

ONE LORD ONE VOICE ONE VISION

ONE magazine

AUGUST-SEPTEMBER•2024

The Nations Next Door

Continue the Mission

Within Arm's Reach

Orphaned Arminians

Surprised by Gen Z

The Path to
Human Happiness

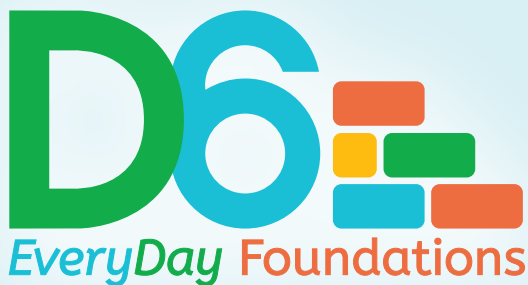
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of our role in the extension of God's Kingdom*

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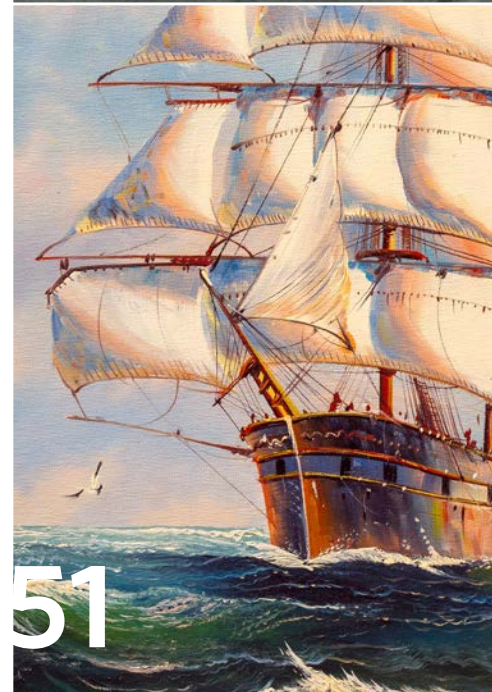
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Four in the Morning... Somewhere in South Asia

BY ERIC K. THOMSEN

Wraithlike, they slip from their homes in the dead of night. Making their way quietly down backroads and byways, South Asian Free Will Baptists meet other believers at remote streams or ponds to baptize new converts under cover of darkness. And not just one stream or one pond. Recently, ten men and women from the same congregation were baptized simultaneously in three different locations.

Why?

Why engage in covert activities that sound like something from a spy movie? The idea of midnight baptisms sounds almost ludicrous to us Americans who worship comfortably and publicly on the day, time, and location of our choosing without fear, threat, or danger.

Kenneth Eagleton, director of global partnerships for IM, Inc., reminds us accepting and proclaiming Christ is not so safe and easy in many locations. "Baptism has become a very risky activity in South Asia," he writes. "Often, baptism breaks anti-conversion laws meant to prohibit forced conversions. Not only do converts face official repercussions, but they also risk being rejected, even beaten by their families as a direct result of accepting Christ."

Yikes! Midnight baptisms, it is.

Yet, when I recently watched a video made during one of these baptism services, I couldn't help but smile at the irrepressible joy. As each new convert emerged from beneath the waters, shouts of "Hallelujah!" and "Amen!"

could be heard echoing from the shoreline as precaution gave way to praise and fear was trampled by faith.

I don't know about you,
but I feel deep

conviction
when I hear stories
of these and other believers
around the world who (literally) risk
their lives to follow Christ and share the gospel.
Where do they find the courage and strength to face
physical and emotional threats? And how can we stand
firm in our own culture as it becomes more hostile to
the faith?

The Apostle Paul addressed these questions directly in 2 Timothy 1:8-12. Writing from prison, he gave his young pastoral protégé four instructions for living faithfully through suffering.

1. Don't be ashamed of the gospel message or the suffering that may result from sharing the message (verse 8a).
2. Instead, embrace suffering for the sake of the gospel (verse 8b) through the power of God who gives us the strength we need.
3. Understand the gospel message of life overwhelms the power of death, and it is our calling as Christians to share this good news (verses 9-10).
4. Lean into the One who saved you, and who will keep what you "have committed unto him against that day" (verses 11-12).

I hope we never have to resort to dead-of-night baptisms in our nation. May we never squander the religious freedom we enjoy and share the gospel openly, without apology, and with anyone who will listen. Maybe that will lead to some much-needed midday baptisms. **ONE**

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

Picirilli Honored With *Teacher, Scholar, Shepherd*



Nashville, TN—On Sunday morning, June 2, 2024, Phillip T. Morgan and Matthew S. Bracey presented Dr. Robert E. Picirilli with the first copy of *Teacher, Scholar, Shepherd: Essays in Honor of Robert E. Picirilli* during the morning worship service at Cofer’s Chapel Free Will Baptist

Church in Nashville, Tennessee.


Published through D6 Family Ministry, the book, which had been kept a surprise for Dr. Picirilli, includes over a dozen chapters analyzing and honoring various aspects of his contributions to Free Will Baptists and evangelical scholarship. The four broad sections of the book engage the topics of theology, church history and philosophy, practical theology and biblical studies, and personal tributes.

Morgan and Bracey, who served as the general editors of *Teacher, Scholar, Shepherd*, explained the book was designed to celebrate Dr. Picirilli’s many contributions to Arminianism, practical theology, biblical studies, Free Will Baptist

history, Christian philosophy, and denominational and educational leadership. In addition, they hope each chapter will inspire young scholars to build on the solid foundation Dr. Picirilli has provided in each of these areas of research.

“*Teacher, Scholar, Shepherd* is a great tribute to an amazing man,” notes *ONE Magazine* editor Eric Thomsen. “For more than six decades, Dr. Picirilli’s work as a theologian, preacher, educator, philosopher, author, historian, and denominational leader has shaped both the face and personality of the denomination. Even a brief glance at Free Will Baptists today reveals the full weight of his work and influence. This volume gives readers a better understanding of Picirilli’s far-reaching influence.”

After receiving a standing ovation, Dr. Picirilli humbly offered his thanks to the contributors of the book. With his characteristic wry wit, he wondered why none of the chapters cover his stamp collecting. At the conclusion of the service, Picirilli was congratulated by family, friends, and guests for the occasion.

Copies of *Teacher, Scholar, Shepherd* can be purchased through D6.family/store. 



2025 Nominees Requested

Antioch, Tennessee—The 2024-2025 Nominating Committee, which will serve through the national convention in Kansas City, Missouri, is prepared to receive nominees for the 2025 election, according to Jimmy Lawson, committee chairman.

The committee will consider nominations and compile a report offering a single nomination for each position to be filled. The report will be presented to delegates at the 2025 convention.

The following board and commission positions will be filled in 2025: Free Will Baptist Foundation (3), North American Ministries (3), Board of Retirement (3), Media Commission

(1), Commission for Theological Integrity (1), Historical Commission (1), Music Commission (1), General Board (12), Executive Committee (3), General Officers: Moderator and Assistant Clerk.

The following boards do not elect members in 2025: Welch College; Women Nationally Active for Christ; D6 Family Ministry; IM, Inc. Nominations, accompanied by a brief resume, must be submitted exclusively to the chairman on or before December 2. Download the nomination form at www.nafwb.org.

You may contact Chairman Jimmy Lawson at pastor_jimmy@ameritech.net. 



Continue THE MISSION

BY KRISTI JOHNSON

Since 1935, IM missionaries have traveled the globe to share the gospel. Their pioneering spirits, unending devotion to their call, and vision to reach people kept them at the task set before them.

How can we embrace their legacy and **CONTINUE THE MISSION** by giving to reach those who need to hear the good news? Participating in the World Missions Offering is a great way to do that! It supports all aspects of IM ministry, including these three main areas.

PARTNERSHIPS

As Free Will Baptists, we were privileged to be part of the ministry of our “legacy” partners when we sent missionaries to India, Cuba, Panama, and more. What an honor to have seen the places, felt the tears, heard the stories, and known the missionaries who went. The national churches in these countries now carry on the ministry, with continued support from IM.

We are extending our reach into places like Pakistan, Argentina, Bangladesh, and many others. We can’t physically reside in many of these places, but we can send funds to the World Missions Offering to support the work.

One of our partners in Pakistan, Aamir, recently told us how he first connected with Free Will Baptists in 2007. Our Korean brothers and sisters sponsored a Leadership Matters Course in which he participated. (LMC is a ministry of one of our partners, International Training Alliance. This is the Body of Christ laboring together!) Aamir was working with homeless teens. He opened a

drug rehabilitation center to help them. God laid it on his heart to work with these young people living in hopeless situations, with no future for jobs or a better way of life. Aamir stated, “God wants something more,” for these boys, many orphaned at young ages.

Aamir rented a small building to begin the drug rehab program. Though \$50 covered the rent, it felt more like \$5,000 in Pakistan’s struggling economic situation. Fellow Christians helped supply food for the young men as the program grew.

Now with 60 young men in the program, the ministry receives funds from the World Missions Offering to offset food expenses. They offer vocational classes to equip the boys for jobs and keep them off the streets. Many boys have become believers and started working with mentors and local businessmen who are also believers. Pastor Aamir says, “From that two-room rented building, God made us like a city on a mountain...to share the Word of Christ with Muslims.”

All our partnerships around the world, like the one with Aamir, are leading ministries to **CONTINUE THE MISSION** into the future.

MISSIONARIES

It's exciting to see God call more workers into the harvest. Young (and not-so-young) people are answering the call. Over the past ten years, IM has sent almost 50 new missionaries to serve in countries around the world. Each had to secure his or her own support, which was sometimes a daunting task.

Knowing new missionaries face barriers that have kept some from making it to the field, the leadership team at IM established plans to provide start-up monies at the time candidates are appointed. This helps with travel, even before they share in their first church service.

One of our field workers in southern Spain, Karah, said, "The WMO has helped us in many ways, but one of the ways it has helped us the most is when we received kick-off money for our fundraising account. We were able to receive funds as soon as we were approved, so we didn't have to start fundraising at zero. It lifted some of the weight of fundraising off our shoulders. We are so grateful for that gift and for all who give to the WMO!"

Karah and other newly appointed missionaries and workers have felt the weight of fundraising and are grateful the World Missions Offering is relieving the burden. As they go out into the world to share the message of salvation and hope, supporters in the States have the privilege of sending them to **CONTINUE THE MISSION** of the pioneers who paved the way.

GENERAL FUND

About 1,800 miles beneath earth's surface lies its ball-shaped core. This extremely hot center reaches temperatures as high as 10,000 degrees Fahrenheit. That's hot! The core is made mainly of nickel and iron, whose moving atoms create what we know as the magnetic field. It has two main functions: give compass direction and serve as a shield to protect the Earth's surface.

The core of IM also contains many moving "atoms" to make it work, gives compass direction (strategy), and serves as a shield for IM missionaries and ministries around the world. This core is supported by the General Fund.

Let's review a few of the ministries helped by the General Fund:

- Student Missions: ETEAM, CMP, OA
- Mobilization: mission education and involvement through THP trips and teams
- Recruiting, onboarding, training, equipping, and deploying missionary personnel
- Strategic oversight and coordination of missionary endeavors toward one purpose
- Developing and maximizing ministry through and with global partners
- Safeguarding the integrity, legality, and viability of all we do through systems, policies, procedures, and infrastructure
- Overseeing a unified and effective approach to funding all efforts both now and in the future

As you can see, the General Fund is not just about the office personnel and their salaries. It's so much more! Supporting the General Fund sustains the core of IM, both for now and for generations to come, as we **CONTINUE THE MISSION**.

We've come a long way since that first pioneer missionary stepped off a boat into a new land in 1935. While our mission is still the same — *labor with the Body of Christ to fulfill the Great Commission* — we know it takes many kinds of people to make up the Body of Christ. Those who go. Those who pray. Those who send. Those who give. What part of the Body of Christ are you filling today? **CONTINUE THE MISSION** by participating in the World Missions Offering! **ONE**

About the Writer: Kristi Johnson, former missionary to Spain, CONTINUES THE MISSION of IM as the development communications manager. Her time behind the lens of her camera and in front of her laptop screen give her opportunities to capture and share stories from our mission fields. Learn more: iminc.org.

THE Legacy OF IM THROUGH THE years

1935



1935
Laura Belle Barnard appointed as first missionary to India



THE HANNA PROJECT

2003
The Hanna Project began



ETEAM
Free Will Baptist Student Missions

1992
ETEAM launched



1973
Spain opened as a mission field



2005
Bulgaria became an IM mission field



2015
First missionaries sent to Samburu people in Kenya



2015
International student ministries began



2017
Department of Global Partnerships created



2019
Ecuador reopened as a mission field





1941

Cuba established as a mission field



1954

Japan opened as a mission field



1957

Ivory Coast and Brazil opened as mission fields



1961
Heartbeat magazine began



1962

Uruguay and Panama opened as mission fields

1973

First \$1,000,000 budget approved



1969

First World Missions Offering



1966

France opened as a mission field



2021

Missio Nexus gave Carlisle Hanna "Lifetime of Service Award" for 70 years of ministry

2024

HOW CAN YOU HELP
continue THE
MISSION?

www.iminc.org/wmo

Reaching the NATIONS NEXT DOOR

BY DON MATCHETT



Over the past few years, immigration has increased significantly worldwide. Many global communities have experienced a substantial shift in demographics. Immigrants bring distinct cultural, social, and ethnic backgrounds with them. This diversity contributes social and cultural richness to their new communities, introducing new traditions, languages, and cuisines. However, it also creates cultural integration and assimilation challenges. These challenges produce gospel opportunities. As people who believe in the power of the gospel, we must acknowledge the need to reach our immigrant neighbors.

Tyler Penn and Bradley Mercer, who engage with international students on public college campuses, offer insight on building relationships and spreading the gospel with your international neighbors.

Tyler Penn, University of Illinois, Champaign

The world really has come to our neighborhoods in the United States. How do we meet immigrants in a way that builds an avenue of trust to exchange the knowledge of Jesus? How do we connect? Our students really desire two things. They want to know what community life is like in America. And they want to practice the English language. It just so happens we can easily meet both these needs.

An international student from Japan was asked, “If you could tell a room full of Americans something about being an international student, what would you share?” She responded, “I would let them know I want to know what American community life is like. I understand life on campus, but I really want to know about life in the community.”

Providing events based on American culture is a good way to connect with internationals looking to understand more about life in the States. Events your church routinely holds may be interesting to internationals. These events can be anything from a fish fry to Easter celebrations or a fall festival. They just need to know they are welcome.

Individuals can invite students to experience life with them in their homes for holidays. International students will gladly experience the holidays of Thanksgiving, Easter, or even the Super Bowl with you. Or encourage students to join in your hobbies. Invitations to experience American life may include putt-putt, camping, or fishing. Students just want to know what the American experience is like. We have a great opportunity to show them and connect with them.

Second, connecting through the English language is one of the most common tools used to meet and befriend internationals. English programs often look for volunteers in communities with international populations. A weekly meetup to practice the English language can systematically build a friendship with an international. This is also a great way to guide conversations of faith into the discussion. Many students are not afraid to have these conversations. They are interested in talking about faith in America because it’s something they are curious about, even if it just begins on an informational level.

The world truly has come next door to us. We just need to step out with a little courage to begin the first step of relationship building with our international neighbors.



The Nations Next Door

- Each year, **more than a million** international students travel to the U.S. to study.
- Most international students come from countries with **limited access to the gospel**.
- **Sixty-two world leaders** studied in the U.S.
- The U.S. remains the **most preferred destination** for international students.
- **50.6 million people** who were born outside the U.S. reside in the country.
- The percentage of **foreign-born population** reached an all-time high during the October 2023 census.
- The **growth rate of foreign-born residents** (4.5 million) over the last three years is larger than the individual population of 25 U.S. states.
- Approximately **15% of the U.S. population** consists of foreign-born individuals.
- Historically, more people have immigrated to the United States than **any other country**.

Sourced from PEW research

BRADLEY MERCER, University of Missouri, Columbia

The number of international students and refugees in the States is growing. Yet the number of people who have thought about this unique field or are willing to serve this segment of the population is scarce. Make no mistake, these truly are unreached people groups — closer and more accessible to us than ever before. These people are waiting for us to help them. All we need is the boldness to ask!

How do you reach the nations next door? The prevailing need among international students and refugees is to improve their English conversational and comprehension skills. Make a trip to your local public university's international student affairs office. Ask about programs they have, or local nonprofit organizations they partner with, which need volunteers. Explore the resources available. You are not the only one trying to help international students or refugees. Someone has already “invented the wheel,” to help students succeed during their tenure in the States. If I can speak from personal experience at the University of Missouri, helping international students meet their English

conversational needs fast tracks the trusting relationship needed to connect with them in a deeper way.

Of course, many other opportunities are available to meet the needs of these unreached people groups beyond English conversational skills. Cook a homemade meal for them. Take them grocery shopping. Walk them through the process of getting a job or becoming a licensed driver. Simply be a friend to someone far from home.

What if you do not have these people groups around you? What if the closest university isn't close? Do not read this article and think it's not for you. It is. I challenge you to bring this unique mission field out of the shadows. Take the first step toward reaching the world next door, to look up and see the fields white for harvest, as Jesus said in John 4. This harvest is in our backyard, and we are to gather it!

This denomination has made tremendous steps forward in partnering with existing ministries on our college campuses (with missionaries like my wife Madison and me, Tyler and Kellie Penn, Darren and Dana Portell, and others) to reach internationals from around the globe for the gospel.

Please support this important work! These ministries cannot exist and be effective for the Kingdom without your support in prayer and through financial partnership.

Tyler and Bradley provide valuable guidance on how to spread the gospel to immigrants. To effectively connect with them, we need to understand their unique circumstances, build genuine relationships, use contextualized communication methods, and show love, compassion, and humility. Believers can form meaningful relationships with their immigrant communities and successfully convey the message of hope and love.

Sharing the gospel with your international neighbors can be both challenging and rewarding. It is essential to approach this subject with sensitivity and respect. Consider their cultural differences and religious beliefs. Remember, the goal is to share the love of Jesus, not to impose your own culture, thoughts, and political beliefs on them.

According to research, the most effective means of evangelism among internationals is by building a relationship that grants permission to talk about the gospel.

So where do you start? A simple conversation or an act of kindness goes a long way. **ONE**

About the Writer: Don Matchett is director of development at IM, Inc.

Leading With Words

BY RON HUNTER JR., PH.D.

