in every situation, without apology—may we all “wear our faith” in a way that speaks to others. **ONE**

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

Former *Contact* Editor Eugene Workman With the Lord



Eugene Workman

Antioch, TN—Erwin Eugene (Gene) Workman died June 30, 2023, at age 83, in Antioch, Tennessee.

Workman served as the fifth editor of *Contact* magazine from 1971-1977. *Contact* was the official denominational publication of Free Will Baptists for a half century but ceased publication when *ONE Magazine* unified all denominational publications.

A graduate of Welch College, Workman was a longtime member of Woodbine FWB Church (now Cane Ridge). He served his church, his association, and the state association faithfully in various capacities, including state clerk and as a member of

the Tennessee Executive Committee.

Former Tennessee Promotional Director Glenn Poston recalls, “His attention to details sometimes drove me crazy, but I knew he took his work very seriously, and he was almost always right. We will all miss this good man.”

Gene is survived by his wife Marjorie; children Regena Sizemore (Tim) and Jennifer Beauchamp (Will); grandchildren Andrew Sizemore (Madison), Abigail Sizemore, Anna Sizemore, Cadence Beauchamp, and Emory Beauchamp; and siblings Cathy Green, Lois Slack, Darrell Workman, and Richard Workman (Kathe).

A celebration of Workman’s life and faithfulness was held Friday, July 7, at Woodbine Funeral Home. **ONE**

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SEPTEMBER 2023

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September 10 • John 1 • Jesus Is God

September 17 • John 3 • Jesus Gives New Life

September 24 • John 4 • Jesus Transforms Lives

OCTOBER 2023

October 1 • John 6:1-14 • Jesus Has Miraculous Power

October 8 • John 11 • Jesus Has Power Over Death

October 15 • Genesis 1–2 • God Is the Creator

October 22 • Genesis 3 • Sin Destroys

October 29 • Genesis 6–9 • Noah



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Changing Lives Through the



World Missions Offering

BY KENNETH EAGLETON

The World Missions Offering is a crucial component in reaching the unreached with the gospel. The following stories highlight lives changed as a direct result of partnerships energized by the WMO.

(Names have been changed and locations are unspecified to protect ministry.)

From Imam to Pastor

Mohamed became deeply convicted about a “bad sin” he had committed. As an imam in a mosque, he could not recall anything in the Qur’an instructing him how to make restoration for his sin.

Deeply troubled, he sought out a Muslim “holy man” and then an Islamic scholar. Neither could help him. Frantically searching the Qur’an, he found a passage saying Allah appointed Isa (Jesus) as our advocate to take away our sins.

Mohamed wanted to find a copy of the Injil (Gospels) to learn more about Jesus, but his district had no Christians or Bibles. He traveled to another district to purchase a copy of the New Testament. Because it was a William Carey translation from the early 19th century, he found it difficult to understand. He located a Bible study correspondence course offering a Bible upon successful completion of the course. He began to understand the truth of the gospel and came to faith in Jesus, finally finding peace for his sin-ridden conscience.

When he spoke about his faith, his father pressured him to renounce his belief in Christ. Mohamed refused, and his father whacked off one of his son’s fingers. This did not stop Mohamed from talking about how Jesus changed him with anyone who would listen. In 2019, he connected with IM partners in south Asia and took their training. Upon completion, he returned to his village. He has since planted four congregations in the area.



My traveling partner and I heard this church planter give his testimony in his south Asian country. We visited a gathering of believers in a courtyard of his village. Mohamed has sent five young men for training with our partners. These Christ-followers pay the price to be Christians who spread the Word.

Special Forces

In one of our south Asian partnerships, we cooperate on a project to send local workers from that country into a remote area with no Christians and no gospel witness. No one else is trying to reach these people in darkness—people who adhere to a radical form of Islam.

Early in 2022, our partnership allowed a team of two families to go live among this people group. In six months, the team saw nine people saved and baptized—truly a miracle of God. In July, the workers met a couple whose children studied at the same school as their children. This couple had cautiously looked for a Christian after the husband/father had a dream. In a vision, he saw Jesus who said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. Follow me and I will give you abundant life.” The couple wanted someone to tell them how to follow Jesus.

In August, the next-door neighbor of one of the workers had a seriously ill child. They had no money to take him to the doctor. The worker prayed for the child, and he was healed. The healing power of Jesus led this family with four children to come to faith in Christ.

So far this year, four more families have been sent to the area to minister. The risks are great, but they are willing to pay the cost

for the gospel to reach every people, regardless of their religious views or the difficulties in reaching them.

Unreached Peoples

The Chakma, an unreached people group in south Asia, are comprised of more than a million people. The Chakma, a powerful Buddhist group in a predominantly Muslim country, are influential in their government and society.

This people group has few Christ-followers. The main reason is persecution. As conservative, devout Buddhists, many Chakma are Buddhist extremists. They often burn churches and kill Chakma believers. Recently, a baptism took place among the Chakma. Buddhist extremists asked the pastors what they were doing in the pond. When the pastors replied they were baptizing, the extremists drowned the pastors and believers in the pond.

The Chakma people do not have the Bible in their language. Several Chakma believers are building a team to translate the Bible. A Bible school student from the Chakma people group is part of this translation project. He is also an evangelist and church planter. Please pray for him as he shares the gospel among the Chakma and pray for the Chakma Bible translation.

From Radical Hindu to Pastor

In his youth, Saad, a Hindu, lived in a Muslim-majority country. For a period, great animosity between the two religions meant Muslims would not let Saad and his friends go to market or school. If the boys tried, they were beaten. This led Saad to join a radical Hindu group and train for terrorist activities. His first goal was to kill a Christian. His second was to burn down a church. He confessed, “I had a lot of hate in my heart and no peace.”

Saad’s cousin, a Christian, visited the family during vacation periods. He always talked about Jesus, who He was and what He could do. Saad never wanted to listen to his cousin. Once, he woke suddenly in the middle of the night with a strong stomachache. He had to get on the floor on his hands and knees. For some reason, he remembered about Jesus and told Him if He would relieve the pain, he would believe in Jesus. The pain stopped immediately. However, Saad’s Hindu beliefs were too strong, and he did not follow through on his promise. Over several years, his cousin continued talking to Saad about Christ.





Finally, Saad became the first member of his immediate family to believe. Today, his brother, his cousins, his nieces, his nephews, and even his parents have become Christians. But it took many years. He talked often to his parents about Jesus, until his mother demanded he stop talking to her about Jesus. She said they could not make that decision. Saad was upset. He couldn't understand why his parents didn't want to accept the only way to Heaven.

The Holy Spirit convicted him. He realized he was trying to force them to convert. He felt the Holy Spirit telling him, "That is not your job. It is mine." From that time on, he and his wife prayed and fasted one day a week for his parents' salvation. One day in 2019, Saad spoke with his mother on the phone and learned she and his father had come to believe in Jesus. On January 1, 2022, Saad baptized his parents.

Currently, Saad helps several Bible translation teams as they work to give their people the Word of God.

Mruchow New Testament

The Mruchow people live in the mountains of south Asia, in an area with much ethnic and political unrest. The Mruchow have waited 65 years to receive the Bible in their language. Our partners set up a volunteer Bible translation team of native Mruchow speakers. Working together intensely for one year, they translated the New Testament and had it checked.

At the end of last year, IM Global Partners, along with Free Will Baptists from Michigan, joined to fund the printing of the newly translated New Testament. On January 27, the New Testament was dedicated in the mountains, in an area where foreigners are not allowed. Praise the Lord, the Mruchow people have the Scripture in their own language!

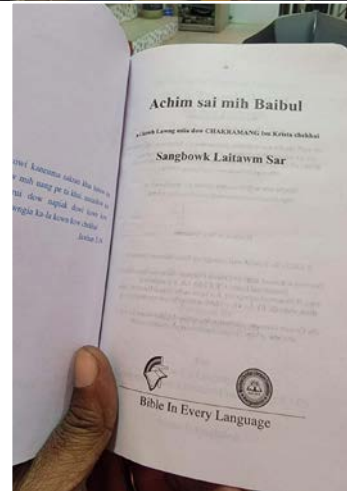
Take the Gospel to the Ends of the Earth

Because people gave to the WMO and directly to partnership accounts, people in areas previously unreached with the wonderful news of salvation through Jesus Christ now know Him as Savior. People who persecuted Christians now preach the gospel. People who have long awaited the Word of Life now have it in their own language.

Because people continue to give, IM's partners reach further, share the Good News with the unreached, train pastors and leaders, build churches, and give people the Bible in their heart language.

Give to the WMO on August 27 (or whenever you choose). Fuel your financial gifts with prayer, asking God to continue to provide courage and perseverance to those taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. **ONE**

About the Author: After 18 years of missionary work in Côte d'Ivoire, Kenneth Eagleton and his wife Rejane transferred to Brazil in 2014. While serving there as a missionary, he also facilitated and promoted partnerships in countries without a missionary presence. The couple recently relocated to the States. Learn more: iminc.org.



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85	8.7%	85/85	7.7%
90	9.7%	90/90	9.4%



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CHANGED BY

BY RENAY RAYOS



Prior to going to Japan through IM’s College Missions Program (CMP), I had limited knowledge about its people, language, and culture. Though I’ve always been curious about missionary work, I didn’t see it as an attainable desire and career. However, as a student at Randall University, I realized **missionaries are flawed people just like me who long to reach lost individuals in dark places.**

During my junior year at Randall, I applied and was accepted for a CMP trip. I remember having many questions. “Will I be able to raise funds?” “Is language going to be a barrier?” “What am I going to do while I’m there?” “What do I pack?” “Will I get homesick?”

These questions and others flooded my mind for months before my departure.

I was as excited as I was nervous about the opportunity to share the love of Jesus with people who had no context for it. I never could have imagined just how humbling and transformative the six weeks in Japan would be.

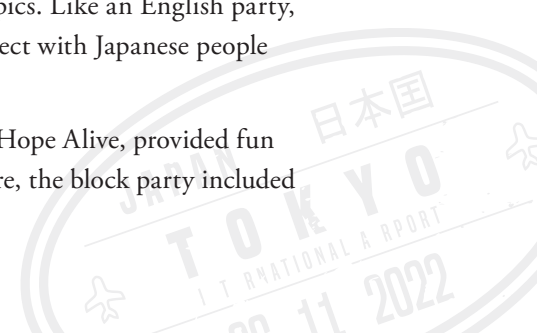
Along with three other students, I worked with the Hubbard family at Hope Alive Church in Tokyo. The Hubbards established a culture of communication, respect, and unity within their ministry and our team. Our days together were almost always filled to the max. Expected to be at the church by 10 a.m., we usually returned home

after 6 p.m. My teammates and I were responsible for events and tasks such as *English party*, *Let’s Speak English*, *block party*, etc.

We hosted an *English party* one or two evenings a week. Held at Hope Alive, the event consisted of games that allowed the Japanese to practice English. I developed and cultivated meaningful relationships with those who attended. English parties lasted about two hours.

Let’s Speak English was held every weekday from 3-5 p.m. During these hours, my team and I stood on a busy city street with colorful signs reading “Let’s Speak English!” Often, curiosity prompted Japanese people to approach us. We discussed a variety of topics. Like an English party, this practice allowed us to connect with Japanese people and invite them to church.

Finally, *block party*, also held at Hope Alive, provided fun and fellowship. While I was there, the block party included





My burden for the nations has only deepened. I am more passionate about mobilizing, supporting, sending, and going.

a bouncy house, snacks, and hotdogs. Each event required much preparation and intentionality, but the fruits of our labors were always worth it.

Though I miss everything from my time in Japan, my most memorable moment took place at a breakfast restaurant. One day, during *Let's Speak English*, I met a 16-year-old girl who asked to be friends. She explained she didn't have many friends and wished to improve her English. Eager to know more about her, I invited her to grab breakfast with me the next morning. During our breakfast, I learned more about her personality, upbringing, and worldview. From all she shared, I knew she had no idea who Jesus was. She didn't even know the difference between Shinto gods and the God of the Bible.

Though her family raised her to believe in Shinto gods, she showed immense

interest in the God and Christ I described. She was hungry for more. After our initial conversation, she continued to ask questions. I'm amazed God allowed me to be the one who planted seeds within her heart and mind. To my knowledge, she continues to attend Hope Alive Church!

It may sound dramatic, but my life was quite literally changed due to my time in Japan. Prior to the CMP trip, I was ignorant of the need for more Christians to be sent into unreached places. Since returning to the States, my burden for the nations has only deepened. I am more passionate about mobilizing, supporting, sending, and going.

Being a CMP student was worth all the work and discomfort. To any student who is even slightly curious about missions: **apply for ETEAM or CMP!** I encourage students not to wait until they feel they "have all the answers" to apply. I also encourage students to remember the Lord's faithfulness and provision. We have nothing to lose but so much to gain. **ONE**

About the Author: Renay Rayos graduated from Randall University in May. She credits her time in Japan with strengthening her awareness of the importance of personal involvement in the Great Commission.



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A man in silhouette, wearing a hat and holding an acoustic guitar, stands in a field of tall grass at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow and lens flare. The sky is filled with soft, wispy clouds. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

MISSIONS *and Worship* in PERFECT *Harmony*

BY
DANIEL
AARON
WEBSTER

Whether worship or missions is more important has been long debated. Should Christians dedicate their lives to telling others about Jesus or to the praise and worship of God? On one side, the rationale goes something like this: “Missions and witnessing are the only things we won’t do in Heaven, so we should make evangelism our highest priority on earth.” On the other side, the reasoning is: “Missions was not created in the Garden of Eden, and will not exist in eternity, so worship is the most important thing a believer can do.”

In Psalm 96, the psalmist addresses both weighty matters, yet without dissonance. The psalm *harmonizes* worship and missions, providing a finely tuned perspective vital for individual believers, Christian families, and churches.

WITHOUT DISSONANCE

Psalm 96 begins with an emphasis on worship and missions. In fact, it sounds as though missions and worship are so entwined the psalmist can’t imagine one without the other—two sides to the same coin. He first invites the people of the earth to sing to the Lord (verse 1) but immediately moves away from the emphasis on “all people” and invites “God’s people” to sing and declare His name among the nations (verses 2-3). For the psalmist, singing alone is not enough. Singing praise *to the Lord* is not even enough. Both singing praise to the Lord *and* declaring His name to the nations is the commission of this psalm.

The harmony of worship and missions is a common theme throughout Scripture. In Isaiah 6, the prophet Isaiah saw the Lord high upon His throne, with encircling angels worshipping His holiness. One might assume the prophet’s response would be to join the worship scene. Instead, Isaiah—now with a purged mouth and bowed head—states, “Here am I, send me.” He followed through, going to a people who rejected his call to salvation.

In John 4, Jesus declared, “True worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth,” and in the next phrase, He revealed the Father’s mission to save the lost: “for the Father is seeking such people to worship Him.” In Acts 2, as people from various cultural backgrounds gathered in Jerusalem, thousands came to Christ under the preaching of the Apostles. Meanwhile, the Christians were devoting

themselves to simple, ordinary acts of worship as they “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). Like the writer of Psalm 96, these scriptural references make it clear missions and worship are compatible, even harmonious.

PRESCRIPTION AGAINST FALSE WORSHIP

Pastor and author John Piper famously said, “Missions exists because worship doesn’t.” While this is a helpful and pithy way to begin to think about the harmonization of missions and worship, Psalm 96 presents it in a different way: “Missions exists because the worship of all sorts of worthless idols *also* exists.” If humankind continues its operation of forging idols that rob God of the glory due His name, missions must continue. Missions is how the Church carries out the battle against the idols of the world.

After commanding the people of God to call the nations into a covenant of worship with God (verses 1-3), the psalmist reveals the primary hindrance to worshipping God: idolatry. He presents God as great and mighty, and a God to be feared (verse 4). Inanimate idols are no competition. God proved His sovereignty and might through the creation of the earth (verses 5-6). No idol has ever created something out of nothing, so why would the peoples of the earth turn to them?

The sad but simple answer: idols are fashioned by humans, in the image of humans. Thus, idolatry is the elevation of humankind as God. How dare we take the elements of God’s creation and fashion them into a god to worship in plain view of the almighty Creator? Idolatry is not a pass-

ing problem; it is treasonous worship and the very reason for the existence of missions.

A CALL TO RIGHT WORSHIP

The psalmist's call to worship, which invites the earth to *sing, sing, sing* (verses 1–3) is repeated in a call to *give, give, give* (verses 7–8). Here, the nations are invited to come and sacrifice in the temple courts of the Lord. In verses 1-3, Israel declares His glory to the nations, but in verse 8, the families of the earth are invited to enter the covenant with God.

When the nations forsake idolatry and worship in the way God intends, they will be introduced to a holy God (verse 9). This holiness is not just something God possesses; worshipers are invited to partake or share in His holiness. This is echoed in the New Testament when God calls His people to be holy as He is holy (1 Peter 1:16; 1 Thessalonians 4:7).

In Psalm 96:7-9, as the people of the earth come to God, the goal of missions (salvation of the nations) is fulfilled, and the evidence is a reformation of worship. People forsake their idols and, instead, engage in the holy worship God has prescribed in His Word. God's call to salvation is a call to the right kind of worship. True worship is both the *stimulus* of missions and the *end goal* of missions.

HARMONY LEADING TO JUDGMENT AND JOY

We don't usually think of judgment as a reason for joy, but that is exactly what we find in the final verses of Psalm 96. Sure, God's judgment is ultimately a good thing, but is it really something to be *joyful* about? The psalmist gets more specific about the message to be proclaimed among the nations: the peoples need to hear the Lord reigns and He is coming to judge (verse 10). The psalmist calls for all of creation to erupt into joy (verses 11-12). He explains the reason for this joy as: "He is coming to judge the earth" (verse 13).

Why would judgment bring joy? Remember, God's judgment is not only for the unrighteous but for the righteous, too. We find hope and anticipation in Psalm 96, because when God reigns and judges, the earth will experience equity, righteousness, faithfulness, and truth. All things will be new. God's judgment and our joy are the inevitable results when worship and missions become harmonious.

When He rules and reigns, our endeavors to win the lost will cease, and our worship will continue forever.

No question should exist in your life, family, and church regarding the priority of missions and worship. They are two sides of the same coin. *Worship without missions is not true worship; missions without worship is not true missions.* Consider the words from John's Revelation where worship and missions are tuned in perfect harmony as redeemed people from all nations (missions) sing unto the Lamb on His throne (worship). As was the case in the final verses of Psalm 96, this joyous song of praise to the enthroned Christ is in the context of the seven seal judgments:

And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.

I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.

*And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen (Revelation 5:9-10; 7:9-12). **ONE***

TRUE
WORSHIP
IS BOTH THE
stimulus OF
MISSIONS
AND THE
end goal OF
MISSIONS.

