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ONE magazine

DECEMBER • JANUARY • 2023

Lighting the Darkness

The Giver of Life

Patience and Authenticity

The Goen Gift

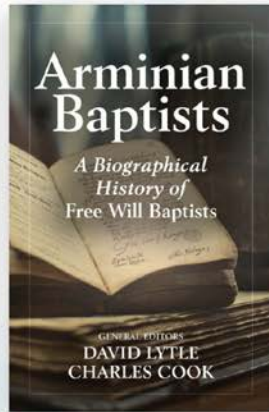
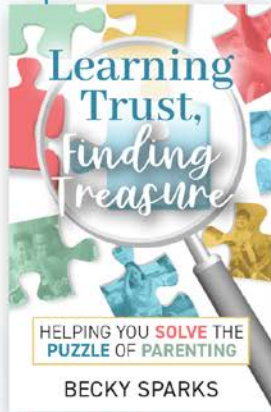
Starting From Minus Ten

Why Should a 21st Century
Christian Care About the
Church Fathers?

Reaching Gen Z With the Gospel

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BY RANDALL HOUSE



*Learning Trust, Finding Treasure:
Helping You Solve the
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BY **BECKY SPARKS, MAFM**

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

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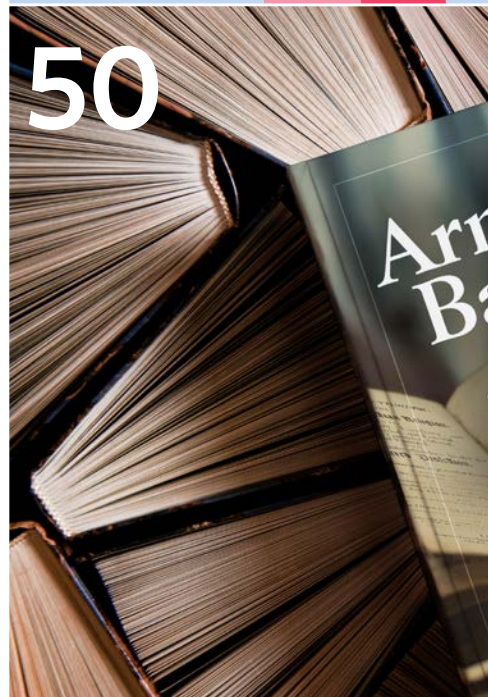


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Rot

BY ERIC K. THOMSEN

PSALM 119:9-11



“Hey, Bud! I think you got a bad board here.”

It all started with a drip. During heavy rains, the guttering system on our home had proven inadequate. Water brimmed the gutters, occasionally overflowing and dripping onto the brick below. Concerned about long-term damage, we contacted installers to replace the existing system with larger, commercial-grade guttering.

Turns out, I should have been more concerned about boards than brick. A few quick pulls with a hammer verified the contractor’s concerns. Water had seeped beneath the vinyl siding and soaked the wood beneath. So rotten that, as I removed the siding, boards crumbled and fell at my feet. Our home’s structure was black, wet, moldy, and rotten. While everything looked fine outside, the inside was a mess.

It’s a good analogy for what happens when we allow spiritual rot to occur—when we lower our spiritual guard and let our relationship with the Lord slip in priority. We may look great on the outside, but inside is a different story.

How does spiritual rot look? Jesus answered this question Himself, as recorded in Matthew 23, when He confronted the scribes and Pharisees for hypocrisy. Those suffering spiritual rot:

- Don’t do what they say (verse 3).
- Make religion an unbearable burden and refuse to follow their own standards (verse 4).
- Do things only to be seen by others (verse 6).
- Want all the glory and admiration of others (verses 6-7).
- Keep others from entering God’s Kingdom because of their behavior (verse 13).
- Take advantage of the needy and marginalized (verse 14).
- Offer pretentious prayers for the sake of those who hear them (verse 14).
- Make followers who are not true converts (verse 15).
- Lead blindly (verse 16).

- Have the wrong priorities and values (verses 16-23).
- Major on minors and minor on majors (verse 24).
- Look great on the outside but are rotten to the core inside (verses 25-29).

“You are like whitewashed tombs,” Jesus told these religious leaders. “You look great on the outside, but inside, you are full of dead men’s bones.”

Yuck!

In case the scribes and Pharisees failed to realize the seriousness of the situation, Jesus offered an additional warning in no uncertain terms: “Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?”

I don’t know about you, but I *never* want God to describe my life this way. I don’t want spiritual rot to reduce my relationship with Him into a religious show or sham. How do we avoid spiritual rot? We find the answer in a familiar passage: Psalm 119:9-11.

- 1. Absorb God’s Word (verse 9).** Read it faithfully. Meditate on it constantly. Make it a priority.
- 2. Seek God with your whole heart (verse 10).** Pursue Him relentlessly. Don’t let anything distract you. Even then, our human hearts may fail us. This may be why the psalmist begged God, “O let me not wander from thy commandments.”
- 3. Hide His Word in your heart (verse 11).** Memorize it. Let it saturate your life. His Word is our greatest weapon against spiritual rot, “quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword” (Hebrews 4:12).

Our home doesn’t really look any different now, but the rot is gone. The structure is sound, with the siding sealed carefully. But water will be back. Rot is the nature of this world, from your house to your heart. So, guard your life carefully against spiritual leaks by sealing it with the Word of God. **ONE**

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

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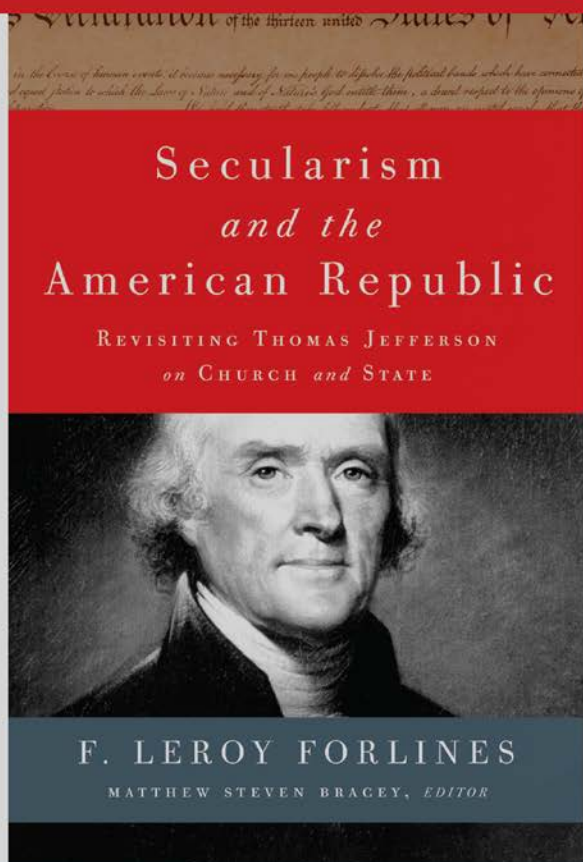
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The Giver of

Life

BY BARRY RAPER

Since the Supreme Court handed down its decision on *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, more than 60 million babies have been aborted in the United States. Keep in mind, this is the number *reported*; the actual number is likely higher. Thankfully, the average number of abortions in the U.S. has been declining in recent years. In 1991, 1.6 million abortions were reported in America. That number shrank to 900,000 in 2020. However, if we really believe abortion is taking the life of the unborn, that number still reflects nearly a million babies murdered in 2020.

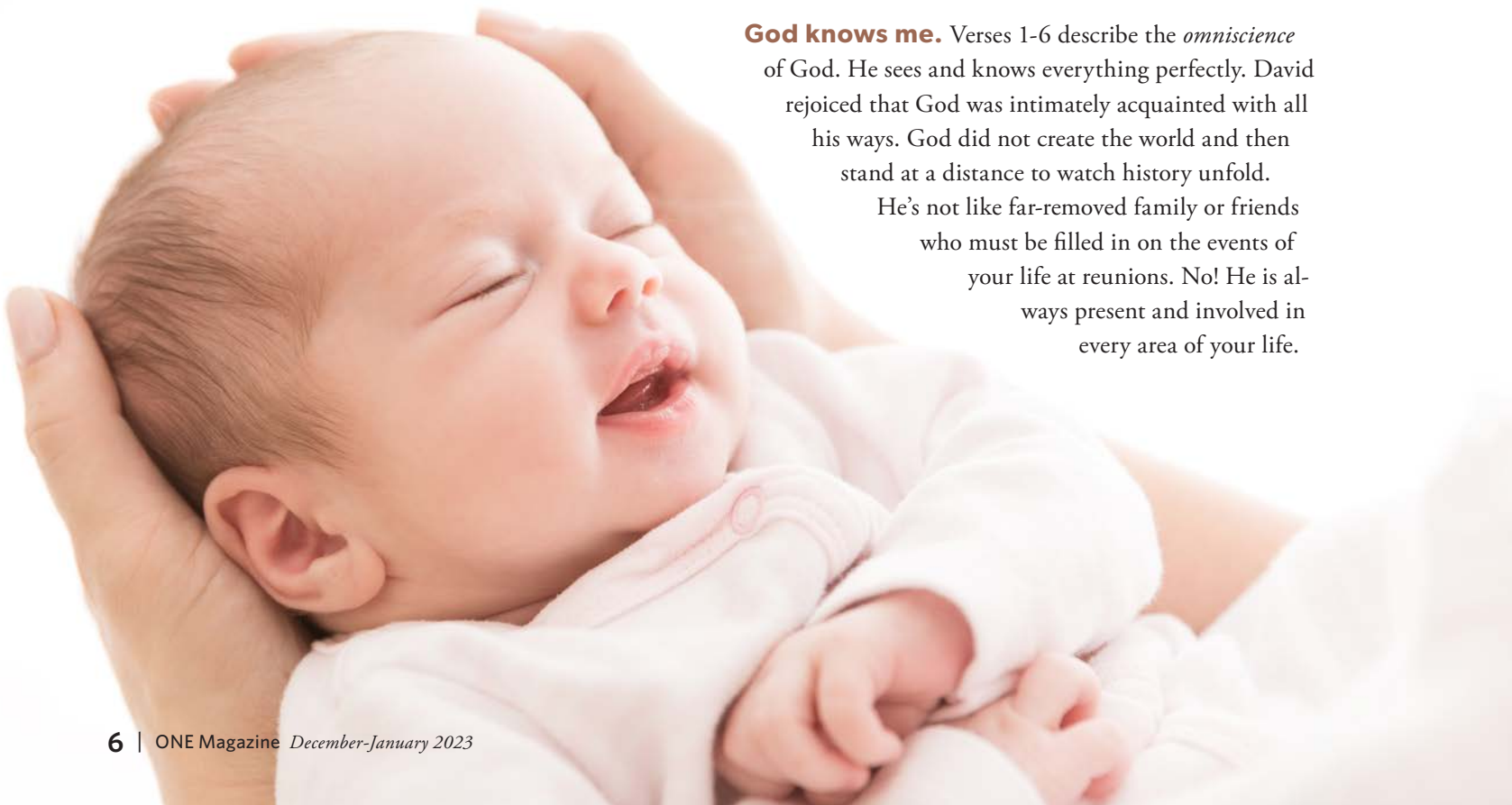
The recent *Dobbs* decision was a great victory. However, much of the American public still doesn't believe abortion is wrong. As Christians, we must continue to defend the rights of the unborn, to win over individuals to embrace the sanctity of all life, including life inside the mother's womb.

My purpose in this article is not to consider the biological data that demonstrates clearly when life begins, but to consider the theology behind our defense of life. Our behavior and life choices as Christians should be driven by our underlying beliefs about who God is, what He is like, our beliefs about ourselves and humanity, and what is right and wrong.

Many say Scripture is silent on the issue of abortion. We must concede the Bible never uses the *term* abortion. However, the Bible is anything but silent because the entire Word of God demonstrates God is the Giver of life, and He stands for protecting innocent life. Consider Psalm 139, one of the most familiar and often-quoted psalms. Three affirmations in this passage speak clearly to this issue.

God knows me. Verses 1-6 describe the *omniscience* of God. He sees and knows everything perfectly. David rejoiced that God was intimately acquainted with all his ways. God did not create the world and then stand at a distance to watch history unfold.

He's not like far-removed family or friends who must be filled in on the events of your life at reunions. No! He is always present and involved in every area of your life.



It is beyond comprehension that God has this kind of immediate and perfect knowledge of all seven billion people on the planet—every single one. This was David’s conclusion as well: “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it” (verse 6).

God is present with me. Verses 7-12 describe the *omnipresence* of God. God is present everywhere. David asks, “Where can I flee from your presence?” The answer, of course, is nowhere. You can go to the heavens and discover God there. You can descend to Sheol (the abode of the dead), and God is there. From East to West to the deepest canyons and trenches of the sea or ocean, God is there.

Remember Jonah? He learned this lesson the hard way. He set out in the opposite direction of where God instructed him to go and ended up on the most unusual ocean voyage ever—inside a great fish. Even there, he couldn’t escape the presence of God. People *try* to run from God all the time, but they soon learn He is everywhere.

My two youngest children still want to play hide-and-seek on occasion. When I really don’t want them to find me—please don’t tell them—I climb down into our storm shelter. I close the hatch and sit quietly in the utter darkness. Sure, I can hide from my children, but I know that even in the middle of the darkness, God is there. David reminds us: even the darkness isn’t dark to God. He is there. That brings us to an affirmation about David’s “life in the dark,” that is, when he was still in his mother’s womb.

God made me. In verses 13-16 David made some important observations: God made him, formed him “fearfully and wonderfully” inside the womb. God knew him inside and out, and even before he was formed, God had a plan for David’s life.

Obviously, David wasn’t making a scientific statement about the exact timing of when life begins. However, it is abundantly clear that his life began in the womb, and God was there in those moments, with intimate knowledge of all he would become. God saw him as an embryo, with all his life before him. At conception, God was there, because God is the Giver of life.

We find a similar statement from the prophet Jeremiah (1:4-5): “Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.”

Jeremiah went even further than David, stating he was consecrated as a prophet to the nations *before* God formed him in the womb.

God uses the natural human reproductive process to produce, protect, and nurture children in the mother’s womb. Yet, make no mistake: **God is the Giver of life.** With advances in science and technology, today we can watch the development of the baby, even getting 3-D pictures that let us see their features before birth. These advances in technology confirm the pro-life view. The heartbeat, the formation of organs, and other important developments come early in the pregnancy. We see this truth reflected in laws like the various heartbeat bills passed.

The incarnation of Christ offers even more evidence life begins at (or even before) conception. Remember what the angel told Mary? “Mary, don’t be afraid...you have found favor with God. You *will conceive* and give birth to a son, and you shall call his name Jesus” (my paraphrase). Once again, God’s plan for Jesus and salvation was in place *before* Mary conceived, before Jesus formed in her womb.

Scripture makes it clear children are gifts from the Lord. This was the perspective of the Old Testament Hebrews and continues into the New Testament. I love the way Psalm 127 phrases it: “Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them (3-5a).”

This is not the mindset of the pro-choice position. If we are honest, most abortions performed in America aren’t due to the health of the mother or pregnancy by rape or incest. Most abortions are about lifestyle and choice. Overwhelmingly, the choice to end the baby’s life is about avoiding the responsibility that comes with bringing children into existence.

This attitude goes against nature itself. The Bible says the law of God is written on human hearts. No matter where you go—even places where people don’t have the Bible in their own language—they know it is wrong to murder, to kill. Why? Because they are made in the image of God, and His law is written on their collective conscience. People can choose to push God’s law aside, ignore it, or drown it out, but when a person acts against it, the impact is felt deeply.

How should Christians speak on this important topic?

Truthfully. We must arm ourselves with truth: biblical truth but also biological and scientific data that speaks clearly about abortion. God's truth always sets people free.

Lovingly. We must speak truth in love, with healing and salvation as our motive. This is not easy, especially when those on the other side view your words, your stance as a threat.

Patiently. We must not set out to win an argument or debate but to win others to redemption.

Redemptively. God is in this business of redemption. While we affirm life begins at conception, and it is wrong to take innocent life, it is also crucial to remember the ongoing impact abortion has on the mother and father of the child aborted. Lingering guilt, shame, and pain can be devastating. But through the grace and power of Jesus, forgiveness, healing, and hope are available.

Perhaps you remember the Old Testament account when David's infant son died—an awful consequence of David's adulterous relationship with Bathsheba. During the baby's

illness, David mourned, fasted, and prayed. But upon learning of the child's death, he got up, washed his face, and began to go about life. David's servants were confused and asked him about the sudden change in behavior: David's reply was short and to the point: "Nothing I can do will bring him back, but I can go to him" (my paraphrase; read the whole story in 2 Samuel 12).

Not long after my wife and I were married, we experienced several miscarriages. Those were heartbreaking days, but we found comfort knowing we have more children waiting for us in Heaven. I will meet them, and—though I can't quite grasp this—Scripture makes it clear we will know them, and they will know us.

Through Christ's grace and forgiveness, anyone who has gone through with an abortion can experience His forgiveness and embrace this hope: they too will see their precious child in Heaven. God is the giver of life. I am so glad. **ONE**

About the Author: Dr. Barry Raper pastors Bethel FWB Church near Ashland City, Tennessee. He also serves as program coordinator for ministry studies at Welch College.

Legacy of Grace

Ruth Louise Johnson was born December 2, 1915, in Smethport, PA, the daughter of a second-generation German immigrant. Saved as a high school senior during a revival meeting at her church, Ruth decided to attend nearby Houghton (Methodist) College and later transferred to Bob Jones College. While there, she met and married Linton (L.C.) Johnson, who became the founding president of Welch College. The couple worked together tirelessly to lead the new school. Ruth firmly believed Welch should educate its students culturally and spiritually, as well as intellectually. So, she developed social events to teach students to appreciate "the true, the good, and the beautiful." Charles A. Thigpen later described Ruth as "one of the most gracious ladies I have ever known, an ideal 'first lady' of the college...kind, loving, and compassionate." **Why not leave your own gracious legacy to Welch College through a FWB Foundation endowment?**



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Eighty Years *of* Faith *and* Learning *at* Welch College

BY GREG KETTEMAN

Winter concludes the ancient, God-ordained cycle of seasons. Hot, dry late summer days signal the end of the growing season before falling leaves set the stage for winter's final act. Beginning in late August, the Welch College year runs counter to this cycle. As nature's growing season comes to an end, the campus comes to life with new and returning students as a God-ordained *cycle of faith and learning* repeats for the 80th year at Welch College.