Leaders need to communicate effectively by speaking and writing well. The responsibility of communication rests primarily on the communicator, not the one listening. You might be surprised by how much you write daily through texts, emails, notes, blogs, or manuscripts. While far from an expert, I've learned from great mentors and editors who have helped me improve. These 16 quick tips have guided me over the years.

Discover the following ways to craft your wording and make your written communication more interesting. When possible, **talk to your audience;** use the second person (you, your) to speak directly to readers. **Use active voice;** aim for 80% active verbs to make writing more engaging. **Avoid repetition;** don't repeat words in close succession to keep your text fresh.



BIBLE VERSES FROM WISE LEADERS

Proverbs 25:11

Proverbs 12:18

Ephesians 4:29

James 1:19

2 Timothy 2:16

LEADERSHIP QUOTE

"The only kind of writing is rewriting."

—Ernest Hemingway

Be specific; avoid vague or generic stand-alone words like *this*, *it*, and *things*, which can confuse readers. **Engage the reader with visual word choices.** Since many people are visual learners, use precise, descriptive words to paint a picture. **Manage your word count.** Budget sentences in your outline accordingly, and remember, less is more. **Rewrite for clarity;** practice by revising drafts. Don't settle for your first attempt. **Allow time between drafts,** which helps you clarify what you truly intended to convey.

Use tools to help your writing improve. **Plan with a mind-map.** Non-linear outlining helps brainstorm your thoughts before you start writing. **Use a thesaurus;** find the right words with tools like the thesaurus in Microsoft Word or Roget's.



Leverage software editors; check your work with Microsoft Word and Grammarly to polish your text. **Change settings on your software editors based on your audience.** Adjusting your criteria in Word or Grammarly helps adjust your writing tone from casual to formal to academic when needed. **Generate alternatives in your word choices;** use AI tools to suggest synonyms and titles. **Use a human editor.** An editor can catch mistakes and improve your grammar, tone, and clarity like software, but also will understand the culture and audience you are addressing. Lastly, **learn from great authors.** Read well-crafted writing to observe effective use of language.

Over several months, concentrate on mastering two to three tips at a time. This focused approach will significantly strengthen your writing skills. Embrace rewriting as a fundamental part of the writing process to continually refine and improve your communication. **ONE**

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



Within Arms' Reach

FIVE WAYS TO REACH THE WORLD FROM WHERE YOU ARE

BY MARIANNE E. STEWART

I stand 5 feet, 4 and a half inches tall. That's one inch above the average height of an adult American woman, according to a CDC report published in 2018.¹ Studies of human body ratios say my arm span — the measurement from middle fingertip to middle fingertip with arms stretched wide — should be roughly the same as my height. Mine measures 5 feet, 6 inches, slightly over the 1:1 ratio. These measurements land me squarely in “average” territory, if we politely omit my weight.

Average height and arm span means most things I need or want are within arms' reach, whether in kitchen cabinets or on grocery store shelves. Occasionally I must ask for help from my husband or a store attendant, and sometimes I borrow the kids' step stool. Generally speaking, though, my reach is plenty adequate.

Yet when it comes to sharing Jesus with the world, my reach feels considerably smaller. I'm a work-from-home freelance designer and homeschool teacher for our two children.

¹ National Health Statistics Reports, Number 122. Published December 20, 2018. Accessed: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhsr/nhsr122-508.pdf>

Additionally, I'm a homebody, and an introvert of introverts. Most of my time is spent at home, around the same few people, day after day. Exceptions include worship with our church family, errands around town, the kids' speech therapy sessions, and visits to the grandparents, to name a few. Still, we spend an above-average amount of time at home, which means occasions to tell others about Jesus feel somewhat limited.

That “limited” feeling, however, could *not* be further from the truth! Perhaps you find yourself in a similar life season, feeling somewhat isolated, confined to your small circle of people, seemingly unable to make the Kingdom impact you desire. If so, I have excellent news! Even if your reach feels small, many significant opportunities to make an impact exist right where you are. Here are five ways within *anyone's* reach to share Jesus with the world.

1 Live out a godly marriage. If you're married, you have a monumental opportunity to demonstrate the love of Jesus. In our self-centered culture, a God-centered marriage shines as bright as a lighthouse in utter

darkness. Ephesians 5 teaches us marriage is a reflection of our relationship with Christ. We should love our spouses as Christ loves us and submit to our spouses as we submit to Christ's authority. Specifically, husbands are the head of the family, even over the wife, just as Christ is the Head of the Church, and we are His bride.

Pursuing a godly marriage is a beautiful testimony of God's love. Your commitment to marriage, especially when you repent of mistakes and choose to walk in God's ways, speaks volumes to a world desperately looking for real love.

Even if God has not called you to marriage (or hasn't yet), live your single life in purity and obedience to God's design. Conducting yourself according to God's Word nourishes your relationship with Him and simultaneously shines a beacon of light to the lost.

2 Love and teach your children well.

Children first encounter the love of God through their parents. Don't take that responsibility lightly. If you have children or children in your life, love them as the Father loves you: filled with truth, grace, and mercy and without merit or condition. Keep your eyes on Jesus, and let them see your walk with Him, both in times of peace and challenge.

Make your home a haven for your children to rest in His Spirit, away from the world. Intentionally teach them God's Word and talk with them regularly about what they've learned (Deuteronomy 6:7). My favorite thing to tell our kids (ages 7 and 5) is that Jesus loves them even more than I do, and that's a whole, whole lot! Never underestimate the far-reaching impact of raising God-fearing children.

3 **Be a good friend.** In this text-message, social-media, quick-quip culture, it's easy for friendships to remain shallow. What we *need*, however, are friends who know us down to our core. Friends who understand our good and bad, our hopes and struggles. Friends who will share our burdens, tell us when we're in error, and point us to Jesus when we focus on the wrong things. These types of friendships don't happen accidentally; they are cultivated intentionally.

To *have* a godly friend, you need to *be* a godly friend. Check in with friends regularly. Text them, but more importantly, call them. Spend time together, even if the only available time is while watching your kids play at the park. (The kiddos won't mind if your conversation runs long.) Ask the hard questions. Edify as you are able. Pray for them and

with them. Sharpen one another (Proverbs 27:17). As you seek Jesus together, you'll see the effects ripple into other areas of your life.


4 **Be a light to everyone you meet.** Demonstrate Jesus' love and mercy everywhere you go. Show patience and cheerfulness to the grocery store cashier, even those working more slowly than you'd like. Be kind and gentle to the customer service representative on the phone. Tip your frazzled server well, even if she is slow to bring refills. Cheer for every player on your child's ball team, and refrain from saying negative or unhelpful things, whether loudly or quietly.

At your workplace, things like a cheerful attitude, respect for authority, being careful with your speech, avoiding gossip, timeliness, and working diligently to the best of your ability will likely set you apart. When your coworkers question why you act differently, use the opportunity to tell them about the Savior. You serve the Lord, who is above all, including your employer (Colossians 3:23-24).

The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering (patience), gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance or self-control (Galatians 5:22-23a). Even strangers should notice these qualities in you.

5 Most importantly, pray without ceasing.

No matter the size of your "reach," you can *always* pray. Pray for your spouse and your marriage. Pray for your children, both for their present and their future. Ask your friends how you can pray for them, and then do it. Pray for coworkers and neighbors. Pray for enemies and those who cause you trouble. Pray for the lost. Pray for missionaries and church planters. Pray for pastors and their families. Pray for your children's teachers. Pray for wisdom. Just pray. Then pray some more. Even if you never know the results of your prayers this side of eternity, they *always* have an impact.

In Acts 1:8b, commonly called "The Great Commission," Jesus instructed us to be a witness for Him "in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Even if your heart desires to go to the uttermost parts, be mindful of the Jerusalem around you. Do everything in your power to share Jesus with those nearest to you. You might be surprised how much is within your arms' reach! 

About the Writer: Marianne Stewart has served as lead designer for *ONE Magazine* since 2018. She lives in Lebanon, Tennessee, with her husband Patrick and their sons John and James.

At Home and Abroad



WNAC INTERNATIONAL EVENTS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

“The look on their faces was pure joy!” said Amy Postlewaite, IM missionary to Bulgaria. This was confirmed by a Bulgarian woman who, when asked how the conference was for her, said, “Can’t you tell that I’m *flying* right now?”

April 22-24, FWB Women’s Ministries had the privilege of sponsoring the first Bulgarian Women’s Retreat in many years. Seventy-seven women gathered from across Bulgaria to worship and receive “Refreshment from the Lord.” Most were Bulgarian, but the group also included representatives from nine other countries: U.S., U.K., India, Ukraine, Nigeria, Russia, Belarus, India, and Kazakhstan. The group exhibited a beautiful mosaic of ages and spiritual maturity, with a wonderful harmony over them all. What a joy to enact our mission statement and “fulfill the Great Commission at home and abroad.”

All who participate in the Great Commission are blessed. Those who go, those who hear, those who pray, and those who send — all play a vital role in spreading God’s Word around the world. This event was a perfect example of that truth.

As we prepared for this opportunity, we were asked by missionaries on the field to provide both a speaker and financial scholarships to enable the ladies to attend. Bulgaria is not one of Europe’s wealthy countries, and even the nominal cost of this weekend retreat was beyond reach for

most. Of the \$130 cost for the Friday evening to Sunday lunch getaway, each woman was only able to pay \$30. At the request of the missionaries, we stepped out in faith to raise \$100 per woman to supplement her ability to pay. Planners expected 50-60 women to register. This was an ambitious goal for our organization, but we began praying God would provide everything needed.

We planned a Facebook Live event, though we’d never tried one before, and got our smartest and youngest experts on the project. Despite some technology glitches, God and His people came through. Within 12 hours, we raised \$7,700, enough for 77 women to attend. We followed the Old Testament example and said, “Stop giving. We have enough.”

Did you notice the amount we raised and the number of attendees? Yes, that’s right. God provided *exactly* the amount needed for the women He knew would come. And to prove His faithfulness, He provided a trickle of a few hundred extra dollars which allowed us to underwrite the entire event.

The generous U.S. believers who gave to support this event came from many places, churches, and women’s groups from coast to coast. Most gave \$100 to sponsor one woman, but some gave a partial sponsorship while others sponsored multiple ladies. They all gave according to their ability so Christian sisters they had never met would be strengthened and refreshed in the Lord.

They also followed up their donations with prayer. Each donor received the name of a retreat attendee and details



Bulgaria

Only God could orchestrate a conversation between two Americans and a Bulgarian...in Japanese.

about her. Tasked with praying for “their” lady, they covered her in prayer before, during, and after the retreat. Many attendees broke down in tears when they learned someone across the world was praying for them.

One Bulgarian believer named Vessie said, “I can testify on behalf of everyone, that the entire event was absolutely God’s idea and was carried out by Him. From the idea to the realization of it which happened through prayer and giving from many people on the other side of the ocean, to

the amazing atmosphere, excellent food, D-I-Y craft time, worship, prayer stations, and the Word [that was shared] which the Holy Spirit continues to bring to our minds.”

Two women from the U.S. were privileged to attend: WNAC Director Ruth McDonald as speaker and WNAC Board Chair Amy Johnson as coordinator of crafts and activities. IM missionary Donnie McDonald provided encouragement for the missionary men on the field. (Amy and Donnie sacrificially made this trip entirely at their own expense.)



During the ten-day trip, the American representatives spent time with each of the IM missionaries on the field and met many precious Bulgarian believers. Ruth presented three sessions to the ladies at the retreat, Donnie preached at the Good News Church in Pleven and in a nearby village. The group carried suitcases bulging with craft supplies, goodie bag treats (donated by local WAC groups), and Easter treats for all.

One especially God-ordained appointment stood out for Donnie and Ruth, longtime missionaries to Japan. The church in Pleven has a thriving ministry to international students at the medical university nearby, and one of the Bulgarian young women is an avid student of the Japanese language. The McDonalds were able to spend an evening conversing with Elvira in Japanese, answering many questions about the faith and how to live out the Christian life. Only God could orchestrate a conversation between two Americans and a Bulgarian...in Japanese.

Amy especially enjoyed connecting with the women and children in Bulgaria and was particularly befriended by one of the young missionary kids. One lady commented at how God surprised her with new friends from the West, something she never thought would happen. “Sunday evening after our worship gathering, when Amy Johnson shared with me how wonderful it is that she now knows so many Bulgarians personally, I realized I had never thought about that. We got to know each other better, we have new friends, and we love our American sisters,” she commented.

The retreat attendees were, for the most part, first generation followers of Jesus. It was refreshing to see their eagerness to learn and listen, and to engage in a lively question and answer session with them. Young and old alike yearn to know how to reorder their lives and relationships around their newfound faith.

Missionary Lydia Awtrey shared, “The retreat was a wonderful experience for the women of Svishtov. They are still talking about it, and many of them have stepped up, serving in church more actively since the conference. They really liked your honest sharing and encouragement. And a few have said you made them cry.”

Other comments included those by Lily, who said, “I truly feel so refreshed. I know the words Ruth shared were from God, that they were meant for me to hear.” Attendee Vanya P. said, “All the little things about the conference made it just wonderful. At home, I have some physical breathing problems. But here I could breathe in multiple senses!”

We thank God for the work of FWB Women’s Ministries as it seeks to “help every Free Will Baptist woman find and fulfill her role in the Great Commission, both at home and abroad.” As Amy Johnson said, “There are so many ways for us to be the hands and feet of Jesus. We’ve always heard some are called to go, some to give, and all to pray. FWB Women’s Ministries expands beyond the local church walls, farther than across the street, and well beyond the ocean shores! Thank you for the part you play.” **ONE**



YOU CAN HELP!

Women's Ministries is doing it again, and you can be a part. October 26, 2024, we will head to Mexico to sponsor the first international **Shine!** event. As the branch of our ministry that focuses on reaching girls aged 12-18, **Shine!** is an important way WNAC obeys the Great Commission.

If you would like to donate to help us show Christ's love to 50 girls at the Getsemani Children's Home overseen by John and Paulina Bivens, please visit <https://pushpay.com/g/wnacantioch> and choose "Mexico Shine." Your gift will help to provide biblical teaching, personal needs, and a day of refreshing for those who live there.

LEARN MORE: WNAC.ORG

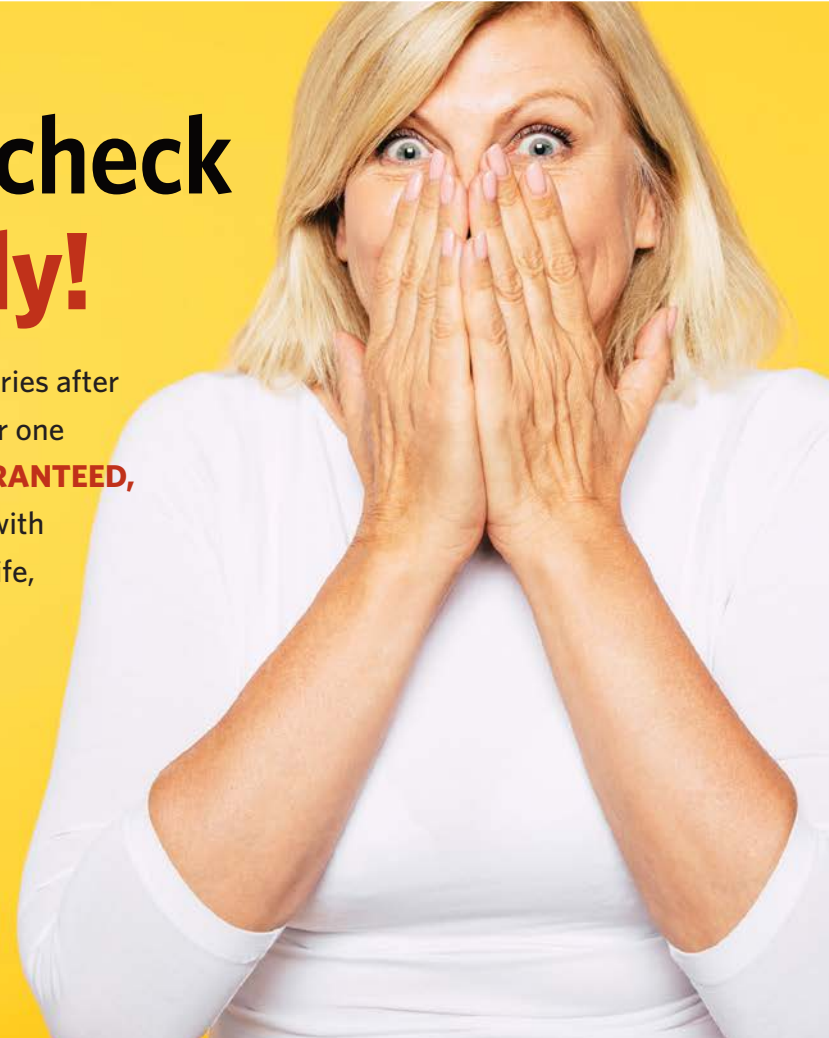
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ORPHANED ARMINIANS

BY KENNETH EAGLETON

I received an interesting email in April 2023 from Dr. Eddie Moody, executive secretary of the National Association of Free Will Baptists. He forwarded an email he had received from Argentina and asked me to contact the sender and see how we could help. I must say, IM frequently receives non-credible requests from distant places offering partnerships, asking for help, or wanting to join Free Will Baptists. However, this message was different. I read it with great interest.

Pastor Nicolás Serrano succinctly and convincingly identified himself as a Baptist church planter in Argentina with a Reformed Arminian doctrinal position who wanted prayer, books, and other materials regarding Arminian doctrine, along with permission to translate and publish Free Will Baptist materials.

Having only his email, I responded on behalf of Dr. Moody, explaining who I was and my interest in initiating a conversation. For the next two months, Nicolás and I conversed almost daily. We progressed from emails to social media conversations. From long audio exchanges to phone calls.

In ministry for over ten years, Pastor Nicolás had served as a missionary to indigenous peoples in the Peruvian forests (with an organization started by a well-known Calvinist apologist) and as a church planter in Rosario, Argentina, his native country. His team planted three churches in Rosario.

About five years prior to contacting Dr. Moody, Nicolás began having serious doubts about his Calvinistic doctrine. He decided to put aside his studies of theological

systems and read the Bible through again to understand for himself what Scripture teaches. After a thorough study, he came away with an Arminian position — one he classified as “Reformed Arminian,” although he’d never heard the term before.