About the Author: Daniel Webster lives in Gallatin, Tennessee, with his wife Kimberly and their three children. He has served Free Will Baptist churches as a lead and associate pastor since 2003. Currently, he is director of enrollment and adjunct instructor of Theology and Music at Welch College. Read more from Daniel: AThingWorthDoing.com.



God Has a Plan

BY CATIE YORK

God's simple plan for salvation is the key to overcoming the chaos of our broken world. The Apostle Peter's example at Pentecost (Acts 2) is relevant in the day and time God has given us to fulfill His work. Through his words, actions, and manner, Peter demonstrated the plan of salvation is both powerful and personal.

The Coming of the Holy Spirit (verses 1-13)

Historically, well-practiced Jews from across the ancient world traveled to Jerusalem at Pentecost to make offerings to God and celebrate the first fruits of harvest by thanking God for His provision. It was also a time to remember and celebrate the Law of Moses.

During the Pentecost celebration in Acts 2, the Holy Spirit descended, and "tongues of fire" rested on each gathered believer. These disciples began to speak in "tongues," that is, every listener understood the message of the gospel in his or her own language. This event was not just a singular occurrence but only the beginning! Though the miracle of tongues was only temporary, the power manifested that day remains very much alive, and believers today live with the supernatural presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling within.

Skeptics among the crowds in Jerusalem mocked these Spirit-filled believers, accusing them of being drunk. That's when Peter entered the scene and shared a simple sermon revealing God's powerful plan.

The What (verses 14-21)

Peter assured his listeners the miracle of tongues had nothing to do with drunkenness, referencing a familiar Old Testament prophecy from Joel. Peter explained exactly *what* was happening. The Holy Spirit had been poured

out upon all those who called upon the name of the Lord (verse 21). Peter then moved to the heart of his message: God's plan.

The How (verses 22-36)

Peter explained to his listeners *how* God's plan was executed. He unpacked the events that culminated at Pentecost. He asserted and defended Christ as the promised Messiah, the One through whom God shared eternal salvation through His death, burial, and resurrection. Christ's saving work gave every person access to the Holy Spirit. Peter made it clear the events Jesus endured were not happenstance or a series of unfortunate events. They were God's perfect plan from eternity past into eternity future.

Verses 22-24 and 32-35 lay out the gospel practically and simply. Peter concisely verified Jesus as God's Son who performed supernatural works, signs, and wonders to demonstrate to humanity He was God in the flesh. Peter identified Jesus as the One the unbelieving Jews sentenced to death at the hands of the Romans only a few weeks earlier (verse 23). Both Jews and Gentiles were equally guilty for Jesus' death, unified in their desperate need for a Savior (still true today).

While Jesus died at the hands of men, His death was known and predestined by God, a sovereign plan of atonement for all who believe in Him for salvation. Only God could work such a perfect paradox. Christ was crucified by men as allowed by God in His sovereignty. What a picture! God, the Ruler and Creator of all, functions as He pleases, yet He anticipates and uses the free will of man as part of His greater purpose and plan.

However, Christ's crucifixion was not the end of God's plan, but the beginning. God raised Christ from death!

I was out of touch with the living Word of God. I didn't know His plan for me until my "Peter" explained it. Suddenly, it jumped off the pages of the Bible and into real life.

In verse 24, Peter described the resurrection as loosening the "pains of death." The original Greek word for "pains" describes the pains of childbirth. Note the play on words: the pains of labor bring new *life*, and God removed the pains of *death* from Jesus. There is no stopping a baby when it's time for birth. Likewise, there was no stopping Christ when the time came for Him to rise.

Peter reinforced this truth by referring to the Old Testament again in verses 25-31, quoting David's Psalm 16:8-11. David rejoiced over the presence of God and prophetically spoke of God's plan for salvation. In Psalm 16:10 (quoted in verse 27), David spoke confidently in first person, confirming his personal hope beyond the grave while also delivering a Messianic prophecy: "Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption."

To readers today, this Old Testament reference might seem trivial or distracting. To the Jews, this was a powerful picture that closed gaps in the prophecies and confirmed Jesus as Messiah. Peter continued to reference prophets familiar to the Jews. Verses 32-35 recount his own eyewitness of the risen Lord and words of David. Peter also described the prophetic promise of the Holy Spirit and explicitly correlated that promise to the events at Pentecost. He left no shadow of doubt for Jews in his audience but fully explained the truth of God's plan in the person of Jesus.

The Why and the What's Next (verses 36-39)

Peter concluded his message by restating with unwavering certainty the prophecies of the Old Testament clearly point to the crucified and resurrected Jesus as Lord and Messiah. Verse 37 describes the crowd's response. People were "pricked in their heart" and eager to learn what to do next. Peter told them to "repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (verses 38-39).

His response was simple: repent and be baptized. Peter did not recommend baptism as the means to salvation, but rather as a public testimony of obedience, identifying with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. New believers were dipped beneath the water's surface to display death to their sin (heartfelt repentance); they rose from the water to display Christ's gift of new life.

Peter made it a point to express the breadth of this simple plan for salvation: available to everyone, in every generation, near or far. The term for those "afar off" describes the Gentiles. Peter again unified Jew and Gentile—this time in the availability of salvation offered in Jesus. Peter shared a powerful sermon with powerful implications.

The Results (verses 40-41)

Peter urged his listeners to turn away from the crooked generation in which they lived (verse 40), and many believed and were baptized. Three thousand new believers were added to the family of God in a single day (verse 41)!

We glean much from Peter's words today. First, God's plan has not changed: the sacrifice of His Son Jesus still provides the atonement for anyone who believes in Him. Salvation is still open to anyone willing to repent and follow Him. It's personal. The salvation God provides through Jesus is intended for me, you, the people we know and love, and strangers we have never met.

Sadly, like the crowd at Pentecost, people often respond to this simple plan of salvation with confusion, speculation, or even hostility. Perhaps they have not experienced that "prick in their heart" like the new converts at Pentecost. Like Peter, we must make it real to them. How do we do that?

Several "Peters" in my life have disciplined me, connected the dots, and made God's ways clear. God used these individuals to make His plan personal to me. With a Catholic background, I learned many rules growing up: how to be good enough and do enough to earn my way to Heaven. We attended holy days of obligation and were always in a pew on big church holidays (mainly to keep my grandma

happy). However, I was out of touch with the living Word of God. I didn't know His plan for me until my "Peter" explained it. Suddenly, it jumped off the pages of the Bible and into real life. I learned what the plan of salvation was, how it came to be, why it mattered, and what my next steps should be.

So, how can we be more like Peter in sharing God's plan of salvation? Consider three simple lessons from this passage.

Peter made sense out of the chaos by piecing together the truths of God's Word in a way his audience could understand. We all recognize the chaos in our culture. To clearly offer God's plan to this chaotic world, we must know Scripture. Peter inserted Scripture into his message constantly, weaving it together with his personal testimony in an intentional way. Likewise, we must carefully and intentionally articulate truths from Scripture for those who need it, in the way they need it, and at the time they need it. We must be sensitive to the Spirit and allow Him to guide our words.

Peter was bold and direct. Boldness with the gospel does not mean we force it onto someone with whom God may not be working at that time. Peter laid out the facts

candidly, simply, and directly. He provided an invitation to the gospel that challenged his audience to think, understand, and decide. God was clearly at work, and Peter obeyed God's leading by sharing God's plan without apology. He did not sugarcoat or dilute it but spoke with love.

Peter pointed toward action. Rather than being vague, Peter spoke clearly and then urged those who believed to act. Repentance is a heart decision, turning away from sin and toward God, a new life. Peter urged his listeners to immediate action: *repent and be baptized*.

As you consider this powerful passage, ask God to reveal direction for your own life. Ponder ways to act more like Peter at Pentecost, and maybe God will bring to your mind the people, the place, or even a specific person with whom you must deliver the message of His plan. **ONE**

About the Author: Catie (Rogers) York is originally from Buffalo, New York, but now lives in Smyrna, Tennessee, with her husband Andy. She was discipled to Jesus out of Catholicism at Northpoint FWB Church and now serves alongside Andy at The Grove FWB Church in Smyrna. She is a technical support engineer in the water utility industry and loves to make connections with everyone she meets.



RECIPE for LIFE



APPLE DUMPLINGS

INGREDIENTS:

2 cups sugar	2 cups flour
2 cups water	1 teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon cinnamon	½ teaspoon baking powder
¼ teaspoon nutmeg	¾ cup shortening
¼ cup butter	½ cup milk
6 apples	

Recipe by Mrs. Russell Spurgeon

Make a syrup of sugar, water, cinnamon, and nutmeg. Add butter. Pare and slice apples. Sift flour, salt, and baking powder; cut in shortening. Add milk all at once and stir. Roll ¼ inch thick; cut in 5-inch squares. Place sliced apples on each square. Sprinkle generously with additional sugar, cinnamon, and nutmeg; dot with butter. Fold corners to the center; pinch edges together. Place one inch apart in greased pan. Pour over syrup. Bake in 375° oven for 35 minutes. Serve with cream.

Reaching the Wi-Fi Generation

BY TIM YORK

We all know the Internet has fundamentally changed our world. I clearly remember the first time I heard my dial-up router singing and humming when our home computer connected to the World Wide Web. Now, the smartphone in my pocket has a stronger Internet connection, faster processing speed, and significantly more storage than my first personal computer. The Internet also has changed the way we bank, read, attend school, and more. The web has revised our vocabulary as words such as *block*, *catfish*, *cloud*, *footprint*, *follow*, *like*, *tag*, *text*, *troll*, and *viral* all have new definitions.

Although Gen Z is the first generation with Internet for their whole lives, our mission of reaching them with the gospel remains. We do not have the liberty of declaring them too different or too difficult to reach. Rather, we must find biblically accurate ways to engage them effectively with the gospel. In the same way Paul visited synagogues and marketplaces to engage with people, we must go online to meet them where they are. Even though the online world is dangerous, dirty, and godless in many corners, we cannot squander the opportunity to reach this generation because their “Nineveh” is intimidating to us. Consider three simple yet important principles to help engage Gen Z online.

Understand and engage the online culture; don't try to make it fit you. Every social media platform has a unique culture that distinguishes it from all the others. It is helpful if you think of each platform as its own country with a unique language, culture, etiquette, and policies. For instance, tipping your waiter is expected in the United States but an insult in Japan and South Korea. Giving a thumbs-up or an okay sign is extremely offensive in many parts of the world.

It is imperative to know and understand the culture you are engaging. We must take time to learn the culture of the various social media platforms to engage their audiences in culturally appropriate ways. It is not enough

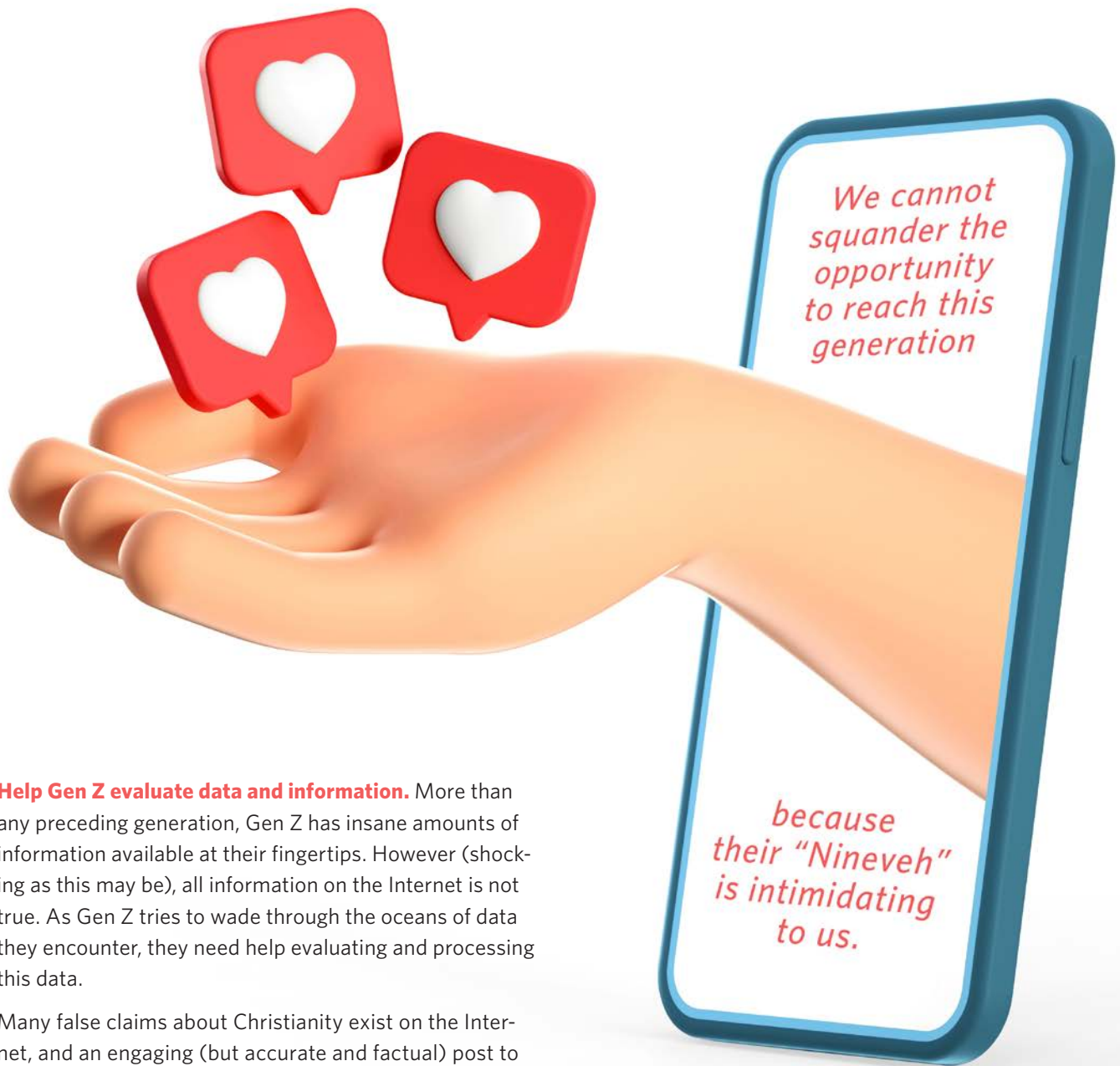
to “be on Facebook” if our goal is effective engagement and outreach.

Nine out of ten Gen Z adults spend more than an hour each day on social media, and nearly half of them spend more than three hours a day. Currently, 62% of Gen Z social media users claim to use Instagram daily, and 60% say YouTube is their preferred platform. Most churches were forced to use Facebook Live during the pandemic, which testifies to how woefully behind we are in reaching Gen Z. I daresay most Free Will Baptist pastors have never been on Instagram, and even fewer churches have an active, engaging account. Yet, this is where we must go to engage Gen Z.

Engaging posts don't have to be professional quality.

The sheer amount of data shared across the digital landscape has necessitated a sharp decrease in the expected quality of a video or picture. Posts that catch the attention of Gen Z include pictures, images, and videos rather than text. Current research suggests you have eight seconds or less to capture the attention of Gen Z. Long, well-written, thought-provoking posts simply do not interest or engage this generation. However, this decrease in expected quality works in our favor, since most churches have neither videographers nor media directors.

Remember, it is your job to match the culture of the platform you engage. A beautiful picture with a Bible verse or thought-provoking quote is a simple but engaging post for Instagram. A short video (under a minute) with a story or a thought is a great idea for YouTube, Instagram, or TikTok. I've observed most churches use social media as a place to “park” live services and make announcements. Please hear me: *this is not engagement with Gen Z*. Major companies like Coca-Cola, Chick-fil-A, and major league sports teams rarely use social media for announcements. Instead, they engage the community; we could learn much from these companies.



Help Gen Z evaluate data and information. More than any preceding generation, Gen Z has insane amounts of information available at their fingertips. However (shocking as this may be), all information on the Internet is not true. As Gen Z tries to wade through the oceans of data they encounter, they need help evaluating and processing this data.

Many false claims about Christianity exist on the Internet, and an engaging (but accurate and factual) post to address these false claims are typically welcomed by Gen Z. Inaccurate, unverified, or false information will quickly be discovered and can be the death nail in your online engagement, so make sure you spend time doing good research.

Many of us find it a daunting and unsettling task to launch into this brave new online world, but we must. With the help of the Holy Spirit and a genuine desire to see young people come to Christ, I'm confident you can make a difference in your context.

Spend time on these platforms, simply observe for a while, and refrain from posting. Spy on major companies and

megachurches to develop a feel for how others engage. Consult a member of Gen Z that attends your church and mentor them to be a part of your social media team. Your potential reach has never been greater, so get out there and engage away. **ONE**

About the Columnist: Timothy York and his wife Amanda are church planters to Buffalo, New York, working primarily with the Deaf community. Learn more about their fascinating ministry: fwbnam.com.



Dancing Through

BY JAIMIE LANCASTER

After the first month of Great Britain's participation in World War II, Winston Churchill analyzed the events and uttered the famous phrase: "It is a riddle wrapped in mystery inside an enigma." After I made my first visit to Cuba in February of this year, his quote came to mind when asked about my experience.

The Cuban people face many hardships. Ration books tell them how much food they get for each month. The books are specific, even to the number of small pieces of bread one can obtain per day. Milk is not available for people over seven years old. Flour, eggs, and "carne prohibida" (prohibited meat) are scarce. One Cuban said most of the day is consumed with finding something to eat.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, Cuba experienced a new wrinkle in this study of shortfall and need. Once, shelves held food, and people didn't have the money to buy it. Now, people have money, but shelves are empty.

The average Cuban struggles. However, these pressures increase for our Christian brothers and sisters. Many times, they face discrimination due to their beliefs. Excuses range from shortages to policy issues, but at the base is rank prejudice.

Free Will Baptist churches traverse the island. To meet for national associations and times of fellowship, churches must contract a bus service. The government provides this service. A Christian working in a bus agency overheard a person explain government policy is to not rent these buses to Christians. When a church petitioned a bus, the answer was, "We don't have any to rent."

While I was in Cuba, during a business meeting, they discussed the prohibition against large gatherings after 6:00 p.m. This conflicted with the opening services of the National Association. The directive was unusual because the government still allowed nightclubs and public events after 6:00 p.m. in the city. The executive committee passed a motion to continue with the service. They resolved if anyone was taken in, the whole group would go.

Another issue facing the Cuban church is relaxed visa regulations in the States, which opened the door for many Cubans to leave the island in search of a better life. Though a blessing to many, this migration also left the leaders of our Free Will Baptist churches with smaller congregations. Some pastors also opted to relocate to the U.S., diminishing the available leadership.