Throughout its existence, a counter-intuitive, counter-cultural cycle of faith and learning has miraculously continued at Welch College. During times of uncertainty, instability, and opposition, God has made a way for the cycle of faith and learning to transpire at the college He called into existence to educate leaders to serve Christ, His Church, and His world through biblical thought and life.

This cycle of faith and learning at Welch began with the vision of men like John L. Welch who, in the wake of the Great Depression, led the newly-formed National Association to establish Free Will Baptist Bible College. In 1942, as the nation suffered through the turmoil and sacrifice of World War II, first college president L. C. Johnson and eight students set the cycle in motion. College presidents L. R. Ennis, Charles A. Thigpen, C. Thomas Malone, and current President Matt Pinson committed themselves to continuing the annual cycle of faith and learning.

The cycle of faith and learning continued against backdrops of wars in Korea and Vietnam and the unprecedented political upheaval symbolized by Watergate. God continued to call young men and women to education as Christian leaders during the Gulf War and after 9-11. God preserved the cycle through wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Great Recession of 2008, and during the epic challenge of a global pandemic.

This new cycle of faith and learning at Welch College is no less a miracle than at any other time in the college's 80-year history. The counter-intuitive, counter-cultural cycle continues in the face of challenges and opposition to historic, biblical Christianity not experienced in American history, and on a trajectory to rival challenges faced by the early Christian church and the Christian martyrs. President Matt Pinson recently remarked, "As Welch College remains true to her charter, anchored in biblical truth and principle, God's light here will shine even brighter in a darkening world."

Yes! God delights in displaying His power in counter-intuitive, counter-cultural ways. In Isaiah 43:19, God said, "Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert."

Just as God lovingly provides His creation with new life each spring, each year at Welch College He reminds us of His life-giving, redemptive purpose for humanity. As the cycle of faith and learning is repeated in this 80th year, may God once again do a new thing. **ONE**

About the Author: Dr. Greg Kettelman is vice president for strategic initiatives, graduate dean of education, and education professor at Welch College. Learn more: Welch.edu.

Patience *and* Authenticity

Keys *to* Helping Generation Z

BY SARAH J. BRACEY



When I first began volunteering as a youth worker two decades ago, my ministry was primarily with Millennials. Looking back, it is hard to believe the things we worried about—high schoolers having iPods in the sanctuary or middle school girls wearing low-rise jeans. Millennials did have their share of troubling paths to navigate, but I was always able to relate to them and help them walk down those hard roads.

About four years ago, I noticed slight differences in the way I was relating to youth culture. At the time, I took it to mean I was no longer the “older sister” but had become a parental figure. As a teacher, I noticed certain lesson plans and activities did not apply as they had years before. As a counselor, my clients were different, too. What was happening? Was I losing touch? Perhaps. Additionally, though, my students and clients were changing. I was seeing the shift from Millennials to Generation Z, those born somewhere around 1997–2012.

First, let’s make an agreement, an understanding so to speak, to avoid making this article a bashing session where we abuse the younger generation, saying, “Back in my day...” That is not helpful. Instead, I would like to have

this frame of mind: *What can I learn about this group of young people? How can I best minister to someone from this generation?*

TURNING OF AGE

Undoubtedly, not all those in Gen Z have the same characteristics. Generational psychology, also known as *birth cohort effect*, has its critics. To what extent do cultural events shape our individual characters? Whether or not you believe we are simply responding to cultural stimuli in our environments, the fashion, music, cultural values, and global events of formative years tend to form some traits we share with our peers. Isolating the real effects of a particular birth cohort event is very challenging, methodologically speaking. Also, I have no doubt that, through

the course of this article, some will think, “Yeah that doesn’t apply to my kid,” and that is okay. My purpose is to examine the overall or general characteristics of Gen Z.

If you consider Baby Boomers, Gen X, and Millennials, each generation has its own quirks, often defined by major events like September 11th. While it is still very early to guess what events will stand out for Generation Z, one current reality is COVID. The pandemic was not only a national event but a global one, and its impact on Gen Z (and all living generations) has now surpassed many events of the past 50 years.

This generation will tell their children and grandchildren about the fear of the virus, the anxiety of knowing loved ones who had it, perhaps the grief of losing someone to it, the loneliness of isolation, the sadness of not being able to celebrate birthdays, holidays, graduations, and the social division over vaccines. For Generation Z, this all occurred before they graduated from college or started their careers or families.

How can a generation that has faced so much turmoil be prepared for what comes next? Will they ever be ready to lead their families, our churches, or the nation? To prepare them for the future, the church must be intergenerational, coming alongside its youth, understanding their unique gifts and personalities, and investing in their futures. To accomplish this goal, we must understand their unique characteristics.

The struggles in social development for Gen Z are not only because of COVID. This generation received its first cell phone at the average age of seven and social media accounts by age 11. We started to see developmental and interpersonal issues with Millennials. Supervisors and employers share common complaints: “They don’t

look me in the eye.” “They refuse to talk on the phone.” “They don’t seem interested in being a team player.” Sometimes, I am called upon to offer career counseling (or Adulting 101).

They expect the real you—not the face you present to the world on social media.

LONELINESS, MENTORS, AND TRANSPARENCY

However, talking on the phone and navigating office politics are not the main issues for Gen Z. The most concerning characteristic of Gen Z is loneliness. In fact, Gen Z has recently been dubbed “The Loneliest Generation.” We all experience loneliness from time to time, but when I learned this characteristic defines an entire generation, my heart became very heavy.

This loneliness drives young people to crave human interaction. Gen Z are digital natives. For them, the Internet has always existed. However, with all their digital knowledge, those in Gen Z prefer human interaction. Some may not need human interaction as much as others, but I find it incredibly encouraging they desire relationship and community. Sure, they could look up how to change a flat tire, but they really want someone to come alongside them and walk them through how to do it. For a generation with all the answers at their fingertips, they would rather participate in one-on-one experiences. I find that so refreshing.

Now, I should specify that the desire here is for positive human interaction. As much as this generation enjoys face-to-face contact, they are *terrified* of conflict, which is important for youth workers to know. The most feared phrase is: “We need to talk.” When a young person receives that message, they do not know how to respond; therefore, they don’t.

They desire human interaction to be not only positive but also authentic. Most generations relate to the desire for authenticity. We desire truth; we want real relationships. However, for Gen Z, this authenticity is different. It is real—even raw. They live in a world where you can create a digital persona, an avatar. You can be whatever you want to be. And, with the right filter and know-how, you can look however you wish. It is understood that everyone wears a mask. But, when it is just the two of you, that one-on-one interaction, they expect the real you—not the face you present to the world on social media.

As I encounter this characteristic in my classrooms and counseling sessions, it is the one with which I struggle the most in relating to the younger generation. While I acknowledge the importance of authenticity, I simply cannot be fully transparent. Ethically, I can’t. When I communicate with a client, I tell them this kind of transparency

with another human, which is emotionally raw, is a form of intimacy that should not be shared with just anyone. When you have a generation of youth who are already struggling socially, they tend to have trouble with disclosing too much, and some will exploit that information.

INTERACTING WITH GEN Z

If you are like me and find yourself struggling with connecting with the youth at church, school, or home, here are some helpful ways to interact with this generation:

- **Promote mental health literacy.** This generation is lonely, and young people need to know where to find answers, not only to theological questions but also for dealing with depression, anxiety, or suicidal thoughts.
- **Teach and model good conflict management.** Help Gen Z see conflict is not always a bad thing but can be restorative and redemptive. This strategy can encourage them to take a stand on religious and moral issues.
- **Encourage healthy boundaries.** Authenticity and honesty do not give us permission to gossip or self-disclose private histories. This point is especially true with

information and images shared online.

- **Be patient.** This generation of digital natives had fewer opportunities to develop the social skills previous generations learned through face-to-face interactions. Looking down at the phone does not necessarily mean they are unwilling to communicate or be a team player.

As we seek to reach Gen Z, we need youth workers who understand loneliness; who have a desire for authentic, human interaction; and who are willing to be patient. I encourage all of us to be aware of our own personal and generational biases. It is easy to criticize, blame, and label young people. Instead, think about what they can teach us. This generation wants to know the real you, not your professional or online identity—the *real* you. So, let them...but model it appropriately. **ONE**

About the Author: Sarah Bracey is the psychology program coordinator and campus counselor at Welch College. She earned her Ph.D. in counselor education and supervision from the University of the Cumberland and is a Licensed Professional Counselor in Tennessee. She attends Sylvan Park FWB Church in Nashville and lives in Greenbrier, Tennessee, with her husband Matthew.

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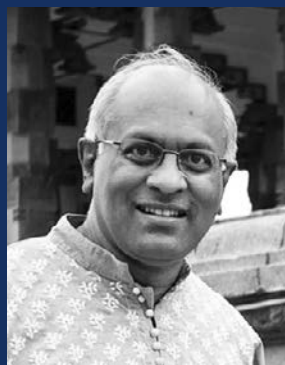
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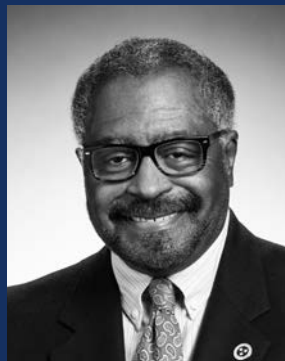
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BY BRAD RANSOM

It's hard to believe, but 2023 is just a few days away. During the coming year, we will focus the Refresh column on reaching Generation Z. Gen Z ushered in a new set of beliefs, values, and worldviews sociologists and researchers are still trying to figure out. This generation made their entrance into the world between 1995 and 2010 (dates vary by sources). They are preceded by Millennials (1980-1994) and followed by the Alpha Generation (2011 to present). The earlier members of Gen Z have finished college, earned graduate degrees, and are solidly in the workforce. They are quickly becoming our bosses, doctors, lawyers, politicians, and world leaders. Yet, most people barely understand them, how they think, and how to reach them with the gospel.

For many years, Millennials were described by some church leaders as the spoilers of tradition and everything holy. More laid back and casual than their parents and grandparents, Millennials ushered in a new age of business casual, blending the church with the modern world and technology.

Generation Z grew up in the shadow of this "infamous" Millennial generation and somehow slipped into adult-

hood without much being said about them by the church. Generation Z, children of Gen X and early Millennial parents, are the first generation to not remember life before touch screens, hand-held devices, and phones that aren't attached to a wall. They care little for the formal and appreciate openness, transparency, and honest discussions about things other generations swallowed hook, line, and sinker.

In his 2017 book *Meet Generation Z*, James Emory White outlined **five defining characteristics** of this unique generation essential to understand if the church wants to reach them with the gospel. The following is taken directly from White's book:

- 1. Recession Marked.** The most defining event in their lifetime is the Great Recession. Beginning in 2007, this economic era is widely considered the worst global downturn since World War II.
- 2. Wi-Fi Enabled.** While Boomers and Generation X don't remember a world without modern inventions and Millennials can't remember a world without computers, Gen Z does not know a world without constant, immediate wireless and convenient access to the web.
- 3. Multiracial.** A record number of births were recorded in the United States in 2006, and 49% were Hispanic. Since the early 1700s, the most common last name in the United States was Smith, but now it is Rodriguez. Gen Z is the most racially diverse generation to date.
- 4. Sexually Fluid.** Seventy-three percent of Gen Z favors same-sex marriage; 74% support equal rights for transgender people; and 49% between 18 and 24 identified as something other than 100% heterosexual. An increasing sexual fluidity refuses either the homosexual or the heterosexual label. According to the majority of Gen Z, both labels are repressive. They believe sexuality should be free from all restrictions, and people should be allowed to follow their moment-by-moment desires.
- 5. Post-Christian.** While 78% of Gen Z believe in God, only 41% attend weekly religious services of any kind, and only 8% cite a religious leader as a role model. The largest religious category in the Harvard *Crimson's* "by the numbers" survey of the class of 2019 was "agnostic" (21.3%). Generation Z is more than post-Christian, White says. They don't even have a memory of the gospel. As a result, there is profound spiritual emptiness.

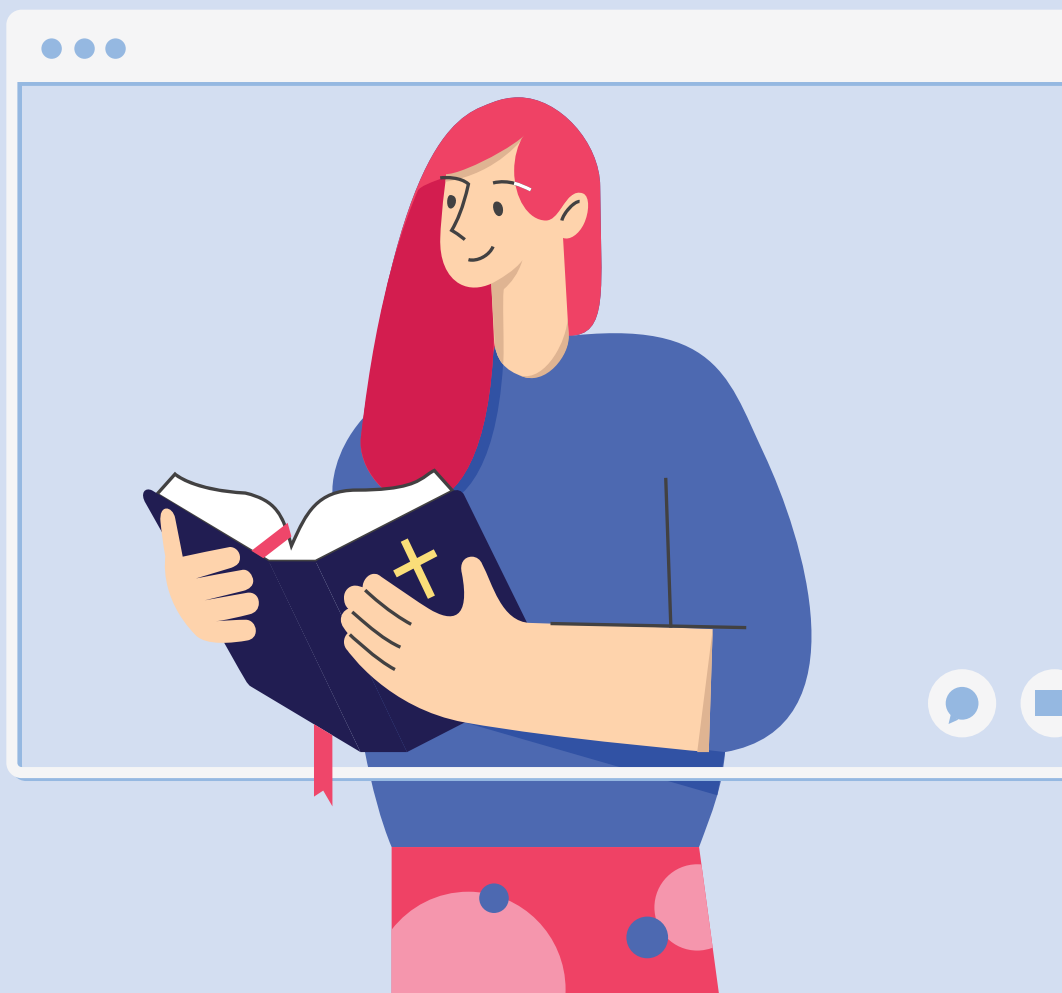
The characteristics of Gen Z are shocking, but truthfully, not surprising. However, these statistics should not lead us to believe Gen Z (and future generations) are beyond hope. We must *never* give up on a generation.

As I mentioned earlier, this generation is more open to honest discussions about the Bible and spiritual matters. They don't want to be "told," but they do want to ask questions and get honest answers. This will require a new way of thinking about how we present the gospel.

Over the next six issues, Refresh will present various articles and resources to help you and your church reach Generation Z. **ONE**

About the Author: Dr. Brad Ransom is director of church planting and chief training officer for North American Ministries. Contact Brad: brad@nafwb.org.

Gen Z cares little for the formal and appreciates **openness, transparency, and honest discussions** about things other generations swallowed hook, line, and sinker.



Money Is Not the Issue

BY CHRIS COMPTON



Marriage is a beautiful thing. God's design for marriage is one man and one woman in a lifelong commitment. As most of us probably said in our vows: *'Til death do us part*. Yet, in today's culture, many forces work overtime to break down commitments and destroy marriages. Some of those forces are external, others internal.

I am always saddened when these forces prevail, and a couple breaks their vows through divorce. Marriages end in divorce for many reasons, but one of the most cited reasons for divorce is money and finances. Unfortunately, this has been true for a long time. Why is that? I am sure *every* couple disagrees over money from time to time. We are human. We come from different backgrounds. Our views regarding money are different. Some are savers; others are spenders. Yet, our disagreements over money do not have to lead us down a path toward giving up on our commitment and calling it quits.


At the end of this month, my wife and I will celebrate 20 years of marriage. (I haven't forgotten!) During these 20 years, we have experienced many transitions: schooling, relocating, serving in ministry, and having children, among others. For many couples, these transitions in life create financial challenges. All too often, these financial challenges result in marital issues. For my wife and I, unity has been the key to staying grounded in our approach to money and financial challenges—unity in how we view God and His provisions for us.

God loves us. Because He loves us, He will take care of us. We can trace God's promises to provide and care for

our needs throughout the Scriptures. One of my favorites is Matthew 6:31-33: "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Where-withal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

God has taken this burden from us and placed it upon Himself. My wife and I trust in God and depend upon Him. He has never failed us, and He will never fail you. So, you can trust Him too.