When he informed the mission agency and his leadership team about his new doctrinal position, they tried to dissuade him. Seeing it was useless, many left him. He had to leave his mission agency. The leaders of two churches the team had planted broke fellowship with him. The church he pastored lost nearly half its members.

The next four years were a painful period of recovery from rejection, teaching the remaining members, and church reorganization. They knew of no other church in Argentina or abroad holding the doctrine they did. They felt orphaned and alone. They longed to belong to a larger church family again.

Once the congregation was healthy, they scoured the Internet, trying to find another group who believed as they did. Pastor Nicolás discovered an article by Dr. Matt Pinson explaining the position of Free Will Baptists — a position defined as “Reformed Arminianism.” They dug deeper into Free Will Baptists and finally decided to write Dr. Moody.

I was living in Brazil, serving as director of global partnerships for IM, when I received Dr. Moody’s email. I contacted pastor Nicolás, and learned his story and the journey of the church. We discussed doctrine, as well





as Free Will Baptist history, practices, and programs. Mutually realizing we were highly compatible, we looked at various scenarios for working together. Convinced of their sincerity and interest, I asked to visit him in Argentina to become better acquainted with him and his church through face-to-face meetings. He was delighted I wanted to visit.

In June 2023, Brazilian pastor Daniel Gouvea and I took a three-day trip to visit pastor Nicolás and the Familia de la Gracia Church in Rosario. It was a wonderful visit. We held long discussions with Nicolás, his three closest leaders, and then his broader leadership team. The more we learned about them, the more impressed we were. They certainly were looking for a broader church family. They mentioned three major reasons they chose Free Will Baptists: our doctrine, our long and distinguished history, and our missions program. By mid-July, the Rosario church voted to join Free Will Baptists.

I invited Nicolás to visit the U.S., hastily arranging for him to attend the National Convention in Raleigh. I wanted him to meet his new denomination. I introduced him to as many people as I could, desiring our leaders get to know him. Following the convention, we visited various departments in Nashville, Tennessee. I also arranged specific meetings. Nicolás had read the writings of Dr. Robert

Picirilli and Dr. Matt Pinson and enjoyed spending time with them. He even recorded short video interviews.

He was especially interested in knowing what D6 Family Ministry (formerly Randall House) had published in Spanish. He discussed the procedures for translating Free Will Baptist doctrinal and theological books into Spanish with them. They worked out a partnership and are currently finalizing their first book translation for publication.

Since last summer, the church in Argentina has grown. Their attendance has increased, forcing them to rent a larger meeting location in the center of Rosario. They began an outreach in a poor neighborhood in the southern part of the city. This outreach led to renting a building

Continued on page 23

CMP Serves India

Antioch, TN—Kenneth Eagleton led a CMP (College Missions Program) team to India May 30-June 12. The five-student team helped IM partners with children's camps in two locations.

Over 180 children, most from Hindu families, attended in the first location. In the second location, 50-plus children participated, but just as many parents and adults attended.

Despite the 100° weather and “feels like” temps of up to 130°, things went well. Children memorized Bible verses, sang Christian songs in several languages, listened to a Bible lesson, drew and painted pictures reinforcing the Bible story, and played games. By the end of the week, some Hindu parents came to see what was going on, entering a Christian church for the first time.

Kenneth declared, “The students did amazingly well, despite the challenges of the heat, different foods, brief illnesses, etc. They connected with the children despite the language barrier. Each day they took turns giving the Bible lesson. They also taught the children several songs in English.”



The team participated in worship and Sunday Schools on two Sundays with local churches. Kenneth preached on both Sundays.

The students observed Hindu idol worship in temples and shrines, visited local places of interest, and tasted a variety of Indian cuisine. “I pray they left with a greater burden for the unreached and find their place in taking the gospel to the nations,” Kenneth stated. “I pray the Lord calls at least one of them into full-time cross-cultural missions.” **ONE**

Board Meets to Continue the Mission of IM

Antioch, TN—On April 29-30, 2024, the IM board met, *Embracing the Legacy and Continuing the Mission.*

To continue the mission, the board appointed new missionaries to three fields of work:

- After a successful two-year internship with Hope Alive in Tokyo, Japan, **Abby Walker** was approved as a career missionary.
- **Billy and Sunni Champion** from Folkston, Georgia, were appointed as interns to work alongside missionaries at the Good News Chapel in Tokyo, Japan.
- **Tim and Loren** joined IM as commissioned missionaries, seconded to Here to There. The couple works with unreached people groups in Los Angeles, California.
- **Faith**, a native of Gallatin, Tennessee, was appointed as a field worker joining the team in southern France. She married Jacob on May 4.



“Interestingly, each of this year’s appointees,” stated Curt Holland, director of field ministry personnel, “was part of a short-term experience, rubbing shoulders with those who gave us our legacy. Now, they are ready to help us continue the mission.”

The board approved IMPact Projects for the University of Illinois, Japan, Bulgaria, Ivory Coast, and Pakistan.

David Brown, director of Free Will Baptist Foundation, presented a \$211,000 check to the board for grants for various ministry projects.

The board adopted a 2025 framework budget of \$10.6 million while acknowledging an ongoing need to fully fund the General Fund. The IM General Fund experienced sizable shortfalls during the last 12 months. Rob Conley, director of financial operations, confirmed, “We are praying for immediate additional funding, while making ongoing expenditure reduction efforts.”

General Director Clint Morgan presented the IM board with a retirement letter from Donnie McDonald. Morgan affirmed, “Donnie served 38 years as a missionary and field leader in Japan and two years on special assignment in the States. He diligently worked with Curt Holland over the past year processing applications and assisting with member care. We sincerely appreciate Donnie’s humble service and willing spirit.”

The board also received and approved a statement by Director Morgan releasing Jerry and Barbara Gibbs from their special assignment and work with the Mission. The Go Global program will still be available to states, associations, and churches that cover all expenses for the Gibbs and missionaries who assist in the program. Don Matchett, director

of development, stated, “Jerry and Barbara, the founders of Go Global, embarked on a mission to spread God’s global purpose to churches. Their efforts have left a profound impact on numerous churches over the years.”

The board approved a letter of missionary resignation from field service in Brazil from Dr. Kenneth and Rejane Eagleton. Dr. Eagleton continues as the IM director of global partnerships.

The board recognized those who contribute to IM’s ministry through their service on the board. Jan Banks resigned her board position due to health issues preventing consistent involvement. Mark Price, who has served as board secretary with meticulous minutes and enthusiasm, concludes 13 years of service in July. The board selected Darren Walker as secretary. Due to increased work demands, Jeff Nichols asked to not be considered for the chairman’s position. The board selected Rodney Yerby as chairman and Will Harmon as vice-chairman. Rodney stated, “I enjoy working alongside these incredible people who have contributed to IM in unique ways.”

Join IM in thanking God for those who pioneered IM’s legacy. *Continue the Mission* by partnering with IM, giving generously to the General Fund, and sending new missionaries into the harvest. **ONE**

Continued from page 21

for regular Bible studies and to a children’s ministry at a second campus. In a neighboring province, a small unaffiliated church, which had followed their services online, petitioned to join them. After a period of teaching, they joined as a sister church. The network of Free Will Baptist churches in Argentina is expanding!

The Familia de la Gracia Church has a vision for even greater expansion, starting more churches. They hold evangelistic campaigns and plan to start a Bible school to train leaders for ministry. To that end, one of Nicolás’ associates, Leandro Galarza, is studying theology and ministry. He plans to dedicate himself to leading this training program.

IM, through Global Partnerships, has established a partnership with our new friends in Argentina. We assist them with outreach, publications, and setting up a leadership training program. We are excited about the opportunity the Lord has given Free Will Baptists to make a difference in this country amid their economic turbulence. Our prayer is the Lord will turn many hearts to Himself.

Your gifts to the WMO provide for partnerships in countries, like Argentina, with no Free Will Baptist missionaries. **ONE**

About the Writer: Kenneth Eagleton relocated to Nashville, Tennessee, after decades (1984-2023) working in Brazil and Côte d’Ivoire. He has served as a missionary (medical doctor, church planting, leadership training) and is the director of global partnerships for IM. He and his wife Rejane have four adult sons and five grandchildren.



Surprised by Gen Z

BY ASHLEY MCNEESE

In July 2022, after a whirlwind summer of job applications, I was excited to accept an unexpected position at a state university as an adjunct professor in the English department. I was thrilled to teach at the college level but more than a little apprehensive about this age group. My knowledge of Gen Z was mostly limited to the way this generation was becoming the scapegoat for all manner of societal ills. But other than fashion choices that eerily reflected those of my own teen years and slang that required frequent visits to Urban Dictionary, I wasn't sure what to expect.

To my utter surprise and delight, I loved teaching Gen Z. I loved how bright and funny they were. I loved their careful, formally worded emails. I loved laughing over funny pop culture references. And despite my misgivings, I found myself connecting with these kids in a way I simply didn't expect. Obviously, some of my apprehension stemmed from the generation gap. Despite being only 15 years older than my students, the separation feels much wider because of the way technology and society have "progressed" rapidly over the last few decades.

I also was nervous about teaching in an entirely secular setting for the first time. How could I be a Christian witness to students in an environment that didn't lend itself to sharing the "Romans Road" on the first day of class?

Over the last four semesters, I have taught several hundred students, almost all Gen Z, and based on my course evaluations, emails, and end-of-semester reflections, I can say confidently while some of them may still be a little iffy on MLA formatting, we have made lasting connections in my classes. That is not a brag — humble or otherwise — on my

end. I genuinely didn't know how this would go when I started. But I have learned a few things along the way, and these principles have served me well in the last two years as I endeavored to connect with my students.

While these principles apply to any age group, gender, or classroom setting, Gen Z is unique in a number of ways, so I bring that perspective to this article.

BE CURIOUS

It is truly important to meet Gen Z where they are and find out what's going on in their world. This doesn't mean condoning or embracing what they find entertaining, but having a baseline knowledge of what they're reading, watching, and hearing can open many conversational doors.

We also must be curious about their stories. I start the semester by giving each student an index card and asking them to write down something they want me to know



about them. I am always shocked, both by their notes and by what these students have already endured at such young ages. But I must ask to learn. During a 2021 commencement speech, author Kelly Corrigan said, “Forget what you heard about the cat. Curiosity is brave and humble and always pays.”

If we’re not curious, we miss out on so much and often fill in those “blanks” with assumptions that may be incorrect.

BE COMPASSIONATE

It’s no secret Gen Z is the first of its kind. These young people have never truly known a world without smartphones, social media, and the Internet in its modern iterations (not the screeching dial-up of my childhood). In his new book *The Anxious Generation*, Jonathan Haidt methodically lays out the movement from a play-based childhood to a phone-based childhood and the way this has directly coincided with a steep rise in mental illness among adolescents, especially girls.

Depression and anxiety are at an all-time high, and the hyperconnectivity of the online world stands in stark contrast to the isolation and withdrawal young people are experiencing in real-life relationships. (All this, of course, was exacerbated by the pandemic.)

This should elicit deep compassion and empathy from us “grownups” who remember what (at least in theory) felt like a much simpler time. We didn’t have access to all the world’s information — good, bad, and often very ugly — in our pockets at every moment. We didn’t have the ability to document our most tender, formative years for friends and strangers to observe and comment. And we weren’t comparing

ourselves to increasingly filtered and curated “feeds” of everyone else’s lives.

When we add the impact social media has in areas such as gender identity, faith deconstruction, political unrest, and the very concept of truth, it is unequivocally more difficult to navigate young adulthood today. Our hearts should go

out to Gen Z (and Gen Alpha to come), and we should welcome their questions with as much compassion as we can muster, even when those questions are difficult or may seem disrespectful.

BE CHRISTLIKE


Older generations are currently not excelling in maintaining our Christian testimonies, especially in online spaces. It’s no secret vitriol and division in our country right now, especially in politics, have reached a fever pitch. *Oh, and it’s an election year!*

Many cultural shifts are happening, and older adults will likely find themselves on the other side of the aisle from Gen Z on many issues. With compassion and curiosity, we must strive to be like Jesus in our communication. It’s cliché at this point, but the well-known saying is familiar for a reason: “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” Anger (righteous or otherwise), legalism, and condescension will never win this generation to Christ. Author Jennifer Greenberg notes, to be Christlike “doesn’t mean we’re perfect, but that in some small way, we remind others of Jesus.”

While I speak openly in my classroom about the importance of my faith and mention things like church and prayer, I’m not explicitly sharing the gospel, so my primary means of witnessing must be found in the way I carry myself and interact with my students, showing them the love of Christ through emails and lectures and grace when they need it most.

Society would have us believe Gen Z is a generation in crisis. It’s true they face challenges young people never faced before. The generation gap sometimes feels wider than ever. But I am more hopeful than fearful about the future of these young people. If we rise to the occasion of this cultural moment and continue to minister to them with curiosity, compassion, and Christlikeness, we can watch them harness their many gifts for the Kingdom of God and do a mighty work for Him. **ONE**

About the Writer: Ashley Baines McNeese is an English professor and avid reader. She moved to Houston with her husband in 2015 and has since acquired two little girls, an M.A. in writing, and an excessive number of books. After growing up on both the West and East Coasts, no one is more surprised than she is that Texas became her home, but the impeccable Mexican food stole her heart.



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hopeful
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Intentional Recruiting

BY STEPHEN KIMBRELL

"If you would like to sign up to be a part of the _____ Team, please see Sheila after church."

Have you heard this statement at church before? I know I have. Honestly, I have no idea who started this method or why. Maybe it feels inclusive. Maybe it seems like a straightforward way to build a team. But can we just cut to the chase and admit it's ineffective?

The best teams are never assembled haphazardly, by appealing to the masses. Instead, they are built through intentional recruitment. Where do you begin the process of recruiting? Effective team recruitment can be simplified into two specific steps: *determine who to recruit* and *make the ask*.

DETERMINE WHO TO RECRUIT

The first step in recruiting is to determine which individuals best fit the team. Several

steps to recruitment are both biblical and strategic.

Pray for discernment.

Prior to selecting His disciples, Jesus spent all night in prayer on a mountain. Prayer was not merely a ritual for Him; it was an essential practice that shaped His

decisions and actions. Take time to pray about individuals under consideration for ministry and volunteer teams, allowing God to shape your decision-making process.

A simple place to start is with a pen and notepad. Jot down names God brings to your mind for specific roles. Then continue to pray through the names over the span of days or weeks asking God for clarity.

Assess commitment and passion. It can be tempting to recruit talented people with the hope they will become committed and passionate. However, merely holding a position rarely creates these qualities. Instead, look for individuals who already demonstrate genuine commitment to the church's mission and who are passionate about using

their gifts and talents to serve others. Those faithful in little will also be faithful in much.

Focus on leadership potential.

 Identify

people who not only possess the necessary skills and qualities to serve in an area, but also show potential for leadership within the ministry. Leaders

display initiative, influence others, demonstrate creativity, and are willing to accept responsibility.



Effective team recruitment can be simplified into two specific steps:

determine who to recruit
and *make the ask*.



MAKE THE ASK

Once potential team members have been identified, it's essential to "make the ask" in a compelling and upfront way. Here are a few tips:

Lead with vision. Begin the conversation by sharing the vision and goals of the ministry team. Remember, people invest more deeply and sustainably in vision than necessity, so, help them see what you see. What could this team accomplish? Where do you see it going? How would it enhance the overall ministry of the church? Could it change people's lives?

Take a personal approach. Use a personal approach rather than mass communication — no pulpit announcements, no mass texts or emails. Instead, schedule one-on-one meetings or have an informal conversation to discuss the opportunity and answer any questions.

Set clear expectations. Be transparent about the expectations, responsibilities, and time commitment required to serve on the team. This helps manage expectations and ensures individuals are fully aware of what is being asked of them.

Taking the time to build ministry teams with Spirit-led intentionality will take more work than making a quick request for volunteers from the pulpit. However, the result — teams passionately serving others from their God-given strengths — is well worth the effort. [ONE](#)

About the Columnist: Stephen Kimbrell is the pastor and lead church planter at Grace City Church in Irvine, California. He and his wife Lauren moved to Irvine from North Carolina in 2015 with a team of committed families to start a church that would reach people of all nations. The Kimbrells have three children: Lilly Kate, Ainsley, and Carter.

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Christopher and Ashly Littlecreek to Plant New Church in San Diego, CA

San Diego, CA—We are happy to announce Christopher and Ashly Littlecreek have been approved to serve as new NAM church planters in the greater San Diego, California, area. Originally from California, the Littlecreeks spent the last five years serving as missionaries in the Czech Republic and have three adult children.

Currently, they are completing a one-year church planting residency with City Lights Church (Amos and Melissa Dillard) allowing them to transition back to life in the States, develop new church planting skills, fundraise, and grow a healthy launch team. After completing their residency, they will launch a church plant of their own in San Diego.

California is among the most influential and diverse states in the nation. The San Diego area itself is home to over

1.3 million people from vastly varied cultural backgrounds, life experiences, and religious beliefs. This makes it a perfect place to cultivate passionate disciples who will then disciple others in their local communities and throughout the world.



Christopher and Ashly Littlecreek

We are excited about these opportunities for the Littlecreeks and the team at City Lights Church. Pray this team will grow the Kingdom in a rich way. **ONE**

FWB Chaplain Deilus to Serve Department of Veterans Affairs



CH (1LT) Elliott Deilus and family

CH (1LT) Elliott Deilus, a Free Will Baptist chaplain with the U.S. Army Reserve since 2023, recently accepted a position as a full-time staff chaplain at the Richmond, Virginia, Veterans Affairs Hospital. His position with the VA will allow him to serve military

veterans and their families during challenging circumstances where the comfort and hope of Christ are much needed.

CH Deilus has also been accepted into the Hopewell City Police Department as a police chaplain, allowing him to minister to the officers and citizens of his community. He and his wife Jacqueline have two children: Elliott II and Julianna. **ONE**

Church Planter Boot Camp Builds Solid Foundations

Thirteen of NAM's newest church planters, seasoned planters, and several guest teachers met in office and online during a recent Church Planter Boot Camp. This specialized training is just one of the many ways NAM assists new planters in laying a solid ministry foundation early in the church planting process. **ONE**



NorthPoint West Seneca Launches

West Seneca, NY—

After a year of renovations and property planning, NorthPoint West Seneca, a sister plant of former NAM church plant NorthPoint Depew in Buffalo, New York, met for its first services Easter weekend. The first official service was Good Friday, and the Depew campus joined the new congregation to celebrate.