A wonderful Cuban pastor and his wife hosted us. They





— Difficult Days

shared the struggles of being Christian and living in Cuba. Their faith in Christ allowed them to tell their stories with a smile. We saw firsthand the scant amount of food they received for the month. We watched them buy expired rice and come home with items missing from their shopping list. We asked, “How do you make it?”

The pastor’s wife smiled and, with a twinkle in her eye, replied, “We just wake up every morning and pray for a miracle.”

Cuba is a breeding ground for miracles. I spoke with many Cubans, hearing numerous compelling stories. My favorite story is well-known in Cuba. After the revolution, many people were incarcerated. The mother of a young man came to the prison and spoke with the commander, pleading with him to give the box of food she had prepared to her son. When the commander refused, she appealed to the love of God. The commander replied, “Madame, God does not enter this office!” He closed the door, and the lady walked away in sorrow.

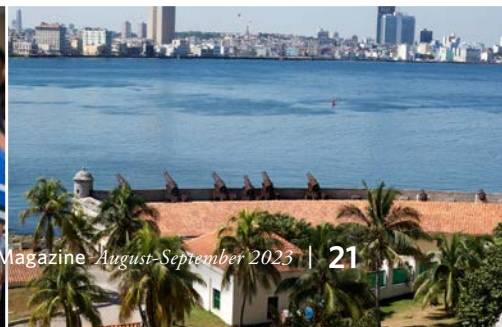
The commander’s driver overheard the interaction and approached her. A Christian, he asked for the food and said he would make sure the young man received the box. He put it in the commander’s refrigerator, then took it

to the young man the next day. The recipient of this box remarked, “Not only did God enter this man’s office, but He also used his refrigerator and his car to bring it to me.”

I was moved to tears at the opening service of the Cuban National Association of Free Will Baptists. Though packed with people facing scarcity, prejudice, and discrimination, they were not downhearted. Their voices rang out in praise. In unison, they sang about dancing through the difficult days. Joy and hope filled the room—the same joy and hope Christians around the world find in our relationship with Jesus Christ. What Churchill’s quote misses (in a spiritual context) is that our joy is no riddle, mystery, or enigma but rather the blessings of life in Christ Jesus.

Gifts to the Cuba partnership and the WMO help ensure these blessings enjoyed by our Cuban brothers and sisters can be shared through trained believers, strong churches, and community outreach. Please be sure to pray and give so this good news can be theirs. [ONE](#)

About the Author: Jaimie Lancaster serves as the assistant director of field partnerships for IM. Currently, 11 partnerships in nine countries take the gospel to unreached peoples. For more information, search “Global Partners” on iminc.org or read encouraging stories and prayer needs on Facebook: [@IMGlobalPartners](https://www.facebook.com/IMGlobalPartners).





Ivory Coast—Prompted by World Evangelism Month (May), the Abobo congregation in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, shared the gospel through street

evangelism the last Saturday of May. This congregation meets in a cramped storefront building. Abobo, a densely-populated, Muslim-majority community in the Abidjan metropolitan area, is home to more than 1.3 million people.



Cuba—In March, Cuban youth participated in a missions/evangelism retreat in Bahia Honda. They enjoyed worship and

corporate sessions, but also literally put feet to their learning as they walked to villages to minister.

Panama—The Betania church in Panama celebrated its 38th anniversary May 21.



India—

A partner in India recently purchased land with a building. The



property is centrally located between three overflowing house churches. Though still seeking funds for renovation, the group held a dedication service the last weekend in May. Six hundred people attended, and 300 Bibles were distributed.

Ivory Coast—On Sunday, May 21, the Doropo FWB church held its first service in its second location in Doropo. “Praise the Lord,” Kenneth Eagleton, former missionary to Ivory Coast and current director of field partnerships, said, “for the expansion of His Kingdom and the diligent work of our Ivorian partners.”

Uruguay—Uruguayan pastors met June 3 to formulate a strategy for church planting in their country. Former missionary to Uruguay, Jaimie Lancaster, urged, “Pray for a church planting movement in Uruguay as our Free Will Baptist pastors, Bible institute students, and congregations seek to share the gospel with those around them.”



Cuba—The El Buen Samaritano Church in Cuba celebrated 25 years in March. Three ladies made professions of faith at the service and were baptized.



Panama—The Camino de Santidade FWB Church in Las Tablas, Panama, held an evangelistic outreach in a nearby village in April. Residents of Oria Arriba responded with open hearts, and many people accepted Christ as Savior.

Students Serve Cross-Culturally

Antioch, TN—During the month of June, 87 high school students served in ten locations through ETEAM. Their work began June 9 as they and their team leaders gathered at Welch College in Gallatin, Tennessee, for training. Teams deployed to Hawaii; St. Croix; Chicago, Illinois; Brazil; Ecuador; Panama; and two locations each in Japan and Spain. During their time “on location,” they assisted missionaries and local pastors with outreach activities, performed service projects, experienced cross-cultural life, and interacted with local youth. They finished June 28, after taking time to process their experiences and celebrate how God used them.

College Missions Program (CMP) students began training in January, both in person and via Zoom. The first student departed April 25, and 34 others served throughout the summer with the last student returning on August 14. Students served in Bulgaria (three teams), Ecuador, France (three areas), Japan (Tokyo and Hokkaido), Kenya, Hawaii, and Brazil. Students supported missionaries and field workers by working in medical clinics, teaching English classes, participating in sports

camp, connecting with university students, teaching music classes, serving in the local church, etc. Additionally, they experienced daily missionary life, found creative ways to share the gospel, and acquired first-hand cross-cultural knowledge.

Director of Mobilization Leslie Nichols urges, “Pray for these students. Ask God to use their experiences to deepen their relationship with Him, serve their local churches better, and truly understand what it means to be mission-minded believers—here in the States and globally.” ETEAM is for teens completing grades 10 and up before their summer missions experience. CMP is for college students wanting to experience cross-cultural missions. See the ads in this issue for deadlines and QR codes to apply for 2024 trips. [ONE](#)



IM Board Convened for April Meeting

Antioch, TN—The IM Board met on April 24-25, 2023. Some gathered around the conference room table while others joined via Zoom. All Board members engaged in conversations centered around what God is doing through the ministry of IM and its partners.

The Board listened with interest as each director shared reports. Board Chairman Jeff Nichols stated, “I wish the entire denomination could be with the IM Board as we receive updates of what God is doing in and through IM missionaries and partnerships around the world. It’s amazing to hear all that is going on. To God be the glory!”

During its session, the Board:

- approved an IMpact Project of \$25,000 for a new building in a creative access country.
- accepted the 2022/2021 audit presented by Blankenship CPA Group.
- adopted the 2024 framework budget of \$9.1 million.
- appointed Daniel and Karah as field workers in Spain.
- approved Josh and Bethany as career field workers in Spain. [ONE](#)



Funding Efforts to REACH *the* **UNREACHED**

BY ROB CONLEY

IM has long been involved in efforts to reach the unreached peoples of the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. From our earliest days of ministry in India, we have focused on taking the love and truth of God's Word to those who have never heard.

We minister to people so we may witness. Ministering to the physical, emotional, health, and humanitarian needs of individuals opens doors that may ultimately allow for a transparent opportunity to share the love and truth of Christ. IM remains solidly focused on reaching the unreached.

The Joshua Project (joshuaproject.net) defines an unreached people group as one with less than 2% evangelical Christians among its population.

Currently, IM works and/or partners with workers in 19 countries inhabited by significant unreached people groups. Myanmar (Burma), Kenya, Uganda, Algeria, Morocco, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, Ecuador, El Salvador, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, China, Japan, Mongolia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal contain unreached people groups with opportunities to hear the gospel through IM's efforts.

Did you know the Japanese are considered an unreached people group? Japan is currently IM's largest field in terms of assigned missionary personnel. Significant effort and dollars are invested in reaching the unreached of Japan.

Are you aware IM is ministering through partnerships in some of the most difficult and most dangerous places around the world? Places where believers are beaten for their faith, yet stand strong, and respond by asking, "Wouldn't all followers of Christ do the same?"

Whether through assigned personnel or through partnerships, we strive daily to carry on the legacy of our pioneer missionaries. This is the very essence of our purpose statement—*IM labors with the Body of Christ to fulfill the Great Commission.*

The annual **World Missions Offering** (WMO) first **benefits any unfunded portion of our partnership budgets.** These partnership budgets also seek designated funding, but any amount of their budget left unfunded through designated gifts is covered through the WMO.

The WMO then **benefits deficit missionary accounts, needy missionary accounts, and new missionary accounts.** No missionary should be encumbered with

the stress of a deficit account. Other sources help offset missionary deficits (such as the Deficits Accounts and Where Needed Most funds), but the WMO comes alongside those missionaries who might need an extra boost. We would love to see the WMO assist missionaries with underfunded accounts so they can strategically remain on task. WMO funds may also assist missionaries to return to their fields in a timely manner.

One of our big dreams for the WMO is to see it help kickstart new missionary appointees. Imagine appointees receiving an initial deposit in their accounts. Because they were immediately placed on salary and benefits, they could focus on completing their fundraising. Expediting their fundraising efforts may mean they arrive to their place of service months faster.

The WMO also underwrites the **General Fund**. I know no one wants to support the General Fund. It just isn't as exciting. I get it. But here are a few other things I understand about the General Fund.

The General Fund...

- removes many logistical and administrative responsibilities from the missionaries.
- recruits, trains, mentors, and recommends new missionaries for Board approval.
- provides the legal and tax-exempt foundation for gifts.
- provides strategic oversight to keep the main things the main thing.
- provides mobilization for high schoolers and college students to engage in the Great Commission.
- provides the financial systems, accountability, and integrity to build the trust necessary to fund this significant effort.

Your support of the WMO makes all these things happen.

Yes, your consistent monthly support of missionaries, partnerships, and the General Fund make these efforts possible. Your support of the WMO ensures these partnerships, deficit and needy missionary accounts, new missionaries, and the General Fund are

adequately supported each year. To the extent the WMO increases, IM reaches farther, pushes harder, and stays longer in those efforts.

If you want to see IM have a great reach to the unreached, pick a missionary, pick a partnership, pick the General Fund, and give monthly. But if you want to see all those things gain an encouraging "shot in the arm" and a significant leap forward, then please give a sacrificial, obedient gift to the WMO. Someone who has yet to hear the name of Christ just might get the chance because of your gift. [ONE](#)

About the Author: Rob Conley is director of financial operations/ CFO at IM, Inc. He began his ministry with IM in January 1995. Rob and his wife Jennifer have two sons, Austin (Britt) and Alan, and their pet dog Scooby.

3 Things the WMO Supports

Partners

Bangladesh, Brazil, Central Asia, Cuba, India, Ivory Coast, Pakistan, Panama, Russia

Missionaries

Deficit accounts, underfunded, new missionaries start-up funds, national missionaries

General Fund

Missionary logistics, recruitment, mobilization, guidance, financial processing

HELP *From* HOME

BY KRISTI JOHNSON



The question loomed over me like a huge cloud. Tim and I had served as missionaries in Spain for almost 25 years. I'd seen God's hand move in mighty ways. I'd watched new converts choose baptism. I'd had a front-row seat as a new church was planted in a place one had never existed. But the question seemed to linger: "Go myself or help from home?"

The answer was clear. It was time to leave the mission field to *help from home*. Being involved in missions isn't always about being the one who gets to go. Making strides to learn a new language. Teaching. Even planting a church.

Sometimes, it means you get to be part of the sending team—those who *help from home*. Those with the resources to send missionaries and partner with churches overseas. That's what the World Missions Offering is all about.

Right now, IM shares the gospel with people in 34 countries. In some of those places, traditional missionaries live among the ones they serve. In other locations, missionaries served and trained believers; now, those believers carry on the work of the ministry. IM also has partnerships with many people around the world who take the gospel to places we could never reach on our own. They speak

the language and know the culture. An extension of our missionary efforts, they reach even farther than traditional missionaries ever could.

Give to Take the Gospel to the Ends of the Earth.

This year's World Missions Offering theme is a reminder we *all* have the responsibility to give. Some of the money supports the General Fund, which helps missionaries around the world. Tim Awtrey, missionary to Bulgaria, recently said, "Few people really know how essential the support of the IM staff is for missionaries. Scattered all over the world, in challenging environments, the encouragement and support given to us by IM, in part funded by the WMO, is critical. At times, Lydia and I didn't know if we could continue on. WMO funds allowed IM staff to visit and care for us when at a crossroads in our




ministry. If we hadn't had the support of IM and the funds available through the WMO, I don't know if the wonderful work God eventually brought about in Bulgaria would exist today."

Other gifts send out new appointees and national workers. They also boost those with deficit or underfunded accounts. WMO funds are vital to supporting all of IM's partnerships around the world, extending ministries through our brothers and sisters who serve in extremely difficult places.

What can you do?

- **CONNECT** with IM on social media to learn more about what God is doing around the world.
- **GIVE** to the World Missions Offering on August 27 and encourage others to promote the offering. Even though we have set aside a WMO Sunday, your gifts can help the WMO at any time of the year.
- **PRAY** the Lord of the harvest will send forth more laborers...and more faithful people to send them.

If God hasn't called you to go yourself, maybe He's calling you to *help from home*. Don't ignore that calling! 

About the Author: Kristi Johnson and her husband Tim served as IM missionaries to Spain for 25 years. She now works as the development communications manager for IM. Kristi is thrilled to tell IM's story as she promotes the WMO. While serving in Spain was exciting, she loves getting to *help from home*.



Do you want *their* future to be uncertain?

When you fail to plan for your passing, you hand over your loved ones' financial future to the courts. Since 2013, **Free Will Baptist Foundation** and **Cornerstone Estate Planning** have helped thousands of families create plans to avoid the legal and financial nightmares of probate court. When you die, their caring staff will walk beside your family in difficult days and guide them through **your plan for the future**.



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Training ★ MILITARY MISSIONARIES

BY TERRY AUSTIN

Just last week, during our monthly military ministry roundtable discussion meeting, one member described what churches around military posts have been doing for years. Our churches minister to military communities by taking the gospel of Jesus Christ to them through worship services, community activities, and outreach opportunities. We build relationships and become part of each other's lives.

After a few short years, we have to say goodbye to them because the military sends them to the ends of the earth. It's called a PCS (permanent change of station) move, and it is part of military culture. PCS moves happen frequently, and normally, the military member has no choice but to leave the current assignment and follow orders to a new location. In many ways, this seems unfortunate, but in many other ways it is an opportunity to be part of God's bigger plan—His orders—to send missionaries to parts of the world needing to hear the gospel of Christ.

Discipleship is challenging for churches ministering to military families. Discipleship is also challenging for military members wanting to grow in their faith in the military environment. Their time in your community is limited, yet it still takes time to develop relationships. Although challenging, it is *critical* for these disciples to grow in their faith, developing a love for Christ and the work of Christ.

From a different vantage point, however, you can see another wave of military families and single military members on the way to your community. This is a never-ending cycle and keeps our pastors and churches busy reaching out, making new friends, and helping military men and women grow in their faith.

I have been to churches that welcome and love the military,

and I have been to churches that don't appreciate the military and its unique culture. I hope all Free Will Baptist churches will embrace the military ministry and reach out to those who serve—both military members and those pastors who are military chaplains. (Free Will Baptists even have a church planter in the military who is currently deployed.) Take this great opportunity to serve Christ by supporting those serving and witnessing to our military.

The military community is a vital part of your own community. Seize the opportunity to introduce them to Christ, love them for a while, and then send them out as ambassadors for Christ and friends with whom we can stay in touch for decades to come. Discipleship may not always be possible face-to-face in the military setting, but many options are available to help you stay in touch and build stronger and lasting relationships.

Make your military friends missionaries by sending them to their next duty station supported by your love and encouragement. Stay in touch with them, because they may return to you when another PCS brings them back to your community. **ONE**

About the Author: Former chaplain Terry Austin is chaplain support officer for North American Ministries. Learn more at fwbnam.com/chaplaincy.

Joseph the Overcomer

BY TOM DOOLEY

Bible teacher Gene Getz once said, “If any man had an excuse for turning out bad, Joseph certainly did.”

However, Joseph’s life is a dynamic portrayal of godliness. Joseph’s growth in godliness was not easy. In fact, Joseph’s life began with overcoming three great obstacles to become a great man of God.

Faulty parenting (Genesis 37:1-4).

Joseph’s father Jacob was far from being a model parent. He made serious parenting mistakes. He showed damaging *favoritism* toward Joseph.

Genesis 37:3 states Jacob loved Joseph more than his brothers because he was “the son of his old age.” Jacob didn’t hesitate to express this partiality in a tangible way. He made Joseph a coat of many colors. This was no ordinary coat. It represented Joseph’s favored position in the family as well as Jacob’s intent to treat Joseph as the

firstborn, with all the accompanying rights and privileges, including a double portion of inheritance. Such favoritism resulted in Joseph’s brothers hating him.

We see a second serious parental error in Jacob’s *preoccupation*. Jacob was oblivious to the animosity of Joseph’s brothers toward the favored son. If he had any clue regarding their deep anger, certainly he would not have sent Joseph on an errand to check up on them.

No doubt Jacob was a busy man, but his preoccupation almost cost him the life of his most loved son. Preoccupation is a trap every parent needs to avoid, especially fathers. It is tempting to become so preoccupied by work, status, responsibilities, and sometimes leisure that we neglect our children. It is crucial to know what is going on in their lives.

Bitter brothers (Genesis 37:5-35). As we already learned in verse 4, Joseph was so hated by his brothers they “could not speak peaceably.” In verses 5-11, when Joseph shared his dreams with his brothers—how he would reign over them one day—they hated him even more. Their deep-set bitterness drove them to want to kill Joseph. Had Reuben not intervened, Joseph would have been murdered. Instead, they cast him into a pit. But even that didn’t satisfy their bitter hearts, and they sold Joseph to Midianite slave traders, condemning him to what seemed likely to be a life of misery.