Unity does not come naturally. Because we are different, it requires a lot of work and prayer to reach a place where you and your spouse are unified around the subject of money. But it is worth the effort! There is a wonderful freedom in understanding God's care and provision as a couple. It frees us from the constant worry and stress over money. It allows our marriage to grow and flourish, and it helps us become more of what God wants us to be—generous.

When you understand this, money will no longer be the issue. 

About the Author: Chris Compton is accounting administrator for the Board of Retirement. He graduated in 2007 with a M.A. in Bible exposition from Columbia International University. A 1998 graduate of East Tennessee State University, he has over 18 years of administrative/financial experience in varied fields, and seven years in pastoral ministry.

Longing and Fulfillment

BY MATTHEW AND SARAH BRACEY

Husband and wife drove down the winding gravel driveway, past the old fencing, and through overarching trees. It was a cold, wintery day, but the sun shone brightly on them. A charming country home greeted them, fashioned after a bed and breakfast establishment.

A large porch graced the front of the house, and she could already hear the creak of a rocking chair, could already smell the aroma of morning coffee, could already envision the grazing of local deer.

They were looking at their new home—their dream home. “I can already see it,” she exclaimed. He looked over at her. “We’ll buy a few layers and have fresh eggs.”

Their previous home was a good one, but it was a starter home. It had been their first home, and they loved it. They tried their hands, time and again, at whatever do-it-yourself project arose—inside of the house, outside of the house, even on top of the house. They gave themselves to that property, and it gave itself back to them: scrapes and bruises and joy and blessing.

He learned how to use a garden tiller. Fond are the memories of them planting and cultivating and harvesting tomatoes and peppers, beans and okra, and herbs and melons, in that quaint 15x15 garden.

Salsa, made from the freshest ingredients, has no equal. Many are the hours they spent in that little garden—hoeing weeds, pruning plants, picking produce. They planted a blackberry crop along a row, and she made the most delicious cobbler.

That home treated them well but could not accommodate their aspirations. They also wanted farm animals: goats and chickens and the like. But the sounds and smells of

country living had to wait—those dreams could not be realized on a mere third-acre plot in the middle of a suburb.

But *this* home standing before them, *this* property stretching out before them, could. This home signified a new, exciting chapter in their lives. “The garden could go here,” she said, pointing northwest toward a field, “and the chickens could go over there,” she added, gazing further toward the west near the woods.

As she spoke, he looked about the property, taking in the totality of the five-and-a-half acres. Undoubtedly, it was much larger than their previous one of six years; in fact, it was 15 times larger. “This push mower isn’t going to cut it,” he remarked.

Husband and wife each recognized stewarding this property would require more than their former one: more planning, more time, more money, more work. But this *more* was a *good* more. It was a significant step forward but not an impossible one. Their new property was big enough to keep them appropriately busy but not so big it would overwhelm them.



“Also, I think we can do something with this area over here,” he said, looking toward the trees on the west side of the home. Woods had grown up beyond the yard on both sides of the house, and they were out of control—full of decades’ worth of terrible thorns and poison ivy, which had grown up among the dense undergrowth.

As they would work to clear this area in the coming months, they would also find evidence of the former owners—broken pots, rusted tools, plastic bottles—buried beneath the seasons of fallen leaves, sticks, and trees. He looked on the sight and, in place of messy woods on a floor of dead leaves and rotting limbs, saw a grove of trees with a carpet of living green.

He also saw scratches and rashes in his future. He would give himself to this property, and, undoubtedly, it would give itself back to him. He was excited about developing it, but it would come by hard (good) labor.

Over the course of coming seasons, husband and wife would tackle these projects and others like them both outside and inside the home. Some would go as planned; others would not. Most projects would take longer—much longer—than expected.

In addition to sweating in the field and working in the woods, she would maintain a compost pile for the garden; he would fell trees and split logs for assorted wood-working projects; they would construct a chicken house for fresh eggs and build fencing for other farm animals. They would work that property and love that property.

As the cold winter turned to a warm spring and hot summer, husband

and wife would acquire rocking chairs for that inviting porch. Through the years and decades, they would enjoy much freshly-ground pour-over coffee while rocking back and forth.

They would also observe the birds and squirrels and rabbits and turkey and deer. They would admire the beautiful blooms and green canopy formed by the trees—ash and beech and cedar and dogwood and maple and poplar and tulip.

“We couldn’t do this at our old home,” she said one day. They breathed in the morning dew and the aromatic coffee as they sat on the porch.



“Do what?”

“*This*,” she returned, extending her arm to indicate their present station—the house, the porch, the property.

“Ah yes,” he chuckled. “That old rickety porch was a bit precarious, wasn’t it?”

“It had its limitations,” she said, “but it was a good home.”

“It was. We learned a lot about keeping a home, maintaining a property. We learned a lot about ourselves.”

“It’s amazing to look back and see how you’ve changed and grown.”

“Anticipation plays an important role in life,” he remarked after a minute. “It’s good to look forward to things, to hope for things. And yet life is now—it’s in the suburbs and in the country.”

“I do love this house,” she paused, “but it’s not without its problems either.” At that moment three white tails hopped the fence from the neighbor’s property onto their own.

Husband and wife remained quiet as they watched the

deer meander from the grove of trees through the field and past the garden (now fenced off from those little sneaks). After they had passed on, he arose to get another cup of coffee.

“Would you like a refill?” he asked.

“Yes, please. Oh, and one more thing,” she said as he opened the door to enter their home. “Have you noticed the shingles? They’re looking rather worn.”

“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth... And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them” (Isaiah 65:17a, 21). **ONE**

He would give himself to this property, and, undoubtedly, it would give itself back to him.



About the Authors: Matthew and Sarah Bracey are professors at Welch College. They attend Sylvan Park FWB Church in Nashville, Tennessee, where they work with children.

Don't cut down the fruit trees!

In the Old Testament, when the nation of Israel was preparing for battle, God told them to choose the trees they used carefully, **NOT** to cut down their fruit trees, thereby robbing themselves of a future harvest.

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The Goen Gift

BY TODD PARRISH

For almost 50 years, the building stood on the corner of Craighead and Richland in the West End neighborhood of Nashville, Tennessee. Constructed in 1967, Goen Hall became the home of many young men who attended Welch College. In fall 1985, I started my four-year residency in that brick dormitory, and I still recall the laughter and banter that regularly filled the hallways. Many nights, bunk beds became altars as students gathered with their prayer groups, shared burdens, and prayed for one another. Theological debates and intense biblical discussions were as common as the practical jokes we played on one another. Few Welch graduates today remember Goen Hall without recalling good memories of bygone days.

I walked under those large, black letters spelling out “Goen Hall” above the entryway a thousand times, but it wasn’t until this year that I learned more about the man who lent his name to the building. Described as “a genuine cattle-working, horse-riding, lasso-throwing Texas

cowboy,” his name was Clyde F. Goen. His love for Welch College and the Free Will Baptist denomination was as big as his native Lone Star State.

Sitting in his grandson’s living room on the Goen Ranch in Bryan, Texas, I learned more about this amazing Aggie. Clyde graduated from his beloved Texas A&M in 1912. An influential lay leader among early Free Will Baptists, Goen saw the need for a denominational college. When the National Association formed in 1935, some like John L. Welch and Clyde Goen knew Free Will Baptists needed an institution to train leaders or risk losing them to colleges operated by other denominations. Goen not only believed in Christian higher education; he put his money where his mouth was and gave generously. On one occasion, he gave when he didn’t have the cash in hand. All he possessed was a vast love for Welch College and a tremendous faith in God to provide.

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Enrollment Increases Post-COVID

Welch College enrolled 388 students for the 2022 Fall semester, according to Dr. Matthew McAfee, provost. This number marks the first increase in enrollment since the start of the COVID pandemic, up 15% from a total enrollment of 336 in the fall of 2021.

“It has been tough navigating the challenges resulting from the pandemic over the last two years,” McAfee said, “so we are thankful for this increase. We believe these numbers signal the beginning of our rebound from the last two years of lower enrollment.”

Full-time enrollment also improved from pandemic years. Whereas COVID most drastically affected traditional dormitory enrollment, this semester saw continued improvement in this area. Graduate studies, adult and online studies, and dual enrollment also showed gains.

At press time, the college reported 151 dormitory students, 61 commuter students, 36 graduate students, 17 adult studies students, 43 online students, and 80 dual enrollment students. Full-time equivalency (FTE) was 274 students, up from 240 last fall. Total enrollment statistics

indicate students from 22 states, one U.S. territory, and six foreign countries.

“Many small, church-related colleges were hit very hard during the pandemic, with some having to close their doors,” President Matt Pinson said. “We’re thankful that, despite these difficulties, the Lord has sustained Welch College and has set us on a course of recovery.”

“We’re also thankful for our new and returning students,” Pinson continued. “They bring a renewed sense of vibrancy and excitement to the campus as we turn our focus to the prospects for future growth and opportunity as an institution. We still have our work cut out for us in this post-COVID recovery period, with enrollment and donations to the college still far below pre-COVID norms. But things are looking up. We are thankful to the Lord for His blessings.”

For more information about Welch College, email recruit@welch.edu or visit the college’s website at www.welch.edu. 

Welch College Ranks 17th Among Best Regional Colleges—South by *U.S. News & World Report*

Welch College recently ranked 17th among “Best Regional Colleges—South” in the 2023 edition of *U.S. News and World Report’s Best Colleges*, according to President Matt Pinson. The Regional Colleges—South category comprises 105 other colleges and universities in the South.

“We’re so glad to have Welch’s academic quality recognized by *U.S. News*,” President Pinson said. “This is another reminder to students and parents that Welch College is a top-quality institution of higher learning that delivers its educational promise.”

The “Best Regional Colleges—South” category where Welch College is ranked includes institutions that focus on undergraduate education and offer a range of degree programs in the liberal arts and in professional fields such as business, nursing, and education.

Most of these institutions award fewer than fifty graduate degrees annually. This year, 13 colleges and universities were added to this category, moving from last year’s total of 93 to 106 total schools.

“Colleges go up and down in these rankings each year,”

Pinson said. “When we first entered the rankings 12 years ago, we were ranked 52nd. Then four years ago we got up to 26th, after which we’ve consistently been in the top 20. Our ranking at 17th is exciting.”

“To be ranked in the top 16% of all colleges and universities in our category is remarkable,” Provost Matthew McAfee said. “Our faculty and staff strive diligently to give our students an excellent Christian educational experience, and this ranking is a testament to their determination and hard work.”

U.S. News rankings judge the relative quality of institutions based on widely accepted indicators of excellence in higher education: what peer institutions think of the institution, how many freshmen return their sophomore year, how many go on to graduate, student-faculty ratio, faculty

quality, financial resources, alumni giving, and more.

“To put our ranking in perspective,” Pinson said, “the ten institutions ranked directly above and below us have an average enrollment three times higher than Welch’s and an average endowment eight times higher than Welch’s. We are good stewards of the resources God has given us.”

Welch received especially high marks in a number of strategic areas, ranking as follows:

- 1st in student-faculty ratio (tied)
- 3rd in graduation rate
- 3rd in classes under 20 students
- 6th in ACT/SAT scores
- 7th in alumni giving

For more information about Welch, email gotowelch@welch.edu or visit www.welch.edu. **ONE**

Goen’s love for Welch College and the Free Will Baptist denomination was as big as his native Lone Star State.

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It was the late 1940s, and Goen heard the new college in Nashville was in great financial need. Goen’s desire to help was so strong, he returned from a National Convention and asked his banker for a loan of \$10,000, an astronomical amount at the time. Goen wanted to give the money to Welch College so the school could continue. The banker desperately tried to talk him out of such a risky move, but Goen was determined. He eventually obtained the loan and gave the money to Welch College, saving it from a financial crisis. Later in 1965, Mr. and Mrs. Goen gave Welch another \$35,000 to help construct a new men’s dormitory, named Goen Hall.

I wonder how many sermons were preached and churches planted by the boys who lived in Goen? Many who resided on the corner of Craighead and Richland went on to make an eternal difference in the lives of high school and college students. Others mentored many more young people to surrender to Christ and His plan for their lives.

Today, people like to play it safe when it comes to money. They don’t put all their eggs in one basket, and they rarely take the unusual step of taking out a loan so the Lord’s work can move forward. But most people don’t have the love and faith of Clyde Goen, either. Because he willingly gave money he didn’t have to house students he didn’t know, many young men had a home away from home while fulfilling God’s call on their lives. Welch College could use another like Clyde Goen. May God bring us another friend who possesses a faith in God that’s as big as Texas! **ONE**

About the Author: Todd Parrish is vice president for institutional advancement at Welch College. Learn more about how you can help train future generations of biblical leaders: welch.edu.

Instructions for the Journey

BY BARRY RAPER

1 THESSALONIANS 2:17—3:5

If you were going to teach a class to new Christians, what would you include in your teaching? To what essential things would you introduce them? If you cannot imagine teaching a class, what about a conversation with a friend, a new Christian looking for guidance? What would be your advice, your instructions for his or her new journey of faith?

Books for new Christians are filled with topics such as baptism, the importance of being connected to the church, giving, how to practice Bible reading and prayer, and the need for service. And these topics are crucial for new Christians. However, I have rarely—if ever—encountered material on suffering and adversity for new Christians. But Paul made sure to tell the new Christians in Thessalonica afflictions would be part of their Christian experience, sharing three important things the Thessalonians needed to know on their journey of faith.

First, Paul expressed grief he had been torn away from these young Christians and asked how they were doing. The word translated “taken from you” or “torn away” is the Greek word from which the English word “orphan” is derived. When Paul preached the gospel in Thessalonica, he and his coworkers were soon driven away by the Jews (Acts 17). The Christians in Thessalonica helped Paul and Silas escape by night to Berea, yet the angry group of Jews pursued them even there.

The flight created a separation, an unwilling and unnatural separation between a spiritual father (Paul) and his spiritual children (the Thessalonians). Perhaps you have experienced the emotions of separation when sending a child off to college, helping her or him settle into a dorm room or apartment. Perhaps you remember the long drive home, worrying about how he or she is doing, hoping you have taught all the right things, or perhaps recalling something you meant to say before leaving. In these verses, Paul shared three things with the Thessalonians, who were now “on their own” and apart from him.

Know afflictions are coming. One of the reasons the “prosperity gospel” is so damaging is because it ignores (or denies) hard truths. Paul certainly wasn’t a health and wealth, name-it-and-claim-it, first century evangelist. Absolutely not! He warned the Thessalonians tribulations *would* come as part of their Christian experience. He shared no hint that suffering affliction results from lack of faith. In contrast, he made it clear afflictions come to all of us.

It seems clear these Christians were suffering persecution for their faith. Earlier in the chapter, Paul described the suffering they faced from their own countrymen, like what Paul and his ministry partners suffered themselves at the hands of the Jews. While we may never experience this level of persecution, we can expect suffering, adversity, and affliction as part of our journey. Jesus Himself urged followers to stand strong in the faith through difficult times, encouraging them that while they would experience tribulation in this world, He has overcome the world (John 16:33).

Simply knowing unpleasant things are coming helps you prepare for them. Consider daily commuter traffic, especially in a big city. You know traffic is worse at certain times of the day—the dreaded “rush hour.” And when you find yourself stuck in rush hour traffic—while it doesn’t make the experience any better—you aren’t caught off guard. You knew rush hour was coming and you understood the possibility of being stuck in traffic before you turned the key in the ignition. While we don’t know the specific hardships and afflictions we will encounter in life, knowing they are coming helps prepare for them to arrive.

Know the adversary you face. Paul desperately wanted to visit the Thessalonians, but his plans were continually hindered or thwarted by Satan. While we shouldn’t think Satan is behind every instance when our plans fall apart, Paul makes it clear his efforts to establish these Christians in the faith had been impeded by Satan. This phrase is sometimes interpreted “blocked our way.”



When we desire to help others come to faith in Christ and progress in their faith, we can expect opposition. Just as we should not be surprised by trials and affliction, neither should we be taken off-guard by these attacks from the evil one.

Specifically, the context here is affliction. Paul warned the Thessalonians they would suffer affliction. Further, Timothy had been sent to establish and exhort them, so no one would be defeated by the afflictions. Hardships sometimes create an environment where people, if not careful, move away from God. It doesn't have to be this way. In fact, when handled correctly, affliction, hardship, and trials bring us closer to God.

Temptation comes in many forms. Satan tailors them for everyone, exploiting the situation, and his or her weaknesses. In those moments, Satan whispers things like: "Why is God allowing this in your life? I thought He loved you?" "It would be much easier if you stopped going to church. You can do this on your own." "Here is what you need. After all, you have been through so much, you deserve something; no one will ever know, and God understands."

He is the tempter, alluring and deceiving, providing the bait while hiding the hook.

Know the allies at your side. Scripture stresses just how much we need other people to live out our faith journey. It is hard to miss Paul's emotionally charged language as he describes his desire to see the Thessalonians and his reasons for sending Timothy: to *establish* them in the faith (to confirm their convictions and beliefs); to *encourage* (exhort) them in their faith; and to bring news back to Paul.

In these words, we observe an interconnectedness in

their faith. Paul didn't simply preach the gospel, make a few converts, and then move on to another city. He was deeply concerned new Christians grow in their faith, their love for Christ, and their concern for one another.

This face-to-face dynamic doesn't communicate as well in English, but in verse 17, Paul used the word for face/countenance, and it appears again in verse 17. He was eager to see them again, face to face. If the recent pandemic taught us anything, it taught us the value of physical, human interaction. We have been created with soul, mind, and spirit. Yet, as humans, we have physical bodies, part of God's good design. We need more than virtual interaction.

The Incarnation of Christ is the greatest illustration of this. Jesus, the Word of God, the eternal Son, was made flesh and lived among us, as John wrote in his Gospel. He lived among us—lived and died and rose again—so we might one day enjoy a face-to-face relationship with Him. As 1 Corinthians 13:12 describes it: now we see through a glass darkly, but someday, we will see Him face-to-face. Until then, we need one other, allies on the journey, encouraging, supporting, and correcting one another.