On Saturday, NorthPoint Depew hosted its first community event, an Easter egg hunt, and 46 kids participated. Their Easter Sunday gathering saw 40 in attendance. Preview services continued throughout the spring, and the church



officially launched June 16. Pray for the Elliotts and their team as they continue following the Lord and building toward the future of NorthPoint West Seneca. **ONE**

Master's Men Generation S: Building a Generation of Servants



Ewing, IL—The premier Generation S event was held May 11 at Camp Hope in Ewing, Illinois. The conference was a great success, with 15 attendees representing four churches.



Generation S conferences seek to equip young men with life skills that can be used to serve their churches and communities. In a day where many young men may not have the access or opportunity to learn these skills, Master's Men wants to help educate them about the fundamentals of carpentry, gun awareness and safety, auto repair and maintenance, healthy relationships, and much more.

Director Ken Akers notes, "We are using local men to teach these classes who are skilled and knowledgeable in each of these areas. It's a great time of mentoring and connecting across generational lines."

If your state association or church would like to host a Generation S event, please contact Ken Akers at ken@nafwb.org. **ONE**



The Time Has Come!

BY JAIME M. HERNÁNDEZ

Is this phrase familiar to you? It is a biblical phrase, and it seems it was one of the favorite phrases of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the Gospel of John, seven times Jesus said, “But the hour cometh, and now is,” or in other words, “the time has come!” Using this powerful declaration, Jesus wanted to awaken His disciples to the reality God was starting a new season. Some of His promises were being fulfilled, and His people needed to act.

After much waiting, prayer, and planning, North American Ministries CEO David Crowe, Cross-Cultural Officer Rick Bowling, and Pastor Gene Williams of Parkers Chapel FWB Church in Greenville, North Carolina, felt God directing them to relocate and relaunch the Hispanic Bible Institute. The Institute is a branch of North American Ministries founded by Rick Bowling and Earl Hendrix in 2004 with great success.

This is great news for many of us! But perhaps some of you are asking “Why is this relevant to me? Why do we need a Hispanic Institute again?”

Allow me to share important details regarding this great vision God has given us.

WHY?

We need the Hispanic Institute to teach, train, equip, and prepare ministers of God for full- or part-time ministry among the Hispanic people. Nearly 64 million Spanish-speakers now live in the United States.

We need the Hispanic Institute to train pastors and preachers with sound doctrine to reach people with the true biblical message of salvation and transformation through Jesus Christ.

We need the Hispanic Institute because it has a legacy of great success, with 200 student graduates. Forty now serve as pastors, and others serve in churches around the United States and internationally.

We need the Hispanic Institute because Spanish is the third most spoken language in the world (after Chinese and English). Many nations speak Spanish, and we can potentially reach students in those nations.

PROGRAM

Students at the Hispanic Institute experience four months of intensive training, five days a week, with six hours of classroom learning each day. This way, students will receive in four months the training most institutes take two to three years to accomplish. Also, it is easier for working people, or those with families, to commit to four months rather than two or three years.

Each week, classroom instruction is paired with hours of practical service among Hispanic people in the surrounding area.

In addition to classroom instruction and practical service, daily prayer is emphasized as a vital part of successful ministry. Students must be equipped with prayer to be strong for the sometimes-difficult work of God. The institute is not just a learning center; it is a transforming and empowering center.

STUDENTS

The institute is open to members of all Hispanic Free Will Baptist congregations in the United States and other countries. Those attending must present a letter of recommendation from their pastor and/or association.

While students do not necessarily have to be from our denomination, they must understand and accept the basic principles of our denomination before entering the institute.

Parkers Chapel will help provide apartments for the students, and they will attend classes and eat their meals in the Parkers Chapel facilities.

TEACHERS

Pastors from Spanish-speaking Free Will Baptist churches are a crucial part of this project. They will volunteer one

or two weeks to teach at the institute, and only transportation and housing costs will be covered for them. We are grateful for their dedication to this work.

COURSES

Courses covered include New Testament, Old Testament, Systematic Theology, Methods of Bible Study, Homiletics, Church History, Apologetics, Successful Evangelism in the 21st Century, Cults, and many more. Each class includes a final test with grades given. Students receive a Certificate in Theological Studies after completing four months of study.

COSTS

Our goal is to keep expenses as low as possible, so more students can attend the institute. We set tuition at \$4,000 per student, which includes housing, meals, and courses. The actual expense is much greater than this, but we're taking a step of faith and appealing to God's providence through His people to make it possible to keep tuition low and classes accessible. Your help and support are vital to realize our vision.

TIME

Our goal is to complete one, four-month class each year. The first class at the institute began August 11, 2024, and ends December 13, 2024.

THE TIME HAS COME!

We all can contribute to this great vision. If you know Hispanic believers who desire to serve the Lord, encourage them to join our Hispanic Bible Institute. If God leads you to be a part, your prayers and your support are very valuable. It will bless the lives of thousands of Hispanics and will even result in the planting of many Hispanic churches. **ONE**

About the Writer: Before moving to Greenville, North Carolina, to relaunch the Hispanic Bible Institute, Jaime Hernandez and his family served as cross-cultural church planters with NAM and the Indiana State Mission Board at Primera Iglesia Bautista Libre in Elkhart, Indiana, for 13 years. While serving the Institute, Jamie and his family will plant a new Hispanic church in conjunction with Parkers Chapel.



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The Path to Human Happiness

BY MATTHEW STEVEN BRACEY

Life can be incredibly fun and meaningful, but it also can be incredibly difficult and frustrating. Sometimes we feel great, and sometimes we feel deeply discouraged. Sometimes we believe we make a difference, and sometimes we wonder whether we matter at all. In many ways, these conflicting feelings reveal the human condition.

We find the interplay of these emotions throughout the book of Ecclesiastes. On one hand, the Teacher, the author of Ecclesiastes, lamented everything is futile; on the other hand, he instructed us to enjoy life. How can we enjoy life if everything is futile? I propose life may seem futile but, for the person who fears God and keeps His commandments, may also be full of joy and possibility.

FUTILITY

Within the opening and concluding refrains of Ecclesiastes, the Teacher lamented everything is futile or vain (1:2; 12:8). Some translations even use the word *meaningless*, although I do not agree with that translation. Undoubtedly, the concept of futility is a dominant theme in the book, appearing nearly forty times. The Teacher sounded as though he is saying nature, history, work, wisdom, pleasure, justice, words, and more are ultimately futile (e.g., 1:8, 14; 2:1, 17). However, elsewhere, the Teacher affirmed the importance of these things. How then should we interpret his teaching?

Some aspects of life are vain in one sense but not in another. Part of the challenge in comprehending the Teacher's meaning is due to our contemporary understanding of words like *futility* and *vanity*. In today's English, these words communicate the idea something is meaningless or pointless. However, if God is sovereignly renewing all

things — even bad things, even seemingly wasted things, according to His purposes (e.g., Ephesians 1:10; Revelation 21:5) — then how can *anything* be pointless? In fact, the word translated *vanity* (*hābel*) literally means “vapor” or “breath.” To illustrate, the psalmist David used the same word when he said our lives are like a vapor (Psalm 39:5; James 4:14).

In other words, these things are not without meaning or purpose, but our lives “under the sun” are short-lived (Ecclesiastes 1:3). Our accomplishments of labor, wisdom, pleasure, and justice are short-lived (3:11, 14; 12:5) and then ultimately forgotten (9:5). For this reason, the wise person does not turn these temporary pursuits into idols since they do not satisfy the deepest desires for meaning and significance.

However, the Teacher was not saying we should reject these pursuits altogether. Rather, we should put them in their proper place, so we might know true contentedness, true happiness, true joy.

CONTENTMENT

In many ways, the Teacher's point was not unlike the message of Psalm 1. The psalmist presented two paths: the way of the righteous person who flourishes like a tree planted firmly by the waters (verses 1–3) and the way of the wicked person who blows away like chaff in the wind (verses 4–6). Likewise, the Teacher presented two paths: the way of joy and the way of despair. The righteous person places the pursuits of work, knowledge, pleasure, and justice under the lordship of God and thereby finds joy in those pursuits. But the wicked person makes them into idols, leading to despair.

FEAR GOD AND KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS

The Teacher repeatedly returned to the theme of happiness or joy throughout Ecclesiastes (2:10; 3:12, 22; 4:16; 5:19; 8:15; 10:19; 11:8–9). This word (*šāmêah*) translates alternatively as *be happy* or *rejoice*. Even so, sometimes people contrast the ideas of happiness and joy as if the former is fleeting but the latter is lasting. However, happiness, like other words, has a wide range of meaning from a light connotation to a more substantive one. We recognize this truth with other words: we love pizza and we love our spouses, yet we recognize a world of difference between them.

Similarly, happiness of one sort may be fleeting, especially when based in an improper object (idolatry). But happiness of another sort may be lasting when it is based in God's purposes. F. Leroy Forlines recognized this point when he subtitled his ethics book *Ethics for Happier Living*. In other words, biblical happiness is what we sometimes call joy. Thus, although the Teacher described futility, his purpose was not ultimately to leave readers in despair but to show them the path to true happiness.

The Teacher explicitly stated God has given men and women the ability to find joy in the following:

- **Work, labor, or toil (Ecclesiastes 2:24; 3:13, 22; 5:18; 9:7);**
- **Food and drink (2:24–25; 3:13; 5:18; 8:15; 9:7);**
- **Wisdom and knowledge (2:26);**
- **Wealth and possessions (5:19; cf. 2:26); and**
- **Family (9:9).**

The Teacher could describe “nothing better” than such things (2:24; 3:22; 8:15). He described them as “good and comely” (5:18), the “gift of God” (3:13), and said He “now accepteth” them (9:7). Even the joy itself resulting from

such objects is a gift from God “from the hand of God” (2:24).

Significantly, true happiness is not available to all people. Specifically, the Teacher explained it is not available to the wicked for whom such pursuits are like “vexation of spirit” (1:14; 2:11, 17; 4:4, 6, 16; 6:9). True joy is not derived from accumulating the most stuff, learning the most information, having the most fun, or doing the most good. From personal experience, it seems, the Teacher knew these paths do not lead to lasting joy. For that reason, he advanced numerous dialectics, introducing sections by phrases like “I communed with mine heart” or “I said in mine heart” (1:16; 2:1).

Instead, for any person to experience lasting contentment, he or she must be righteous, the result of fearing God and keeping His commandments. After the refrain “vanity, vanity” at the end of Ecclesiastes, the Teacher included a coda in which he states:

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (verses 13–14).

Ultimately, *everything* has meaning of some kind because everything is subject to God's commandments and His judgments (3:17; 11:9). A person may find happiness in his pursuits only if he places them under the lordship of the sovereign God. To fear God means to revere, venerate, and worship Him. As the proverb says, the *fear of the Lord* is the beginning of wisdom (1:7). The Teacher's point was not to reject the pursuits of work, wisdom, play, and justice because they are meaningless but to submit them to God's purposes. God has formed our bones in the womb (Ecclesiastes 11:5) and has foreknown and foreordained our days (6:10); therefore, we can trust Him.

Although the pursuits of life are futile in themselves, they are not ultimately futile in God's hands because they last eternally: “I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him”

(3:14). The things we do under God's lordship last forever. Certainly, the good things are meaningful, lasting into eternity. Yet even what seems to fail is meaningful; failure is a harsh but effective teacher that may shape us for the better. What seems like a failure in the moment may signify success in eternity.

Whether or not we can discern God's purposes, we have this promise from the Teacher: whatever God does will endure forever. Therefore, if God gifts it to us, we can enjoy it and know it has significance, even when it seems to be temporary. In our feelings of futility, even grief, we find hope that nothing is futile in God's hands.

The Teacher's theology of contentment is reiterated throughout the New Testament (Philippians 4:11; 1 Timothy 6:6, 8; Hebrews 13:5). Although God has given us each different roles in life, He wants us to find joy in what He has given us: labor, food, knowledge, wealth, and family. Still, in all this discussion of true happiness, the Teacher was not saying we cannot be sad. He fully acknowledged a time to weep and laugh, a time to mourn and dance (3:4). But beneath the circumstances of life lies an abiding confi-

dence in God's provision. Or, as the Apostle Paul stated, we do not grieve as people without hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). True joy, happiness, and contentment in the Lord equips the person to weather the worst of life's storms.

Ecclesiastes is a book about the human condition, answering our feelings of meaninglessness and angst. But Ecclesiastes is not ultimately a book of despair — at least for the believer — but rather a book of happiness and hope. It teaches us to think rightly about the ordinary things of life. The world has deep problems, and sometimes we are tempted to despair. But thanks be to our good and sovereign God who does not let our work in His will go to waste and allows us to know happiness. By fearing God and keeping His commandments, our pursuits of work, knowledge, pleasure, and justice may have meaning into eternity even when we cannot see it. This is the path to human happiness. **ONE**

About the Writer: Matthew Steven Bracey is assistant vice provost for academic administration and professor of theology and culture at Welch College. Learn more: Welch.edu. Adapted from an essay on HelwysSocietyForum.com.



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Light & HEAT

A BALANCE FOR MINISTRY

BY CHRIS TALBOT

Over the past decade, I have been privileged to serve in ministerial and academic roles. Prior to becoming a college instructor, I was a full-time youth and family pastor. In 2014, Welch College hired me to lead the youth and family ministry program. Shortly thereafter, I became the campus pastor at Welch and began serving my local congregation in a part-time position as youth and family pastor.

To be on both sides of the theory-practice coin has been interesting. At times, I have felt I have been too theoretical for the practitioner and too practical for the theorist. Yet I think a sound ministerial philosophy balances theory and practice. To be clear, I am not saying one should focus simply on theory and practice in equal amounts, giving 50% here and 50% there. Rather, the right balance for ministry is to provide plenty of light and heat.

Throughout this article, I seek to demonstrate that the minister of God's Word — the one who pastors a flock and rightly divides the Word of Truth for God's people — must seek to both illumine and impassion Christians. I primarily consider the task of preaching, but I believe this balance can and should be extended to other areas of pastoral ministry.

LIGHT

I am not the first to argue for a balance between the mind and the heart. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, in his book *Preaching and Preachers*, spent ample time defining his now famous phrase: "logic on fire!" Lloyd-Jones thought sermons should be equal parts fervor and reason. "What is preaching? Logic on fire! Eloquent reason! Are these contradictions? Of course they are not. Reason concerning this Truth ought to be mightily eloquent....It is theology on fire."¹

Our ministries, not least of which include preaching, are to bring light to darkness. That is, we are to help our flocks

¹ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 40th aniv. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 110.

have a better and clearer understanding regarding their role as Christians in this world.

However, our concern for thoughtful preaching and ministry should not slip into cold intellectualism. Yes, biblical ministry focuses on the mind, but not only the mind. We must engage the intellect but avoid causing confusion with dense terminology, or impractical and abstract reflections. In other words, our emphasis for ministry is on understanding and application, not just knowledge. We want to bring light, not just content, to people's minds.

Light is shining on the path before us — that is, when we bring light to our ministries, we seek to apply and live out God's truth, not just think about it. The difference is between more information and actual understanding. Our goal is qualitative more than quantitative. As our church members sit with the Bible open before them, we want to help them make sense of God's Word so they grow closer to the Lord and serve Him more faithfully. We should desire to illuminate and make sense of difficult interpretations and ethical questions. Good ministry is a ministry full of light — that is, illuminating clarity.

HEAT

Light on its own is not enough. All the information in the world means little if we are not persuasive and impassioned when we communicate. Lloyd-Jones continues his definition: "Preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire. A true understanding and experience of the Truth must lead to this. I say again that a man who can speak about these things dispassionately has no right whatsoever to be in a pulpit; and should never be allowed to enter one again."²

Lloyd-Jones was not arguing for preaching that inflames only the emotions of its hearers. Instead, he wants to connect the head and the heart in the heralding of God's Word. But herein lies the problem: too often our preaching (and ministries-at-large) are either too heady or too emotional. The former focuses on providing a lot of information, assuming such preaching equates to greater sanctification. The latter emphasizes experience, assuming more emotion means more transformation. By doing this, we put the mind and heart at odds with one another. Yet it is precisely by tying these two areas together we achieve balance. Reason balances zeal. The heart balances the head. Good

preaching (and ministry) appeals to the mind and the heart. It is theologically-rich, biblically-saturated truth communicated with enthusiasm and compassion. We meet the living God revealed in His Word; that should leave neither the pastor nor the congregants unchanged.

Lloyd-Jones's statement is not just about projecting an animated point. It is about the pastor feeling the full weight of Truth in the here and now. That is, has the pastor — in preaching, counseling, and personal life — come into contact with the Truth he is sharing? Are his mind and heart softened to the instructions of the Scriptures? Has he experienced the Truth he preaches? Too often our lips demonstrate how far our minds are from our hearts. Meditative preaching does not require emotional reaction, but it certainly does not exclude it.

Jerram Barrs, long-time professor of apologetics at Covenant Theological Seminary, exemplifies this as described in the following account by Zack Eswine, describing the professor's classroom meditation on Psalm 10:

Jerram's voice faltered. He looked out above his glasses but away from us. He searched the wall with his eyes and heaved a deep breath. He could read no further. He pulled both hands up and spread them flat upon his face, covering his cheeks, forehead, and eyes....In his mid-forties, Jerram cried like a man, as if none of us were there. I'm not sure I had ever seen a grown man cry like this. But there it was. The biblical text and love for God and neighbor led the apologist to weep....Class was in session. The sermon thundered. As a minister in training, all semester, I learned a great deal about the isms and idols that create barriers to the gospel in our hearts and in our culture. I learned what an apologist is meant to say. But that day, I was introduced to who an apologist is meant to be.³

**REASON BALANCES
ZEAL. THE HEART
BALANCES THE
HEAD. GOOD
PREACHING (AND
MINISTRY) APPEALS
TO THE MIND
and THE HEART.**

2 Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 110.

3 Zack Eswine, "Apologetic Communication: How Someone Who Isn't A Christian Is Meant to Experience Someone Who Is," in *Firstfruits of a New Creation: Essays in Honor of Jerram Barrs*, Doug Serven, ed., (Baltimore, MD: White Blackbird, 2019), 243.

As pastors, maybe we need to learn how to cry — to cry like men. I am moved by Eswine’s summary: “The biblical text and love for God and neighbor led the apologist to weep.”⁴ Our ministries not only need light but also heat. They need a zeal for the Lord grounded in love for God and neighbor. This combination comes from utter dependence upon the Lord and His work. We need logic, but we need logic on fire. Let us long with fervent spirits for the work of the Lord in our own lives and in the lives of others.