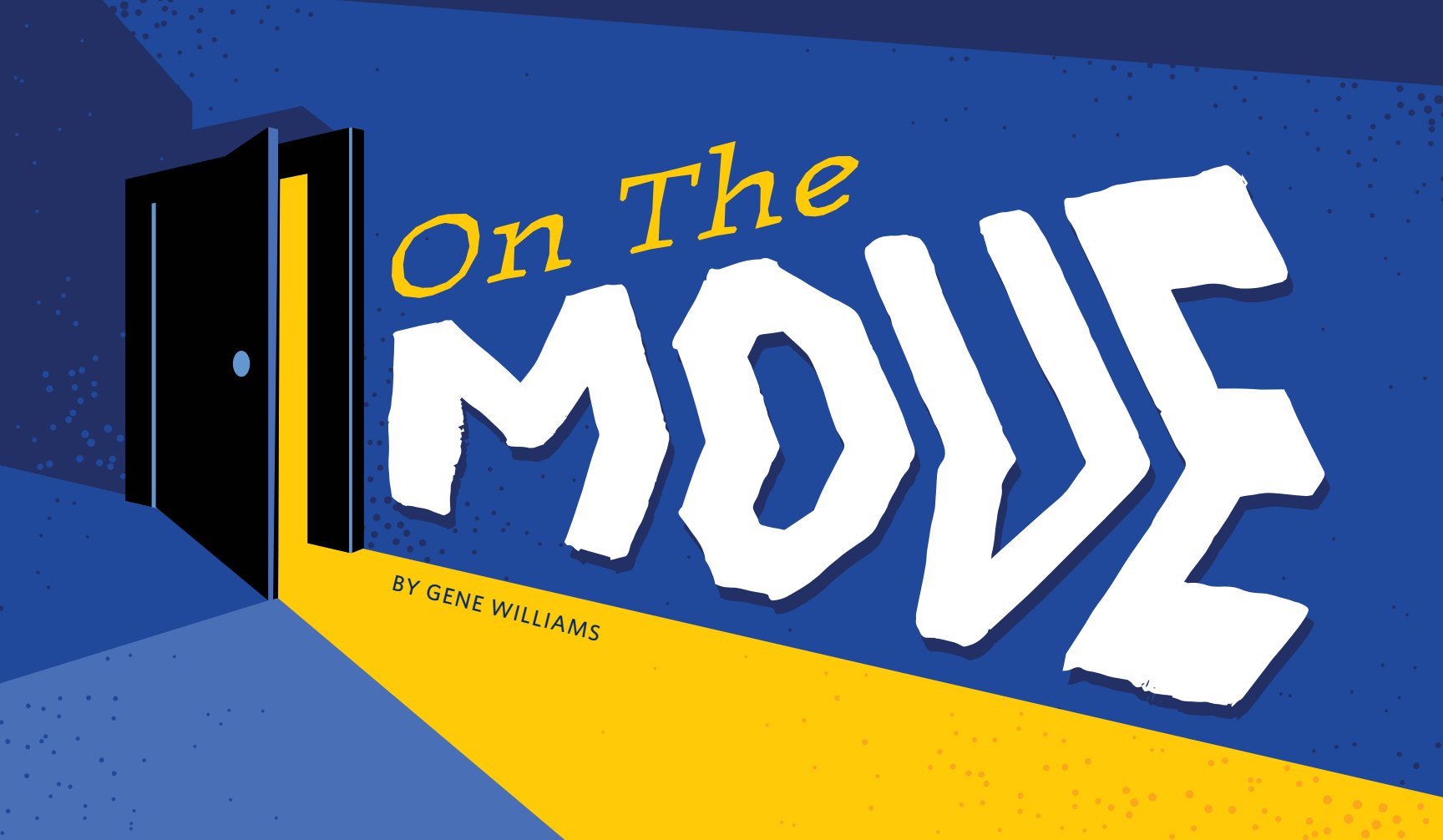
Joseph was totally rejected by his brothers, the object of their disdain. Yet, as difficult as it must have been for Joseph, even this horrible relationship didn’t detour him

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Discussion Questions for Further Reflection

- »» What common mistakes do parents in our culture make? What does godly parenting look like considering Joseph’s story? (Colossians 3:21; Ephesians 6:4)
- »» Why is bitterness such a dangerous emotion? How do we combat bitterness? (Ephesians 4:31-32)
- »» What should be our response when life circumstances “throw us a curve”? How can we become overcomers like Joseph? (Romans 8:28)

Continue your study of Joseph’s life by reading the **Better Together** column (page 62), or by ordering the new Master’s Men’s Direction Bible Study “Joseph: The Lord Was With Him” at fwbmastersmen.org.



Each year at Parkers Chapel, we prayerfully choose a verse and spiritual emphasis theme. In 2021, while navigating through the residue of the pandemic, the Lord directed me to Revelation 3:7-9. He had blessed the church of Philadelphia with an open door no man could shut. Throughout that year, we saw the Lord open many doors and bless the ministry of our church.

As I headed to the Free Will Baptist Leadership Conference in December, that truth continued to resonate with me. Prayerfully, I told the Lord if He had something else for us, I would be open to whatever door He opened.

As the conference concluded, David Crowe, director of North American Ministries (NAM), asked if we could meet to discuss a prayer need. That afternoon, I met with David, Brad Ransom, and Jeff Jones to discuss the potential of relocating the Free Will Baptist Hispanic Institute to North Carolina. Specifically, these men asked if Parkers Chapel and NAM could partner for the project. I must say, this was a larger “open door” than I thought the Lord had for us.

We spent that spring (with the theme “By Faith” for 2022) praying as pastors, ministry leaders, and the church body

to discern the Lord’s direction. **One thought continued to surface. It wasn’t, “Why would we do this?” but “Why wouldn’t we do this?”** In May 2022, we stepped out by faith and committed to receive this work. We are excited to work with NAM and its leadership in this joint project moving forward.

In 2021, the Census Bureau recorded the U.S. Hispanic population exceeding 62 million, with that number projected to reach 84 million by 2030. In short, this group now represents 20% of the U.S. population. **Today, Free Will Baptists are not only going to our “Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts,” but they are coming to us.** Often, God’s people have willing hearts but lack the means or resources to reach the world at our doorstep. Without the right tools, we find ourselves at a loss.

This is why the Hispanic Institute carries an ever-expanding potential for Free Will Baptists in the years to come. Institute Director Alfredo Botello has done an apt job of leading this work over the years, and he continues to have a passion for the institute and its future. Over the decades, he and his lovely wife Ruth have ministered to countless students. These graduates now serve in works across this country, in Mexico, and even throughout Central America and into South America.

We will begin offering classes in January 2024, and we are excited to see the ministry up and running again. Students will experience intensive Bible training along with hands-on instruction designed to enable their work in the ministry. They will learn theology, doctrine, philosophy of ministry, and everyday life skills to benefit them in every aspect of their work. We also hope to provide online and digital resources for them as the work progresses.

It is our vision for these graduates to go on to serve at one of the many Free Will Baptist Hispanic churches. Others will become “church planters” in a community needing a Hispanic ministry. Some will find a place at English-speaking churches in search of a “Hispanic pastor” to

Prayerfully, I told the Lord if He had something else for us, I would be open to whatever door He opened.

reach this fast-growing demographic. And, in other cases, we believe we will see students choose to pursue more concentrated training at one of our Free Will Baptist colleges.

We ask you to join in praying for this ministry as we move forward by faith. We believe the Lord will use the Hispanic Institute in a great way in the decades to come. **ONE**

About the Author: Gene Williams is pastor at Parkers Chapel FWB Church in Greenville, North Carolina. Learn more about this important ministry: fwbnam.com.

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from becoming the man God wanted him to be.

Instead of wearing a spirit of bitterness, Colossians 3:12-14 commands us to be people of mercy, kindness, humility, and patience. Rather than acting in violence like Joseph’s brothers, we are instructed to act in compassion and forgiveness. Later in life, Joseph demonstrated exactly what godly forgiveness looks like when he came face to face with his brothers once again.

Confusing circumstances (Genesis 37:36). Joseph’s dreams were not coming to pass. He wasn’t reigning over anyone. He found himself enslaved in a foreign country. Amazingly, even in this heartbreaking situation, we have no record Joseph ever questioned God’s love, power, and faithfulness.

Joseph set a worthy example. We need to remember when life puts us into a pit, it does not mean God has forgotten us or failed us in some way.

Of all the obstacles Joseph had to overcome, I believe this one was the most challenging. He could have used the hardships he endured as an excuse to turn his back on his relationship with God, but he didn’t.

As Philippians 4:10-14 reminds us, with God, we can be content no matter our circumstances! Joseph experienced both a life of plenty and a life of servitude. No matter the circumstances, he found strength to overcome in the Lord.

Growth in our Christian life will bring us face to face with obstacles. So, let’s determine to be overcomers. Joseph could have made all kinds of excuses for himself. He could have quit, but he didn’t.

He overcame. **ONE**

About the Author: Ohio native Tom Dooley has pastored New Road FWB Church in Austintown, Ohio, since 2002. He previously served as the director of Master’s Men.



Recruiting for

BOO 
CAMP

BY BRAD RANSOM

Have you ever wished you had practical ministry training? I think it is safe to say almost every pastor and leader has felt unprepared for certain things in ministry. As I travel around the country visiting churches and pastors, I hear this comment repeatedly.

North American Ministries now offers a free, two-day Boot Camp for pastors and church leaders.

Let me be clear: this training does not replace a college program or degree. I *strongly* encourage all ministry-minded people to pursue a degree from one of our Free Will Baptist colleges. Like many pastors, I graduated from college with a theology degree, but when I started my first ministry position, I still felt unprepared for many challenges I encountered in ministry. North American Ministries and the Executive Office have partnered to provide practical training through Boot Camps for pastors and church leaders.

The next training is **October 23-24** at the National Office Building in Antioch, Tennessee. Camp begins Monday morning at 9:00 a.m. and concludes Tuesday afternoon at 5:00 p.m. When you do the math, that's 36 hours of intense, ministry-changing training.

Boot Camp is FREE but limited to the first 15 registrants. The training is applicable not only to pastors but also to other church leaders. In fact, many pastors bring a leader with them to receive training together. We ask churches to limit registration to the pastor and up to two other leaders to save room for other churches to participate. Travel, lodging, and dinner are not provided.

Since Boot Camp started, we have provided training for over 100 pastors and leaders. Here is what we have heard from those who attended:

† One word. AMAZING. The strength and encouragement from the leaders was AMAZING. The knowledge we gained in each session was AMAZING. The fellowship with other pastors was AMAZING. Exactly what this discouraged pastor needed! This would be an excellent two-day camp for every pastoral student to take. All I can say is THANK YOU for pouring your hearts of knowledge into me and my ministry. Pastors Boot Camp was AMAZING.
—*Pastor Mike Nabors, Alabama*


† I truly enjoyed each session and the practical application given. The teaching topics were excellent, and the motivation was greatly appreciated. The question-and-answer time, along with the fellowship, was helpful. I encourage anyone in ministry to consider attending the Pastors

Boot Camp training. The time and sacrifice our NAM leaders put into this makes the training well worth attending. You will be blessed and equipped.

—*Pastor Gary Mitchener, Missouri*

- † Pastors Boot Camp is by far one of the greatest resources in the denomination. It was both engaging and practical. I came expecting a blessing and went away feeling encouraged, challenged, and excited about ministry.
—*Pastor Dwayne James, Tennessee*
- † The Boot Camp I attended in Nashville was an incredible experience packed with knowledge and bursting with encouragement from our denominational leaders. I obtained a lead pastor position in October 2020 in California. This was my first time as a lead pastor, and due to shutdowns, I couldn't really meet with local pastors to bounce ideas off one another and gain the confidence needed to soldier on in a completely unknown era in church history. The sessions offered during this conference were timely and informative to a new pastor, and there were men there who were just as engaged who had been serving in their leadership roles for many years. The other helpful factor was the openness and love demonstrated by the entire NAM staff and the other departments. It was encouraging to hear people you look up to in the denomination cheer you on and pray for your ministry. I would encourage you to consider this opportunity if you are new to the role or have been pastoring for years. We are always able to learn more about ministry, and the opportunity to meet other people in ministry is a great reward as well.
—*Pastor Jarod Wood, California*

These comments make it clear this practical training has been beneficial to many leaders. We hope you take advantage of the upcoming training and sign up today!

To register, or if you have any questions, please call **615-760-6137** or visit **fwbnam.com/pastors-boot-camp**. 

About the Author: Dr. Brad Ransom is chief training officer for North American Ministries.

God Speaks



BY JEFF CAUDILL

God speaks. When I hear the phrase *God speaks*, my mind goes to places in Scripture where God spoke in unusual ways. Throughout Scripture, God spoke in visions and dreams or through prophets. Elijah heard a still, small voice. God spoke to Job in a whirlwind. Paul heard God speak in a blinding light on the road to Damascus. God even used a donkey to speak to Balaam.

God may use different methods today, but He still speaks. He speaks through sermons and lessons. He speaks words of encouragement through song lyrics. He speaks through His servants to provide counsel. Ultimately, today, God speaks through His Word. We may read a passage telling us not to fear exactly when we need it. We may hear biblical song lyrics that provide just the encouragement needed for a difficult time.

I have also heard God speak directly to me. Not through a donkey or a dream. He has not shown me a vision. He has not spoken from a whirlwind, yet I have heard Him speak, often during situations when I needed it most. In those moments I needed His strength and direction—He spoke to me.

For example...

My car needed service. When I took it to the dealership, I began prepping for a sermon in the waiting room.

Pause.

It is important to know I was struggling spiritually and emotionally during this time. I had known for some time my role on the church staff needed to change. Our church had reached a point where my role needed to become part

time, meaning I needed to find another part-time position. I allowed these potential changes to become a heavy burden.

I allowed the evil one to convince me no one would hire someone my age. That I had no marketable skills. I believed those lies to the point I wondered if perhaps it was time to leave pastoral ministry all together. Satan's voice in my head had become all I heard: I was too old and had nothing to offer. I believed the lies, and the load was burying me.

Back to the waiting room...

The sermon I was preparing was part of a 12-part series presenting an overview of the entire Bible through significant events. My assignment was to cover Joseph through the Exodus, focusing on Moses' call at the burning bush to lead Israel out of Egypt.

As I considered Exodus 3, I sought to read and analyze the passage as if unfamiliar with it. This was a story I had heard and read my entire life, but I tried to identify details

I missed previously. I placed myself in the scene. I saw the bush—that amazing bush burning but not consumed. Imagining what it might have looked like, I wondered what God's voice sounded like.

As I read how God spoke to Moses and called him to lead Israel, I could almost hear Moses reply, "Who am I?" Moses was a fugitive. He felt unqualified. He saw himself as the last person God could use. God responded in two simple phrases that really said the same thing. God said, "I will be with

you" and "I AM has sent you." God was telling Moses He was all that mattered.

As I read those words, I immediately heard God speaking to me. No longer an ancient conversation between God and Moses, those words became a conversation between God and me, right there in the waiting room. I had been saying to God, "Who am I?" And His response to me through His Word—right then and there—was "I AM!"

It was as though He spoke directly to me: "I am with you." "I AM."

Into my struggle, into my lack of confidence and discouragement, He spoke, and suddenly God's voice drowned out the voice of the evil one. I sat in that waiting area with tears flowing down my reddened face. God used His Word, a story I had heard since childhood, to speak directly to me. No one else in the waiting room heard Him. (Although others might have wondered what was going on with me as I sat there crying while I "heard" the voice of God.)

That communication from Him gave me the confidence to act. My burden was no longer as heavy. Motivated by the voice of God, I reached out to others who might be able to help me find a part-time position. The first person told me he could not help; the second never even replied. Yet the burden still was not as heavy as it had been previously.

Within a few days, one of my contacts called with a position to consider. When I first reached out, he had no idea a position would soon become available. But God knew! And these events in God's perfect timing led me back to the staff at Welch College.

God speaks. He has spoken to me at other times, through decisions, confusion, crossroads, and hurt. Amazingly (but not surprisingly), God uses His Word empowered by the Holy Spirit to speak to us as individuals. In this way, we hear the voice of God.

Consider three simple takeaways:

- 1. God wants to speak to us.** He desires to provide strength and direction in our lives as we serve Him (Isaiah 28:23).
- 2. We need to hear His voice!** We need the strength and direction only He can provide and the assurance we get from "hearing" His voice (Psalm 32:8).
- 3. He is and always will be "I AM."** Through all our perceived inadequacies, God's response is "I AM" (Exodus 3).

God speaks! Not only has He spoken, but He also continues to speak. The God of the universe—omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient—desires to speak to mere humans like us. I am in awe God would speak to me and continues to speak to me. God speaks! **ONE**

About the Author: Jeff Caudill serves as executive pastor at Cofer's Chapel and as marketing operations manager at Welch College. Learn more: welch.edu.

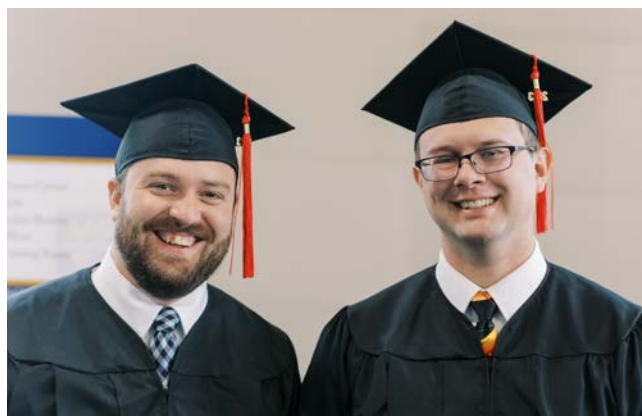
The God of
the universe—
omnipotent,
omnipresent,
and omniscient—
desires to
speak to mere
humans like us.

Welch Divinity School Celebrates First M.Div. Graduates


Two years after its inception, Welch Divinity School celebrated its first two graduates: Josh Hunter and Dustin Walters.

Josh Hunter is a native of Missouri who came to Welch for his bachelor's degree in 2015 and completed it in 2019, moving straight into the M.A. in Theology and Ministry. Upon completing the M.A. in 2019, Josh took a short break, working as a curriculum instructional designer before returning to pursue the M.Div. at Welch. Josh plans to pursue further study at other institutions as he continues to explore the broader cultural and religious contexts of the Scriptures. He desires to continue engaging in evangelical scholarship within the academy.

Dustin Walters is a native of Hamilton, Alabama. He and his wife, Laci, currently reside in Chandler, Indiana, where Dustin serves as connections and next steps pastor at Faith Church. Dustin graduated from Welch College in 2016 with a B.A. in pastoral ministry, studied at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and just completed his M.Div. at



Welch Divinity School. Dustin enjoys coffee and conversations about theology and discipleship. Dustin was not only one of the first M.Div. students, but he also became the first administrative assistant for the Divinity School.

We congratulate Josh and Dustin on their accomplishment. For information about Welch Divinity School and its programs of study, contact Dr. Martin Sheldon, director of administration at msheldon@welch.edu or (615) 675-5285. 

Welch College Graduates 75 in Commencement Exercises

Welch College conferred degrees on 75 students, according to Provost Matthew McAfee. Commencement exercises were held in the Student Activities center. The gymnasium space was converted into a 700-plus seating auditorium for the Baccalaureate service on Thursday evening, May 4, and the Commencement ceremony on Friday morning, May 5. The college awarded degrees in multiple programs, including associate's degrees, bachelor's degrees, the Master of Arts degree in Theology and Ministry, the Master of Arts in Teaching degree, and for the first time, the Master of Divinity degree.