Being prepared for the road before us is important. While we cannot always see what's coming over the horizon, these essential directions from Paul enable us to navigate our way. Afflictions will come. Our adversary will do his best to steer us off-course. But thank God for our allies, our friends and family in the faith upon whom we can (and should) depend. **ONE**

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



A *Fast* Response *to the* Refugee

BY DANNY GASPERSON

Crisis



In the Old Testament days of Isaiah, the people of the Kingdom of Judah were confused, frustrated, even a little angry with the Lord. They understood they were God's chosen people. In their eyes, they faithfully followed the prescribed patterns of worship and dutifully performed the religious rituals of their faith. They offered sacrifices, fasted, and prayed. Nevertheless, they were not experiencing the favor and blessing of God they thought they deserved. In Isaiah 58 we read their complaint: "Why have we fasted and humbled ourselves to no avail? God isn't paying attention."

The Lord sent Isaiah to explain what they were missing. The Israelites were saying the right words and performing the right rituals of worship. But true worship is more than rote recitation, superficial ritual, and pious practices. The Lord looks for heart engagement leading to life transformation. Their words and worship did not alter their walk and work. God-honoring, acceptable worship engages the heart; it also leads to an obedient life, holy humility, and compassionate concern for others.

The Lord used the spiritual discipline of fasting to make His point: “Is not this the fast that I have chosen?” (Isaiah 58:6a) To the Israelite, fasting only meant depriving oneself of food, wearing sackcloth, and spreading ashes. But when the prescribed fast was over, normal life resumed—seeking one’s own pleasure and disregarding the plight of others.

In contrast, the Lord describes the kind of fast He desires. Our God has a heart for the down-trodden, displaced, oppressed, poor, and afflicted. He expects His people to share His compassion and respond in practical ways.

That is the kind of “fast” the Lord desires.

Two recent events had a significant negative impact on millions of people around the world. In 2021, the U.S. withdrew all military forces deployed to Afghanistan to support the Afghan National Security Forces in their stand against the Taliban. Without the help of the U.S., the ANSF collapsed and the Taliban immediately took control. Taliban soldiers brutally persecuted or killed Afghans not aligned with their radical Islamic beliefs. People were forced to leave their homes with little more than the clothes on their backs to seek safety.

Neighboring Pakistan has received over 4 million refugees from Afghanistan. Most live in makeshift, refugee tent villages along the border. Residing in a refugee village is more existence than life. Adequate food, water, shelter, and safety are scarce. It is especially dangerous for those who have embraced Christianity to live in this predominantly Muslim context without the protection of government or law enforcement.

The second significant event is Russia’s invasion of Ukraine early in 2022. This aggression has resulted in Europe’s largest refugee crisis since WWII. More than 6.4 million Ukrainians fled the country, and one-third of the

population is displaced. People have been forced to flee their homes, families, possessions, and livelihoods with little advance notice. Families are forced to seek refuge in countries where the language, culture, and customs are radically different. The majority of these people desperately cling to the hope of returning to their homes. Sadly, for many, their homes are no longer there. Bombing has obliterated cities, communities, and many important and historical structures.

It is heartbreaking to watch or read reports on these situations and impossible for us to imagine the desperate plight of those directly affected. Millions of people need help and hope. Their need is immediate, urgent, and immense. Refugees need help quickly. They need a “fast” response.

Free Will Baptists have responded to this crisis! Certainly, we expressed our compassionate concern and offered prayers on their behalf. But Free Will Baptists did not stop there. Our people acted quickly and offered a *fast* response.

In partnership with Pakistani Free Will Baptists, we established a safe house for Christian Afghan refugees endangered in the refugee camps. They receive lodging, food, clothing, protection, and compassionate care while healing from their trauma and adjusting to their new country.

The Taliban pursued a Christian family of 40, trapped in Afghanistan. Taliban soldiers brutally murdered nine family members. Our FWB partners in Pakistan located this family and, through the generosity of Free Will Baptists in the U.S. and Brazil, the 31 remaining family members were extracted to the safe house in Pakistan. They received help getting residency papers and have begun to establish a life in their new home.

We rarely hear about the Afghan refugee situation, but the crisis still exists and the needs are ongoing. Free Will Baptists have not forgotten their plight and our *fast* response continues.

In even greater ways, Free Will Baptists offered a *fast* response to Ukrainian refugees. When the Russian invasion forced Ukrainians to flee their homeland, they spread throughout Europe. Missionaries and partners in Bulgaria, France, and Spain recognized and acted upon several opportunities to provide compassionate care and practical assistance. Free Will Baptists in the U.S. have given generously to fully support these efforts.





Our church in Svishtov, Bulgaria, set up living quarters inside the church to offer lodging for refugees. Tim Aw-trey recently shared, “Last night, in the Bulgarian darkness, we were put in contact with a family from Ukraine who fled the Russian attack on their town of Mykolaiv. Anna, her two teenage boys, and Stasia with her little girl were worn out after two days’ travel. They are now safe and living at the Free Will Baptist church in Svishtov. Lydia has been seeing to their needs, and Josh Provow brought a meal for the whole family today. We have put out an appeal to church members for food and basic supplies.”

Later, Tim and Lydia traveled to Mykolaiv, Ukraine, to offer food and basic supplies to those ravished by the war. Lydia wrote, “Glory to God, we had a successful, exciting, and humbling day in Mykolaiv! There were not bombings for the first time since the war started, and we believe it’s because of all the prayers! We gave away food and medical supplies to seven villages and a hospital. Everyone was very grateful....600,000 people live in Mykolaiv, but half of them have left, and it looks like a ghost city. There is no water. People live in their bunkers or garages. So far, officially 89 civilians have died from the bombings, but the Russian army is only 30 miles away, and they expect fierce battles soon. Pray for this city and for the wonderful people we have met there! The Ukrainian people are amazing, and their spirit is strong!”

Our church in Varna offered Bulgarian language courses and provided other assistance to Ukrainian refugees in their city. Forty students filled the first class. Trif Trifonov shared this [edited] report, “I met Sergey at the Ukrainian Refugee Center in Varna in March. We were there as volunteers helping the new arrivals of refugees. He told me he was from Kyiv and had arrived in Varna with his wife. I told him we were starting Bulgarian language classes for refugees. So, that’s how he and his wife Oksana came to our church and joined the language course.

“After the end of the language course, we started a church

remodeling process. So, I invited our friends from Ukraine to come work alongside our Bulgarian volunteers. Sergey came and worked very hard for two weeks with us! After we finished the remodeling, he and Oksana helped us clean the church. I told Sergey, ‘You have to come to our first church service in the new church auditorium!’

“The next Sunday, both Sergey and Oksana came! At the end of the service, I felt the Holy Spirit’s nudge to pray for them, so I asked them to come in front and led the church in prayer for them and for Ukraine.

When I opened my eyes after prayer, they had tears in their eyes. Many of us did. With a trembling voice Sergey thanked the church for the support.

Please, pray God would bring these dear souls to His Kingdom and they both would one day find their home.”

Similar examples of this *fast* response in Bulgaria are happening in the churches in Pleven and Shumen.

Matt Price, IM missionary in France wrote, “The St. Nazaire Church has been blessed with several Ukrainian workers who have attended the church for the past two years. With the war in Ukraine, we were asked by our Ukrainian brothers to help find lodging for their families as they arrive in St. Nazaire. We have already been solicited by five families for help. Our project is to help find temporary housing for them, help them get settled, and then help them move on to more permanent lodging. We will provide furniture, food, and essential needs to these families.” The faithful, generous giving from FWBs in the States has allowed them to do this and much more. As time has gone on, the church learned of several other Ukrainians working in the city and reached out to them. They have started using their church building to provide Ukrainian worship services on Sunday afternoons.

Millions of people need help and hope. Their need is immediate, urgent, and immense. Refugees need help quickly. They need a “fast” response.




Our workers in Southern Spain operate a food distribution center for immigrants and refugees. They increased the amount of food and other essential supplies they distribute to provide assistance to the Ukrainians who come to them for help. The increased demand has been so great they designate one day a week for Ukrainian refugees. They serve over 60 families each week and anticipate more in the months to come. Generous financial support from FWBs in the U.S. has funded this increase in ministry.

The overwhelming *fast* response from Free Will Baptists enabled us to help one of our partner ministries, Bible Mission Global, which works directly with refugees in Ukraine and neighboring Moldova. They provide food and essential supplies, help restore damaged churches and homes, and equip children for school. BMG sends

over 700 tons of relief supplies into Ukraine each week. Beyond the physical supplies, they offer comfort and hope to these people.

I am thankful for the many ways you have offered and continue to provide a *fast* response to the refugee crisis. More importantly, I know God recognizes this as a *fast* He desires and will give His favor and blessing.

Our partner, The Hanna Project, has a fund to channel all donations to refugee aid. To contribute to these efforts, visit <https://ppay.co/5iKA9mdczlk>. 

About the Author: Danny Gasperson is the director of The Hanna Project. Before that, he served 19 years as pastor of Zephyr Hills FWB Church in Asheville, North Carolina. Helping individuals find and fulfill his or her place in the Great Commission is his passion. Learn more: HannaProject.com.

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Starting From Minus Ten

BY TIM AWTRY

Years ago, I saw a chart entitled “Gospel Receptivity.” The chart started at minus ten and continued to plus ten. Minus ten represented cultures hostile to the gospel. Plus ten indicated a culture open and receptive toward missionaries. Newly arrived in Bulgaria to plant churches, Lydia and I sat in a smoky coffee shop with 4 a.m. jetlag. Drunk men lolled in one corner while a depressed waitress pointedly ignored our attempts to get coffee. Bulgaria had recently turned from communism to embrace democracy, and I thought this must be a country greater than minus ten.

Communism’s long-term cultural legacy erected distinct barriers to an individual’s openness to the gospel. First, in post-communist countries like Bulgaria, we see a marked change from the past, especially as it relates to Christianity. In 1948, many Bulgarian Protestant pastors were arrested and put on trial as American spies. Many were killed and others sent to concentration camps—like the one only a few miles from our Free Will Baptist church. For years, my wife lived within a stone’s throw of this prison and heard only “bad” people were sent there. The past was erased and replaced with a communist narrative, a pseudo history.

Today’s Bulgarians have no knowledge of the hospitals, schools, and businesses begun by Protestant missionaries in the 19th and early 20th centuries.



This is a challenge to missionaries working in post-communist countries.

However, we also have an opportunity here. Bulgarians are proud of their history. If a missionary is willing to study this forgotten past and reiterate it, he will open a door into the hearts of Bulgarians. When Bulgarians realize Protestants helped shape language and literature in the early 19th century or hear the impact Protestants had in the Bulgarian war of independence against the Ottoman-Turk Empire, they take a step toward the reality of the gospel in their own life. **Missionaries in post-communist countries must redeem history.**

In addition, an undercurrent of communism profoundly stifles the gospel...even in post-communist societies. To everyone living under communism, it is an open secret that it is all a lie. Communism is a well-placed, widespread, and demanding fabrication. There is no equality. There is no harmonious gathering of the proletariat. There are the rulers and the ruled. The titles have changed, and the various seats of power shuffled, but, at the end of the day, it is the same despotic rule. Yet, the propaganda machine continues, day after day, year after year. The missionary is seen as just another type of propaganda. So, of course, no one believes your message. Every message is false, only designed to manipulate. So, too, must be the message of Jesus Christ. This is a significant barrier to ev-

ery missionary working in post-communist societies, especially in the beginning stages.

Here, too, is an opportunity. If the church is the church, not only in word, but also in deed and action, over time the truth of those words and actions will ring true. For this reason, it is immensely important churches in post-communist countries, like Bulgaria, be active in their communities. Remember the deeds of our forefathers who brought the gospel with words and deeds, so people can see the power of the Good News in action. Lies bring a hunger for the truth. **If a missionary can demonstrate the gospel is true, he will see the lie of communism shred before him.**

Missionaries must not only redeem history, but also redeem the truth so the community can see the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Working in post-communist societies poses a significant challenge to missionaries who would go to those who continue to be denied access to the gospel for lack of community-impacting churches. In these countries, often, you must start from minus ten. Yet, Christ can, and will, redeem all things. There are substantial challenges working in post-communist societies and, still, there are opportunities for the life-giving transformation of the gospel. Just as in our own lives, **to be effective as missionaries in post-communist countries like Bulgaria, the past must be redeemed, and the truth must set us free.** [ONE](#)

About the Author: Tim Awtrey and his wife Lydia have been serving in Bulgaria for over fifteen years. Tim grew up in a Free Will Baptist Church in California and Lydia grew up under the communist regime in Bulgaria. While Tim started attending church a week after birth, Lydia didn't see a Bible or hear the name of Jesus until age 20. The couple is dedicated to starting churches in Bulgaria to make sure that never happens to anyone again. Learn more: iminc.org.

Central Asia Trip Renews Commitment

Central Asia—THP Director Danny Gasperson and Bob Brown of Florida traveled to Central Asia to reestablish the relationship with IM’s valued partner, Bible Mission Global (BMG). COVID-19 restrictions prevented travel to Central Asia for the past three years.

The men spent one day in Almaty, Kazakhstan, reconnecting with friends at BMG. From there, they traveled to Dushanbe, Tajikistan. They spent five days working at a Hope Center, which provides housing, care, and Christian teaching for men recovering from addiction, imprisonment, or other hardships. The goal is to help these men understand and accept the gospel, grow in their faith, and become contributors and Christian influencers in their communities. Danny and Bob worked with the residents

to prepare and pour concrete driveways, sidewalks, and multi-use areas around the campus.

Gasperson and Brown also visited another Hope Center in Dushanbe that provides housing, care, and training for women and children. This facility is home to a dozen children who cannot live with their parents, as well as five ladies transitioning from difficult circumstances in their lives. Because of this ministry, the children and ladies have help in their present circumstances and hope for a brighter future.

The visit yielded renewed commitments to send at least one short-term team each year to either Kazakhstan or Tajikistan (determined by BMG). **ONE**

Cuba Hit by Hurricane Ian

Cuba—Hurricane Ian hit Cuba with winds of more than 125 mph September 27. The province of Pinar del Rio, home to the Cedars of Lebanon Seminary, took the brunt of the Category 3 storm. Thousands of homes were destroyed and churches heavily damaged, and the seminary sustained significant damage.

Cubans are working hard to clean up the debris, searching for salvageable materials, and worshipping the Lord in roofless church buildings. Cuban churches are working together and sending teams from other parts of the island to repair the hurricane damage.

The pastor of Iglesia la Gran Comisión in Calera wrote, "Right now I don't know how or when we will have a roof once again. But I can tell you that even without one we will continue to praise the Lord and preach His Word. We will arise once again in the name of Jesus because the work is not ours; it belongs to the Lord."

"Please pray for our brothers and sisters in Cuba as they continue to clean up and rebuild from the hurricane," Jamie Lancaster encouraged. "Then put some feet on those prayers by giving to the THP emergency relief fund. One

of the striking things about the reports is they are also concerned for the people who are not in their churches and looking for ways to help them." **ONE**



Meetings Held in Bulgaria and Côte d'Ivoire



Annual association meeting in Côte d'Ivoire

Côte d'Ivoire held their annual association meeting August 17-20, in Bondoukou, at the Free Will Baptist Women's Conference Center. Over 100 people attended the conference and conducted the business of the association. Though all churches did not submit reports, 165 churches indicated more than 10,000 people attend regularly. Two of the three regional associations reported 380 salvation decisions and 406 baptisms over the last year.



Footwashing at IFOFWBC meeting in Bulgaria

The tenth gathering of the **New Life Churches of Bulgaria** occurred September 3-6, 2022, in Tryavna, Bulgaria. Over 100 people representing the five New Life churches converged to enjoy fellowship and games, share how God is working in their churches and towns, learn from seminars and sermons, witness seven baptisms, and participate in worship. U.S. Executive Secretary of NAFWB Eddie Moody was the featured speaker.

Immediately after the New Life Churches conference, Bulgarian missionaries and workers hosted the triennial meeting of the **International Fellowship of Free Will Baptist Churches** (IFOFWBC) September 6-10. Twenty-one representatives from nine countries enjoyed Bulgarian vistas and hospitality as they conducted business, heard reports, shared challenges and victories, worshiped, and participated in feet washing and communion. Following the meeting, international guests dispersed



International Fellowship of Free Will Baptist Churches, Bulgaria

Saturday to the various areas of work and spoke to the five New Life churches' congregations on Sunday. **ONE**

Côte d'Ivoire—The Abobo FWB Church in Ivory Coast conducted a two-day evangelistic campaign in Bettié, September 29-30. Door-to-door evangelism during the day was followed by public evangelistic meetings in the evenings. The church recorded 113 salvation decisions.



Cuba—Free Will Baptists in Cuba led in forming an association of Christian medical professionals. The group held its first conference at the First FWB Church of Pinar del Rio, August 16-18, 2022.

Brazil—The First FWB church in Uberlândia, Brazil, celebrated its 45th anniversary September 18. The theme verse was 1 Samuel 7:12. Earlier, a sister church in the city, Jardim Palmeiras, celebrated its 33rd anniversary.



Panama—La Paz de Chame FWB Church is meeting needs in its neighborhood through a meal outreach to the children. Needy children receive a meal and hear the gospel.



Boua, Côte d'Ivoire—The Bible institute in Boua started the school year October 4. Twelve men are studying for the ministry.




France—In early October, Lydie Teague reported two ladies announced decisions to follow Christ. "C" approached Lydie following a church service: "I have decided to follow Jesus for the rest of my life and I want to get baptized!" A couple days later, "O" announced she, too, had decided to follow Christ. She'd made the decision three weeks earlier but waited to share it.

A DAY WATERED WITH BLOOD

BY BRENDA EVANS

“Darker and darker are the clouds which gather around Israel”—so begins Alfred Edersheim’s re-telling of the Battle of Taanach by the waters of Megiddo where Sisera’s 900 chariots of iron rumbled out against Israel’s ill-equipped foot soldiers—thunderous beats of Sisera’s steeds, clatters of steel wheels, maniacal shouts of enumerable troops. The sounds of Sisera must have terrified Barak and his 10,000 inexperienced Israelites waiting on Mount Tabor. Plus, there were the optics—swift stallions hitched to armored war machines and foot soldiers, well-weaponed in battle regalia.