A decade ago, I was traveling with another pastor with whom I worked at church. We were discussing a student in my youth ministry who had incredible zeal for the Lord. The pastor warned, “Yes, but be careful. There can be a lot of heat but no light.”

He was right. The student, being new in the faith and young, was zealous but not discerning. He had a zeal for God without the accompanying knowledge of God (Romans 10:2). I did not want to dampen his zeal but wanted him to think wisely and biblically about his life. As that student grew in his sanctification, he needed balance between the two.

4 Eswine, “Apologetic Communication,” 243.

Just as it is true in the lives of individual Christians, we as pastors should avoid the extremes in our ministries and preaching. Moreover, we model in our ministries and preaching what we hope to be true in the lives of our flock. We need both light and heat. We need to transform our minds and take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. Likewise, we should not be slothful, but fervent in spirit as we serve the Lord (Romans 12:11).

Ministry is not only for the intellect. And it is not only for the emotions. Pastoral ministry brings believers into communion with God Himself, specifically through His Word. God made us as people with minds and hearts. We can have confidence in the Word. It speaks Truth. Likewise, we can have boldness in the work of the Spirit through His Word. We should not neglect the work of speaking the clear truth of Scripture, but we must also speak in a way that is persuasive and compelling. In doing so, we can lead people to transformed Christian lives, the goal of Christian ministry. **ONE**

About the Writer: Chris Talbot is instructor of ministry and program coordinator for youth and family ministry at Welch College, where he also serves as campus pastor. Adapted from an essay on HelwysSocietyForum.com.

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Welch College Unveils New Master's Degree in Organizational Leadership

Welch College is now enrolling students in a new Master of Arts (M.A.) degree in Organizational Leadership, with classes beginning this fall, according to Dr. Greg Ketteman, vice president for strategic initiatives.


Designed for leaders of non-profit and for-profit organizations, the interdisciplinary program aims to provide organizational leaders with graduate education in the art and science of Christian leadership, inspiring professional excellence through integration of biblical thought and life.

The 33-hour degree program will be delivered in a 100% online format, accessible to busy Christian men and women who serve as leaders in nonprofits, businesses, communities, athletics and recreation, educational organizations, and ministries.

Dr. Ketteman will serve as coordinator of the new pro-

gram. In addition to his doctorate in educational leadership, his background in organizational leadership includes doctoral-level study in public administration, more than 15 years as a school administrator, and 18 years of executive leadership in higher education.

"We're so excited about this new program," Ketteman said. "There has never been a greater need for Christian leaders with integrity who live out the timeless, unchanging truths of Scripture. We believe the M.A. in Organizational Leadership will strategically position strong, well-prepared, servant-leaders to serve God in building His Kingdom."

The first courses in the degree begin in September. For more information, visit welch.edu/MAOL or contact Dr. Greg Ketteman at gketteman@welch.edu. Apply now online at welch.edu/MAOLapply. 

Welch College Graduates 57 in Commencement Exercises

Welch College conferred degrees on 57 students in its May 3 commencement ceremony, 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 Thursday evening, May 2, and the commencement ceremony Friday morning, May 3. The college awarded degrees in multiple programs, including associate's and bachelor's degrees, the Master of Arts in Theology and Ministry, the Master of Arts in Teaching, and the Master of Divinity.

The Honorable John J. DeBerry, Jr., senior advisor to Tennessee Governor Bill Lee, delivered the commencement address. Dr. Will Beauchamp, pastor of First Free Will Baptist Church of Tampa in Seffner, Florida, delivered the baccalaureate sermon.

President Matt Pinson recognized Angie Edgmon, financial aid coordinator, and Tina Tolbert, assistant professor of speech, for 25 years of service. Dr. Etta Patterson (associate undergraduate dean of the School of Education), Christopher Talbot (program coordinator for youth and family ministry), and Frank Thornsby (program coordinator for English) were recognized for ten years of faithful service.

Dr. Ian Hawkins, assistant professor of biology and dean of the School of Arts and Sciences, was named Teacher of the Year. The college also awarded Academic Advisor of the Year to Dr. Barry Raper, associate professor of ministry and dean of Welch Divinity School.

The college congratulates the 2024 graduating class and commends them to the service of Christ and the transformational work of His Kingdom.

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Chandler Ray Binkley
Ashland City, Tennessee
Business

Walker Hamilton Cummins
Gallatin, Tennessee
Business

Kenadee Athens Osborne
Cross Plains, Tennessee
Biology

Kade Aaron Riddle
Hendersonville, Tennessee
Ministry

Associate of Arts Degree

Samuel Jae Riggs
Pleasant View, Tennessee

Bachelor of Science Degrees

Isabella Nicole Alvarez**
Sherwood, Arkansas
Music Performance

Ellis Keaton Bass**
Hendersonville, Tennessee
Exercise Science

Owen Riley Bass*
Hendersonville, Tennessee
Business Administration

Eliza Grace Bernui
Hendersonville, Tennessee
Business Administration

Chandler Ray Binkley
Ashland City, Tennessee
Exercise Science

Anna Grace Blades***
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James Harrison Boyd*
Northport, Alabama
Business Administration

LeeAnn Branch*
Darlington, South Carolina
Business Administration



Edward Keith Byrd, Jr.
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Exercise Science

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Alpedrete, Spain
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Ellie Breann Daniel*
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English—Licensure 6-12

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Exercise Science

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General Christian Ministries

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Benton, Kentucky
Psychology

Eden Elizabeth Rose Suggs
Tifton, Georgia
Mathematics Education

Continued on page 53

Do You “Smell” Like a Christian?

BY BARRY RAPER

2 CORINTHIANS 2:12-17

Think about sending a text. You know it has been received and read, and you are waiting (impatiently) for a response. Suddenly, a little word-bubble icon pops up to let you know the other person is tapping out a response. Still, you must wait (even if impatiently) for the actual message to come through. Waiting patiently for news from others isn't a strength in today's culture. Can you imagine the circumstances Paul described in this section of 2 Corinthians?

Paul wrote a severe reprimand letter (now lost to history) to the church at Corinth to address a situation in Corinth that worsened after his first letter we call 1 Corinthians. Paul sent the letter through Titus, hoping it would have the intended effect. When he and Titus were unable to connect as planned, Paul became anxious, thinking perhaps the letter had the wrong effect on the church. In verses 14 and following, after Paul finally met up with Titus in Macedonia and heard a good report from the church in Corinth, he began to celebrate and rejoice over the leadership of God in his life.

His words offer a good reminder. The life of the Christian, in simplest terms, is following the leadership of Christ. If we, by His grace, follow Him faithfully, several things will be true in our lives.

When we follow Christ, we walk in His victory (verse 14). Paul's metaphor here recalls generals who, after a great conquest, returned with their troops to their home city with a victory parade. Often the parade included captured opposition troops. The procession served as a long, visible declaration of victory. A similar description is found in Colossians 2:15: "And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it."

The Colossians passage signals that Jesus defeated the evil spiritual powers in the world once and for all.

Perhaps you have observed the old practice of pulling to the side of the road when a funeral procession passes on the other side. The gesture of courtesy demonstrates

respect for the deceased and for those who lost a loved one. I don't want to minimize how hard and difficult life can be. Sometimes, it may feel like a long, painful funeral procession. But these passages ultimately remind us those following Christ aren't in a funeral procession but a victory parade. Recall the words of the old gospel song:

*Oh, victory in Jesus, my Savior forever!
He sought me and bought me with His redeeming blood;
He loved me 'ere I knew Him, and all my love is due Him;
He plunged me to victory beneath the cleansing flood.*

When we follow Christ, we spread His "aroma" (verses 14-15). Paul told the Corinthians that Jesus spreads the knowledge of Himself everywhere through us. I'm sure you have heard the old saying, "You are the only Bible some people will ever read." This passage essentially says, "You are the only Christian some people ever smell."

Do you "smell" like a Christian?

As Christians, God uses our lives and actions to spread the fragrance of Christ to the world. This fragrance elicits different responses. The message of a crucified Savior, dying like a criminal between two thieves, is utter nonsense and folly to the unbelieving world — both then and now. To this group, Christians are the aroma of death leading to death. (This language harkens back to 1 Corinthians 1, where Paul established the preaching of the cross as foolishness to those who perish.)

However, to those "being saved," the fragrance of our lives communicates the power and wisdom of God. These individuals see the beauty and wisdom and power of God displayed at Calvary. To those who believe the gospel, who hear and accept the good news, it is the aroma of life that leads to life.

There isn't a third option.

After 15 straight years of losses to the University of Alabama, in 2022, the Tennessee Volunteers sent a last-second knuckleball kick through the uprights in Neyland



Stadium in Knoxville, Tennessee, to defeat their rivals. The crowd went crazy, and cigar smoke soon filled the air. The thick, pungent smoke was the “smell of victory” for almost everyone there. But not me. As an Alabama fan, surrounded by a hundred thousand cheering Tennessee fans, the aroma smelled awful. It was the noxious scent of defeat. That day, the same smell produced different responses depending entirely on your team.

Paul told the Corinthians the aroma of our lives, as Christ-followers, permeates the world and produces different effects or responses.

We see this in Paul’s own ministry, in the city of Athens, when he preached at Mars Hill to a group of pagan philosophers. At the end of the sermon, after Paul preached about Jesus and the resurrection, Luke records: “Some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter....Certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them” (Acts 17:32, 34).

These pagans had differing responses to the aroma of Paul’s preaching. Some continued to mock. They smelled the aroma of death. Others believed, and the aroma of the gospel led them to life.

When we follow Christ, we proclaim His Word simply (verse 17). In the final verse of this passage, Paul emphasized the proclamation of God’s Word by first stressing the negative. We are not like those who corrupt or “peddle” the Word of God. The word used here calls to mind annoying and dishonest sales tactics, those who cross ethical lines to make a profit.

When it comes to sharing the Word of God, we aren’t peddling or selling anything. The Word of God doesn’t need our help. We aren’t called to smooth out the rough edges, adapt it to fit the culture, or to make it politically correct. Instead, we are to proclaim it or preach it simply.

“Preaching” in this sense isn’t just the work of pastors, but the work of all Christians to share the gospel. So, Christian, *preach* or *proclaim* the Word.

- **Preach it cleanly**, with sincerity and ethical purity or cleanness. In contrast to false teachers who profit from or manipulate the Word of God, Paul said to live upright and honest lives in the sight of everyone, with nothing to hide.
- **Preach it authoritatively.** We are commissioned; that is, we are sent into the world with a message *from God*. Later in this epistle, Paul described us as *ambassadors* for Christ.
- **Preach it verbally.** Speak clearly and openly of Christ. While a godly lifestyle is important, we must also share the words, the message of the good news of Christ.

Billy Graham preached the gospel to more than 200 million people who attended one of his 400 crusades, simulcasts, and evangelistic rallies in 185 countries and territories. A 2005 Gallup poll revealed 35 million people in America — one in six U.S. adults — had heard Billy Graham preach in person. He was an outstanding preacher and communicator and a spiritual counselor to several U.S. presidents. His clear and compelling gospel sermons were packed with one simple phrase used again and again: “The Bible says...”

This is our responsibility and privilege as well, to let our proclamation be “the Bible says.”

Paul rejoiced over God’s guidance in his life, leading him in victory, leading him to spread the fragrance of Christ, and leading him to preach God’s Word. No matter where your life takes you, if you follow Jesus, these things will be true of you as well. **ONE**

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

The Things We Carry With Us

BY BRENDA EVANS

The list was long. It started with a 55-foot keelboat and two smaller flat-bottomed pirogues, named *Red* and *White*, plus a bronze swivel cannon mounted on *Red* and hundreds of other items. Led by Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, the trip stretched 8,000 miles from St. Charles, Missouri, to the mouth of the Columbia River on the Washington-Oregon coast — and back, of course.

Food included 200 pounds of dried soup, flour, lard, salt pork, three bushels of salt, and other staples. Meat would be provided by hunting along the way — elk, bear, buffalo, fish, birds, small mammals, and finally horsemeat and dogmeat when game was not available. Then gifts — thousands of beads, especially blue ones for Native Americans west of the Mississippi, along with 288 brass thimbles, 144 “small cheap Scizors,” 10 pounds of assorted sewing thread, and Jefferson medallions.

Weaponry included knives of all sizes and usage, 400 pounds of lead, 200 pounds of the “best rifle powder,” and a variety of firearms.

Clothing, tobacco, and navigating instruments such as sextants, charts, and a premier “time chronometer” were essential.

Multipurpose 8-foot by 12-foot oilskin sheets served for tents and sails.

There were journals, notebooks, candles, and ink tucked into waterproof oilskin bags, along with a “traveling library of books.” More than 30 medicines included opium, mercury ointment, and Dr. Benjamin Rush’s patented “Rush Pills,” familiarly known as “Thunderclaps.” Rush, a prominent Philadelphia physician, scientist, and signer of the Declaration of Independence, claimed his purging pills worked gently and were “sovereign for nearly all mankind’s ills.” Lewis bought 50 dozen.

The Corps of Discovery’s journey, led by Lewis and Clark from May 1804 to September 1806, was both triumph and failure. Thomas Jefferson’s commission had been to find a water route up the Missouri River beginning in St. Charles, Missouri, all the way to the mouth of the Columbia River on the Pacific Coast. The Corps made it to the Pacific Coast all right, but not always by water. Portaging on foot or horseback was too frequent.

By the spring of 1805, the captains were 1,600 miles up the Missouri River. The Corps included 29 people from three races and Seaman, Lewis’ black Newfoundland dog. Clark wrote that the 23 enlisted men were “good hunters, stout healthy unmarried young men...capable of bearing bodily fatigue to a pretty considerable extent...and not adventurers.” Clark also brought along York, his slave.

Shoshone-born Sacagawea and her newborn son Jean Baptiste (“Pomp”) were aboard, along with her husband Toussaint Charbonneau, a Frenchman whom the captains described as a “squaw man” and “ne’er-do-well,” but a much-needed interpreter.

Captain Lewis also carried a new contraption the enlisted men called *The Experiment* — a collapsible iron framework for a boat he and Thomas Jefferson designed in 1803. By June of 1805 the iron frame was assembled and covered with 28 elk and four buffalo skins. When launched, Lewis wrote that, at first, “She lay like a perfect cork on the water.” But without pitch to waterproof the skins, Lewis soon added, “She leaked in such manner that she would not answer.” *The Experiment’s* sinking “mortified me not a little,” he confessed.

Mortified. We know *mortified*. We’ve all been mortified, shamed, embarrassed, humiliated by certain things we have carried with us — at least I have. Thousands of items on the captains’ lists were useful and needed, but not *The Experiment*. Lewis “bid adieu” to his “favorite boat,” and left *The Experiment* and a few other items in a deep cache the men dug along the Missouri River. Lewis never mentioned *The Experiment* again.

Sometimes, that’s what I need to do with things I carry with me. Bury them along the river of my life. Leave them in the deep cache of the Lord’s forgiveness. Walk away. No looking back, no digging up, especially those things that should never have been on my list in the first place. Spiritual misdeeds, sins, bad attitudes, character failures.

Topping my list are the five Gs: greed, gluttony, gossip, gloom, and grumbling. Any day, I’m susceptible to loading up and toting around one or more of these.

Grumbling and gloom, for example. One morning I wake up in a foul mood, gloomy, downcast. That bad mood becomes an excuse to grumble. My father, who wasn’t a grumbler, used to chide me for “getting up on the wrong side of the bed.” Then he would tell me to quit whining, stop carping, and get going. Above all, he wouldn’t let me excuse myself.

Grumble — mutter, murmur, carp, fuss, gripe, nitpick, squawk, growl — label it what you will. Both Testaments condemn grumbling. Jesus warned Jewish leaders not to grumble among themselves (John 6:43). I think He pointed out grumblers need and want an audience. We grumblers are not prone to silence. We affect others, and grumbling goes hand-in-glove with bitterness, a vice not from above, James says (3:14-15). Paul warned us to put grumbling away and instead be kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving (Ephesians 4:31-32).

Moses’ warning to the Israelites about grumbling was even more pointed when he told them their grumbling was not against their leaders but against God (Numbers 16:11). The Psalmist went further in 106:25-39: They murmured [grumbled] in their tents...and did not obey the Lord...they served idols...became unclean...and provoked the Lord to anger. Consequently, God brought them down in the wilderness and scattered their offspring. Grumbling is not a minor sin.

Sometimes, I load up **greed** and tote it along. Greed isn’t always about money, although in the New Testament it often refers to the intense desire for “base gain” or “filthy lucre.” The Ten Commandments call it covetousness and suggest it is greediness for anything.

When you think about it, greed is motivated by selfishness. It is all about “I.” *I want, I need, I hunger for.* It is an insatiable urge to grab for more: more power, prestige, position, pleasure, fame, food, drink, time — the list is as long as human depravity. As early as the fourth century A.D., Christians listed greed among the seven deadly sins. Both Peter and Paul warned against greed. Jesus spent a whole parable on it (Luke 12:13-21). In his *Inferno*, Dante called greed a “she-wolf” that devours us.

The perpetual longing for MORE and MORE and MORE is a heavy load to carry, and a sin I confess to the Lord and turn from. For me, after I repent, the way to throw off greed is to load up on contentment, gratitude, and peace with who I am and what I have. These are great gains.

Fear. How many times have I packed up fear and taken it along with me? The two fears I battle most are the “long goodbye” and widowhood. By long goodbye, I mean a lengthy, lingering end-of-life event, with dementia or incapacitation. The inability to take care of myself. Death is not my fear, as far as I can tell. Being absent from the body and present with the Lord sounds like blessedness to me.

It’s the potential long, hard months or years leading up to death that I fear.

In addition, the aloneness and loneliness of widowhood frighten me. How could I endure, go on without Bill, the one who loves me unreservedly — my partner in life and faith, the father of our sons, the friend who has stuck with me and put up with me these 62 years?

I know I need to unpack those fears, throw them off, and I’m trying. Scripture and the Holy Spirit are my best weapons. Jesus promised to give me rest when I’m “heavy laden,” for His burden is light (Matthew 11:28). Paul urged me to renew my mind (Romans 12:2), to throw off fear and load up on a new kind of thinking: what is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable (Philippians 4:8).