Dr. Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, delivered the Commencement address. Rev. Brad

Ryan, pastor of Ina Free Will Baptist Church in Ina, Illinois, delivered the Baccalaureate sermon.

President Matt Pinson recognized Matthew Bracey, vice provost, for his ten years of faithful service as a faculty member and administrator. Dr. Ian Hawkins, assistant professor of Biology and dean of the School of Arts and Sciences, was named Academic Advisor of the Year. The college also awarded the inaugural Teacher of the Year Award to Dr. Linda Shipley, professor of Music.

The college congratulates the 2023 graduating class and commends them to the service of Christ and the transformational work of His kingdom.

Associate of Science Degrees

Matthew Dillon Alphin
Kinston, North Carolina
Ministry

Cadence Cara Beauchamp
Plant City, Florida
Business

Erica La’Nise Boone
Gallatin, Tennessee
Business

Julia Faith Chandler
Pleasant View, Tennessee
Biology

Meril Makensie Moss DeFrank
Gallatin, Tennessee
Biology

Karrah Nicole Johnson
Sumerco, West Virginia
Biology

Colson Laine Puckett
Gallatin, Tennessee
Business

Sarah Marie Reynolds
North Kingstown, Rhode Island
Biology

Corinne Lee Washington
Gallatin, Tennessee
Biology

Associate of Arts Degrees

Juanell Elizah Chapman
Murfreesboro, Tennessee

Jackson Lee Hester
Gallatin, Tennessee

Justin Charles Hester
Spring Hill, Tennessee



Faith Ashley Miller
Gallatin, Tennessee

Alexander Nichole Tuttle
Portland, Tennessee
Teaching

Bachelor of Arts Degrees

Caleb Isaiah Boivin
Gallatin, Tennessee
English

Caleb Mark Creech
Macon, Georgia
English

Nicolas Isaiah Cruz*
Bristol, Tennessee
Humanities and Arts

Daniel David Delgado
Russellville, Arkansas
Intercultural Studies

Jacob Adam Johnson**
Smithville, Mississippi
Pastoral Ministry

Raygan Elizabeth Sellers**
Pleasant View, Tennessee
Humanities and Arts

Bachelor of Science Degrees

Erric Tyrone Adams, Jr.
Nashville, Tennessee
Business Administration

Kyra Alisse Anderson**
Chapmansboro, Tennessee
Exercise Science—Licensure K-12

Harlee Christann Branson
Vilonia, Arkansas
Business Administration

Madison Lynn Carnes***
Wilson, North Carolina
Business Administration

Joseph Roy Cooper
Hendersonville, Tennessee
Business Administration

Loren Danielle Craig
Hermitage, Tennessee
Early Childhood Education

Shelby Elizabeth Dilda**
La Grange, North Carolina
Mathematics Education

Caleb Ronald Franks
Hamilton, Alabama
Pastoral Ministry

Brian David Fritts**
Limestone, Tennessee
General Christian Ministry

Andrew Robert Glass
Springfield, Ohio
General Christian Ministry

Jacob Alan Hannis
South Roxana, Illinois
Exercise Science

Gabrielle Jean Hicks*
Arkansas City, Kansas
Psychology

Ashley Elizabeth Holland**
Hendersonville, Tennessee
Child Development and Learning
Licensure K-12, EL

John Alexander Howell
Chipley, Florida
General Christian Ministry

James Alan Hunt
Gallatin, Tennessee
Theological Studies

Brian Jay Johnson**
Gallatin, Tennessee
Biology

Kylah Alexandria Kivette***
Seymour, Tennessee
Mathematics Education
Licensure 6-12

Chloe Michelle Lawson*
Nashville, Tennessee
General Christian Ministry

Caia Gabrielle Lytle***
Ashland City, Tennessee
Psychology

Joshua Tyler Mayo
Greenville, North Carolina
General Christian Ministry

Bradley Troy Mercer
Raleigh, North Carolina
Exercise Science

Lanae Marie Miller
Park Hills, Missouri
Child Development and Learning

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Bethany Rose Milling***
Ashland City, Tennessee
Child Development and Learning—
Licensure K-5, EL

Mitchell Edward Moody***
Clayton, North Carolina
Mathematics Education—
Licensure 6-12
Music Education—Licensure K-12

McKenna Linde Moore*
Locust Grove, Oklahoma
English Education—Licensure 6-12

Kerena Nicole Morton*
Norfolk, Virginia
Child Development and Learning

Kevan Austin Owen*
Mooreville, Mississippi
Pastoral Ministry

Chance Hammond Pride
Louisville, Tennessee
Business Administration

Chelsea Leigh Rackley***
New Bern, North Carolina
Business Administration

Samuel José Rodríguez***
Miami, Florida
Music Education—Licensure K-12
Music Performance

Olivia Grace Ryan***
Ina, Illinois
Biology Education—Licensure 6-12

Chandler Aidan Spradlin***
Hoxie, Arkansas
Exercise Science

Lauren Heather Thomas***
Morristown, Tennessee
Child Development and Learning

Luke Everett Tyler***
Hendersonville, Tennessee
Youth and Family Ministry

Jackson Taylor Watts**
Pleasant View, Tennessee
Pastoral Ministry

Lauren Elizabeth Weese**
Greenville, North Carolina
Exercise Science

Rylan Gray Willaford**
Jacksonville, North Carolina
Business Administration

Mancer Camern Wilson
Columbia, South Carolina
Business Administration

Master of Arts Degrees

Kevin Thomas Banberger
Clayton, North Carolina
Theology and Ministry

Eric L. Brown
Cedar Hill, Tennessee
Theology and Ministry

Billy Johnathan Champion
Folkston, Georgia
Theology and Ministry

Ryan Daniel Curtis
Paragould, Arkansas
Theology and Ministry

Michael Adam Holloway
Pikeville, Tennessee
Theology and Ministry

Anna Grace Kozyutynski
Nashville, Tennessee
Theology and Ministry

Derreck Andrew Lute
Wheelersburg, Ohio
Theology and Ministry

Jacob Tyler Lute
Gallatin, Tennessee
Theology and Ministry

Michael Houston Pugh
New Bern, North Carolina
Theology and Ministry

Theron Barton Scott
Turbeville, South Carolina
Theology and Ministry

Mark Edward Webster
Gallatin, Tennessee
Theology and Ministry

Master of Arts in Teaching Degrees

Abby Grace Bragg
Senoia, Georgia
Special Education

Jennifer Lavonne Connor
Portland, Tennessee
Instructional Leadership

Rachel Elizabeth Goode
Champaign, Illinois
Teaching

Amy Rene Lytle
Nashville, Tennessee
Instructional Leadership

Master of Divinity Degrees

Joshua Allen Hunter
Pleasant View, Tennessee

Dustin Michael Walters
Hamilton, Alabama

*** *Summa Cum Laude* - 3.75

** *Magna Cum Laude* - 3.50

* *Cum Laude* - 3.25

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The Adventures of Mary Rowlandson

BY PAUL V. HARRISON

**"It is good for me that I have been afflicted"
(Psalm 119:71).**

February 10, 1675, at about sunrise, Narragansett Indians attacked Lancaster, Massachusetts, a town of about 50 families. They destroyed the settlement, burning houses, killing residents, and taking captives, among them the pastor's wife, Mary Rowlandson. She wrote: "It was the dolefullest day that ever mine eyes saw."

After a two-hour siege, "some in our house were fighting for their lives, others wallowing in their blood, the house

on fire over our heads, and the bloody heathen ready to knock us on the head if we stirred out." But the fire forced them to stir. "No sooner were we out of the house, but my brother-in-law (being before wounded...in or near the throat) fell down dead."

Bullets were flying, and one pierced Mary's hand and the stomach of her six-year-old whom she carried. Surrounded by bloodshed, Mary's sister Elizabeth said:

"Lord, let me die with them." This was no sooner said than she "was struck with a bullet and fell down dead."

The natives grabbed Mary and her child, both bleeding, and hauled them off. Riding a horse with no saddle down a steep hill with her child in her arms, she, along with her little one, "fell over the horse's head," at which "they like inhuman creatures laughed and rejoiced." This little one called out: "I shall die, I shall die." The child prophesied

correctly. "About two hours in the night my sweet babe like a lamb departed this life on February 18, 1675, it being about six years and five months old." That night she lay with her dead little one in her arms.

Hardship abounded. While Mary's diet consisted of bear, horse (including the liver and feet), a pancake of parched wheat fried in bear's grease, and groundnuts, perhaps the greatest burden Mary carried was uncertainty regarding her children. She had lost one child. Would she lose others? "My son was ill. ...And my poor girl, I knew not where she was nor whether she was sick or well, or alive or dead." She asked one of her captors about her children. He said his master had "roasted" the boy and that he "himself did eat a piece of him as big as his two fingers and that he was very good meat." She later learned this was a cruel lie.

After 11 weeks and five days, several Bostonians redeemed Mary from the Indians for 20 pounds. Her son Joseph was also ransomed. Her daughter escaped, trudging three days through the woods, living off water and green hirtleberries. Soon both children were reunited with their parents.

Captivity changed Mary forever. She wrote, "I have seen the extreme vanity of this world. One hour I have been in health and wealth, wanting nothing, but the next hour in sickness and wounds and death. ...Yet I see when God calls a person to anything and through never so many difficulties, yet He is fully able to carry them through and make them see and say they have been gainers thereby. And I hope I can say in some measure, as David did, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted.'" **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.

Image: Wiki Commons



"Mrs. Rowlandson Captured by the Indians"
Illustrator unknown; published in 1901

Unexpected Arrival

BY BARRY RAPER

1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-11

If you knew company would arrive at your house today, it would probably change your plans. At our house, the arrival of company means straightening up around the house, buying extra groceries, and making sure the guest room is ready. When you know company is coming and the approximate time they will arrive, you can plan your preparation for the visit. But we have all had visitors show up unexpectedly, and that's a different story. We simply have a different feeling when you open the door to an unexpected guest.

The Bible reminds us that one day, an unexpected arrival will catch much of the world completely off guard. The aim of the Bible as a whole, and of 1 Thessalonians 5, is to prepare us for the return of Jesus. *The day of the Lord* is used throughout the Bible to refer to the final day when Christ brings salvation to His own people and judgment to those who have rejected Him. This phrase *day of the Lord* was also used throughout the Old Testament. After the coming of Jesus, His sacrificial death on the cross, and His resurrection from the grave with His ascension into heaven, the New Testament authors used the phrase as shorthand for His return.

Being ready for His return is the theme of 1 Thessalonians 5, which shares three important reminders.

1. Jesus will return suddenly (verses 1-3). Teaching on the return of Jesus is found throughout the New Testament as the next unfolding event in salvation history (2 Peter 3:10; Hebrews 9:27-28; Revelation 22:12-13). How should the uncertain timing of His return impact us personally? Change the way we live?

First, the passage is aimed at believers, but for those who are not followers of Jesus, know the day of the Lord will come unexpectedly. The time to prepare for His return is *now*. The descriptions of judgment and wrath for the ungodly in that day are unmistakable. In verse 3 of this chapter, Paul used the phrases "sudden destruction" and "they will not escape."

Recently, escape games and escape rooms have gained in popularity. Participants are placed in a room with clues about how to escape within an allotted time. But it is just a game with no real pressure because someone will let you out eventually. What we are considering here is no game, and there is no other door, no escape. When this day comes, the unrepentant will discover it is too late to repent. As Scripture reminds us, *today* is the day of salvation. Now is the appointed time.

2. Stay awake spiritually (verses 4-8). Verse 4 describes Christians as children of light, or of the day, not children of darkness. This is our identity as Christians. Obviously, Paul was using light and darkness as metaphors. This is true of various passages in the Bible. For instance, 1 John 1 proclaims God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all. Then John urged Christians to walk in the light as He is in the light. This is who we are as Christians. And then he urged believers not to "sleep" and to be sober.

Obviously, he wasn't describing sleep in a physical sense because we all need sleep, and the reference to sobriety here is more about your entire life. Let's stay awake spiritually and keep our heads about us. We must not "fall asleep at the wheel," so to speak, and must keep our wits about us—unimpaired in our spiritual life.

It is comical to watch people fight sleep in church. When I first started preaching, it bothered me more than it does now. Today, I understand that age, work, events at home, fatigue, and more result in a person getting drowsy at church—perhaps the first quiet break they have had in a week. From a physical standpoint, it really is not a big deal if you fall asleep at church. The danger is when we are lulled to sleep spiritually speaking.

Are you kicked back in a comfortable recliner, listening to the lies of the devil, and slowly growing numb until you are not awake and sober? Paul warns us to live awake and alert, and he repeats this same warning in various other places in his epistles.



*One day,
an unexpected
arrival will catch
much of the world
completely off guard.*

As a boy, my mother and father had very different approaches to waking me up. Mother was soft and tender: “Barry, it is time to get up.” Dad was anything but soft and tender. He did anything from yanking me out of bed to shouting, “Bear, it is time to get up!”

God, in His infinite grace and wisdom, sometimes uses people to whisper and at other times uses people to shout this important command—wake up!

I take this as a reference to the previous section in chapter 4 where Paul discussed believers who die in the Lord. Here, he emphasized the need to be awake and alert. The point? Whether we are alive or have “fallen asleep” (died) in Christ, the purpose of the atonement was so we might live together with Him. This is why Paul could state boldly in Philippians 1:21: “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

3. Build each other up continually (verse 11). The simple admonition at the end of this passage is clear: considering Paul’s warning, we should encourage and edify one another. Every Christian needs a church and other Christians to help us stay awake and spiritually sober. We need a community of brothers and sisters who encourage one another to walk with God, to build each other up in the faith.

No matter what our culture tells us, we need the church more today than ever. And by *church*, I don’t mean buildings. Our beautiful church buildings are fine, and we ought to be thankful for them, but our buildings are only where we meet. The real building is within the people. You and I were not meant to live in isolation but in interdependence. Being connected in a local church helps us live out our identity. It helps us stay on track; it helps us stay awake.

Don’t get caught up in speculation regarding the exact time and date of Christ’s return, because Jesus said no one knows the day or the hour. Instead, focus on the fact of His sudden return. Stay spiritually awake and sober. Keep your head in a world that has lost its mind. Take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. Put on the whole armor of God to wrestle effectively against principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places.

Stay connected—vitaly connected—to a local body of believers and forge relationships that encourage, build up, and hold one another accountable.

He’s coming back. Will you be ready? **ONE**

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



BY BRENDA EVANS

Gray tombstones rose through the eight-inch snow like stone chimneys. Male relatives carried my father's casket, then lowered it into a seven-foot gash in the clay at the head of my grandparents' graves. My bones shivered.

In the grays and whites of sky and earth, I heard words. Prayers, really, and songs about grace and hope. Then, damp red clay the color of dried blood was first sprinkled then shoveled into the gash, filling the earth's wound where my father's body lay. I thought of the word *everlastingness* and wondered whether it was even a word.

I recalled my father two months earlier, covered in white, lying in a hospital bed in his and Mother's bedroom. A fetal position, body curled forward, head bowed, limbs drawn up close. In pain and frailty, Daddy slowly withdrew from this life. To change the sheets, I maneuvered him into a sitting position with feet brushing the floor, grasped him under his arms, and pivoted him into a safe chair. I died a little with my proud, diminished father in my arms. He was thin and insubstantial. He didn't speak—or couldn't. He was preparing.

Daddy found his image in Mother's dresser mirror opposite the chair. He flinched as if to say, "Who is that man?" I cursed the mirror for showing him and myself for seating him there. Quickly, I finished the sheets and clutched him close. Covered his face, his eyes, his body, hiding him from himself in the mirror—holding, caressing. Daddy was never a hugger, but he gave no resistance. I maneu-

vered him back into his fetal position, smoothed his hair, his gown, his fresh white sheets.

I remembered more. Daddy—the man who sat with my sister and me at the piano when I was ten. We sang songs of the church. Grace offered her beautiful alto. I played and sang soprano. Daddy brought in tenor, motioned rhythm, and tapped his toes. He could have square danced as he did when he was young if he had been so minded.

My father was a man quick to laugh. He wielded hammers to build houses, a man who talked half the night with a drunk friend to keep him from driving. He tended livestock, waded into baptismal rivers as a deacon, testified for an accused but innocent neighbor charged with murder, triumphed over sister Grace and me in Chinese Checkers, spoke good and not evil of others. He carried me in his arms against his scratchy serge suit long after I was old enough to walk and later pulled me along with him wherever he went—except when he slit hogs' throats or attended birthing cows. The man who loved me even though he never once said the words.

At the cemetery, I mumbled aloud, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. Daddy is in everlastingness."

I said it because I knew Daddy's soul was not lost, annihilated, or dead, but alive somewhere with the Lord. I said it because I grieved, but not as others who had no hope. I said it because I had no earthly remedy for Daddy's death.



Something was ruined, broken, flung irreversibly like glassy splinters shimmering all around me that I could not collect and put together again. Daddy was gone from me but everlastingly with the Lord.

I felt the weight of that cold, red dirt on my soul. Men and women arranged frozen flowers over the covered gash to disguise it. Standing there in the snow before the soil and the flowers, I wept. For myself, for Mother and Grace, for our mates and our children, and for my father who I enjoyed

for so many years but lost. My good father.

Then another statement flickered through my mind like refracted light. A poet's words: "This world is not conclusion; a sequel stands beyond." Daddy believed it, believed Jesus, believed the sequel that stands beyond and is gained by a crucifixion and resurrection. The sequel that meant a future, a hereafter, a later-on, a life after death, a world to come with the Lord.

In that moment, I understood that sequel as never before. The sequel Daddy believed in, banked on—would have placed all bets on, had he been a betting man. I finally understood the blessed consolation and the home beyond the river he often sang about. In my mind, I saw his right hand motion a rhythm once again on our piano bench, as he did at Rock Springs Church every Sunday where he led the singing. I heard his clear tenor voice:

*I've a home beyond the river,
I've a mansion bright and fair.
I've a home beyond the river,
And I'll dwell with Jesus there.*

Often, I mourn again as I did in the icy cemetery that February day 43 years ago, when frozen flowers were laid with love over the bare red soil of his grave. I mourn for myself and my family, but not for Daddy, because I believe that sequel as well. Daddy dwells with Jesus there.

This week, I thought of another song Daddy often sang. One line is: "I'll have a new body. Praise the Lord! I'll have a new life." So, I did a brief study on the biblical perspective of the resurrection. It gave me fresh hope for the sequel Daddy is living, and that I anticipate after my own death.