Despite all that, Barak marched down Tabor and into the valley with the 10,000 at his heels (Judges 5:15). From the heavens came the Lord’s “direct interference”—heavy rains, Edersheim says. The armies fought. From their courses in the celestial sphere, stars



also fought against Sisera, Deborah sings in her victory song (5:20). All God's universe came down on Sisera. Horses slowed by wheels bogged deep into the sog. Barak and the 10,000 pursued. Chaos followed and "the host of Sisera fell upon the edge of the sword." The ancient torrent "Kishon swept them away" (5:21). Baal, the main god of the Canaanites and the god of storms and weather, was thwarted by Israel's "God of the gods." On foot, Sisera fled to the tent of Jael, a wild and weird bedouin woman. By age 30, according to Jewish tradition, Sisera had conquered the whole world. There was not a place the walls of which did not fall before his voice. That's a bit of Jewish hyperbole, undoubtedly, but more factually, the Scripture records Sisera oppressed the people of Israel cruelly for 20 years, with the backing of Jabin, king of Canaan (Judges 4:3). Yet on this day and on foot, Sisera fled—straight to a nomadic tent, Jael's fatal House of Hair.

Why did he flee to Jael, the agile mountain goat, as her name implies? I don't know. I understand why Sisera ran from Barak (lightning) and Deborah (the bee), but why to Jael? Or better said, why not? He knew Heber the Kenite, Jael's husband, because there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and Heber the Kenite (4:17). Perhaps Heber's tents were near and Sisera knew it. Add to that, the law of hospitality was strong among desert peoples. If a fugitive—even a fugitive from blood revenge—could reach a nomad's tent or even "touch the ropes of it," he was safe for two days and the night between, according to John Paterson in *The Praises of Israel*.

Still, there's the question: why Jael's tent, rather than Heber's? We can speculate. Maybe Heber's tent was empty because he was away. Or Jael's was the first Sisera came to. Or he knew Jael well and anticipated more kindness from her than from Heber. Or he hoped for safety or even sexual favors from this tent-dwelling, wild and weird Kenite. How can we know?

But we do know the rest of the story, so we follow Sisera into Jael's tent. We want to watch, then we don't want to watch. Something bloody and unimaginable will happen past Jael's tent flaps.

Sisera asks for water. Jael brings him milk from her sheep or goats, also clotted milk or curds or cheese or butter. We don't know which. The Hebrew *hem'a* can mean

any of these dairy items. In any case, the food is special, already prepared by Jael for Heber, their children, a friend. Perhaps soured or shaken in skins to form soft clots or heated that very day to form curds. The bowl is beautifully decorated, lordly, fit for a noble, which Sisera seems to be, though his garments are those of a military commander's, disheveled and sweaty. He is dark, handsome, muscular, arrogant, I imagine. His sword still swings from his left side. His chariot is missing, washed away, along with his slaughtered or drowned army back at the battlefield.

Inside Jael's black goat-hair tent, the cinematic scene scrolls on. This agile, wild, and weird mountain goat covers him with skins or woven blankets. He is drowsy and commands, "Stand at the opening of the tent, and if any man comes and asks you, 'Is anyone here?' say, 'No.'"

She nods. He snores. Jael eases out the tent flap, pulls a peg from its anchoring place, takes a mallet in her right hand, and goes to him softly.

The death scene is dramatic. Jael raises the mallet and strikes the peg through Sisera's temple until the peg goes down, down into the ground. The blows crushed his head, shattered and pierced his temple. He lay dead at her feet (5:26-27). The audio is loud—*wham, wham, wham* of the mallet. The video is blood-spattering, crushing, violent beyond words. We step away, not wanting to hear or see more.

I understand Sisera. He was the relentless warrior and well-armed enemy of God's people who lived in Canaan. Now he is dead. Good and dead, no question. As for Jael, she is a puzzle. She knows God's people, the Israelites, but her husband is a friend, we assume, of Jabin and Sisera. Is Jael? Her husband is a Kenite. Is she? Her husband has made peace with Jabin and Sisera. Did she?

All we know for certain about Jael is that she was a tent-dwelling woman who became an assassin. Some Bible commentators straddle the fence about this wild and weird woman. Yes, she killed Israel's enemy. That is good. But no, she's not a woman of God, nor did she do a godly deed. Others say she was a good instrument in the Lord's hand, as Cyrus was in the book of Daniel.

I'm baffled. There's so much ambiguity here. I do know this. Jael was a pretender. Some would call her a shadow warrior, as the espionage novelist Tom Clancy defined *shadow warrior*—a special force who uses subversion, does what is not expected or even legal, including execution, for



a greater good. Her duplicity is obvious. “Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not,” she said. (4:18). She sheltered Sisera, fed him, covered him, and killed him.

Was Jael justified? Commentators are all over the place. Some say her deed cannot be acquitted of the sins of lying, treachery, and assassination. Others say Jael did a good thing; God no

doubt ordered it. Still, that does not justify Jael. It was a flesh and blood deed, a Kenite deed, not of God and His word. But Sisera was God’s enemy; she had to kill him. One commentator declines to say *yes* or *no* because, he says, “the Scripture responds with solemn silence” regarding whether her deed was good or bad. So, I remain baffled.

For the most part, the book of Judges is a dark time filled with tragic stories. Even grand military victories like Samson’s and Gideon’s are tainted with spiritual defeat. The final words of Judges sum it up: “Every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (21:25). Yet, God’s purposes went forward despite the leaders’ flaws, failures, and outright sin. That’s how I take the Jael event. As Deborah told Barak before the battle, God’s purpose was to “sell Sisera into the hand of a woman” (4:9). And He did.

What is the take-away for me as I commit to pursuing God’s purposes in my life? First, like Barak, will I refuse to stand or go without a human crutch on lean on? Second, will my history show I am one who rises above when the “zero hour” bears down on me—or that I fell below? Finally, will I admit my thoughts are not God’s thoughts, nor my ways His ways (Isaiah 55:8)? Like it or not, I am a soldier in life’s battles—battles that will test my faith, my grit, my courage to carry on. Will I pass or fail the test? **ONE**

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

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Bloodlust and a Modest Lady

BY PAUL V. HARRISON

“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful” (Psalm 1:1).

Stepping into the arena, she smelled the blood in the sand. She heard the crowd’s frenzied roar and saw the men who awaited her, helmeted and armed for killing. No one doubted the outcome. Following Christ was not only illegal but also lethal. The very name *gladiator* derives from the Latin, *gladius*, sword.

The Roman government fed the bloodlust of the population. Glitz and gore were regularly on tap, and the people drank it in. Even plays sometimes had real death scenes where condemned criminals played the unfortunate roles.

Gladiatorial “spectacles” took place in amphitheaters. Theaters fanned out 180°. Amphitheaters made a complete circle. All kinds of warfare were available for viewing. Promoters sometimes filled arenas with water for naval battles. *Venationes*, wild animal hunts, pitted man against beast, with no guarantee who would survive.

Crowds ranged from 7,000 to 18,000. Rome’s Colosseum, the Super Bowl of the ancient world, could accommodate 50,000. Events came complete with season tickets, scalpers, and some sleeping by the gates the night before to guarantee getting in.

Passions ran high on the arena floor: the hunted filled with fear, the hunters with bloodlust. Violence sometimes erupted in the stands. An A.D. 59 riot among the audience in Pompeii resulted in a ten-year ban on the games. In Rome, Nero kicked Poppaea to death because she complained about his coming home late from the games.

Historian Alison Futrell explained: “Watching violence runs the risk of drawing the spectator into the action, transforming him from a vicarious participant to an agent of violence himself.”

Having attended “spectacles” in his pre-Christian days, Tertullian struggled to write against them because it “set memory a-working.” Even past sin has its allure. Some Christians, he said, demanded “direct authority from Scripture for giving up the shows.” He responded: “Well, we never find it expressed with the same precision, ‘Thou shalt not look on combat or show’; as it is plainly laid down, ‘Thou shalt not kill.’” But, he argued, we do find David saying, “Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers.”

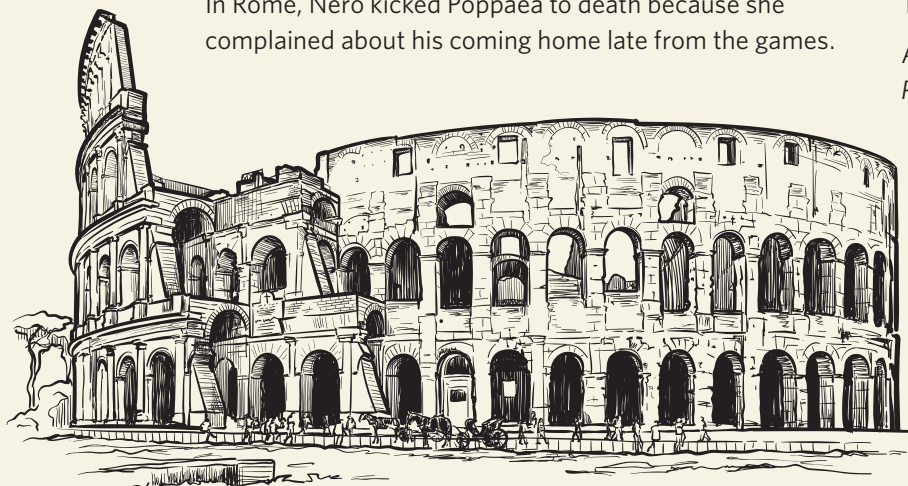
“Here,” the church father said, “you have an utterance which is not far from a plain interdicting of the shows. . . . Every show is an assembly of the wicked.” Tertullian also sarcastically asked whether watching fights would help the Christian learn to turn the cheek. Overall, he concluded: “How monstrous it is to go from God’s church to the devil’s—from the sky to the sty.”

This provides background to our Christian lady in the arena. We know basically nothing about her except that she fell to the gladiator’s blow. The historian, however, did record one more fact: This unnamed believer, while falling, arranged her skirt to avoid being immodest in her death.

For further reading:

Tertullian, *On the Spectacles*. Online.

Alison Futrell. *Blood in the Arena: The Spectacle of Roman Power*. University of Texas, 1997. [ONE](#)



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

Abigail

From VICTIM to VICTOR

BY LEE ANN WILFONG

1 Samuel 25:1-42

Tucked away in the final chapters of the book of 1 Samuel, we find a remarkable story, with a plotline that rivals any great cinematic saga. A tragedy in the “early scenes,” the tale of Abigail, Nabal, David, and—most importantly—God, transforms this account into a story of grace.

Let’s start with the back story: David was mourning Samuel’s death while running for his life from King Saul. He and his men were suffering sorrow, weariness, fear, and hunger. David sent men to see Nabal, owner of the wilderness region where they were hiding, to ask for food. Verse 3 introduces us to this man and his wife. Nabal was churlish, harsh, rude, and brutal, an unmanageable, stubborn, ill-tempered drunk. (His name means *fool*.) In contrast, his wife Abigail was a woman of good understanding and of a beautiful countenance—brains as well as beauty! Her name means *cause of joy*.

What an ill-matched couple! It is likely, given the traditions of that day, Abigail was party to an arranged marriage. Nabal would have seemed a great catch to a father seeking a wealthy provider for his daughter. However, before long, Abigail found herself married to a far different man than her father imagined, suffering pain and sorrow from the husband who should have protected her. But Abigail did not bemoan her lot in life. She knew God, and although trapped in a difficult marriage, she honored her commitment.

When David’s men asked Nabal for food, the tyrant abruptly and rudely refused. Before departing, one of the young men encountered Abigail and told her about Nabal’s behavior, revealing the miserly nature of her abusive husband. I am sure she was not surprised since she had witnessed (and experienced) his mean ways. Abigail immediately set about gathering supplies, carefully hiding her actions from Nabal, of course. She delivered the provisions to David, knowing it was the right thing to do.

When I read this story, a word immediately comes to mind, a word not found in the Bible, but which certainly describes Abigail: *enabler*. Abusive men are often drawn to loving, helpful women who take care of them. An admirable characteristic in a God-ordained, mutually loving marriage, it is destructive in an abusive relationship. Abusers take advantage of their mild-tempered and caring spouses. As both an abused woman and an enabler, Abigail covered for her husband’s brutish ways, sought to smooth things over with David’s men, while hiding her actions and appeasing the abuser. Still, Abigail must be commended for her hospitable, kind, and generous actions toward these men who desperately needed help.

For Abigail, the nightmare marriage ended abruptly when Nabal died. But for many women, the nightmares continue for long years, and sometimes end another tragic way—their own death at the hands of their abusers. It is

certainly reasonable to label Abigail as victim. She was trapped in a marriage filled with abuse and heartache. However, she still lived a life of generosity, love, and endurance that pleased God and glorified Him. Because of her goodness, she prevailed and eventually married David (verse 39), the man who would become king of Israel. God blessed the couple with a child. No longer a victim, she became a victor!

Yet even if the story had ended differently, and Abigail had died at the hands of Nabal, she still would be a victor because she trusted God and remained faithful to Him.

Fast forward a few years—make that three millennia—to the present day. Some things never change. Many marriages are still abusive. Take Jacque, a beautiful, young woman whose parents attend our church. Jacque was saved as a young girl, baptized, and became active in our congregation. If you had to describe Jacque in one word, the word would be *sweet*.

After graduating from high school, she attended a nearby university where she met a man who soon asked her to marry him. They wed in her home church, and Jacque looked so happy on her wedding day—excited to start a new life. She progressed quickly into management in her insurance career. In contrast, her new husband never held a job for long, and, according to him, it was always the company's fault when he left a job or was fired. Although the couple depended on Jacque's income to pay the bills, they were able to live comfortably due to her success.

However, the couple struggled to have children. After visiting specialists and trying everything, Jacque under-



went in vitro fertilization. It worked—in triplicate! She was ecstatic when she learned triplets were on the way, and a short time later, she delivered three beautiful babies. Her family offered their full support after the babies were born, and Jacque and the babies often stayed with her sister on weekends. During these visits, the family learned Jacque's marriage was not what they thought. They began to hear about incidents when her husband's temper boiled over into physical abuse.

When the triplets turned four, Jacque knew her situation had to change. Up to that point, she had been the only target of the abuse, but when the children began to face the threat of suffering, she left the abusive situation and filed for divorce. Her husband told her repeatedly if she divorced him, she would sign her own death certificate. She believed him! She knew he might kill her, but she also knew she had to protect those three beautiful babies.

Jacque did not make this decision lightly, and she carefully avoided any loopholes her husband might find to skirt the law and take possession of the children. She secretly confided to her closest friends and her sister, without giving all the details. She also kept a secret journal on a laptop in her office, completely unknown to her husband. In that digital journal, she chronicled the many times she was abused or threatened, sometimes in the presence of the children.

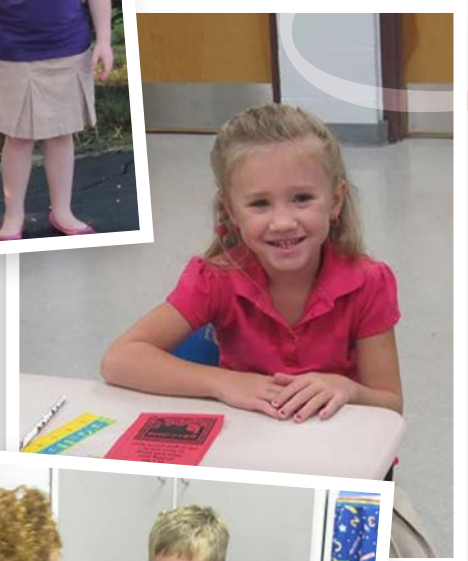
*She trusted God
to do what she
could not do...*

Looking back, I believe Jacque knew her husband would not stop the abuse until she was dead, and her fears were accurate. On a weekday in June, the couple met at the attorney's office and signed a separation agreement. Jacque had allowed him a brief visit with their son (one of the triplets) as an appeasement to avoid more abuse. When they left the attorney's office, her husband told her to pick up their son at the home where they lived together previously. While this was not the plan, Jacque was willing to do it to get her son. Her husband manipulated the situation, knowing she would come for her child. The last image of Jacque was captured by security video at her bank, where she withdrew money her husband demanded in exchange for handing over her son. It was Jacque's last act in life.

Two long years followed before her husband finally revealed where he had hidden her body in exchange for a plea deal to lighten his sentence. The details of Jacque's death were horrific. She was a victim in the full sense of the word. But, in her death, she ensured her children would be delivered from the monster she had married; they would not endure his abuse. I can't help but believe Jacque pled with God to protect her babies. And God answered those prayers. He listened to His beloved child. God was with her children through the horrible aftermath, placing people in their lives to love and protect them.

Jacque left all the evidence needed to prove her husband was a liar and an evil man. She did everything possible to protect her children, and she succeeded. Then she trusted God to do what she could not do—protect them after her own death. I don't call Jacque a victim; I proclaim her a victor!

It has been more than a decade since that dark day when Jacque's life ended tragically. Today, the triplets are healthy, happy, beautiful Christian teens who know they are loved by their aunt and uncle (now their adopted parents). They celebrate their mother every day, knowing she loved them fiercely and gave her life for their safety. They revere the memories of their victorious mom.



Sadly, Jacque is only one of millions of abused women in the world today, often trapped by a monster spouse who makes living a nightmare. Do you know an Abigail or Jacque? Statistics tell us it is likely someone in your circle of friends and family is hiding abuse from you. Please learn the signs, be a trustworthy friend, and do everything you can to end abuse. Help victims become victors. Pray for God's discernment to recognize signs of abuse and pray for courage to intervene and to help a woman who cannot help herself. **ONE**

About the Authors: Lee Ann and Vernon Wilfong live in Park Hills, Missouri. They have two adult daughters, Megan and Tracy; son-in-law Kurt; and a grandson named Malachi. Lee Ann attends Leadington Free Will Baptist Church. She serves on the Board of WNAC and chairs the Missouri Women's Ministry. Learn more: wnac.org.