And so, I pray: *Lord, help me renew my heart and mind. Help me reload good things to carry with me.* **ONE**

About the Writer: Brenda Evans lives and writes on the banks of Rockhouse Fork in Ashland, Kentucky. You may reach her at beejayevans@windstream.net.



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“It Was the Best of Times; It Was the Worst of Times”

BY DAVID BROWN, CPA

We often get in trouble when we start comparing ourselves to things or people. The book of Haggai refers to many events that happened when Ezra and the returning Jewish exiles rebuilt the temple. In chapter 2, Haggai asked who remembered the former Temple of Solomon and whether the current temple seemed like nothing compared to the original temple.

However, it is important to note that, over time, this temple continued to be improved until, in Jesus' day, it was considered truly magnificent. When we make comparisons, sometimes, we don't make allowances for what someone or something could be in the future.

Humans also tend to believe things were better in the “good ole days” — that events, conditions, or people in the past were better than they are today. I think Charles Dickens had it right when he stated in *A Tale of Two Cities* it was the best of times and the worst of times. This is true of any period. You will find things that were really good about a period, but also things that were really bad.

Some Free Will Baptists might lament that, in the past, we were better than we are today. Some might consider the 50s, 60s, or maybe even the 70s as a “golden age” for Free Will Baptists. While it may be true that during those decades we did some things better than we are doing them today, I would also hasten to say we were not doing some things in those days as well as we do them today.

We like to compare ourselves to other denominations, and, of course, our favorite target is Southern Baptists. According to a recent article by a Southern Baptist publication, 46% of their churches have an attendance under 50. The same article said 27% had an attendance between 50 and 100. It further explained church attendance between 100 and 250 accounted for 19% of their churches, with only 5% of churches between 250 and 500 in attendance. This leaves a mere 3% of Southern Baptist churches with an attendance of over 500.

As Free Will Baptists, we don't do a great job of keeping these kinds of records, but as someone who travels extensively in the denomination, I suspect our numbers would be like theirs.

Most of us are aware we are losing churches, and the overall attendance of Free Will Baptist churches has dwindled in the United States. However, don't overlook a bright spot! International attendance in Free Will Baptist churches beyond North America has exploded over the last several years and now exceeds 50,000. Around 30% of Free Will Baptists attend a church outside of North America.

Again, like Charles Dickens wrote: “It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.” **ONE**

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



Angel Inve\$tor or Venture Capitalist?

BY JOHN BRUMMITT

The term *start-up* first appeared in the business world in the early 1970s. It usually describes a technology-type business. With it, a new segment of U.S. investors — the angel investor and the venture capitalist — emerged. As with many business-world philosophies, these approaches have also worked their way into our churches.

ANGEL INVESTOR

For many, the word *angels* suggests shiny beings with halos and wings (although Scripture does not mention angels having either halos or wings). Most of the time, angels stood out from humans and were shocking, causing great fear in the humans who encountered them when they delivered their messages from God. Yet, they are still alike enough to be mistaken for humans.

In the business world, an “angel investor” describes an individual who invests initial seed money to help a start-up or invests in a company during the earliest stages. This investment usually carries some ownership, includes decision-making responsibilities, and grants certain privileges. Angel investors usually invest in a company because they believe in the ideas, leadership, and business model. While investing with expectation of reward, they expect it only when and if the business takes off. Angel investors often wait years before receiving the first financial benefit from their investments into a company.

VENTURE CAPITALIST

Venture capitalists are known for their risk-taking in the start-up world. They usually involve firms or a collective group of investors who pool money to invest in a start-up. The firm, however, usually doesn’t invest at the beginning of a start-up but during later stages when the potential of gaining a return on investment (ROI) is greater and they can capitalize on the upswing of the company in a relatively short time window. While venture capitalists experience a high failure rate, because they pool assets, they spread the risk around and expect massive returns on those investments that prove successful.

Angel investors focus on one, or maybe a handful, of companies about which they are passionate or support things they value. Venture capitalists jump aboard companies about to skyrocket in value, accepting high risk for the sake of potential high reward. Truthfully, it usually takes both angel investors and venture capitalists working together to take a start-up to the next level.

So, here is the question. When it comes to the church and ministry world, which are you, and how does your church operate? Angel investors or venture capitalists? Does it matter?

It does matter! It matters because how you and your church operate makes a big difference in how your church

gets things done. Identifying the “angels” in your church who are willing to embrace new endeavors, believe in the process, and understand the end goal is vital to getting it started. These may not be the people with the idea, but they have the resources to “invest” at the start to help get things moving.

One word of caution: be careful not to make your “angels” the go-to for everything. It is common for churches to use their “go-to” team so much they either burn out or are spread too thin to be effective. Also, not every endeavor will be something about which an “angel” would be passionate. Look for several angels and find endeavors that align with their gifts and passions. Identify and communicate with them as new ideas are presented to add resources and expertise to those ideas.

Churches also should make use of their “venture capitalists.” These individuals are willing to join something already up and running and push it to the next level. Let them handle the many endeavors the church will host or launch. They provide an infusion of resources that can

bring success for the endeavor. These individuals can be used and want to be involved. They work better as a pool or group, avoiding burnout or being stretched too thin. This allows them to be involved in more programs the church is doing.

Understanding who you are and identifying who is in your church allows better resourcing of new ideas and endeavors of the church. Identifying “angels” and “venture capitalists” will protect members from burnout and make everyone more efficient in handling church outreach and initiatives.

As believers, we are all equipped to be involved in ministry, but finding the role that best suits our skills and passions allows us to be most effective in ministry. **ONE**

About the Writer: 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 2006: www.BoardofRetirement.com.

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A Life Without Greed

BY CHRIS COMPTON

I have been reflecting recently on my attitude towards money and material possessions. The Free Will Baptist Board of Retirement, where I work, educates people on the importance of saving. It is a good thing to have an emergency fund, save for retirement, and invest your money wisely to get the greatest returns.

While it is not wrong to buy things for yourself and your family with the hard-earned money you make, we must be sure we are not seeking to *satisfy* our hearts with money and what it can buy. The questions become: are we asking too much of money? When is enough, enough? Has our pursuit for more turned into greed?

Living a life without greed is a noble pursuit. Not only is it a noble pursuit, but it is also central to our Christian tradition. At its core, living without greed means prioritizing values such as contentment, generosity, and selflessness over the relentless pursuit of material wealth or power. We see this taught repeatedly in the Scriptures.

One of the most well-known verses regarding greed comes from the book of Luke, where Jesus cautioned, “Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things he possesseth” (Luke 12:15). This teaching from Jesus encapsulates the Christian perspective on greed, emphasizing that true fulfillment and purpose are not found in material possessions. They can only be found in Jesus.

From a biblical perspective, how can one live a life without greed? Here are four key principles and practices to consider.

Contentment: Cultivating contentment is foundational to overcoming greed. First Timothy 6:6 says, “But godliness with contentment is great gain.” We learn from the Apostle Paul in Philippians 4 to be content whatever the circumstances. Contentment stems from a deep understanding that true satisfaction comes from a relationship with God, rather than from money, possessions, or achievements. The key to contentment is gratitude. Gratitude for what one has can foster contentment and diminish the desire for more.

Generosity: Generosity is a hallmark of Christian living. Jesus demonstrated this virtue through the things He taught and did. He encouraged His followers to give freely to those in need, without expecting anything in return. By living generously, Christians acknowledge God’s provision in their lives and participate in His work of reconciliation and redemption.

We must be sure we are not seeking to satisfy our hearts with money and what it can buy.





Stewardship: The most foundational truth relating to stewardship is everything belongs to God. Understanding this can help Christians adopt a mindset of stewardship rather than ownership. The parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) illustrates the importance of responsibly managing the resources God has entrusted to us. Instead of hoarding them out of greed, we are called to use them wisely for the glory of God and the betterment of our culture.

Detachment: Christians need to learn how to live with a certain detachment from this world. This involves holding our “stuff” loosely, recognizing the transient nature of possessions, and prioritizing eternal treasures and values. Jesus teaches us, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust

doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal” (Matthew 6:19-20). Shifting our focus from earthly treasure to heavenly treasure can loosen the grip of greed.

Greed undermines our relationship with the Lord. It distracts us from God, leads to spiritual emptiness, and conflicts with our Christian values. To live a life without greed, we should embrace the values of contentment, generosity, stewardship, and detachment from this world. Doing so will help cultivate a more fulfilling and meaningful life for us and those to whom we are called to minister. **ONE**

About the Writer: Chris Compton is accounting administrator for the Free Will Baptist Board of Retirement. He graduated in 2007 with an M.A. in Bible Exposition from Columbia International University. A 1998 graduate of East Tennessee State University, he has over two decades of administrative and financial experience in varied fields, along with seven years in pastoral ministry.



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Things You May Not Know About Benjamin Randall

BY ERIC K. THOMSEN

Most of us know the “rest of the story” already, how Elder Benjamin Randall became a key figure in the birth and development of New England Free Will Baptists. In fact, we sometimes still refer to the northern movement of Free Will Baptists as Randallites in his honor. But what do you know of his earlier life? The formative years? Consider eight things about this remarkable young man who became an iconic figure of faith among Free Will Baptists.

He was the son of a sea captain. Randall was born in the little village of New Castle, New Hampshire, in February 1749, the oldest of nine children. His father was a successful sea captain, also named Benjamin. His mother Margaret was the daughter of a sea captain, making Benjamin Randall the son *and* grandson of sea captains.

He spent many early years at sea with his father serving as a cabin boy. He received a good education as time afforded, and everyone assumed he would grow up to command his own vessel. This assumption probably only grew stronger when he married Joanna Orm, the daughter of a sea captain.

He was a sail maker by trade...at first. At 18, at his own request, Randall was apprenticed by his father to a sailmaker in Portsmouth. He became so proficient he set up his own sail-making shop. One day, his father gifted him an expensive suit of rich, light-colored material — garments gentlemen wore in those days. Randall wore the new suit to a social gathering, where he promptly sat in a freshly painted chair, covering his new suit.

Upset and embarrassed, he returned to his apartment, took the suit apart, removed the cloth panels, turned them inside out, and sewed the suit back together. When he finished, it looked and fit better than when he received it. It was then he recognized his abilities not only as a sail maker, but also as a tailor. He later used his craft to supplement his income, just

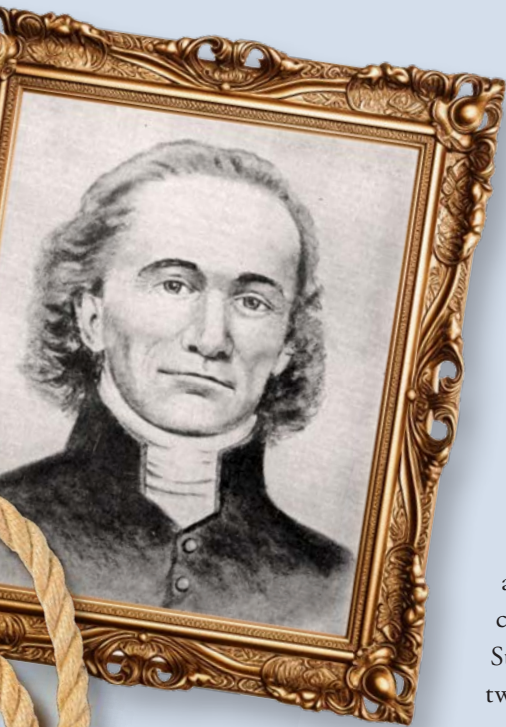
as Paul made tents to support his efforts to preach the gospel.

George Whitfield influenced his conversion to Christ. “Influenced,” because when young Randall — who was quite church-ed but even more unsaved — heard Whitfield preach, he rejected the message outright, scoffing at the great evangelist and his manner of preaching. The following Sunday, as Randall rode with a friend, a mounted herald (a crier) approached, shouting as he rode, “Mr. Whitfield is dead! Died this morning at Newburyport [Massachusetts] about 6 o’clock.”

The news shocked Benjamin. He said later, “As I heard that voice, an arrow from the Almighty pierced my heart.” He realized he was a sinner, only going through the motions of a religious life. Recalling a verse in Hebrews 9, he accepted Christ’s sacrifice for his sin and acknowledged Him as Savior.

He was a Congregationalist and a Calvinist first. After conversion, Randall and his wife immediately joined the Congregational Church in New Castle, New Hampshire. To say Randall was unimpressed with the church and its minister would be an understatement. The minister showed little interest in Randall’s faith or conversion experience. Before long, Randall discovered the church was cold. Dead. Many in the congrega-





tion were unsaved. He later wrote: “The zeal, the glory, and the power of the Lord had departed.”

With the permission of the minister, he began hosting meetings where he read from the Scripture, read printed sermons, and read from godly books to a group of genuine Christians. They also sang and prayed. Before long, as you might expect, the meetings — you might as well call them services — became more popular than the dry Sunday services, creating tension between Randall and the minister. So much tension, in fact, Randall soon left the congregation.

Convinced of the biblical teaching of immersion for believers only, he was baptized by a Calvinist Particular Baptist minister in a nearby village. So, Randall became a Baptist...but he still didn't have a church.

He served in the War for Independence. When the Revolutionary War began, Randall enlisted in the New Hampshire militia. Between engagements and official responsibilities, He continued meeting with his little “unofficial” congregation, reading sermons and Scripture. You see...

He was reluctant to be a preacher. His followers soon tired of the endless reading, and the group slowly dwindled. Finally, one stood up and said, “Mr. Randall, I am tired of hearing you read old sermons. If you will not preach to us, do leave that off and read the Bible instead.”

The words “if you will not preach to us” stuck with Randall, but he still avoided the calling to preach. Finally, one night, when he began to read yet another sermon when he knew he should be preaching himself, God's conviction hit him so powerfully that, he later wrote,

“The more I read, the more I felt the life departing, and at length I thought should I venture a line further the Lord would depart and give me up to hardness of heart....I threw down the book and broke into confession. With tears, I told the

people how the Lord made it manifest to me through the last two years that it was my duty to preach the gospel. I told them I had been like Jonah who attempted to flee away from the presence of the Lord, but now I was by the grace of God, resolved to be obedient and give myself up to His service as long as I lived.”

The next morning, Randall wrote out a personal covenant, in which he gave himself and his all to the Lord for sacrifice and service. And Randall kept his covenant...preaching until the final days of his life, sometimes from his sickbed.

He was a man of deep courage and conviction. And that was good, because his straightforward preaching made folks angry, from Calvinists to carousers.

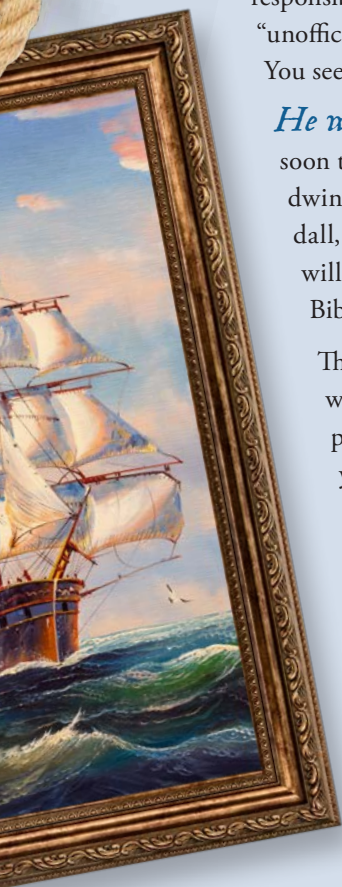
Once, when asked to preach at a town some distance away, he received numerous threats against his life, if he kept his preaching appointment. His enemies raised volunteers against his preaching, and a mob of 40 men gathered at a tavern he had to pass on his way to the village to preach. The instigators had offered the roughnecks a barrel of rum to kill Randall. To this report he responded, “That is the devil's old regiment. He raised 40 men to kill brother Paul, but he missed it then, and I believe he will now. I feel that God has called me to preach in that town, and I am resolved to go.”

And he did go! The mob showed up not long after he started preaching from Acts 13:46. Randall just kept preaching. As he preached, a fierce storm blew up, and his listeners later said it was like Mt. Sinai. As Randall preached, lightning flashed, and thunder shook the house. Yet, just as the meeting closed, the rain ceased, the thunder moved into the distance. Randall then went out and shook hands with several men in the mob. They left quietly.

He refused tax money. In 1778, with the War for Independence still raging, Randall accepted a call from the town of New Durham, New Hampshire, to be the town minister, a village chaplain. He accepted the position but refused any money gained by taxing citizens, a widely accepted custom that taxed everyone, Christian and non-Christian. Everybody was taxed to pay the preacher. Instead, Randall depended on free will gifts and offerings, worked the small farm provided, and did sailmaking and tailoring. While at New Durham, he was finally ordained. To this point, he had simply been serving as a lay minister.

And that brings us to “the rest of the story.” Randall broke

Continued on page 53



Have Mercy; Chop Off His Head!

BY PAUL V. HARRISON

“Make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions” (Daniel 6:7b).

Unlike Persian rule where Daniel was thrown to lions for his religious practice, the First Amendment of the United States Constitution states: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press.”

Thomas Jefferson provided background for these rights when he famously wrote: “The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts only as are injurious to others. But it does me no injury for my neighbour to say there are twenty gods, or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg....Reason and free enquiry are the only effectual agents against error.”

Since such freedom grants atheists the same legal standing as Christians, it’s tempting for believers to think we should have religious laws making it illegal to espouse Hinduism or deny the Trinity. God commanded the Jews to punish deviation from truth, so why shouldn’t we? When Jefferson argued atheism “does me no injury,” one might argue error is contagious, and its free promulgation might land many a soul in Hell. The alternative to such freedom, however, is instructive.

In sixteenth-century Geneva, Protestantism became law. Rulers required church attendance. Tribunals prohibited gambling and dancing. Preachers enforced orthodoxy as they understood it. Of course, Geneva was simply a Protestant version of many Catholic cities.

Such laws caused trouble for Michael Servetus. Born in Spain around 1511, he excelled academically in Spanish and French institutions. He immersed himself in medical studies, becoming the first European to understand the pulmonary circulation of blood.

Servetus emphasized Christianity. “Read the Bible a thousand times,” he said. But his studies led him to reject Christian thought. In 1531, he penned *On the Errors of the Trinity*, placing him in danger from both Catholics and Protestants. Corresponding with Geneva pastor John Calvin did no good.

When the Reformer mailed him a copy of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Servetus penned insults in the margins and sent it back.