As far as I can tell, Old Testament saints had no finely-developed doctrine of the resurrection. Yet many spoke, though often with a slant, of their belief in it. According to Hebrews 11:17-19, Abraham believed God would raise Isaac, whom he was ready to sacrifice (Genesis 22). Job shared a short parable about a tree's dead stump that "through the scent of water" would bud and put out branches again. Then he asked, "If a man die, shall he live again?" (Job 14:7-14) Job's thought seems equivocal there. Maybe like a tree's "dead stump," a man will sprout new life after death, or maybe he will not. Commentators are divided on whether Job was describing a resurrection or just a dead stump. But later, in 19:23-27, Job seemed quite certain his Redeemer lived, and he would see Him one day. I believe it, too.


We must not overlook Ezekiel 37 and the valley of dry bones that, of course, refer to "resurrection" or restoration of Israel but seem also to look toward our own resurrection as well. David and Hosea spoke indirectly of resurrection, and Elijah and Elisha both served as God's instruments for raising the dead. Daniel was explicit: "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2). Daniel believed this life is not the conclusion; a sequel stands beyond.

When I study Acts, I am always struck by the emphasis on the resurrection. Both Peter and Paul preached repeatedly about Jesus' resurrection—and very often about ours as well. Peter and John annoyed the priests, the captain of the temple, and especially the Sadducees, because they "taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (Acts 4:1-2). In Acts, Paul "confessed" there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust (Acts 24:14-15), as John did many years later in Revelation 20.

Paul described our resurrection transformation with incomparable force and beauty in 1 Corinthians 15. We will be changed, he said, becoming imperishable, immortal, and glorious when God gives us a body He has chosen (1 Corinthians 15:38). Surmounting them all, Jesus said, "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (John 11:25).

Like Daddy, I *know* a sequel stands beyond! **ONE**

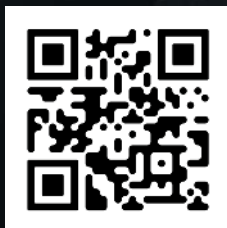
About the Author: Brenda Evans lives and writes in Ashland, Kentucky. You may contact her at beejayevans@windstream.net.




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Bond...Government Bond

BY DAVID BROWN, CPA

Do government bonds fluctuate in value? Most people have a lot of faith in U.S. government bonds, and rightly so, because they are guaranteed to pay you the stated interest rate. When the bond matures, you get 100% of what you invested back. For instance, if you invested \$100,000 in a newly issued ten-year government bond, it will currently pay you 3.5% or \$3,500 for ten years, and when the ten years have passed, it will pay you back the \$100,000 you invested. So, it's a risk-free investment, right? Well, only if you hold it to maturity.

During the pandemic, almost every American received stimulus checks. These checks were a lifeline for those unemployed due to the government-mandated shutdown that caused many businesses to close temporarily or permanently. However, many Americans did not need the stimulus checks, and they simply put them in their banks. These banks are required either to loan the money to businesses and individuals, or (if they do not have a lot of loan demand) they must invest in government bonds.

This is precisely what happened in 2020 and 2021. When the economy shut down, it took time to get it running again. Because banks had little demand for loans, they bought a great number of government bonds. The Federal Reserve stepped in to stimulate the economy and basically cut the federal funds rate to zero. This meant all government bond rates went down as well. The ten-year bond rate was around 1.8% at the beginning of 2020, but by May when the stimulus checks arrived, the ten-year rate had dropped to 0.7%.

So, banks bought ten-year government bonds paying 0.7% in May of 2020. Fast forward to May 2023 when, to combat inflation, the federal funds rate was reset to between 5-5.25%, and ten-year bonds are now paying 3.5%. Government bonds still pay the stated rate for the stated maturity, and you get your \$100,000 back. But, what if you need to sell it before it comes to maturity? If you have a ten-year bond purchased in May 2020 with a rate of 0.7%, but you need to sell it in June 2023, this could be a problem.



When someone can buy a new ten-year bond with a stated rate of 3.5%, do you think anyone will pay you \$100,000 for your bond? Nobody will pay \$100,000 for a bond with seven years until maturity when they can buy a ten-year bond that will pay 3.5%. Bonds fluctuate in value to reflect the going rate of return. So, if you want to sell that 0.7% bond, they will offer you around \$83,000, making the rate on the bond like a newly-issued bond.

This is precisely what caused the banking crisis earlier this year. People and businesses withdrew their money, and banks had to sell bonds at a loss to have enough cash to pay depositors.

So, yes, even U.S. government bonds fluctuate in value during a dramatic rise or fall in interest rates. **ONE**

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



Does Your *Love of Money* Make You a *Bad Decision-Maker*?

BY JOHN BRUMMITT

Did you know we typically make bad decisions during high emotional responses? Research reveals once our emotional response is triggered, we make quick decisions rooted in emotion rather than thoughtful and measured choices. An emotional response, linked to feelings rather than facts, sometimes leads us to react in the exact opposite way we should!

We all (whether aware of it or not) have—on some level—a love of money, but 1 Timothy 6:10 warns this love of money is “the root of all evil.” The love of money (including the pursuit and protection of it, and the fear of losing it) works against the way research leads us to make decisions. If we heed Paul’s warning, we will strive to make better decisions regarding our investments and savings.

As recently as 2022, we began to see the effects of poor financial decision-making. Everyone hates to see a downturn in financial portfolios. Even for those years away from using funds, a 20% sell-off in your portfolio gives you real pain. The real damage is done, however, if a downturn leads us to change our investments or pull them out of the market. In trying to protect our money, we allow emotions to control our decisions. We run rather than stay the course, even though decades of financial statistics tell us staying in the market is the correct course of action.



Emotions negate what is probable and put the focus on what is possible. This is the reason so many people play the lottery. Whether the odds of winning are one in 10,000 (0.01%) or one in 7 million (0.0000143%), that doesn't impact their decision to play or lessen their belief they have a chance of winning, especially when the payout is enormous. Their decision to play is based on desire, not data; emotion, not facts; possible, not probable.

While 1 Timothy 6:10 doesn't necessarily refer to how we approach investments and savings, it is always fascinating to see the truth of God play out in different arenas. Allowing our love for money to control our decisions creates issues. We put money before God, focusing more on the possible than the probable. Removing emotions from money allows us to make financial decisions wisely as we remove both the fear of loss and the thrill of winning from the equation.

In and of itself, money is not evil. However, our love of it certainly leads to evil: greed, idolatry, and lust. Even mild "affection" for money can lead us into unwise decisions not rooted in truth and with detrimental results. How do

we keep from loving money? The answer is not simple, because money affects every aspect of daily life. Our careers and jobs produce wages for living. We work for decades to provide for our families. We save and invest to live through retirement years. Money is necessary for the basic needs of living. When something carries such intrinsic importance, it becomes difficult not to desire it, chase it, and yes...love it.

How do we keep from loving money? Honestly, I don't know. But acknowledging our love for money, however slight, helps us more easily recognize the pitfalls of emotional financial decisions. Perhaps understanding this human inclination to love money will, at least, slow down our decision-making and lead us toward more informed, logical decisions based on what is probable rather than possible. **ONE**

About the Author: John Brummitt became director of the Board of Retirement in January 2016. He graduated in 2011 with an MBA from Tennessee Tech University. A 2004 graduate of Welch College, he has been with the Board of Retirement since spring 2006: www.BoardofRetirement.com.

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“It” Matters to the “Thing”

BY RON HUNTER JR., PH.D.

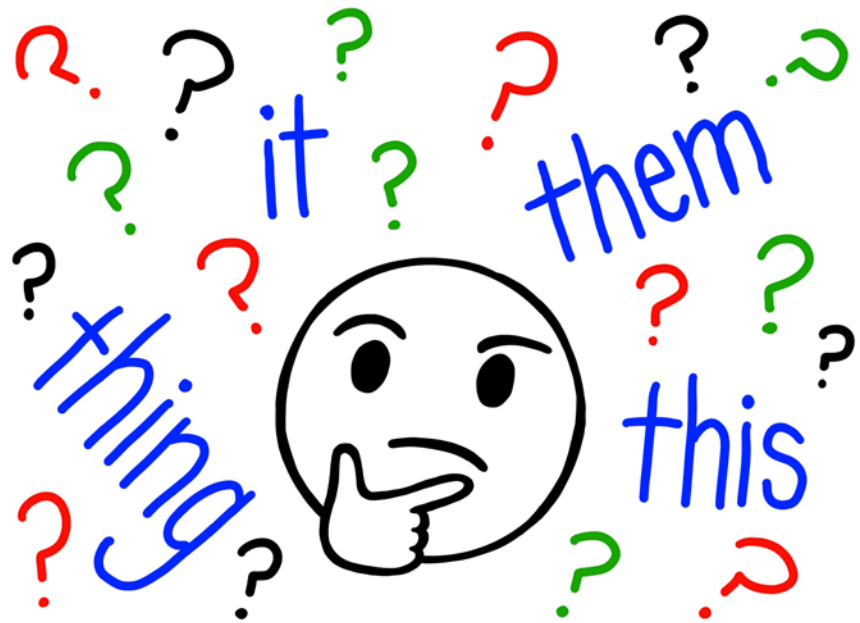
My title probably lost half the readers, and those who chose to dive in did so out of curiosity. Leaders owe listeners and followers clear and understandable communication. When our kids were growing up, my wife and I told them curse words were used by people too lazy to find the correct adjective or adverb.

For example, I hate that *blankety-blank* car could be better communicated by changing the curse word(s) to: slow, broken-down, tempermental, or unreliable. All communicate a much clearer reason for the individual’s hatred of the car. Leaders use their own lazy vocabulary in the form of generic words.

Using generic words like *it*, *them*, *this*, and *thing* do not clearly communicate to what you are really referring. At best, listeners will misapply *it* to the wrong *thing*, and at worst, they will simply get lost. Confusion and misunderstandings can lead to serious consequences and frustrations. Many followers will not feel comfortable enough to ask for clarity. Instead, they will assume an intended direction only to discover your generic words misled them, resulting in loss of morale.

For example, if you said, “Last Sunday, we had great worship, fellowship, and food for visitors. Our guests found *this* interesting,” what does *this* refer to? Worship, fellowship, food, or maybe all of it? Even without multiple options, generic words confuse the listener. Instead of saying, “I don’t like *it*,” perhaps say, “I don’t like this book” (and include the specific title when appropriate). Instead of saying, “They should smile more,” perhaps say, “The greeters at the main entrance should smile more.”

To avoid confusion and misunderstanding, it is crucial to use specific and concrete language that ensures



the intended message is conveyed accurately. Ask a colleague to “call you out” each time you use a generic or unclear word. Parents sometimes establish a bad word jar (requiring money each time their child or children say a bad word). Maybe you need a generic word jar.

The more your attention is drawn to vague language, the more you will tamp down the poor habit of lazy speech. Your mind will begin to reach for more precise word choices. Sharpening your communication will enhance the listener’s comprehension, resulting in clearer communication, fewer misunderstandings, and better outcomes in every aspect of life. **ONE**

About the Columnist: Ron Hunter Jr. has a Ph.D. in leadership and is CEO of Randall House & D6 Family Ministries. You may contact him at ron.hunter@randallhouse.com.



BIBLE VERSES

Proverbs 25:11
Psalm 19:14
Psalm 141:3
Proverbs 21:3
Colossians 4:6

LEADERSHIP QUOTE


“Although there is no substitute for merit in writing, clarity comes closest to being one.”
—E. B. White

Randall House & D6 Family Publications Receive National Awards

Lancaster, Pennsylvania—At the April 2023 meeting of the Evangelical Press Association, in a field of nationally-known publications, D6 devotional magazines earned top awards in the devotional category with *Fusion Next* receiving the Award of Excellence. *Fusion Family*, *The Brink*, and *Forward* were recognized with Awards of Merit.

In the youth category, *Velocity* and *Adventure Guide* received Awards of Merit.

In the Higher Goals competition, *The Brink* won second place in the General Article Medium category with the article “Living *the* Truth vs. Living *My* Truth” by Alisa Childers. *Forward* magazine earned fourth place in the Humorous category with “I Hate My Forehead” by Jon Forrest.

These awards illustrate how D6 Family Ministries products are recognized for excellence in both writing and design among the broader publishing world. 



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From COAL COUNTRY to COLQUITT

BY ERIC K. THOMSEN

“We call these ‘cathead’ biscuits. Not sure how they got their name.”

A broad smile spreads across William Smith’s face as he deftly flips the flaky biscuits from the black-iron skillet onto a waiting plate. My mouth waters as the sweet, buttery aroma blends with the smell of the sausage gravy simmering on the stove.

William sighs deeply. “Mmmmm. Smell that? Doesn’t get much better!”

You don’t have to spend much time with William and his wife Terra in their gracious southern home near Colquitt, Georgia, to discover he is passionate about cooking...and eating. Tossing a kitchen towel over his shoulder, he turns back to the stove and begins frying eggs—yard eggs, mind you. Not those store-bought ones with anemic yolks and no flavor. These are straight from the coop.

In that moment, I feel as though I have been transported into the pages of *Southern Living* magazine. I lean back in

my chair, savor the aromas, sip strong coffee, and listen to William’s endless stories about the place and people he has come to love.

Coal Country

These days, you would never guess William is not a native South Georgian. But, he was born into a West Virginia coal mining family. His dad operated a coal preparation plant, where coal was washed for refinement. A WWII veteran, William’s dad was featured in Ernie Pyle’s *Here Is Your War*. Pyle described how, after recovering from a gunshot wound suffered in Sicily, William’s dad served with the force that freed Jewish prisoners from concentration camps.

Though William’s mother was a faithful Christian, William’s dad did not come to know Christ until later in life. Over the years, a bi-vocational preacher named



Billy Smith (brother of Free Will Baptist missionary Alice Smith) set a good Christian example for William's dad as the foreman at the coal plant. William thanks the Lord for Billy's example: "He didn't cuss or swap dirty stories. It wasn't Billy's preaching that was the reason my daddy got saved. It was what happened at the plant!"

William fondly recalls childhood days in his West Virginia home. Bass fishing with his dad in the summers. The smell of sassafras trees and the strong tea it produced. Making apple butter in the fall with Grandpa Johnson—outside, in a cast iron black cauldron, throwing copper pennies in the bottom and stirring the mixture with a wooden paddle over an open fire.

"I remember the crisp air, picking the apples, the smell of the sauce and butter simmering in that cauldron," William recalls. "My grandmother always made one batch with red hots rather than cinnamon, just for us grand-boys. That batch was bright red, not the usual brown, and it had a special place in her cupboard. Only us boys were allowed to eat it."

William points to these good early years and the part they played in the man he is today. "I didn't hear my dad say 'I love you' often, but I knew. It wasn't what we had; we were dirt poor. It was in his actions: taking me fishing, spending time with me, providing for me, and simply being there."

"I had a home where my parents loved me, my mother prayed for me, and my daddy had a strong work ethic. In fact, all the men in my life growing up had a strong work ethic. We don't realize how important our actions are when it comes to impressing our example and our faith on our children."

Every night, William's dad read aloud to his children. "And before I could even talk, I also heard my grandpa read

entire Louis L'Amour books," he recalls before adding: "Of course, I really didn't care who wrote the books. I just cared about who read them to me."

At age six, William began playing baseball. Baseball ran deep in his blood. His great uncle, Billy Southworth, now enshrined in the MLB Hall of Fame, was both a Major Leaguer and later the manager of the St. Louis Cardinals. Billy won three World Series, the first in 1926 as a player against Babe Ruth's Yankees, and then as the manager of the Cardinals in 1942 and 1944. Following the family passion, William's pursuit of baseball consumed his youth and high school years. He became a star player, with aspirations of a college and professional career. Then, God threw William a curve.

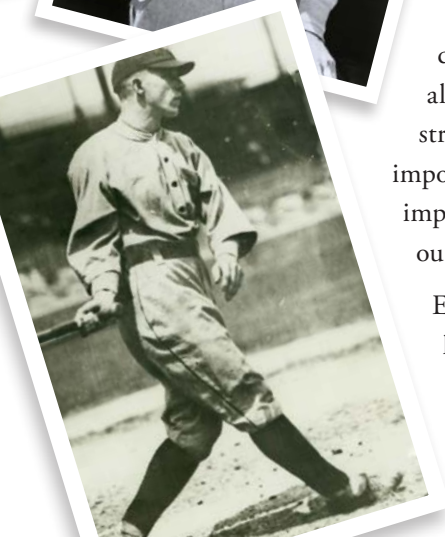
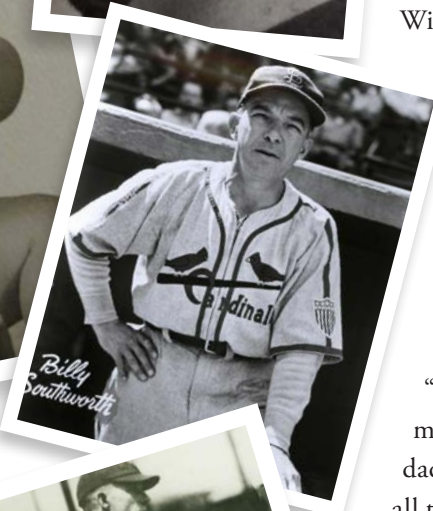
The Free Will Baptist church in his hometown needed someone to play a minor part in the Christmas play, so they offered William the role. It was their way of pulling the young ballplayer into church. William recalls, "I didn't go to the church because of the Christmas program; I went because of Paula Roberts. I wanted to meet Paula, but I met the Lord!"

Even more ironic, William played the part of a preacher in the program, and nearly every line he delivered was about the Lord. William stuck around after the play was over and soon began attending church regularly. November 2, 1972, during a revival service, William accepted the Lord at age 16. He was baptized a month later in December, in an unheated church baptistry.

Even before he was saved, William felt God calling him to preach. He admits putting off the decision to accept Christ because he knew, deep down, God wanted him in the ministry. A shy, introverted child, the idea of speaking in public terrified William, and he fought the Lord.

After being saved, he answered the call to preach only two months later, was licensed in April 1973, and was ordained a year later, April 21, 1974. Answering the call to preach only seems right. Turns out, every American generation of William's family on his mother's side had at least one preacher, and his dad's oldest brother was a preacher as well.

After high school graduation, William worked two years for the coal mining company and kept preaching on weekends. West Virginia pastor Burt Hall invited William to





preach at the Loudondale Church in West Virginia. Terra Mooney was a member of the youth choir at Loudondale, and it was love at first sight...for William. Not as much for Terra. Her dad liked William more than she did. She had no desire to marry a preacher. “He slowly grew on me,” Terra recalls with a laugh, “and I finally came around.”