“The Triplets” Today

BY TRACY WILFONG AND KURT LABRUYERE

If you saw them today, you would see three normal teenagers involved in all the usual things: sports, friends, school, and (of course) their phones. But

I still see three of the bravest kindergartners I ever had the privilege to teach.

Truthfully, I knew about them, prayed for them, and met them long before their first day in my class. We called them “the triplets” when they frequently visited our church, which was anytime their mom was in town visiting her parents, whom I have known and loved my whole life. I remember the horror we all felt when we heard Jacque was missing. Our first thoughts were of the innocent children whose lives would be changed forever. That was in June, and that seemingly endless summer the family sought justice for Jacque and began caring for three children who had to navigate life without their amazing mom.

In August, the triplets started kindergarten, and because God has even the tiniest details in His hands, I also was starting my first year as a teacher. I already had spent time with the kids, teaching them in children’s church, so the family hoped the familiar face would comfort them as they started school. Before the year started, I spent time with each family represented in our class, explaining the situation with the triplets. Because Jacque’s story was well known in our area, everyone knew about the tragedy.

The family obviously wanted to protect the children from the horror of what happened, so they only knew their mom was gone, and they called her their “Angel Mommy.” They didn’t know about their father’s involvement but knew he was gone too. We decided our classroom would be a safe place for them. We united to protect them and to help them and their family through this incredibly difficult time. Those wonderful parents had conversations with their own kids to prepare them and to help them understand (as best they could) why the triplets’ mommy was no longer here.

On many days, they cried because they missed their mom, and they wanted her to be there for family events. Other days, anger and confusion would be too much for their young hearts, and one would yell or scream. On occasion, they would say something with childlike faith that brought tears to my eyes. But we also had days when they laughed and days when they learned to do something new or days when they were proud to tell us about something they did with their aunt and uncle.

Each had a distinct personality, and each dealt with fear, anger, and confusion in his or her own way. But they also each possessed an unwavering faith in God, and I heard each of them utter prayers wise beyond their years. I know without a doubt they taught me more that year than I taught them.

Every time I met with their aunt, we ended up crying together and wishing Jacque could have seen them do this or that or had been here to see all the new things they were learning. I know they all still wish for that. But I believe Jacque is with them. They have her strength and determination. I saw those three kids show amazing strength through the nightmare they endured, and that is a reflection of Jacque’s strength. Jacque only got to be their mommy on this earth for a few years, but we know she was an incredible mom because they are three amazing, smart, funny, talented, and loving kids.

Today they are teens, learning to drive, excelling in sports and school activities, and planning for their futures. They are active in church youth group and are even still friends with some of the kids from their kindergarten class. Anyone who knows them and their story cannot help but be amazed and thankful for their lives today. Their mommy would be very proud of her babies. **ONE**

About the Author: Tracy (Wilfong) and Kurt LaBruyere live in Park Hills, Missouri. Tracy is the leader of the District WAC and she teaches kindergarten in a small Christian school. Learn more: WNAC.org.



Self-Supporting... But Not Alone

BY MARIE DRAKULIC

On Sunday, May 1, 2022, Flagship Church in Erie, Pennsylvania, became a self-supporting Free Will Baptist congregation—a momentous occasion more than ten years in the making. We celebrated with food, music, tears, and laughter. Although we heard from many how Flagship Church and the Grimes family made a difference in their lives, I don't know if we could fully describe the impact of a decade of ministry in a weekend celebration.

It seems a whole lifetime of memories, moments, and changed lives have passed since those early days. The building alone has seen a progression from outdoor picnic tables and indoor living rooms to monthly services at a local YMCA to a corner neighborhood church to a newly renovated building off a busy street.

Yet, the building and the passing of time have not mattered nearly as much as the people.

Flagship Church has been blessed to have two pastors who love Jesus, their families, and this city. Although Pastor Darin Alvis is no longer assistant pastor, Flagship Church would not be where it is without the work of God through him and his family. Pastor Darin has a gift for making every person feel special. Whether leading children's church, preaching a sermon, or talking with a mentally disabled member, he treated everyone equally, without reservation.

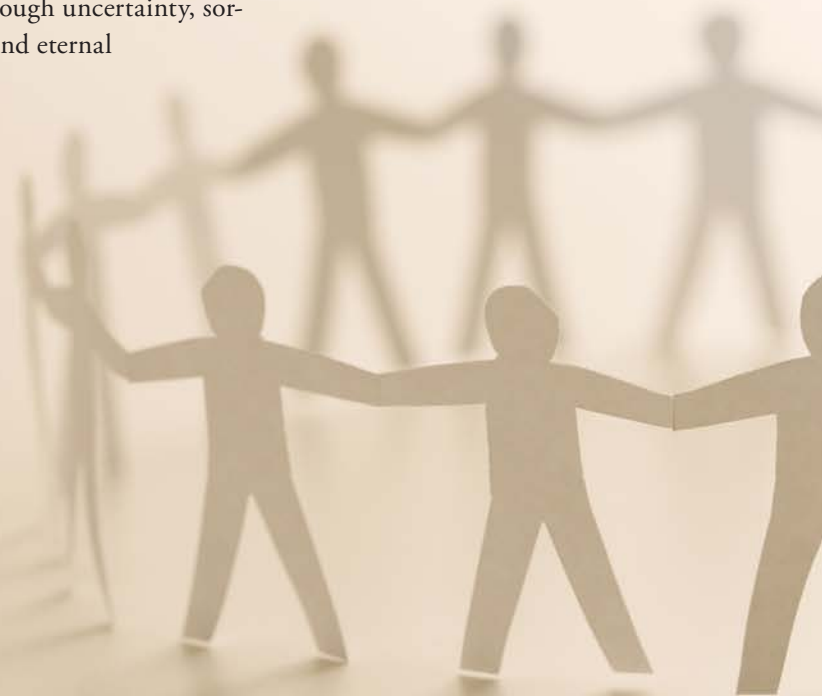
In the earliest days of ministry, the Alvis family attended and ministered at their home church in Buffalo, New York, and then drove two hours south to lead music at YMCA services in the afternoon. In the summer of 2013, they moved to Erie and became part of the ministry team, serving faithfully until 2020.

Pastor Daryl Grimes felt the call to Erie, and he and his family moved—without knowing anyone—in 2011. God put people into their lives at just the right time, and now, friends have become family. Pastor Daryl has never lost

sight of his vision for Flagship Church, nor has he failed to inspire us to seek “to know God personally, love God passionately, and serve Him purposefully.” He is driven, passionate, and self-sacrificial. No matter the challenges Pastor Daryl has faced personally or in ministry, he has relentlessly pursued making God's name and glory known in this city we call home.

Countless people have come to know Jesus and have been encouraged and challenged through the ministry of Pastors Daryl and Darin. Their families, too, have served faithfully beside them, helping wherever needed: music ministry, children and youth ministry, outreach, discipleship, and hospitality. They have been found rejoicing, weeping, and kneeling with members in the congregation or people they just met. Whether around a dinner table, at an altar, or in a hospital room, the Grimes and Alvis families have given of themselves time and again.

In my own family, these men journeyed beside us through uncertainty, sorrow, and eternal



hope—traveling long distances to sit in waiting rooms or be near us in the predawn hours on the morning we said goodbye to our oldest son.

My family has “grown up” since we moved to Erie to help the Grimes family in 2012. To be honest, I never thought we would make it this far. As a young mom with two toddler boys, I prayed God wouldn’t send me here. I recognize now my prayer was fear-driven. I had been reading a book about women who did amazing things for God. They were bold, courageous, and often far from home, but I never wanted to leave the familiar circle of Columbus, Ohio. Fast-forward six years, and I felt a very different tug on my heart. This time, I was *asking* God to go. While the road has not been easy, I am grateful for the opportunity and honored to be a part of the ministry in Erie.

Our family has served in different capacities over the years of ministry at Flagship Church. It has been a joy to see my children serve in outreach, music, and offering. My husband, Tony, has served in many ways—preaching, landscaping, and singing, to name a few. I had the privilege to share God’s Word through women’s ministry and *Latte Ladies* for many years.

My husband was ordained at our service on May 1, along with another faithful member and friend at our church. Out of our greatest suffering has come a new ministry, to offer comfort, hope, and presence to the grieving through *Grief Share*. God’s glory has shone the brightest in our lives in the place where we found ourselves the most broken and lost.

As I looked around the room during
the Saturday night dinner

concert, I thought of the many people who have been part of Flagship Church. Some visited briefly and others stayed for a season. Still others are serving in other ministries. I recalled people from China, the Philippines, Germany, and Puerto Rico, and the couple my kids came to know as Grandma and Grandpa. I remembered someone I met after our youngest was born. I didn’t know it then, but she had lost her young son tragically only a year and a half earlier. I remember kneeling with her to pray and feeling her tears fall on my hands.

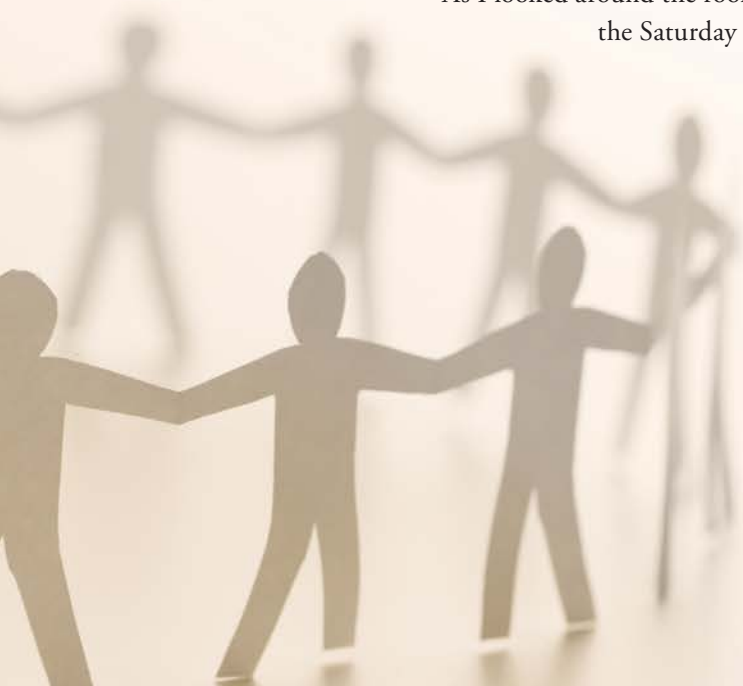
I remembered the times our congregation served together at block parties and events, and when we worshiped during heartache. I remembered game nights, leadership meetings, and a deep theological discussion over McDonald’s hamburgers with a new family. That family got baptized, grew in their relationship with the Lord through many ups and downs, and have become an integral part of our ministry.

I also thought of the people no longer with us in this life and how happy they would be to see this day. In that instant, the words from Hebrews came to mind, that we are surrounded by “such a great cloud of witnesses” (12:1). I imagined them cheering us on, rejoicing over the milestone, but knowing our long race isn’t over yet. We still have ministry to do in the days ahead.

“Self-supporting” is a bit of a misnomer. Yes, Flagship Church now serves as a self-governing church body, financially dependent on its congregants. However, we are far from alone. It would be impossible to recount all the people who contributed to the ministry over the years and who continue to support us with their prayers and encouragement. Across this denomination and with believers of other Erie churches, we have a community who loves and cares for us. These are the people whose texts or calls comfort and strengthen us when we feel defeated. They are the people faithful to pray as the Spirit prompts. They are the ones to whom we turn for guidance and who give generously of their time and resources.

Ultimately, this community serves as the hands and feet of Jesus. He is the One who has funded and sustained Flagship Church and will continue as He wills. He is the one we celebrate at Flagship and beyond. To God be the glory! **ONE**

About the Author: Marie Drakulic and her husband Tony are on the leadership team at Flagship Church in Erie, Pennsylvania. Learn more: FlagshipChurch.com.





Light *in the* Darkness



BY SUHEY CORREA

Christ's earthly ministry was one of service. As Jesus carried His message of salvation everywhere, He also extended His hands to the needy, the sick, the poor, and the helpless along the way. When He returned to Heaven, He made it clear it was our job to follow His example and bring the Good News while serving our fellow men (Luke 22:27).

Genesis Academy is a ministry of the Free Will Baptist Church of Puerto Rico. It began seven years ago with a deep desire to reach children and young people by bringing them the message of God and by serving them. Unfortunately, in Puerto Rico, private Christian education is only available for the financial upper class. Yet those with fewer economic resources also need to hear the message of our Lord while receiving a good education.

Genesis Academy began by helping children and young people in their studies, assisting them, and giving them a place to feel comfortable learning. After several years of seeking permits, searching in general, and above all praying, we understood Genesis Academy would be the first private Christian school offered free to students in Puerto Rico. Social class or academic level do not matter. Here you find a refuge of love and learning, and all students are welcome. God has added mothers, teachers, and students to make this ministry a reality. Brothers in the faith and private companies have also joined in supporting this effort.

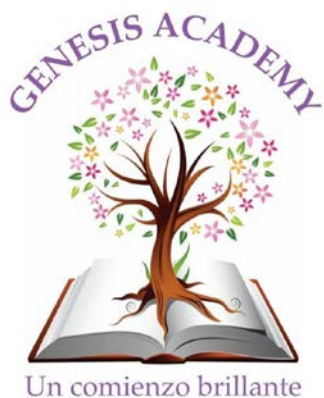
The school tests our faith every day—believe me, it is tested! We must pray and trust God to bring both workers and supporters. In recent years, dozens of schools have closed because catastrophic events hurt the economy. In September 2017, a hurricane hit the island, destroying homes, and leaving the island without electricity and drinking water for more than six months. During this time, children did not attend classes, losing almost a full school year of learning. In January 2020, a 6.4 magnitude earthquake damaged many structures around the island, including schools. Children were again without schooling. In March 2020, COVID-19

arrived in Puerto Rico, once again paralyzing education. These events created the economic deficit currently facing the island.

Many schools have closed, and many teachers have relocated to the United States looking for better job opportunities. After the pandemic, many young people simply dropped out of school, increasing the already high percentage of dropouts. This situation is even worse in poor communities, with a current rate of 46.1% of those under 25 without a diploma.

During these years, we received students with learning difficulties or with problems in their homes. We have seen these children and young people make school a place of learning and well-being. They know it is a place the Lord has provided them. Because many children do not have the financial resources to pay for necessities, Genesis has provided uniforms, books, and school supplies to help them complete their studies, without singling them out from others who can afford it. Every morning students learn the Bible. Their days begin with prayer and a quick devotion or reflection. In addition to their main classes, they take music classes. They are taught to love and respect fellowmen, to strive to achieve their goals, and to trust a powerful God.

For many, this ministry sounds crazy—to think of supporting a school only with donations! But two years ago, we had three students; today, we have 29. We started with one teacher and a dining room employee; today, we have seven teachers, two dining room employees, a secretary, and a maintenance person. Two years ago, we taught at a dining table, and today, we have six classrooms, a chapel, a dining room, and a kitchen. But we still need much help. We desperately need missionary teachers willing to give themselves up for His cause in Puerto Rico. We welcome anyone who wants to experience the mission field as a teacher.



We also proudly announce our first Genesis Academy fourth-year graduate: Dayana Correa. Dayana is the daughter of Pastor Jose and Suhey Correa (school principal). God used this ministry to guide Dayana in her calling to missions. She is now enrolled at Randall University, pursuing a bachelor's degree in Intercultural Studies.

Another milestone for the school is the construction of a new school building

in four phases. The first phase consists of having a new building with four more classrooms (12 students per room) and two bathrooms. The other phases consist of expanding the building to include more classrooms. We are still in the planning phase and hope to begin construction of the new building in 2023.

Regarding the Free Will Baptist Church in Puerto Rico:

We are growing as families slowly join us. We are thankful some students and their families are looking for God. We have weekly worship gatherings and a prayer service on Wednesday. Also, we have regular Sunday Bible School for children.

We have learned when God calls, we must persevere in His call, no matter what we face—no matter what our eyes can see. It is our Lord who gives us the strength and security that everything will work according to His will. We are sure this ministry is part of God's purpose. The Church of Christ is called to work as a body, to work together for the same purpose, and to carry the message of the Good News to each creature.

Over the years, we have learned great things happen when the church comes together. When the church demonstrates the love of Christ, He oversees and adds to His work. This ministry is impacting both believers and non-believers, not only with words but with deeds. It is our duty as Christians to teach this generation about the great God full of love and forgiveness; it is our duty to teach another way to live this life, a life in holiness apart from sin.

Young people are being bombarded without mercy, and it is the duty of the church to stand in defense of children and young people, not only with words but with works. We invite you to be part of Genesis Academy, bringing light to the darkness by sponsoring this beautiful ministry.

We want to thank everyone who prays for us, those who have visited the island and contributed so much to this work. Also, we want to thank all those who contribute economically from a distance. Please help us continue providing children with a refuge in chaos and light in the darkness. **ONE**

About the Author: Suhey Correa and her husband José lead the Free Will Baptist church in Puerto Rico. Learn more: www.fwbnam.com.


Remembering Chaplain (MAJ) Walter Golding

After trusting Christ as his personal Savior in 1956 as a young marine, **Walter "Walt" Golding** answered the call to be a Free Will Baptist minister and then a military chaplain. Chaplain Golding and his wife Lena served their country and Free Will Baptists for over 15 years, touching the lives of many military members and their families.

Chaplain Golding deeply sensed God's calling to be a military chaplain and patiently waited for a position to open. While he waited, he taught school at Faith Christian School in Goldsboro, North Carolina, and Ruth's Chapel School in New Bern, North Carolina. In June 1974, Chaplain Golding received a call from Home Missions General Director Bob Shockey asking if he was interested in being an Air Force chaplain. Walt enthusiastically replied "Yes, yes!"

After three long years of waiting, the Lord opened the door for him to become a U.S. Air Force chaplain.

Chaplain Golding's military service as marine, soldier, and airman totaled 24 years. He continued serving the Lord after his military service by serving as a marriage and financial counselor to marines and sailors. He also served for over 20 years on the Salvation Army Advisory Board.