The doctor’s anti-Trinitarian writings forced him into hiding. He recalled: “For many years I lurked among strangers in sore grief of mind.” He hid because almost all organized religion thought “just as the amputation of a putrid member may save a body, so the stake may turn tares into wheat or may protect the wheat from the insidious scab.”

In April 1553, Catholics apprehended Servetus in Lyons, France. One morning at 4:00 a.m., dressed in robe and nightcap, the wily doctor requested access to the prison garden to tend to “necessities.” The jailor never suspected the inmate was fully dressed under his nightclothes. The Spaniard climbed a roof and escaped.

In August, Servetus reappeared in Geneva and was promptly arrested. Found guilty of heresy, authorities sentenced him to the stake. Calvin’s suggestion of beheading instead of burning was ignored.

October 27, 1553, they chained the heretic to a stake and bound his book to his arm. Placing a crown of straw on his head, they lit the fire. He cried out: “O Jesus, Son of the Eternal God, have pity on me!”

Had he been able to say, “O Jesus, Eternal Son of God,” they would have released him. **ONE**



Engraving by Christian-Friedrich Fritzsche. Image from WikiCommons.

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.

Continued from page 39

Jordan Wayne Teem
Dunlap, Tennessee
Pastoral Ministry

Robert Michael Mackinley Waddell
Joelton, Tennessee
Biology, Youth and Family Ministry

Hunter Douglas Walker
Sevierville, Tennessee
Exercise Science

Brianna Eileen Weems
Cottontown, Tennessee
Psychology

Truman Dana White
Pleasant View, Tennessee
International Business

Stephen Andrew Yerby
Madison, Alabama
International Business

Bachelor of Arts Degrees

Bayley Louise Floyd
Turbeville, South Carolina
Intercultural Studies

Anna Marie Gedeon**
Wakefield, Rhode Island
Biblical Studies

Olivia Mae Harrell**
Pleasant View, Tennessee
English

Justin Charles Hester
Gallatin, Tennessee
History

Silas Graham Houser**
Chesterfield, Virginia
Intercultural Studies

Abigail Saige Pace**
Hendersonville, Tennessee
English

James Matthew Pinson, Jr. ***
Gallatin, Tennessee
Humanities and Arts

Master of Arts Degrees

Adam William Brown
Eldorado, Illinois
Theology and Ministry

Devin Lyle Cominskie
Jacksonville, North Carolina
Theology and Ministry

Jonathan Edward-Ray Cribb
Cramerton, North Carolina
Theology and Ministry

Canaan Brick Crowder
Grifton, North Carolina
Theology and Ministry

Master of Arts in Teaching Degrees

Jenna Elizabeth Fleming
Gallatin, Tennessee
Instructional Leadership

Ashley Elizabeth Holland
Hendersonville, Tennessee
Special Education

Bethany Rose Moody
Huntsville, Alabama
Teaching

Makenzie Paige Rankin
Hendersonville, Tennessee
Teaching

Victoria Anne Rogers
Angier, North Carolina
Special Education

Kelly Smith Thompson
Raleigh, North Carolina
Instructional Leadership

Master of Divinity Degree

Alexander Ray Johnson
Gallatin, Tennessee

*** *Summa Cum Laude* - 3.75
** *Magna Cum Laude* - 3.50
* *Cum Laude* - 3.25

Honors awarded only to recipients of Bachelor's degrees ONE

Continued from page 51

completely with the Calvinist Baptists, and in 1780, he gathered like-minded believers from New Durham, New Hampshire, formed a Baptist church that believed in free will, and established the first Free Will Baptist church in the North.

I don't know about you, but I am honored to be part of that denomination, to remember and honor Benjamin Randall and other dedicated, courageous Free Will Baptist pioneers who gave their all to establish this denomination we love. ONE

About the Writer: Eric K. Thomsen has been the managing editor of *ONE Magazine* for 20 years. A member of the Free Will Baptist Historical Commission, Eric is the creator and curator of FWBHistory.com. He resides in Joelton, Tennessee, with his wife Jennifer.

Consider reading these works cited:

John Buzzell. *The Life of Elder Benjamin Randall, principally taken from documents written by himself* (Limerick, ME: Hobbs, Woodman, & Co., 1827).

Frederick Wiley. *Life and Influence of Benjamin Randall, Founder of the Free Baptist Denomination* (Boston: American Baptist Publication Society, 1915).

Isaac Stewart. *The History of the Freewill Baptists, for Half a Century* (Dover, NH: Freewill Baptist Printing Establishment, 1862).

Also cited: "The Story of Benjamin Randall." An address by Dr. Mary Ruth Wisehart, presented during Welch College History Week (year unknown).

doers of the Word

NAFWB

88TH NATIONAL CONVENTION
JULY 21-24, 2024 🌴 TAMPA, FL

*But be ye doers of the word,
and not hearers only...*

JAMES 1:22

SUN. SHOWER. SUN. STEAM. REPEAT. Tampa's tropical weather certainly met expectations as 4,000-plus Free Will Baptists gathered for the 88th convention of the National Association of Free Will Baptists July 21-24. Brilliant sunshine gave way to towering thunderstorms, followed by sweltering humidity. But the showers didn't dampen spirits. In fact, no one really seemed to mind. As usual, Free Will Baptists were simply happy to be together. From worship services and seminars to business sessions and fellowship, the denomination came together to consider what it means to be **Doers of the Word**.

Sunday morning, after **Gary Clark (FL)** taught Sunday School, **Dr. Bob Brown (FL)** encouraged listeners to do the Word by embracing trials (James 1). Sunday evening, **Josue Suarez (FL)** offered a challenge to do the Word by treating others well (James 2). Monday, **Chaplain Brad Hanna (VA)** reminded the congregation doing the Word means taming the tongue (James 3). Tuesday, **Reuben Cason (NC)** encouraged listeners to do the Word by enduring suffering (James 5:7-12). Wednesday, following a commissioning service for new church planters, international missionaries, and field workers, **Noah Taylor (TN)** reminded listeners every believer has a responsibility to do the Word by reaching the world.

This year's convention music can only be described as *powerful*, preparing attendees to hear the convicting, encouraging messages. **Kevin Justice and the Convention Music Team** did a masterful job planning services. Some musical highlights (among many others) included the Ebenezer FWB Church Hispanic Choir from Miami, Florida; "It's Still the Cross" featuring a 12-voice Convention Ensemble; "Until Then" featuring Chad Donoho and the Convention Choir; "Such an Awesome God" with soloist Audrey Hollifield; and a children's choir on Wednesday evening.

Attendees gathered Sunday afternoon for washing of the saints' feet. During the Sunday evening service, they observed the Lord's Supper, setting a clear tone of humility and service for the convention to follow.





SWELTERING SATURDAY. IMPACT Tampa, the annual outreach and service event held the Saturday before the convention, enjoyed a great turnout this year. More than 100 volunteers from five states and ten churches met at First FWB Church Tampa to assemble 200 bags of supplies for the homeless community then dispersed into smaller work groups. Each group visited one of three locations: downtown Tampa to deliver the assembled bags to the homeless; Eisenhower Middle School for a painting project; and Oak Park Middle School for landscaping, sodding, painting, and assembling furniture. These hardworking teams gave their morning (and early afternoon) to make a difference in Tampa. Sunshine and sweat didn't slow them down, and volunteers enjoyed serving together.

"We were glad to see such a great turnout," said Director Ken Akers. "Our volunteers were able to accomplish a great deal despite the heat. IMPACT provides a great testimony and example to the host city. Thanks to all who went out of their way to take part."

Tori Matlock, Oklahoma church planter and volunteer, said, "The annual IMPACT event provides a great reminder we can impact our own communities. I hope you plan to be part of IMPACT Kansas City next year...but don't wait until then! See how your church can impact your own community in the meantime."

MORE THAN MEETINGS. While the annual convention thrives on worship services, it is much more than a series of meetings and services. The week is punctuated by special events, training (90-plus seminars, workshops, or panels this year alone), fellowship, networking, exhibits, promotional opportunities for denominational and global endeavors, and programs for children and youth. Executive Director Eddie Moody, not mincing words about his feelings, exclaimed, "We *need* the convention! It is a crucial part of denominational health."

The convention also provides a forum for the denomination's annual business session.

SERIOUS BUSINESS

GENERAL BOARD. The General Board meeting began Monday, July 22, with a message from Moderator Tim York (TN) from Colossians 2:19, encouraging listeners to have a direct connection to Christ, the Head of the Church, the source of power for life, church, and denomination.

The board heard reports from nine national agencies and four commissions during a two-hour, 30-minute meeting. The board approved three recommendations from the Executive Committee, including a recommendation to approve the 2025 denominational budget of \$33.9 million and a recommendation to change the title of the executive secretary of the Executive Office to executive director (requiring a constitutional change). The board also recommended the acceptance of Puerto Rico into the National Association as a district association.

During Tuesday and Wednesday business sessions, delegates heard reports from national departments and agencies and approved all recommendations. When it came to a vote on Puerto Rico, delegates enthusiastically approved the new district with a resounding vote of "¡Si!"

EXECUTIVE OFFICE. Executive Director Eddie Moody identified challenges facing Free Will Baptist pastors and churches before introducing solutions offered by the Executive Office: Know Your Community, The Hope Initiative, Bless Every Home, First Aid Ready, pastoral placement and The Shepherding Initiative, Refresh counseling, college-student engagement resources, social media graphics and resources, and printed resources. More details about these resources and tools can be found at nafwb.org/resources.

Moody also addressed significant financial challenges surrounding the National Convention, which has experienced a deficit for five successive years, and expects a loss of \$83,000 in 2024. He encouraged the denomination to offset these expenses through 1) increased convention offerings; 2) increased giving to the Executive Office and D6 Family





Ministry (which underwrite the costs of the National Convention and Vertical 3 Conference); and 3) an increased number of churches giving offerings directly to the convention. Moody encouraged delegates to give to The Together Way Trust, to help the office get ahead of a difficult financial situation. “You have my word,” Moody concluded. “When you give to us, we will take that money and pour it back into you.”

RICHLAND AVE FINANCIAL (BOARD OF RETIREMENT). Director John Brummitt noted overall enrollments and contributions were up in 2023, and 2024 continues these positive trends. Since 2016, funds have grown from \$54 million to \$120 million. This increase reflects the expansion in participant retirement accounts as well as enrollment of new participants — more than a thousand over the last eight years. Additionally, the board has become more involved in financial training for churches and ministries.

Brummitt celebrated new investment options and strategies, making the Retirement Plan more attractive to potential investors, including a new guaranteed rate plan, an attractive option for investors needing to safeguard their funds. He also pointed to an increased emphasis on communication: social media, *Re:Invest* podcast, educational materials, and more resources available at reinvestfwb.com. “While the Lord has really blessed our office,” Brummitt concluded, “we don’t think He is done with our department yet!”

Following his report, Brummitt shared the historical basis for the department’s proposed name change to Richland Ave Financial, denoting the location of the first national office building on Richland Avenue in Nashville, Tennessee. Delegates approved the requested change.

FREE WILL BAPTIST FOUNDATION. Director David Brown described 2023 as a challenging year, with the department’s first significant outflow of assets. Total assets declined from \$114.9 million in 2022 to \$82.2 million in 2023, a total of \$32.7 million. The downturn resulted from rising interest rates the Foundation could not match immediately, leading investors to take advantage of higher rates

elsewhere. (Although \$24.5 million reflects a withdrawal by a single investor.)

Brown described this difficult period as a good test for the Foundation’s portfolio, which responded well, and delivered outgoing money in a timely manner. Recent adjustments to the portfolio have made it possible to raise interest rates to 5-5.5%, depending on investment amount. Despite the difficulties, the Foundation enjoyed positive income of \$443,000. “We have a proven track record,” Brown continued. “What is happening right now is an aberration. The Federal Reserve generally does not raise [interest] rates this fast.”

Even with the challenges, the Foundation awarded \$500,000 in ministry grants in April, bringing the total grants distributed to more than \$5 million for 142 ministries. Brown encouraged Free Will Baptists to continue to help make the grant program possible by investing in the department’s demand notes program and charitable investment funds. Estate planning continues successfully, helping 2,654 denominational families to date, with an estimated ministry impact of \$38.5 million in estate gifts. Brown encouraged pastors and associations to take advantage of this wonderful resource for Free Will Baptists.

NORTH AMERICAN MINISTRIES. David Crowe brought greetings on behalf of 52 church planting families who oversee 88 church plants — 34 English-speaking and 54 Spanish-speaking — dispersed across 23 states, two U.S. territories, Canada, and Mexico; 16 chaplains; ten staff families; and nine board member families. He highlighted partnerships NAM has established with each Free Will Baptist department and agency, working together to make a difference in ministry.

Crowe anticipated the August 2024 reopening of the Hispanic Bible Institute in North Carolina on the campus of Parkers Chapel FWB Church, noting the school “will be a game-changer for Free Will Baptist Hispanic ministry.” The Church Extension Loan Fund (CELF) continues to be financially healthy. CELF made \$2.3 million in 2023, and finished



2024 CONVENTION AT A GLANCE

doers
of the
Word

REGISTRATION

National Convention - **3,655**
Vertical Three - **3,030**
Total (Unique) Attendees - **4,103***
**Note: Many attendees register for both conventions.*

SPEAKERS

Sunday School, July 21
Gary Clark (FL)
Sunday Morning, July 21
Bob Brown (FL)
Sunday Evening, July 21
Josue Suarez (FL)
Monday Evening, July 22
CH Brad Hanna (VA)
Tuesday Evening, July 23
Reuben Cason (NC)
Wednesday Evening, July 24
Noah Taylor (TN)

2024 VERTICAL THREE CONFERENCE

Registration - **3,030**
Truth & Peace - **129 participants**
Competitive Entries: **878**
Buck-A-Week Offering: **\$4,080***
** Initial count may be adjusted.*

Contributors: Eric Thomsen,
Tori Matlock

Vertical Three: Claire Ryan

Photographers: Rodney Yerby,
Sydney McClure, Michael E. Rogers,
Jeremy Correa

Download Photos:
nafwb.yerbyphoto.com

ELECTED IN 2024

Executive Committee

Chris Dotson (TN)
Reuben Cason (NC)
James Coffelt (OK)

WNAC

Melanie Franks (AL)
Angie Frazier (FL)
Ashley Alphin (OH)

D6 Family Ministry

Kendall Ross (AR)
Kevin Barnett (AR)
Mark Price (OH)

IM, Inc.

Darren Walker (NC)
Casey Cariker (OK)
Paul Etterling (OH)

IM, Inc. - 2026 Unexpired Term

Chris Todd (OK)

Welch College

Tim Campbell (AR)
Theron Scott (SC)
Josue Suarez (FL)

COMMISSIONS

Theological - Cory Thompson (OK)

Media - Josh Owens (TN),
Isaiah Grimes (VA)

Music - Kevin Justice (NC)

Historical - Philip Morgan (TN)

The following boards did not elect members in 2024: Free Will Baptist Foundation, North American Ministries, Richland Ave Financial (Board of Retirement).

Nominating Committee - 2024-25

Jimmy Lawson (MI), Chair
Clint Adams (GA)
Travis Alexander (AR)
Lanney Ard (SC)
Chris Dotson (TN)
Stephen Hood (AZ)
Carol Thompson (OK)

2024 Resolutions Committee

Ken Simpson (MO), Chair
John Collier (TX)
Mark Harrison (CA)
Jason Miller (AL)
Gene Williams (NC)

2025 BUDGETS

D6 Family Ministry - \$5,530,250
Executive Office - \$1,008,216
Foundation - \$2,358,612
IM, Inc. - \$10,600,000
NAM (includes Master's Men) - \$5,000,000
Retirement - \$891,750
Welch College - \$8,120,408
WNAC - \$316,700
Theological Commission - \$6,500
Historical Commission - \$6,035
Media Commission - \$11,150
Music Commission - \$8,350
Total - \$33,857,971



with more than \$900,000 in surplus, even after contributions to the general fund and church planter accounts. The department (including all facets of ministry) finished \$880,000 in the black in 2023, and these positive financial trends continue in 2024.

WNAC. Director Ruth McDonald emphasized any woman attending a Free Will Baptist church is part of Free Will Baptist women's ministry. She expressed delight at meeting Free Will Baptist women across the country during her travels. She noted the continuing missions (and giving to missions) emphasis for the department, with nearly a half million dollars given by women in 2023. This generosity allowed WNAC to underwrite the expenses of a Bulgarian Women's Retreat in 2024, bringing the nation's women together for encouragement, training, and fellowship for the first time in many years.

The department offers numerous training and discipleship opportunities for women, including the *As You Go* podcast, *Treasure* Bible study guide, scholarships, and more. Because monthly support was down slightly in 2023, McDonald encouraged regular, monthly support from churches and individuals through The Giving Tree to help these ministries continue.

In October, Mexico will host its first *Shine!* conference for girls and young women. The *Shine!* 2025 conference will take place February 1 at The Donelson Fellowship in Nashville, Tennessee, and will be available in simulcast. Learn more at shinefb.com or wnac.org.

Following her report, McDonald honored outgoing board members Amy Johnson (chair), Sarah Sargent, and Kristi Shores.

D6 FAMILY MINISTRY. Director Ron Hunter Jr. described his report as a "family meeting," as he addressed difficult topics and offered "plain talk" about the direction of the department. He shared troubling statistics regarding Christian publishing, as many denominational publishing houses have closed or diminished. D6 Family Ministry is facing many of the same challenges as these other publishers — inflation and (the lack of) income.

Production expenses rose while the number of Free Will Baptist churches shrank, reducing the number of churches ordering curriculum, and leading to a shortfall in funding. In response to these challenges and with determination to operate the department responsibly, D6 Family Ministry is making changes where possible to Vertical 3 Conference programming and reducing peripheral (non-essential though important) ministries. Hunter challenged the denomination to

support D6 Family Ministry regularly as a "D6 Family Hero" to make it possible to get ahead of the financial challenges.

In conjunction with his report, Hunter honored outgoing board members Mike Mounts (OH) and Chairman Mike Trimble (MI).

IM, INC. General director Clint Morgan celebrated a 90-year milestone for IM, Inc. The department embraces the legacy of previous generations by continuing the mission and building upon nine decades of work. He thanked the denomination for more than \$9 million in contributions to IM in 2023, record giving for the third year in a row. However, he also warned about shortfalls in the general fund, which underwrites the IM office, partnerships, and more.