The romance soon took the young couple to the altar. As a foodie, William jokes his fondest memory of their wedding day was “the cake!” But then he grows serious and recalls his first glimpse of Terra at the back of the church, wearing her sisters’ wedding dress. She was the third sister to be married in the dress. “Buddy, she shore was something!” William says, with his typical Georgian drawl.

Colquitt

Though a West Virginia politician offered William an appointment to the U.S. Naval Academy, where he could also study theology at nearby Georgetown University, William chose instead to attend Salem Bible College, a small Free Will Baptist school in Florida.

After graduating, William accepted an interim pastorate at Belleview Church, just across the state line in Colquitt, Georgia. When Belleview hired a preacher and William’s interim pastorate ended, Mother’s Home Church (also in Colquitt) offered William its pulpit. This was the beginning of a fruitful pastoral ministry that took William to Quincy, Florida; Charleston, West Virginia; Sophia, West Virginia (where he also served as principal of a Christian school); then back to Blakely, in southwestern Georgia, to the region where William and Terra established their permanent home.

William took an active leadership role among Georgia Free Will Baptists, serving as state camp director, state camp cook, Board of Trustees member, member of the Executive Board, and finally, in 1997, executive secretary-treasurer. For the next quarter century, William guided Georgia Free Will Baptists. He encouraged pastors; promoted state and denominational efforts; planned and hosted state meetings, retreats, and other events; established a state office in Colquitt; and led Georgia to a sound financial position.

Convention

William was the Georgia representative to the General Board of the National Association of Free Will Baptists when then-moderator Carl Cheshier stepped aside in 2002 (though Cheshier stayed another year at the request of recently-elected Executive Secretary Keith Burden). After Tim York was nominated as the next moderator, William was flabbergasted when Nathan Ruble and Jack Richey approached him about his interest in serving as assistant moderator. William shakes his head as he recalls, “I asked them if they had lost their ever-lovin’ minds!” But when they pushed William for an answer, he agreed to accept the nomination, was elected the following year, and served until the 2023 National Convention in Raleigh.

“Those men believed in me, even when I didn’t believe in myself,” William acknowledges. “Jack Williams also was a great supporter and encourager. I am so grateful to him, along with Melvin Worthington, Oakie Tolliver, and Malcolm Freeman. They all made such an impact on my life.”

William explains the assistant moderator plays a crucial, though largely behind-the-scenes, role. In addition to “assisting’ the moderator, whatever that means,” he keeps up with discussion time from the business floor and tracks who has spoken from the floor, since delegates cannot speak more than twice. The assistant moderator is the parliamentarian, making sure business stays within *Robert’s Rules of Order* (though the rules can flex according to the will of the body). William also kept his own detailed notes of all business conducted, apart from those recorded by the clerk and assistant clerk. “It just gave us one more record of the proceedings, just in case something fell through the cracks.”

William laughs when he recalls how unprepared he was for his first convention. “I thought I was ready! I talked with attorneys, took courses on *Robert’s Rules*, and did



everything I could be prepared. I quickly realized I still faced a steep learning curve. The only way to learn a position like that is to serve in the position.”

Over his 20 years of service, William

had opportunity to learn the position well. He enjoyed serving with Executive Secretary Keith Burden, whom he describes as “a strong leader with even stronger morals, values, and integrity.” He also appreciated the approach taken by his fellow moderator. “Tim York has been generous with the body, letting everyone have their say and weigh in on important decisions.”

It could be argued that William, as assistant moderator, had “the best seat in the house” to every aspect of convention business. He recalls several memorable moments. “The year I started, auditor Terry Hill stood up and announced, ‘We are insolvent.’ I thought to myself, ‘What in the world have I gotten myself into?’ Thankfully, we had a leader [Keith Burden] and a board willing to step up to the plate and do what was right and necessary to bring the Executive Office and denomination back into financial health.”

He points to *ONE Magazine* as the most important decision made during his time in office, “without a doubt! Every faction within our denomination went to the microphone to tell us what a great idea the magazine was. And it continues to prove it was a good decision.”

William also recalls the lengthy debate in Charleston, West Virginia, over the funding structure of international missions. “I was so proud of the way our delegates handled that business. Speaker after speaker after speaker came to the mic to address the issue. Each one was passionate, but things didn’t get out of control. We reached a consensus without losing our senses.”

He remembers hearing Rick Locklear speak when he knew he was dying—the power of his words as he spoke. William fondly recalls “going home” to the convention in Charleston, West Virginia, and having the opportunity to preach.

“There are so many good moments to remember,” he concludes. “But I still say we do too much at the convention. We need more time for fellowship, to sit down together over a cup of coffee or a meal to get to know one another, encourage one another, and talk about the challenges and blessings of ministry. Yes, there is strength in diversity, but we also need to learn how much alike we are as a denomination—how much we agree on.”

As William steps down from his time as assistant moderator, he offers two succinct pieces of advice to whoever follows him and other rising Free Will Baptist leaders. “First, you are there to serve. In God’s pyramid, the higher you rise in leadership, the more you serve. (And never forget we serve at the will of the body.) Second, leave your own agenda at home. That’s not your job.”

On to the Next Big Adventure

William is turning the corner on this phase of life. He announced his resignation as Georgia executive secretary earlier this year and just wrapped up his time as convention moderator. But he also wants to be clear. God is not done with him yet. In fact, his next big adventure has begun already. Last year, William returned to the pastorate at Cedar Springs FWB Church in Blakely, Georgia, where he pastored decades ago. He quips: “I planned to go pastor a little, country church, but it has grown, and it is not so little anymore.”

Nor is William done with state and denominational work. He has already accepted a nomination to a denominational board, and he wants to continue to promote and grow the endowments the state of Georgia has set up. “More than anything else,” he concludes, “I want to spend my time encouraging young, struggling, and hurting preachers.”

What one thing would William say to every Free Will Baptist? “Thank you! I have been so blessed by Free Will Baptists. My wife. My living. My friends. Everything I have, both spiritually and materially, I owe this denomination. And I am so grateful.” **ONE**

About the Author: Eric K. Thomsen is managing editor of *ONE Magazine*. He and his family affectionately refer to William Smith as “Uncle Big Daddy,” as William introduced himself when his daughter was in elementary school. Contact eric@nafwb.org.



87TH NAFWB CONVENTION • JULY 16-19, 2023 • RALEIGH, NC

More than 5,000 Free Will Baptists (the highest attendance in a decade) gathered July 16-19 for the 87th National Convention in Raleigh, North Carolina. The meeting previously visited the “City of Oaks” only one other time, in 1965.

The 2024 convention considered the theme “As for You.” Sunday morning, after a Sunday School lesson from **Bruce Barnes** (VA), **Butch Taylor** (GA) challenged listeners to *continue in the Word* (2 Timothy 3:1-13). Sunday evening, **Gene Williams** (NC) underscored the importance of *encouraging one another in the Word* (1 Thessalonians 5:1-7). Monday, after a warm welcome to North Carolina from State Promotional Director **Reuben Cason**, **Faron Thebeau** (MO) urged listeners to *reach with the Word* (Acts 8:26-40). **Amos Dillard** (CA) spoke on Tuesday and explored *teaching and training others in the Word* (Titus). During the concluding Wednesday evening missions service, **Ken Cash** (NC, Bulgaria) challenged listeners to *give themselves as laborers* (Matthew 9:35-38; 10).

These sermons were more than convention messages, as Executive Secretary Eddie Moody emphasized to listeners during his opening remarks. “Often, we attend a conference, revival meeting, or service and walk away feeling good. But it is our hope this year’s convention will help us more effectively *reach* people with the gospel, *train* them in the Christian faith, and *give* ourselves wholly to the Lord. We need to return home better equipped to work together to turn an upside-down world right side up. How? By hearing the Word and doing the work!”

Along with excellent preaching, worship services were characterized by enthusiastic congregational singing, special music, and choir selections; and Scripture related to the convention theme and sermons. Every service was memorable. Shouts echoed above the singing, hands raised toward Heaven, and altars filled as Free Will Baptists responded to the Word of God read, sung, and preached.

ONE DAY EARLY

Eighty Free Will Baptist volunteers from across the country arrived a day early to join this year’s IMPACT Raleigh outreach event the day before the convention. Teams worked in three locations: Shady Grove FWB Church, Haven FWB Church, and With Love From Jesus Ministries. Impact Coordinator Ken Akers said, “IMPACT Raleigh was a great success! We washed cars, sorted food and clothing, served meals, and went door to door with outreach materials. Most importantly, we made many new contacts for the churches involved.”

HONORS AND EVENTS

Several individuals were honored in Raleigh for significant contributions to the denomination. The Executive Office honored outgoing Assistant Moderator **William Smith** (GA), who served the denomination faithfully from 2004-2023. The Historical Commission recognized **Robert E. Picirilli** (TN) for 50 years of faithful service and leadership as its longtime chairman, and Randall House honored **Allen Pointer** (TN) for 26 years as the director of Truth & Peace.

The convention also hosted a variety of special events. During the annual **Laughter and Latté**, ladies gathered to fellowship after the Monday night service. Ruth McDonald, Phyllis York, and the entire WNAC board entertained the group with a skit about Ruth's first board meeting.

Tuesday night featured **Fun With Forrest**. For years, the games, comedy, and prizes of Jon Forrest have entertained young convention-goers. This event was filled with those familiar signature activities, and it was a hit! Members of the audience participated in wacky games and won even wackier prizes such as superhero gadgets and condiment squirt guns. The audience roared with laughter as Forrest delivered perfectly timed jokes about Truth & Peace, the Vertical 3 Conference, and, yes, even church restrooms. Attendee Camden Lewis spoke for everyone: "This was the best entertainment we've had in years!"

CONVENTION BUSINESS

The **General Board** began its Monday, July 17, meeting with a brief message from Moderator Tim York (TN), who challenged listeners to live a life *of the Word* and a life *in the Word*. The board heard reports from eight national agencies and four commissions during a two-hour, 18-minute meeting. Members approved a variety of recommendations from the Executive Committee, including a 2024 denominational budget of \$31.6 million and recommendations for future conventions in Grand Rapids, Michigan (2027) and Little Rock, Arkansas (2028).

The board also approved the Executive Committee recommendation to adopt a revised resolution regarding the ordination of men referred to the Executive Committee during the 2022 convention. The resolution was later amended and accepted by delegates. (Read the full resolution at nafwb.org.) Delegates approved all other recommendations from the General Board without change, including updated nominating guidelines previously tabled.

During Tuesday and Wednesday business sessions, delegates heard and approved reports from the following departments and commissions:

Executive Office. Executive Secretary Eddie Moody emphasized the progress of the Executive Office in assisting and equipping pastors and churches to meet the denomination's 3 for 30 reach, train, and give goals. This progress stems from a variety of new resources and initiatives: matching available pastors and potential churches through the assistance of Moderator Tim York (TN); Refresh resources, including free pastoral counseling via Zoom; Know Your Community reports offered in cooperation with Church Answers; Rekindle revitalization and coaching; Growing Together; and a wide variety of printed and online materials.

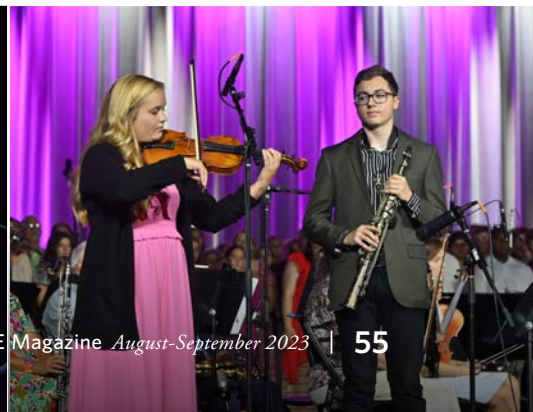
Moody introduced The Hope Initiative, a new church revitalization effort offered in conjunction with Church Answers using prayer and Scripture as its foundation. The Hope Initiative seeks to change the culture of a church three to five participants at a time over a 12-month period. Learn more: nafwb.org/hope.

Moody additionally urged churches to participate in Operation Restoration, where congregations and associations come together to help struggling churches within their association or region. Interested churches should visit nafwb.org/restoration. He urged churches to reach out to college and university students in local colleges, and encourage their own students to attend a Free Will Baptist college. If not, help students connect with a Free Will Baptist church in the city where they study.

In closing, Moody honored outgoing Assistant Moderator William Smith (GA) for 19 years of service (2004-2023) and Executive Committee member Chris Todd for serving on behalf of the South Carolina State Association.

D6 Family Ministry (Randall House). CEO Ron Hunter Jr. mourned the recent passing of Dr. Alton Loveless, former director, noting, "We lost a giant this week, and he will be missed. ...We need more leaders like Alton Loveless." (Read Hunter's full tribute to Loveless in the October-November issue of *ONE Magazine*.)

Hunter celebrated progress made in the development of an Arminian Study Bible before introducing a list of new book titles available from Randall House. He shared highlights of



the now-available EveryDay Foundations curriculum that provides small group and Sunday School Bible studies in two-month “blocks” rather than quarterlies. The curriculum is designed for all ages, with a particular emphasis on family interaction through shared biblical themes.

Hunter updated listeners on the D6 Conference. Internationally, the conference has expanded its reach into 19 countries (at the expense of only \$15,000 to the department). In the U.S., a new D6 Conference will begin in the Northwest region starting in 2024.

Hunter acknowledged the lingering impact of the pandemic on curriculum sales, with a \$568,000 loss in 2020, \$595,000 in 2021, and \$390,000 in 2022—a cumulative loss of more than \$1.5 million. Sales continue to remain 9% lower than pre-pandemic levels. To help off-set these financial challenges, Hunter asked churches to consider:

- Adopting locked-in pricing with EveryDay Foundations curriculum.
- Providing devotional guides to all students.
- Putting Randall House in the church budget.

Following Hunter’s report, delegates approved the department’s previously requested name change from Randall House to D6 Family Ministry. Later, during a brief report on Vertical 3, Hunter honored Allen Pointer (TN) for 26 successful years as director of Truth & Peace and announced Ryan Akers (MO) will follow Pointer in this role.

IM, Inc. Director Clint Morgan acknowledged the end of an era marked by the recent passing of pioneer Free Will Baptist missionaries Carlisle Hanna and Tom Willey, Jr. However, he celebrated the rise of a new generation of missionaries inspired by the faithfulness of these men and other pioneers: *generation to generation*.

Morgan celebrated 87 ETEAM participants in 2023, along with participants in CMP (College Ministry Program), and OA (Overseas Apprentice). These programs give students an opportunity to broaden their view and understanding of the world through time on the mission field. The trips are not “an experience,” Morgan noted, but “part of a process. Eventually, we want to see all these young people serving on one of our fields.”

IM now enjoys multi-generational missionary families, with children serving with IM. These second-generation missionaries understand the needs and challenges of their fields, because they grew up there. Morgan also expressed gratitude for the growing number of “national” missionaries now serving with IM.

To pass a clear vision of missions to the next generation, Morgan indicated the denomination must:

- Proclaim sound biblical doctrine, absolute truths, and foundational life principles without compromise.
- Wholeheartedly preserve the authenticity and rich heritage of the denomination.
- Willingly involve all generations in ministry opportunities of serving and leading.
- Faithfully labor with the Body of Christ to fulfill the Great Commission.

After introducing new staff members Catie Pointer and Sydney McClure, Morgan expressed excitement over many new strategic partnerships making it possible for IM to extend its reach into 34 countries. He celebrated progress toward strategic goals and objectives for 2025 aligned with the objectives of the 3 for 30 plan. These resulted in the following milestones in 2022:

Reaching with 112 missionaries; 1,788 professions of faith; 1,308 baptisms; and 48,936 Free Will Baptists worshipping each Sunday outside North America (equaling 30% of all Free Will Baptists).

Training through 14 organized training programs with 380 pursuing degrees, along with 1,765 national believers participating in informal training programs.

Giving totaled \$8.8 million, with 500 new donors and a \$50,000 increase in the WMO.

Morgan emphasized the \$1 million WMO goal in 2023 and reminded listeners of the August 27 offering date. “Although,” Morgan concluded, “Any offering day is a good day!”

Welch College. President Matt Pinson identified 2022 as one of the most financially challenging years in the history of Welch College as the school continues to recover from the significant impact of the pandemic. He thanked his staff for “doubling down” through these difficult days continuing to provide a high quality, distinctively Free Will Baptist educational experience.

Pinson pointed to significant improvements in academic excellence and expanded graduate programs. Climbing rankings among colleges and universities underscore these efforts. He celebrated a 24% increase in ministry enrollment over the last four years. And, after a significant increase in enrollment in fall 2022, the college anticipates an even larger jump in students in fall 2023.

To meet the continuing financial challenges, the college made deep budget cuts. Pinson encouraged Free Will Baptists to

2023 CONVENTION AT A GLANCE

REGISTRATION

National Convention - **4,826**
Vertical Three - **3,039**
Total (Unique) Attendees - **5,159***
**Note: Many attendees register for both conventions.*

SPEAKERS

Sunday School, July 16
Bruce Barnes (VA)

Sunday Morning, July 16
Butch Taylor (GA)

Sunday Evening, July 16
Gene Williams (NC)

Monday Evening, July 17
Faron Thebeau (MO)

Tuesday Evening, July 18
Amos Dillard (CA)

Wednesday Evening, July 19
Ken Cash (NC, Bulgaria)

2023 VERTICAL THREE CONFERENCE

Registration - **3,039**
Truth & Peace - **144 participants**
Competitive Entries: **792**
Competitors: **1,449**
Buck-A-Week Offering: **\$5,244***
** Initial count may be adjusted*

Contributors: Eric Thomsen,
Tori Matlock, Jaron Austin

Vertical Three: Derek Altom

Photographers: Rodney Yerby,
Sydney McClure, Michael E. Rogers,
Tori Matlock

Download Photos:
nafwb.yerbyphoto.com

ELECTED IN 2023

Board of Retirement - 2029

Travis Moots (NC)
William Smith (GA)
Joshua Chapman (MO)

Foundation - 2029

Jonathon Locklear (MI)
Melissa Haralson (AR)
Bob Thompson (OK)

2025

Matt Mouser (GA)

North American Ministries - 2029

Brian Williams (NY)
Josh Baer (NC)
David Sexton (VA)

Theological Commission - 2028

Matt Pinson (TN)

Historical Commission - 2028

David Crowe (TN)

Music Commission - 2026

Sam Harris (NC)

Media Commission - 2028

Stephen Lopes (TN)

Executive Committee - 2026

Stan Bunch (MO)
Wayne Hale (Mid-Atlantic)
Daniel Edwards (IN)

General Officers of the

Executive Committee - 2026

Randy Bryant (FL) - Clerk
Jackson Watts (MO) -
Assistant Moderator

**The following boards did not elect members in 2023: IM, Inc., Randall House, Welch College, and WNAC.*

Nominating Committee - 2023-24

*appointed by moderator

Terry Hinds (IN), Chairman
Jimmy Lawson (MI)
Mark Harrison (CA)
Melanie Franks (AL)
Ken Simpson (MO)
Mark Walker (GA)
John Collier (TX)

2023 Resolution Committee

Dick Terry (OK), Chairman
Stephen Hood (AZ)
Brent Patrick (VA)
Curtis Smith (IL)
Will Beauchamp (FL)

2024 BUDGETS

Executive Office - \$972,354
Foundation - \$2,334,012
IM, Inc. - \$9,100,000
NAM (includes Master's Men) - \$5,000,000
Randall House - \$5,330,850
Retirement - \$855,850
Welch College - \$7,755,234
WNAC - \$260,000
Theological Commission - \$6,800
Historical Commission - \$5,680
Media Commission - \$7,925
Music Commission - \$8,350
Total - \$31,637,055





send students and support the college financially to help the situation. “The long-term picture looks very good and very promising,” he told listeners. “It’s just the short-term cash picture that is daunting.” He made it clear the financial challenges are related in part to the growing number of ministerial scholarships provided to ministry students.