Walt and Lena were married more than 60 years. After a long illness, Chaplain Golding went to be with the Lord Sunday, September 8, 2019, at his home. 



**Chaplain (MAJ)
Walter E. Golding**
December 19, 1936–
September 8, 2019

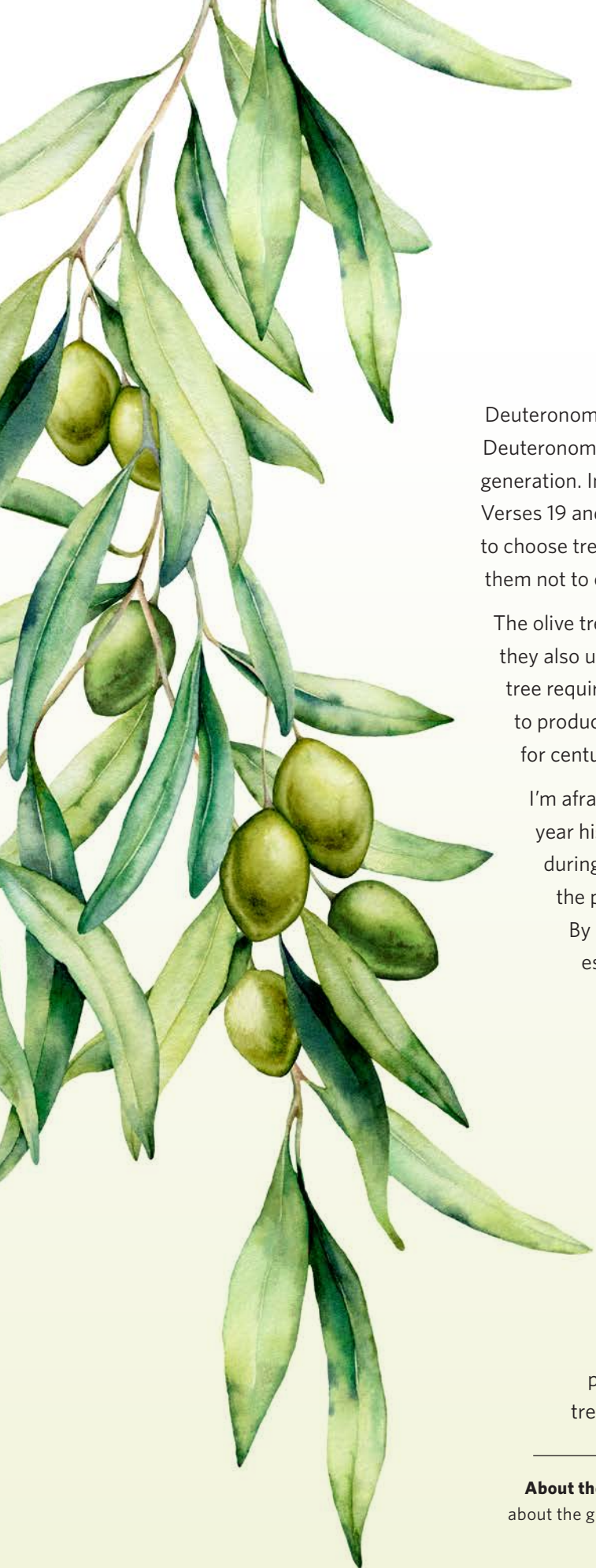
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Don't Cut Down the Fruit Trees

BY DAVID BROWN, CPA

Deuteronomy is a practical book about how the Israelites were to live. For example, Deuteronomy 6 includes the famous passage about passing our faith to the next generation. In chapter 20, Moses gave the Israelites instructions for waging war. Verses 19 and 20 detailed how they were to lay siege to a city. Moses instructed them to choose trees carefully when building the siege works, and he specifically warned them not to cut down the fruit trees.

The olive tree was vital to life in the Middle East. Not only did they eat olives, but they also used olive oil for many purposes. Like many fruit-producing trees, an olive tree requires time before growers can expect a harvest. Olive trees take eight years to produce a reasonable harvest of olives, but once they start, they can produce for centuries. In fact, some 2000-year-old olive trees still produce fruit.

I'm afraid our denomination has cut down many fruit trees over its 300-plus year history. We tend to think of ourselves as producing fruit for the Kingdom during our lifetime, or when we are actively working. The truth is, we all have the potential to produce fruit long after we have gone to our reward. How?

By simply tithing on our estates. If we fail to leave an endowment gift in our estate plan, we are, in effect, cutting down our own fruit tree.

The Harvard endowment has \$53 billion (that's with a b). Based on a 5% spending policy, their endowment produces \$2.65 billion a year, covering more than a third of their annual operating expenses. It makes it possible for bright students to attend Harvard on scholarship, who would not have the financial capability otherwise. Why does Harvard have \$53 billion in the endowment fund? To be honest, they have many very wealthy alumni! However, it is also true they have been building the endowment for almost four centuries.

Free Will Baptists are a little behind, but I challenge each of us not to cut down our own fruit tree but to tithe on our estates, leaving a portion to ministry. The Foundation is here to help as we offer estate planning services. Please contact us today. We will help care for a fruit tree that will continue producing until the Lord returns. **ONE**

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

The Importance of SUSTAINABILITY

BY JOHN BRUMMITT

Sustainability has been a frequent subject over the last decade. We hear the food we buy and eat is *sustainably* grown and harvested. Businesses strive to operate with *sustainable* methods and techniques to protect the environment. The truth is, even we individuals need to plan in *sustainable* ways. *Merriam-Webster* defines *sustainable* as “of, relating to, or being a method of harvesting or using a resource so the resource is not depleted or permanently damaged.”

While this definition brings up images of forests harvested carefully for lumber or seafood being pulled from the sea responsibly, we have many daily resources that need to be *sustainably* harvested for our success. (I am using the word *successful* in the broad sense of thriving, not only surviving.)

Most of us don't need to be rich, and while we think it would be nice to be wealthy, most of us just wish to be comfortable with our finances. Consider these recent studies and stats: 78% of Americans were financially “stable” in 2021 (Federal Reserve); 34% of Americans were financially healthy (Financial Health Pulse 2021 U.S. Trends Report), while 40% of Americans are struggling just to pay their bills right now (*Money's* analysis of Census data, July 2022).

As Americans, we just don't want to worry about how to pay our bills, and we want to enjoy some of the nice things in life. This is where sustainability comes into play. We harvest our financial resources to purchase things we need but avoid depleting them fully or damaging our ability to use them in the future.

In its most basic form, financial sustainability is not spending more than we bring in. When we keep from overspending and retain a financial base for the future,



By “replanting”
our income
into savings,
retirement, and
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we begin to build
harvestable
resources for
the future.

we have sustainability. As the remainder or base grows, if our expenditures don't increase at a greater rate, the length of our sustainability grows as well. This gives us a greater chance of not depleting or damaging our resources for the future.


Unfortunately, it is easy to “talk the talk” but much harder to “walk the walk.” Most people want lumber and seafood sustainably harvested, but it costs more, making the purchase a tougher choice. The same is true in our finances when faced

with opportunities to enjoy money now versus building sustainability for the future. The choice to delay gratification can be difficult.

Financial sustainability starts the same way forestry and fishery agencies start. You must be intentional. No one who sustainably harvests timber cuts down trees for lumber without replanting the harvested trees. Financially, we set aside money or resources to replace the income we

will lose in the future when we retire or are unable to be employed.

By “replanting” our income into savings, retirement, and other investments, we begin to build harvestable resources for the future. Replanted income grows (and replants itself) through compounding interest. Hopefully, this process can continue into your retirement years, so when you do start harvesting your carefully managed resources, they regenerate at a level to provide lifelong sustainability.

Sustainability, whether personal finances or God's amazing creation, is something all of us should embrace. Sustainability will not happen unless we are intentional about what we take and replace. Random, unplanned, or undisciplined use of our resources will not be as successful as living with consistent, purposeful effort. We set ourselves up for sustainability when we plan and then stay consistent with our plan. 

About the Author: John Brummitt became director of the Board of Retirement in January 2016. A 2011 MBA graduate of Tennessee Tech University and a 2004 graduate of Welch College, he has been with the Board of Retirement since spring 2006. Find more tools to help you live your best life at BoardofRetirement.com



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Thriving (Not Just Surviving) as a Co-Vocational Pastor

BY GREG FAWBUSH

The demands on a pastor are overwhelming at times. The nagging feeling each sermon must be on par with the Gettysburg Address, the midnight phone calls from a church member in distress, or a scheduled surgery he feels compelled to attend can easily propel even a seasoned pastor into survival mode. For many pastors, these demands are complicated by a second job. This role, described as the bi-vocational pastor, has become the norm for many in the ministry. However, for a church using this ministerial model to be successful, the pastor must divorce himself from a lifestyle of surviving and embrace a strategy for thriving.

Developing a holistic approach to ministry can help create a thriving ministry. Adopting the title co-vocational pastor rather than bi-vocational pastor can be beneficial. The word *bi* means “two” or “twice.” This implies separate occupations or ministries and often leads to focusing on one role or the other. However, a pastor with two vocations has just as much a calling from God as the full-time pastor: co-vocations. His ministry at church and outside the church are connected. Embracing this concept brings freedom to co-vocational ministries rather than bondage to one role or the other.

Co-vocational pastoring can also be beneficial to the church. If communicated to the congregation well and carried out correctly, it provides an example of uniting vocations and sharing with the church. Developing a church

wide co-vocational view can promote church growth.

In addition to this holistic approach to co-vocational ministry, a realistic approach to pastoring is beneficial. Often, our culture determines success based solely on numbers. This can be discouraging when it comes to co-vocational pastoring. One can assume a pastor working a second job is ministering to a church with limited resources. These limitations may include finances, limited leadership resources, or lack of membership. With these limitations, the church may have less numerical growth in certain areas. Having limitations does *not* mean growth should not be a goal. It *does* mean success must be viewed through a different lens.

Rather than focusing on numbers, focus on smaller victories. Survival mode can be overcome through small accomplishments. Develop relationships with the congregation to see spiritual growth in their lives. Celebrate families and individuals who become more faithful to life groups or who accept more active roles in the church. Any of these “small” victories can encourage a co-vocational pastor, but they are often missed due to misplaced focus on how God is blessing “other” churches.

The co-vocational pastor must also understand his own limitations. As much as the pastor may desire to be involved in every aspect of church ministries and needs, it is simply impossible. To escape survival mode and thrive as

a co-vocational pastor, he must forge a partnership between himself and the congregation to fulfill the ministry of the church together. Encouraging church members to become part of the ministry will remove pressure and help avoid survival mode.

In forming a realistic approach to co-vocational pastoring, it is important to evaluate personal strengths and weaknesses. God has equipped each of us with unique talents (Ephesians 4:12) that work in tandem with others to carry out the ministry of the church. However, it is easy for the co-vocational pastor to focus less on his talents and more on the pressing needs of the church.

The saying “think outside the box” has often been promoted as a strategy for leadership. Perhaps another approach is better suited for ministry: think *inside* the box God has given us. Performing tasks outside of God’s gifts—no matter how worthy—often leads to discouragement and frustration. Instead, developing and using the gifts God has given you leads to a fulfilling life and ministry.

Every pastor and church should have the goal of carrying out the Great Commission. For the co-vocational pastor, this can be challenging. But developing a holistic, realistic approach to ministry can help the pastor avoid the detours that take many down the road to burnout and exhaustion. Don’t just survive. Thrive in ministry! **ONE**

About the Author: Greg Fawbush is the program coordinator for exercise science and athletic director at Welch College. He also pastors Cane Ridge FWB Church in Nashville, Tennessee. Learn more: Welch.edu.

Performing tasks outside of God’s gifts—no matter how worthy—often leads to discouragement and frustration. Instead, developing and using the gifts God has given you leads to a fulfilling life and ministry.



Why Should a **21st Century Christian** Care About the **CHURCH FATHERS?**

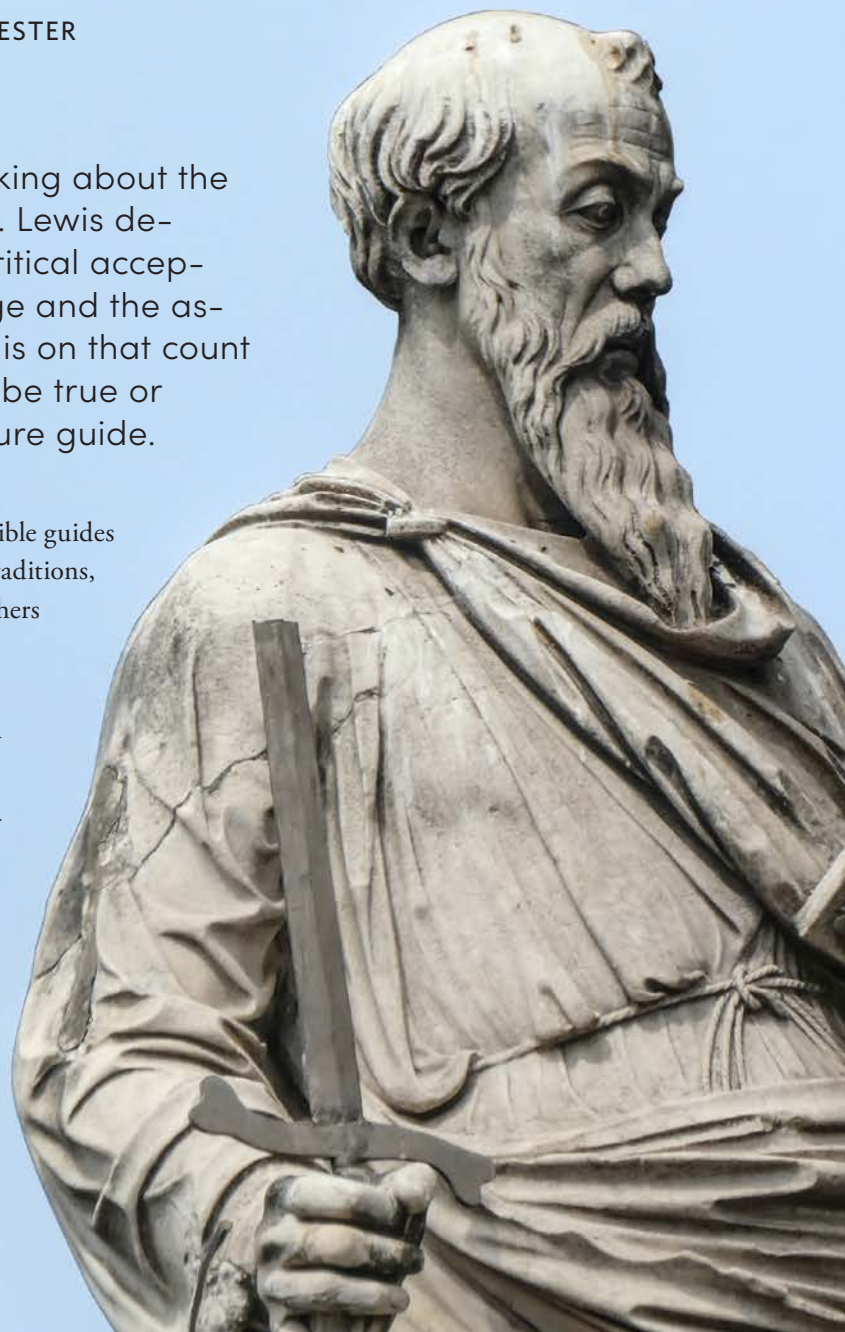
BY DR. KEVIN HESTER

We must avoid two opposite errors when thinking about the church fathers. First, we must avoid what C. S. Lewis described as “chronological snobbery,” the “uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate of our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that count discredited.” In other words, if it is old, it can’t be true or right or good. But current fashion is never a sure guide. Just ask bell bottoms and penny loafers!

The second error is the enshrinement of the church fathers as infallible guides when it comes to theology, Scripture, and the faith. Unlike other traditions, Protestants have always recognized that, as fallible humans, the fathers could, and often did, make mistakes.

Instead, evangelicals should adopt a balanced approach regarding the church fathers like that of Protestant Reformers, what Timothy George describes as “retrieval for the sake of renewal.” Our goal in learning from the church fathers is not to copy them or their methods exactly. We know their practices and applications were culturally bound, just like ours. At the same time, the fathers provide us with a treasure trove of wisdom from which we can draw.

The Protestant Reformers believed reading the fathers would lead them to a better understanding of Christian theology and church practice. They wanted to purify doctrine and understand Scripture. They recognized God’s sovereignty in history and saw the early church as revelatory insofar as they followed Scripture.



With these things in mind, I offer below a brief apologetic for why today's Christian should care about the church fathers (and Christian history in general), why you should read their writings, and how they can help you today.

They were Christians and pastors like us.

Most people imagine the church fathers as a collection of elderly men sitting around in robes debating which Greek term should be used to describe the Trinity. Or perhaps they picture half-naked ascetics wandering the desert gaunt and alone.

While the fathers often wrote on theological topics, and an ascetic community did arise after the fourth century, most church fathers were involved in pastoral ministry as bishops, elders, pastors, and deacons. They cared deeply about what they called the "care of souls." Their writings and sermons bear witness to this. They were committed to spiritual growth, thinking deeply about what it meant to live as a Christian in a broken world. They practiced the spiritual disciplines and wrote on their usefulness for the spiritual life. In the church fathers, we find our brothers.

They lived and ministered in a world like our own.

The ancient Roman world is the only historical age that readily equates to the multicultural diversity and information overload in our own day. The *Pax Romana* (Peace of Rome) introduced a period during which the entirety of the known world was under a single government and largely spoke one language.

The Roman world was a melting pot of cultures, religions, and vices. Ideas and religious concepts circulated freely. The multiculturalism of this period brought philosophies from Egypt, the Middle East, Greece, and Rome together. Various temple cults promoted idolatry and sexual immorality in a debauched age. It was a period of rampant and confused sexual behavior (read Romans 1 or Tertullian's *De Spectaculis*).

The early Christians taught and wrote against all types of immorality including abortion and infanticide. Theologians argued against faulty scientific views like atomism, which taught matter was all that existed. They fought philosophical views

that argued against the existence of truth (skepticism), and against astrological cults that played themselves off as scientific (Gnostics, Manichaeism).