Morgan spelled out six key tasks for IM and how each was fulfilled in 2023:

- 1) ministering to 54,737 people's needs through 155 ministry centers;
- 2) sharing the gospel resulted in 6,319 conversions in 2023;
- 3) discipling new believers reflected by 2,732 baptisms;
- 4) planting churches, with 49 new places of worship, 79 churches self-supporting, and 376 preaching points;
- 5) training leaders through 15 Bible institutes and training centers with 499 students;
- 6) partnering with the Body of Christ to fulfill the Great Commission through 28 partnerships in 41 countries.

In 2023, 1,136 churches met outside North America, and believers beyond the U.S. have grown from 35,537 in 2020 to 57,417 last year. These remarkable statistics surpassed the existing five-year goals set by IM in 2020, and Morgan introduced five "extreme" goals for the next decade:

1. Grow individual donors from 3,609 to 7,000.
2. Have 225 IM board-commissioned missionaries.
3. Meet three major financial objectives: \$1 million WMO; \$3 million in the GROW endowment; and \$10 million in the CORNERSTONE endowment.
4. See Free Will Baptists overseas share the gospel with one million people.
5. Double the number of Free Will Baptists outside North America.

"When we see what God has done in, with, and through IM over the past ten years, we could be impressed," Morgan concluded, "but if we could see where God is taking us, we would be awed!"



Following Morgan's report, Board Chairman Rodney Yerby honored outgoing board members Mark Price (OH) and Janice Banks (TX). Morgan honored long-time missionaries Donnie McDonald (Japan) and Jerry and Barbara Gibbs (France) as they ended their service with IM.

WELCH COLLEGE. President Matt Pinson observed Great Commission ministry continues to be the heart of Welch's mission, and the college's greatest distinction remains its Christian worldview approach to higher education, standing in contrast to widespread secular progressivism throughout higher education.

Pinson highlighted the college's ongoing commitment to excellence reflected in high rankings among colleges and universities; new academic programs, including the new, fully-online Master of Arts degree in organizational leadership; along with master's degrees in ministry and humanities, teaching, and divinity.

He identified ongoing challenges facing Christian higher education: lingering post-COVID financial and enrollment issues; the widespread availability of inexpensive online degrees or state-funded degrees; and greater skepticism regarding higher education in general. Welch also deals with a declining number of Free Will Baptist churches. Though reaching a higher percentage of Free Will Baptist young people, the pool of potential students has shrunk. "But God is still meeting our needs," Pinson encouraged listeners. "He is holding our hands through these difficult inflationary post-COVID days."

Following his report, Pinson honored outgoing board member Will Beauchamp (FL).

COMMISSION FOR THEOLOGICAL INTEGRITY. Chairman Matt Pinson invited listeners to attend the 2024 Theological Symposium, October 7-8, on the campus of Welch College. The commission is currently producing a new volume of *Integrity Journal* and will soon release the premier issue of *De Doctrina*, an occasional newsletter.

HISTORICAL COMMISSION. Eric Thomsen thanked the denomination for improved record keeping, with current minutes coming in better than they have in many years. He thanked Free Will Baptist Foundation for a 2024 grant to produce a devotional book from late board member Dr. Mary Ruth Wisheart, to be released in July 2025. Finally, on behalf of the entire commission, he thanked outgoing commission chairman, Robert E. Picirilli, for 51 years of service. Delegates gave Picirilli a rising vote of thanks after a motion from Welch College President Matt Pinson.

MUSIC COMMISSION. Chairman Doug Little introduced a new initiative called "Grow Your Own Musicians" to help develop music programs in local churches, from training and education to revitalization. "Your Music Commission is doing what we can, any time we can, and wherever we can to come alongside churches and help," Little concluded. Churches seeking more information can visit fwbmusic.com.

MEDIA COMMISSION. Josh Owens emphasized the commission's attention to special needs in the online audience after adding Deaf interpretation, Spanish translation, and more. He thanked the Foundation for grants making the expansion possible. In addition to its role at the convention, the Media Commission works with churches and ministries, collaborating, training, and equipping others in media ministry. The commission honored Jeremy Smith for his work and acknowledged the passing of founding Media Commission members Sandy Goodfellow and Guy Owens. **ONE**

V/// CONFERENCE

JULY 21-24, 2024 • TAMPA, FL

BY CLAIRE RYAN

Your eyes open blearily, blinking away sleep. You turn your head, and see your mom standing in the middle of the hotel room, giving you *the look*.

That's when it all comes rushing back. You're in Tampa, Florida, at the Vertical Three Conference. CTS final competition starts in an hour, and you're still in your pajamas! You jump to your feet, smile sheepishly at your mom, and throw on some clothes.

Competition this week has been a blur. You recall meeting your team, running through last minute lines and vocal warm-ups, and then approaching the stage when your name was called. Other than that, you only remember the watching crowd, the proud look on your dad's face, and the pounding of your own heart in your ears. All that's left now is the awards ceremony on Wednesday night.

With the rest of the day free, you decide to explore the convention center with friends. You find V3-Preschool on the top floor and peek into Ballroom D, where V3-Kids enjoyed hours of great fun and energy. You stop by Ballroom A, where Pastor Steve and his team led V3-456. This week, they taught kids the importance of following Jesus, no matter the cost, and provided students the opportunity to become closer to the Lord by going deeper into His Word. Exciting games included Bible verse memorization, the "Screen Game" relays, and funny skits.

You enter TCC West Hall where the V3-Teen services were held. Your eyes roam the high ceilings, and your skin tingles with the electric memory of the atmosphere. Few experiences compare to unashamed worship in a room full of fellow Christians. And the nights only got better, because two of the world's greatest goofballs, Jon Forrest and Neil Gilliland, were on stage giving out — you guessed it — free stuff.

V3-Teen services were incredible. Blake Nance started the week strong on Sunday morning with a sermon about walking a counter-cultural Christian life based on Daniel 3. Derek Altom spoke Sunday evening from Luke 5, exploring more from the Matthew 4 "Follow Me" passage. Derek challenged the

audience in three ways: ensure you know Jesus, be willing to obey what He says, and readily leave everything to follow Him. Monday, Fuad Farhat discussed "A Call to Sacrifice All," how the Christian life is not easy but requires sacrifice of comfort, competing commitments, and our past. Tuesday, Tyler Penn discussed the mission of Vertical Three, how listening to the voice of the Lord can (and should) alter your future in a mighty way. He focused on the importance of reaching others for Christ. Worship, led by the Youth Evangelistic Team, was amazing! They shared their phenomenal program of worship on Monday evening. Tuesday night, Michael Boggs shared songs and stories for the V3 Event.

Just up the grand central staircase you find a much-anticipated area of the National Convention, the Exhibit Hall. With a deep breath you take in the greatest smell for any Free Will Baptist: free stuff! After perusing the aisles, and spending way too much time looking through old photos at the IM booth, you finally make your way from the hall with a billowing D6 Hero cape, three coasters, several tangled lanyards, a battery pack, and too many luggage tags to count. You've collected every type of candy available and entered three drawings in the hopes of winning a prize that will likely end up on a dusty, random shelf.

But since there is nothing quite like hearing your name announced, echoing through the Exhibit Hall with exciting reverb, you make certain to fill out all the entry cards in large, legible handwriting no one can miss. Wow! You hit the jackpot! Your three hours in the Exhibit Hall were well-spent.

It's nearly dinner time. Do you scour the area for something to eat, like every other Free Will Baptist in the city? You've heard The Columbia restaurant has the best Cuban sandwich





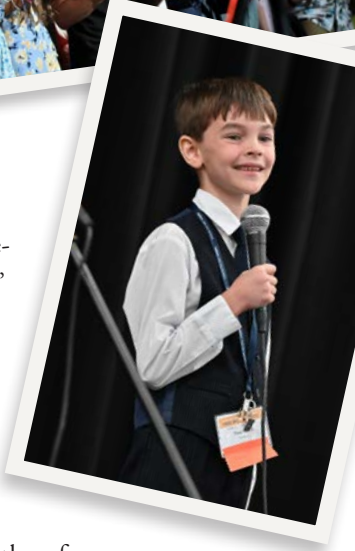
and salad in the state (and their churros are to die for). Or do you take your chances munching on Exhibit Hall goodies on a return trip? You choose the obvious answer, turn on your heel, and head straight for the free stuff.

Later that evening, you reflect on your incredible day. You are physically hungry because the pizza place was overcrowded and the steak bistro was way too expensive (and you filled up on candy at the Exhibit Hall), but at least you also filled up on good times with good people worshipping a great God! You close your eyes, sigh contentedly, and doze off with a big smile.

CTS MINISTRY EXPO. Every year, hundreds of young people spend countless hours in preparation for the CTS Ministry Expo, where they compete against fellow students. But competition itself is not the end goal. The end goal is that the countless hours spent worshipping the Lord, speaking His Truths, or studying His Word will ground students with a spiritual foundation able to withstand the trials of this life. The true purpose is not a medal or trophy but the promise of Christ and His Kingdom, brought down through Scripture and those faithful to follow Him. Hundreds of students from kindergarten through 12th grade competed in various music, drama, Bible, and arts categories, submitting a total of 878 entries.

TRUTH & PEACE STUDENT LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE was comprised of 129 students and 16 staff members in 2024. The Olympic-themed conference focused on training students for life in service to Christ and His Kingdom. Students learned how to grow in their faith using best personal Bible study practices and were trained in methods for teaching God’s Word to others.

Students arrived on the campus of Welch College July 10 and immediately began leadership training, which included leadership development courses, team building opportunities, and service projects. Participants had this to say about the conference:



- “Truth and Peace was exactly what I needed at exactly the right time to prepare me for the next season of my life” (Molly Hicks, 301).
- “If I could describe Truth and Peace with one word, it would be *refreshing*. It’s the greatest experience to come together with other like-minded teens who want to learn more on how to lead and serve others for God’s glory” (Lilly McClintock, 201).
- “This year’s conference is the culmination of the past three years. It’s awesome to use what I have learned in the past three years and then pour it out into my fellow Truth & Peace students” (Trey Mygatt, 401).

YOUTH EVANGELISTIC TEAM (YET). Bryan and Kinsley Houser and Caleb Carroll served as leaders for the 12-student worship team. All students arrived in Nashville Sunday, June 17, to begin preparations for the 2024 summer tour. The team rehearsed at The Donelson Fellowship then traveled to four states, with 11 services.

The 2025 Youth Evangelistic Team members will be Jaxon Aldridge (FL), Luke Donoho (NC), Allie Garren (MO), Andy Garren (MO), Cy Hylton (OK), Madison Masters (NC), Joel Miller (NC), Aly Postlewaite (GA), Andrew Riggs (OK), and Daisy Villegas (NC).

The annual **BUCK-A-WEEK OFFERING** collected on Tuesday evening during V3-Teen service netted \$4,080.10. This year, recipients were Bradley and Madison Mercer and the Justin and Allison Feight family. **ONE**

“I’m Going to Heaven; Who’s Going With Me?”

BY EDDIE MOODY

As we approach the 23rd anniversary of 9/11, it is important to remember one of the heroes from that day. Every Christian should be aware of certain lives. Some are found in the Bible, especially Hebrews 11. Others are part of modern history like Jim Elliot and Nate Saint. I think Al Braca falls into that category.

Braca may have seemed an ordinary man, but God used him to do something extraordinary. Many, including me, have shared his story and written about him. Recently, I learned former Free Will Baptist missionary Charolette Tallent was friends with Al and was a guest at his home the day he died.

Do you know Al’s story? It’s important to know it and share it, especially considering the challenges we face today.

Al Braca lived in Leonardo, New Jersey, with his wife Jean. His daughter became ill, and through the process of that illness, Al and Jean met the Lord. Al believed the Lord healed his daughter of a rare blood disease. He became a deacon and was put in charge of discipling new believers at his church.

Al’s job as a corporate bond broker and vice president for Cantor Fitzgerald was hard. People in his workplace often were hostile toward him because of his faith. They picked on him and called him “The Rev.” At times, they put offensive pictures on his computer. He wanted to leave but became convinced God wanted him to stay. (You can hear the whole story from Charolette on “My Friend Al Braca” on the *Better Together Podcast*.)

Other times, people brought their problems to Al, and he prayed for them. He also helped people during the first bombing of the World Trade Center, and his actions drew much attention.

On September 11, 2001, Al was working on the 104th floor of World Trade Center Tower 1. None of the Cantor Fitzgerald employees at work that day survived. After

the first plane hit the tower at 8:45 a.m., several Cantor Fitzgerald employees called their loved ones and said their goodbyes. Many told their families they were okay; they had prayed with Al. It has been reported that Al got up on his desk and said, “I’m going to Heaven; who is going with me?” Many calls and emails indicate Al led a prayer meeting and shared Christ with more than 50 people.¹

What can we learn from Al’s story?

While it is difficult to live and work in a secular culture, we should expect it, accept it, and *embrace the opportunity to be salt and light in darkness* (Matthew 5:11-16).

We must *persevere by living out our faith*, even when no one seems to listen or respond favorably (Galatians 6:9). On September 11, 2001, Al had been working at Cantor Fitzgerald for 16 years with limited impact.

Be ready when the opportunity arises to share the gospel (1 Peter 3:14-16). At 10:29 a.m., World Trade Center Tower 1 collapsed. That’s 104 minutes after the plane hit it. Al was ready for that moment and shared the Lord with his co-workers.

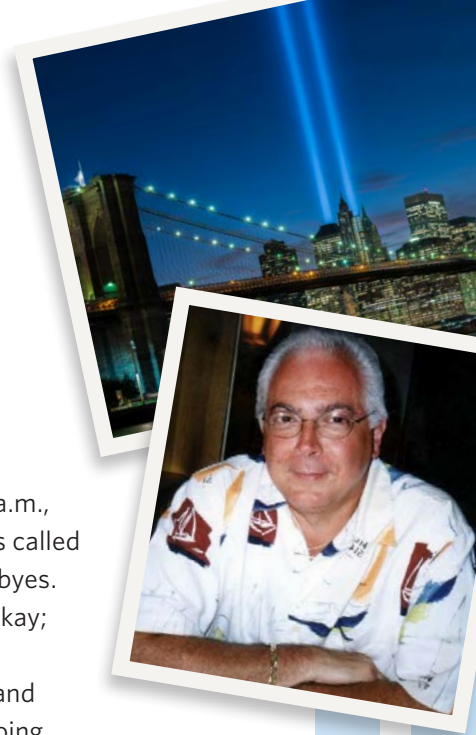
See the big picture. Much more is at stake than our happiness or comfort in our daily activities. The God who sees and knows all is always working, so we must look for opportunities to point people to Him. We are His instruments, His tools for something greater than ourselves. **ONE**

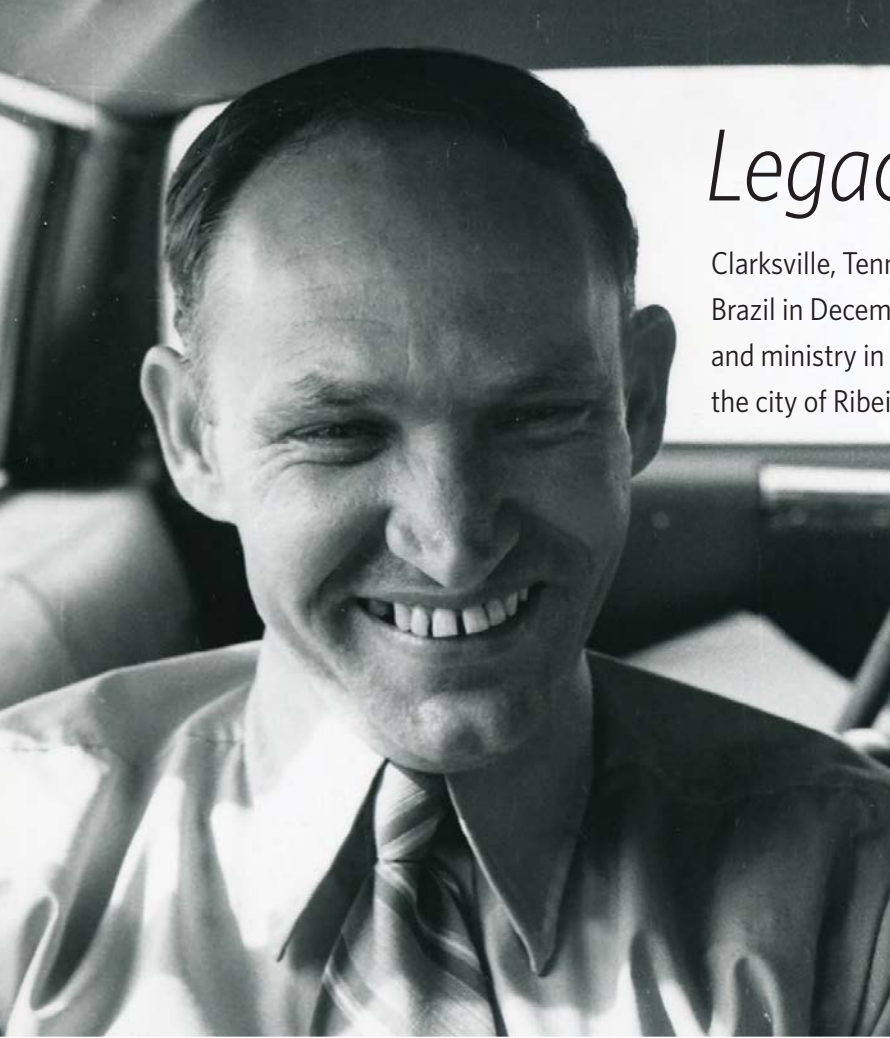


Eddie Moody

Executive Secretary,
National Association of
Free Will Baptists

1 C. Ditchfield. “A Light in Darkness.” *Focus on the Family Magazine*. Colorado Springs, CO, 2002.





Legacy of **faithfulness**...

Clarksville, Tennessee, native Bobby Poole and his wife Geneva arrived in Brazil in December 1960. The pioneer missionary spent the rest of his life and ministry in this nation he came to love as his own. Working primarily in the city of Ribeirão Preto, São Paulo, the Pooles established three churches, developed a camp ministry in Jaboticabal, and established a Bible institute in Ribeirão Preto to train pastors and lay leaders. Though Bobby retired in 2013, his love for the Brazilian people soon took him back "home," and he died in Ribeirão Preto, Brazil, January 25, 2024, after serving as a missionary to Brazil 53 years.

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