He thanked the denomination in closing, noting, “Thank you for giving sacrificially to keep this vital ministry strong for the future. Thank you for sending us students...and thank you for your continued prayers for this Christian community of faith and learning.”

WNAC. In her first report to the National Association, Director Ruth McDonald emphasized her department’s focus on helping Free Will Baptist women find and fulfill their role in the Great Commission. She explained a change in structure, as WNAC moved from a membership model to an inclusive organization for every Free Will Baptist woman. “We are trying to reach all women from 12 to 112!” McDonald noted, “And if you have someone older than 112, she is welcome, too!”

Ruth encouraged listeners to subscribe and listen to the new WNAC podcast, “As You Go,” which launched during the convention, and features pioneer missionary Lorene Miley in the first episode. *Shine!* Conferences continue to provide training for girls and young women, offsetting negative messages from our culture with sound, biblical teaching about worth and womanhood. Two 2024 *Shine!* events will be held, one in Oklahoma and one in Michigan.

McDonald thanked God for financial provision throughout the pandemic and the growth of The Giving Tree, a monthly plan of support. The resulting monthly giving offset the loss of membership dues. Women continue to be generous, giving \$433,000 to ministries through WNAC in 2022 (nearly twice the department’s budget).

The new director concluded by thanking national departments for coming alongside and supporting WNAC, noting, “I am convinced WNAC’s best days are ahead.”

Board of Retirement. Director John Brummitt celebrated one of the board’s best years of growth in 2022, despite the volatility of financial markets. The department had its second highest enrollments at 133, and the highest one-year financial increase, with nearly \$17 million in new funds. Brummitt indicated a renewed focus on new participants by reaching out to individuals, church schools, and daycares. The board also has begun consulting with churches to help them create a financial strategy.

In cooperation with the 3 for 30 plan, Brummitt introduced the following goals: 1) increase the average account balance of participants; 2) increase the percentage of participating denominational employees; and 3) expand financial opportunities for Free Will Baptist churches. To help meet these goals, the board will pay for Know Your Community research for any church that currently provides or begins to provide retirement benefits for employees.

Following his report, Brummitt initiated a name and charter change (to be finalized in 2024), opening the door to participants in partner ministries, churches with no denominational affiliation, and schools and ministry organizations beyond the denomination. Brummitt also honored three outgoing board members for their work: Danny Baer (NC), chairman; James Beasley (SC); and Mike Gladson (OH).

FWB Foundation. Director David Brown highlighted the purpose of Free Will Baptist Foundation: to serve other Free Will Baptist ministries. This is accomplished through estate gifts, endowments, planned gifts, and individual revocable trusts. In addition, the Foundation manages a charitable investment pool that will benefit ministries in the future.

Because the Foundation gave away \$1.1 million in ministry gifts last year, the department reported an expected loss of \$800,000. Yet, the Foundation still increased total assets by \$1.3 million in 2022 and finished the year at almost \$115 million (despite the almost 20% decline in the markets).

Brown announced the reopening of the money management program on a limited basis, following a lengthy registration process in various states. “While not every state is open



initially,” Brown reported, “most are now open, and we are paying 3.45% at our base rate and up to 3.7% on larger amounts.” These rates will jump again in January 2024 when the Foundation expects the top rate to hit 4%. “Money management is vitally important,” Brown explained, “because while we offer a very good rate to our investors, the Foundation also earns a service fee that supports our overall ministry and funds our estate planning ministry.”

Following his presentation, David Brown honored outgoing board members Chairman Bobby Edwards (TN) and Hubert Stafford (GA).

North American Ministries. CEO David Crowe emphasized church planting as the primary goal of North American Ministries, with 85 church plants (31 English, 54 Spanish) currently underway. He expressed excitement over Pastor’s Boot Camps, which have trained 244 pastors to date.

Crowe noted Master’s Men expansion of disaster response efforts, with new state teams and new equipment added in 2022. Denominational chaplain’s ministry continues to flourish, with 15 military chaplains (a record number) and many civilian chaplains. Crowe also announced the relocation of the Hispanic Bible Institute from Bartlesville, Oklahoma, to Parkers Chapel FWB Church in Greenville, North Carolina.

He explained the Church Extension Loan Fund (CELF) has worked diligently to bring the financial program into compliance with a wide range of state regulations. To date, this has involved a financial investment of nearly \$300,000 in legal and financial fees, leading to a reported deficit in 2022.

In closing, Crowe expressed deep gratitude to the denomination, which gave \$3.9 million to the department and its various ministries in 2022.

COMMISSIONS

Historical Commission. Eric Thomsen updated the work of the commission during 2022: archiving books and documents for the Historical Collection, scanning and posting associational minutes to FWBHistory.com along with

important periodicals such *The Free Will Baptist Bible College Bulletin* and *The Missionary Helper*. He pointed to upcoming projects: scanning and posting WNAC periodicals *CoLaborer* and *Together With God*, along with the *Oklahoma Bible College Newsletter*. He thanked Free Will Baptists for supporting the work of the commission before honoring Commission Chairman Robert E. Picirilli (TN) for 50 consecutive years of service on the commission.

Music Commission. Chairman Doug Little expressed the commission’s desire to provide help for Free Will Baptist churches, especially the average church with volunteer or part-time music leaders. The commission is seeking to identify concrete ways to provide help. He encouraged churches and individuals to contact the commission regarding resources they need.

Media Commission. Josh Owens expressed thanks for a Foundation grant making it possible to optimize the live streams at the National Convention and Leadership Conference. These improvements include an ASL feed and a Spanish translation app. Owens noted the commission is available to serve churches through logo design, Web design, branding, and sound and lighting consultation. The nominal fees charged for these services help offset costs of travel to and from the National Convention.

Commission for Theological Integrity. Chairman Matt Pinson encouraged listeners to attend the 2023 Theological Symposium, October 2-3, on the campus of Randall University in Moore, Oklahoma. (Learn more at FWBTheology.com.)

Pinson summarized, “On Divorce and Remarriage of Ordinand,” a report developed at the request of delegates during the 2022 convention. (Read the full report at nafwb.org/convention.) The document explains the biblical phrase “husband of one wife” rules out divorced and remarried persons as proper subjects of ordination” as the “near unanimous view of Free Will Baptists at the time of the 1976 resolution.”

Based on more recent surveys and scholarship, the commission concluded “this interpretive view and theological application still reflect the thinking and practice of the vast majority of Free Will Baptists.” However, the commission also clearly stated the limits of the 1976 resolution, noting the “non-binding nature of the resolution on state local associations and conferences.”

The report therefore advises: “the 1976 resolution reflects a prudent path that clearly recognizes the majority view on this question while at the same time acknowledging the existence of alternative views at the local level.”

Delegates approved the report. **ONE**

VIII CONFERENCE

JULY 16-19, 2023 • RALEIGH, NC

BY DEREK ALTOM, VERTICAL 3 DIRECTOR

The mission of Vertical 3 is to *help students discover their talents, develop their leadership, and dedicate their hearts to faithful service to God*. One of the ways we seek to achieve this mission is through the annual Vertical 3 Conference during the Free Will Baptist National Convention. This year's conference in Raleigh, North Carolina, helped advance this in many ways.

CTS MINISTRY EXPO

One way we help students discover their talents is through CTS Ministry Expo. Students from across the denomination, **1,449 to be exact**, competed in **792 entries**. Since the pandemic in 2020, the number of competitors and entries has continued to rebound. The students of our denomination were celebrated during the CTS Ministry Expo awards presentation on Wednesday evening. In addition, at the awards presentation, Jill Pointer was recognized for over 30 years of service to both Truth & Peace Student Leadership Conference and CTS Ministry Expo.

TRUTH & PEACE STUDENT LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

The 2023 Truth & Peace Student Leadership Conference was comprised of 128 students and 16 staff members. The conference helps students develop leadership skills. After leadership training on the campus of Randall University in Moore, Oklahoma, participants traveled to Raleigh, North Carolina, to serve as staff for the Vertical Three Conference. The thing I love most about these students is their willingness to do anything asked of them to make the conference successful. From my vantage point, the future of the Free Will Baptist denomination is bright.

The 2023 conference marked the 26th and final year for Allen Pointer as the director of the conference. Allen's influence on the lives of the students in our denomination over the last several decades is evident. You do not have to look far to find someone serving in our denomination today who was affected by Allen during this ministry. Few individuals in the denomination's history have had more impact upon the lives of young people. Ryan Akers will follow Allen as the Truth & Peace director starting with the 2024 conference.

YOUTH EVANGELISTIC TEAM (YET)

Under the director of first-year leaders Bryan and Kinsley Houser, YET was comprised of 12 students who assembled on the campus of Randall University in late June for a week of training and rehearsal before leaving on a two-week tour through Tennessee, Alabama, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Missouri. After a short break, YET reunited in Raleigh, North Carolina, to lead the Vertical 3 worship services.

BUCK-A-WEEK

The annual Buck-A-Week offering, collected Tuesday evening, totaled \$5,244.05. The generosity of attendees benefited Taylor Pate (IM intern to Japan) and Team Athens, Alabama (Joel Franks Family and B. J. Eaton Family).



V3 SESSIONS

Nightly sessions encouraged students to dedicate their hearts to faithful service to the Lord. V3-Preschool was led by the “Queen of Preschool” Katie Greenwood (TN). V3-Kids featured a team of teachers led by Johnny Miller (AR). V3-456 was led by “Pastor Steve” Greenwood (TN). Collectively, these leaders have been involved in the ministry of Vertical Three for nearly 75 years. It is amazing to consider how many individuals they have impacted.

During V3-Teen, students were challenged to “Suit Up!” centered on the words of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 6:10-20. On Sunday morning, Mason Polk (OK) challenged students to recognize who their enemy is (verses 10-13). On Sunday evening, Andy Rains (MO) focused on the believer’s armor (verses 14-17). Monday evening, technology expert Arlene Pellicane (CA) educated attendees about the “dangers of digital candy” and how technology can be a huge distraction to “suing up.” During the concluding service of V3-Teen, Aaron Pierce (NC) touched on the believer’s secret weapon of prayer (verses 18-20). The conference was capped off by “Fun With Forrest,” an evening with Free Will Baptist youth pastor and funny man Jon Forrest.

CONCLUSION

The Vertical 3 Conference—an action-packed four days of competition, sessions, seminars, and reconnections—is physically exhausting. However, if we polled attendees, I think we would learn the conference is the highlight of their year. It is my prayer the students of our denomination will return to their homes and churches more spiritually awake than before. Hopefully, they have better *discovered their talents, developed their leadership, and dedicated their hearts to faithful service to the Lord.*

After all, this is our mission. **ONE**





Bitter or Better Together



BY EDDIE MOODY

A great deal of bitterness saturates the world today. It has funneled down into our communities, the places we work or go to school, our families, and even the church. Thankfully, we find a good role model in the Scriptures who modeled how to deal with bitterness.

Somewhere around 2000 B.C., a young man began to encounter choices that eventually dictated the trajectory of his life. Joseph's family was filled with jealousy, hatred, and bitterness (Genesis 37:4-5, 8, 11). Perhaps Joseph exasperated the situation by telling his brothers about his dreams (Genesis 37:9-11). Whatever the case, Joseph's brothers grew bitter together and conspired against him (Genesis 37:18-19). They cast Joseph into a pit (Genesis 37:24) where he remained while his brothers plotted his demise (Genesis 37:25-26). When the opportunity presented itself, they sold him to Midianite traders, and Joseph was taken to Egypt and sold into slavery.

Choosing to Be Better, Not Bitter

Joseph's experience was distressful (Genesis 42:21; Psalm 105:17-19) to put it mildly. This kind of trauma often leads to bitterness. Rather than becoming bitter, Joseph developed into a better person. How?

Focus on work. Joseph focused on his work. Work is good with a broad range of psychological and spiritual benefits (Genesis 2:15). Joseph poured himself into his work, even though he was a slave (Genesis 39:2-6). Hard work allowed little time to ruminate upon the hurts of the past.

Focus on others. Though faithful to his work and his master Potiphar, Joseph soon encountered difficulty when Potiphar's wife falsely accused him of attempted rape when he refused her sexual advances. As a result, Joseph was imprisoned (Genesis 39:7-20). Again, Joseph chose to be better, not bitter, and was a good worker (Genesis 39:21-23). He was also keenly aware of the wellbeing of others (Genesis 40:1-7), noticing their difficulties and trying to help them.

Focus on the Lord. Throughout this narrative, the Lord was with Joseph (Genesis 39:2-3, 21, 23). We must conclude Joseph was dwelling upon God's truth and talking to the Lord. Joseph had yet another opportunity to become bitter after being forgotten in prison by the butler he helped (Genesis 40:23). Joseph must have grown and overcome this slight, because when he stood before Pharaoh, he noted it was God (Genesis 41:16) who provided the answer to Pharaoh's dream.

Behave wisely, not vindictively. As famine raged in Egypt, Joseph had opportunity to exact revenge upon his brothers. Instead, he tested them. The binding of Simeon (Genesis 42:24) was likely a test to see if his brothers were the same people who bound him decades earlier. And when Judah made his great speech and asked to take the place of his brother Benjamin (Genesis 44:33-34), Joseph knew the men before him had grown into better men than the bitter brothers he had known before. At that moment, he could no longer contain himself (Genesis 45:1).

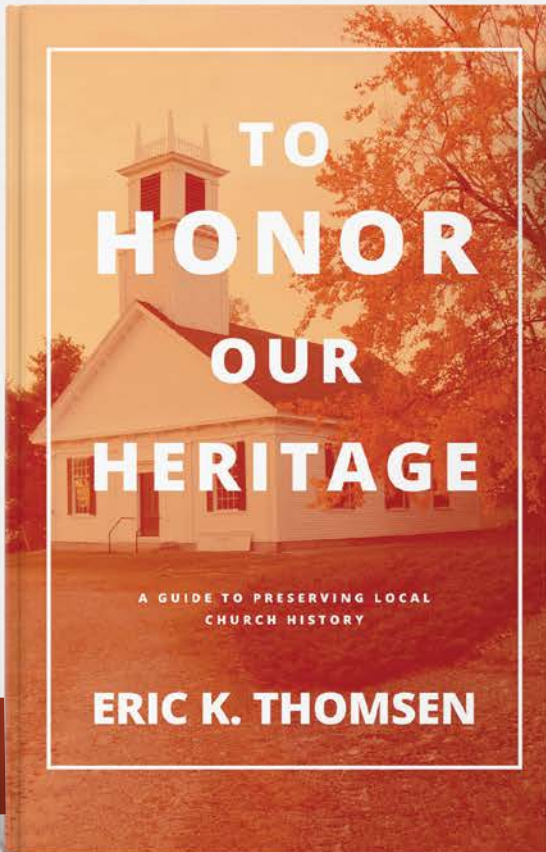
Forgive and live. Joseph's revelation to his brothers made it clear he had forgiven them (Genesis 45:3-5). Years later, he echoed verse 5 after his father's death (Genesis 50:20). Somewhere along the way, Joseph left justice to the Lord (Genesis 50:19) and chose to forgive the brothers who hurt him. This made it possible to live and grow into the person God wanted him to be.

Each day, we choose to be bitter or better with the people in our lives. This choice may impact where many reside for all of eternity. Let us be better—not bitter—together. **ONE**



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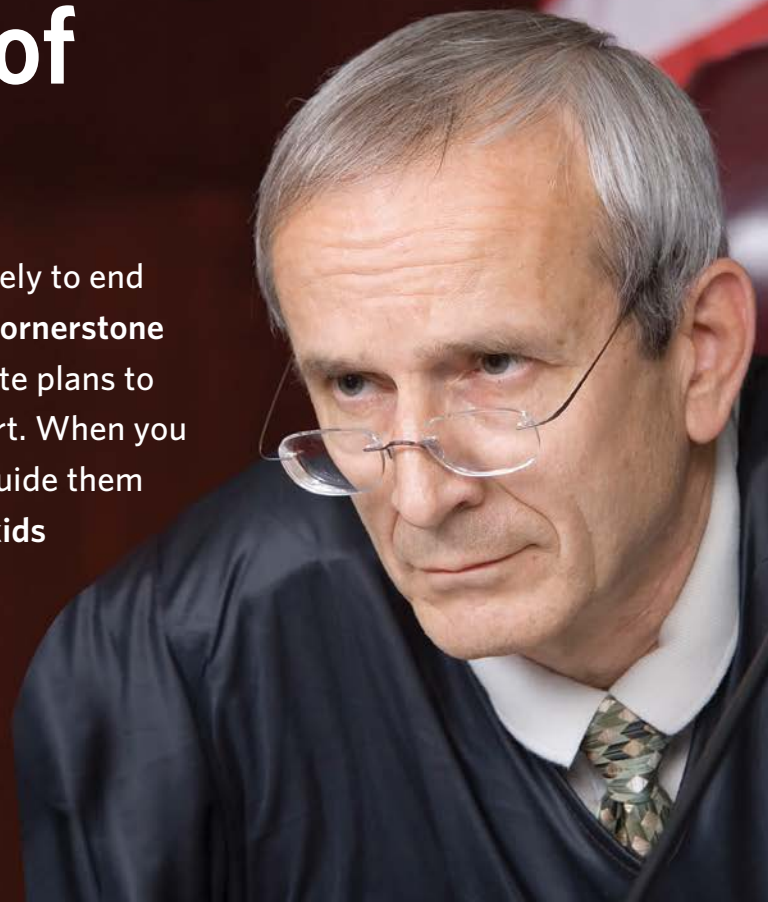
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