They had the same missional purpose.

Earlier, I described this article as an "apologetic" for the church fathers. If you are unfamiliar with this term, it simply means a "reasoned defense." Many in Christian circles today use the word to describe a Christian writing or argument for Christian truth against certain scientific or philosophical objections.

People often describe the writings of C. S. Lewis or Francis Schaeffer as apologetics. We often think of this as a modern invention. However, the church fathers invented apologetics to explain Christianity to the educated elite of their day. They took philosophical categories and adopted the rhetorical style of their age to present the gospel clearly and to argue for Christianity's claims for truth.

They faced similar theological questions.

The process of developing apologetics led to the adoption of philosophical structures and language that became the basis of what we call theology today. As debates emerged in Christianity about the best way to understand certain passages of Scripture, or how to express certain teachings, these discussions borrowed from the methods of the apologists. The first theological works are, in many respects, apologies for a particular interpretation of Scripture or a particular understanding of Christian teaching.

In their writings, we see theology develop. Their wrestling with different languages and ideas in real time helps us understand the language and concepts ultimately adopted and codified into the creeds and councils of the ancient church. We often answer reflexively that the Trinity is one God in three persons. What we don't realize is that this understanding took 300 years to develop. While the Church has always embraced the full divinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and has always taught that God is one, finding the best language to communicate these truths accurately was a trial-and-error process. The early fathers were led by the Spirit in conversation with Scripture and culture.

The more we know about this process, the better we can understand theology in general and how to express difficult theological statements in a way that accords with Scripture while remaining relevant to culture.



They were closer to the events and the culture in which the New Testament was written.

The church fathers were committed to the *kerygma* (proclamation of the gospel) of the apostles and sought to remain consistent with their teachings at all costs. In ecclesial practice, theology, and exegesis, they expounded the tradition handed down to them. Over and over, they refer to the “deposit of faith” they believed guided them in the interpretation of Scripture. This deposit of faith informed the early creeds and councils of the church.

The fathers were close (chronologically) to the writings of the apostles both historically and culturally. This aided their understanding of the text. Living only a few centuries after Christ, their environment allowed for depth in context and understanding of the text that can surpass even modern exegetes. We should take care to hear their voice and consider their reading of Scripture.

We find help in their commentaries and their sermons, and from these “old wine skins” we can draw out teachings that, although not new in themselves, seem new to us. As we reflect upon them, their depth will inspire us to the same commitment: faithfully hearing, teaching, and

preaching the Word of God to our culture.

Like the faithful generations of the Old Testament, the early church fathers are an important part of the “cloud of witnesses” described in Hebrews 12. We need them. Our generation needs to know we aren’t alone in our struggles against a sinful, idolatrous culture. We must remember we are part of a rich, continuous history of Christians who looked to Scripture for answers. We aren’t the first to encounter the biblical texts we strive to apply to our lives and explain to our congregations and classes.

Christians today need the wisdom of those who have gone before. Let us follow their examples and avoid their mistakes. Let us look to them as brothers and sisters in Christ who desired for us to grow in faith and Christlikeness. They are waiting to sharpen us as iron sharpens iron. Therefore, in the words of St. Augustine: *Tolle, lege.* Take, and read! **ONE**

About the Author: Dr. Kevin Hester is vice president for institutional effectiveness at Welch College, where he additionally serves as senior professor of divinity, dean of the School of Theology, and program coordinator for theological studies. Learn more: Welch.edu.

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Using Your “Super Powers”

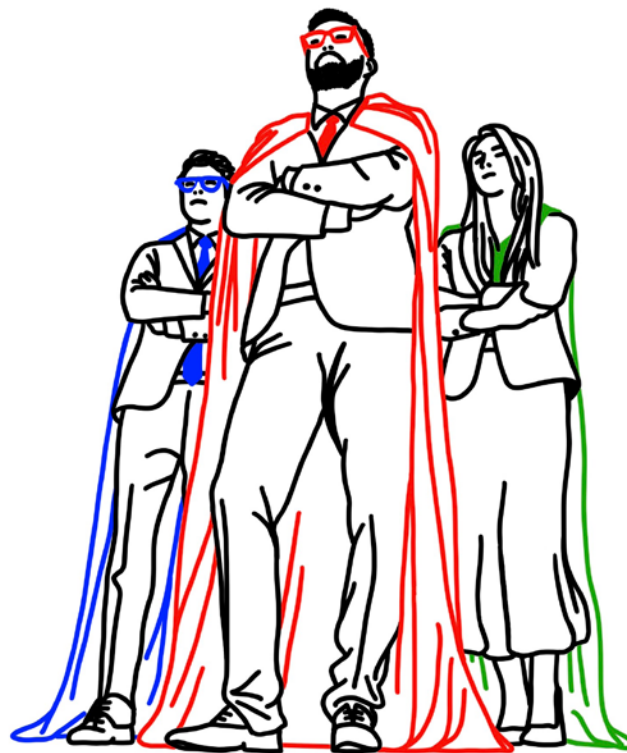
BY RON HUNTER JR., PH.D.

Growing up, what superhero did you want to be? Every generation has its own group of superheroes. Your age may determine if you identify with DC or Marvel superheroes. If you find these two categories foreign, you most likely wanted to be Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman, or Aqua Man. (If you always pretended to be the Joker, Thanos, Lex Luthor, Magneto, Loki, or Doctor Doom, maybe this column is not for you.)

People find themselves drawn to certain heroes primarily based on their superpowers. Did you want claws like Wolverine? To spin webs like Spider-Man, deflect bullets with your bracelets like Wonder Woman, or shoot photon blasts like Captain Marvel? Though we all had our favorites, did you notice no individual caped character had *all* the superpowers? As a result, they worked in groups: the Justice League, Guardians of the Galaxy, the Incredibles, and the Avengers. These super-talented individuals with unique skills combined to make an even stronger team. While we know some heroes envied the superpowers of others, the group was more substantial because their abilities differed.

When leaders recognize three superhero characteristics, their leadership goes to a new level. First, your skills, though significant enough to reach your position, are not enough to sustain the mission. Second, lean on the team around you because you do not possess uber-leader powers alone. Third (and most important), hire to your weaknesses. Bringing people to your team requires more than hiring another “mini-me” (people who think like you and get along with you).

If you are astute enough to recognize your deficiencies, you know gaps exist and you need someone to provide that missing strength. We need Wonder Woman when Superman deals with kryptonite. And we



all have kryptonite areas. If you're comfortable enough under your bulletproof cape, ask your team where you are not as strong. They know!

Scripture taught us all these principles long before the creators of Marvel and DC. A three-fold cord brings way more strength than one; the eye cannot be the ear, and none of us possess all the spiritual gifts equally. No one sees us as uber-Christian or super leaders.

Surround yourself with capable team members and trust their strengths. Acknowledge your weaknesses, and never fear those who disagree with you. If you require absolute compliance from everyone under your authority, you're not leading; you're dictating! Build your team biblically and trust their superpowers. **ONE**

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



SCRIPTURE PASSAGES NOTING VARIOUS COMBINED SKILLS

David and his warriors

2 Samuel 23:8-39

Spiritual gifts

1 Corinthians 12

Romans 12:1-8

Ephesian 4:11-16

1 Peter 4:10-11

Builders of the Tabernacle and Temple

Exodus 33:1-11

Exodus 35-39

Telling Our Stories

A Biographical History

BY DAVID LYTLE

The stories we tell make us who we are. The Jewish celebration of Passover includes the repetition of the story of the Exodus. This story doesn't just bring solidarity to a community; it creates identity. To forget this story is to forsake one's identity as God's chosen and delivered people.

In much the same way, Protestants tell the story of Martin Luther posting the *95 Theses*. This bold protest against the abusive sale of indulgences and corrupt papal authority is celebrated by Protestants of all stripes. Our recapitulation of the story makes us people who stand for salvation by grace and for the authority of Scripture. Our stories create our identity.

Because we are human, our stories inevitably revolve around people. Americans remember George Washington's Christmas Day crossing of the Delaware River. We remember Lincoln's desire for the success of government "of the people, by the people, and for the people" at Gettysburg and Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream of racial equality before Lincoln's Memorial. On a smaller level, no family get-together is complete without stories of crazy uncles, nurturing grandmothers, or hilarious cousins.

Because we are Christians, we do not simply tell human stories; we tell the story of God's presence in our stories. Our ultimate story is the gospel—the good story of God's entrance into our broken human story. Christians not only tell the gospel story but *thousands* of gospel stories as we recount God's redemptive actions through His church.

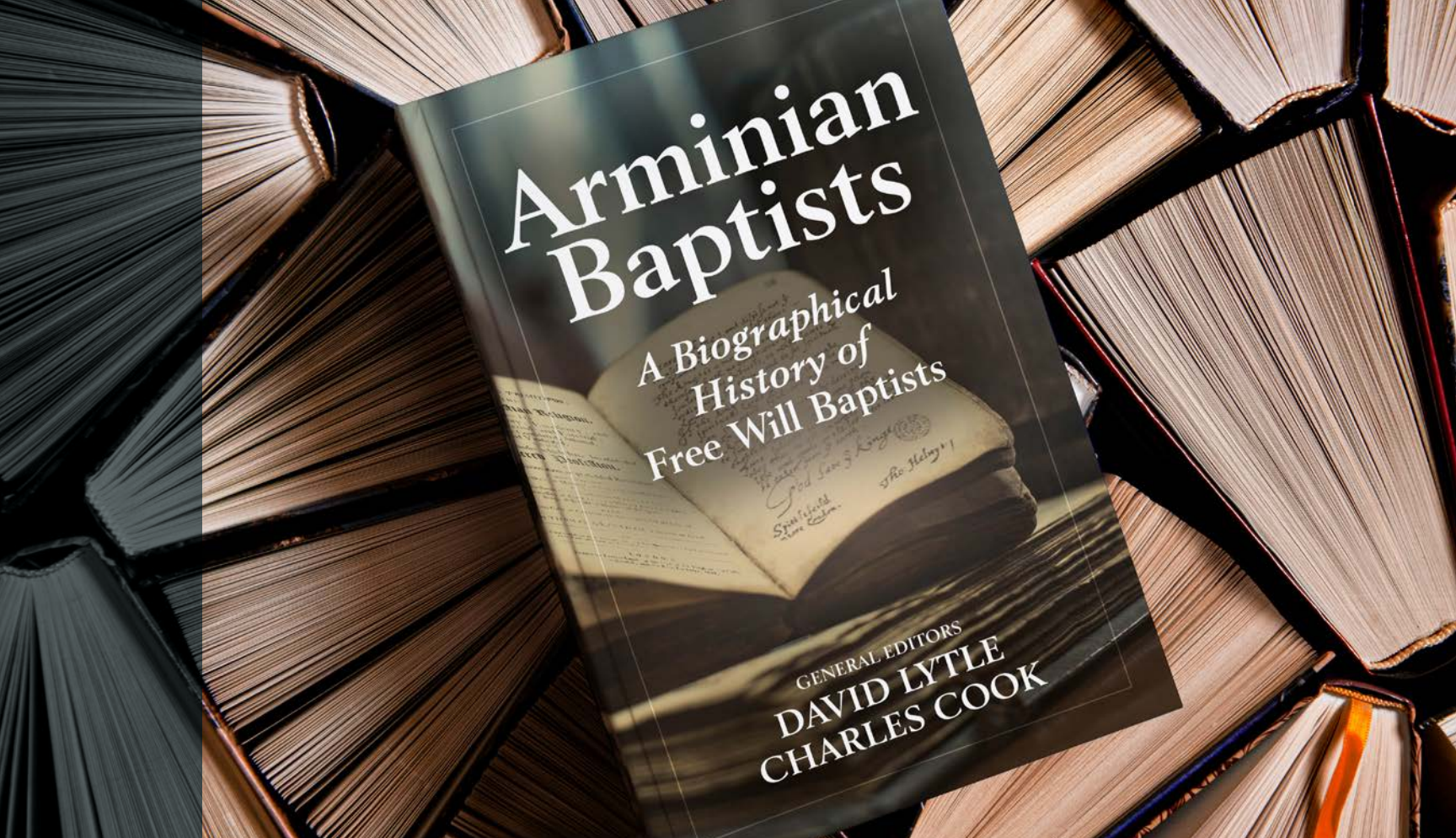
Because God has deemed it right to use the church to carry the gospel to all nations, we, like the first church historian Luke, tell the story of the church. Unlike Luke, we do not have the inspiration of the Spirit. We do our best to tell the story of the church accurately. We hesitate to attribute human actions to God, because we don't want

to presume to have an "inside scoop" on things too great for us. Still, we tell the story of Christ's church knowing God is using the church, knowing it is a flawed human story, and knowing it is identity forming.

If Free Will Baptists are to have an identity, we must tell our stories. No one else is going to talk about Paul Palmer or Benjamin Randall. It is up to us to tell our kids and congregations about the confident faith of Laura Belle Barnard. Only we can speak to the tenacity of David Marks, who wore out his body to preach the gospel in New York, Ohio, and Canada. These are the stories that shape Free Will Baptists.

Randall House is publishing a new collection of essays from various authors entitled *Arminian Baptists: A Biographical History of Free Will Baptists*. Because stories about people engender our identity as a people, this book aims to introduce readers to the story of Free Will Baptists. It starts in the seventeenth century with Thomas Helwys and ends with biographies of denominational pioneers Leroy Forlines, Thomas Marberry, and Robert E. Picirilli. Each contribution is a brief biography intended to introduce the reader to the life, thought, and legacy of key figures.

We were fortunate to have scholars from inside and outside the denomination contribute to this work. Matthew Pinson wrote essays on Baptist founder Thomas Helwys and the General Baptist theologian Thomas Grantham. Robert E. Picirilli wrote on Lizzie McAdams and John Welch. Twenty different authors contributed, including Kevin Hester, Paul Harrison, Danny Dwyer, and Timothy Eaton. We also were able to get some younger talent involved; Jesse Owens and Jackson Watts provided excellent chapters.



This book does not attempt to be a complete history of Free Will Baptists, nor does it try to capture every significant figure. We tried to include many significant figures in Free Will Baptist history and in our General Baptist origin story, but we knew the biographical approach was limited. Still, we believe this book can introduce a new generation to names that should never be forgotten. We wrote it to inspire future research and scholarship, but we also wrote it to equip pastors and lay people with a better grounding in their history. We invite Christians from other traditions to look in on our story, to learn from our failures, and to find courage in the success God has allowed us.

While this is not strictly a theology text, we tried to examine some of the theological contributions of the great minds in our tradition. Thomas Grantham, John Jay Butler, and Leroy Forlines come to mind as noteworthy shapers of Free Will Baptist theology. This book is an invitation to engage with their lives and thoughts as they considered God and life in relation to Him.

We sincerely hope this book is well received and engaged with thoughtfully. Each contributor has a unique perspective that tells a small part of the larger story. Allow me to close with two brief excerpts:

J. Matthew Pinson explains Thomas Helwys' doctrine of the church:

Helwys's understanding of the sufficiency of Scripture for church practice also extended to his view of church polity, how the church should be led and governed. This led him to espouse views that differed from the episcopal and presbyterian forms of church government that were most popular in his day. Thus, while churches must maintain strong relationships and mutual accountability and care with each other, and while presbyteries (groups of elders or pastors) must ordain and care for ministers, local congregations are essentially self-governing. "No church ought to challenge any prerogative over any other." Important decisions are made by the congregation, not just by its leaders. For example, church office bearers (ministers and deacons) "are to be chosen ... by election of that church or congregation whereof they are members."

Unlike the episcopal and presbyterian models, Helwys believed the New Testament words "pastor," "elder," and "bishop" all refer to the same office. Bishops, rather than being authority figures over local pastors, are pastors. Elders, rather than laity who rule the church, are preach-

ing pastors (many if not most of the early Baptist churches had more than one pastor or elder). So Helwys said, “And there being but one rule for elders, therefore but one sort of elders.” According to Helwys, the job of these elders is “to feed the flock concerning their souls.” Helwys’s doctrine of the church laid the foundation for Baptist ecclesiology and would shape generations to come.

Robert Picirilli on H. M. and Lizzie McAdams’ role in the formation of the National Association:

From early days in the ministry, Lizzie and H. M. intentionally promoted the Free Will Baptist cause. As early as 1917, H. M.’s annual report to the second session of the Co-operative General Association included that “he and Sister McAdams had held twelve revival meetings with 532 conversions, organized two new churches” and collected “considerable money...for the [Tecumseh] College and for publications, not forgetting Foreign Missions, and arousing a general interest for the Co-operative General Association.” For several years before Tecumseh College burned and closed in 1927, they were traveling representatives for the institution.

When influences began to lead up to the formation of the National Association of Free Will Baptists in November 1935, Lizzie and H. M. involved themselves. In June 1935, at the General Conference (of the Southeast) annual meeting in North Carolina, women organized the Woman’s National Auxiliary Convention (WNAC) and elected Lizzie, who was present, as third vice president, promoting missions. She had long labored to organize women’s “mission societies” in local FWB churches.

In November 1935, the National Association of Free Will Baptists (NAFWB) was organized at Cofer’s Chapel in Nashville, Tennessee. Lizzie was present and made the motion that the body adopt, without public reading, the Treatise recommended by the revision committee; the motion carried. At the second NAFWB session in 1938, the Home Missions Board was created, and she was elected a member. From that time on, at least until 1944, the work of WNAC and Home Missions became Lizzie’s primary focus. Before long, she was officially employed by both Home Missions and WNAC to travel and promote the work. **ONE**

About the Author: David Lytle (M.A. Middle Tennessee State University, M.T.S Gateway Seminary) teaches history and Bible at Woodcrest Christian School in Riverside, California.

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- Dec. 11** God Promised a Savior (Minor Prophets)
- Dec. 18** The Savior Serves (Isaiah 49)
- Dec. 25** The Savior Is Born (Isaiah 7 & 9; Luke 2:1-21)
- Jan. 1** The Savior Suffered (Isaiah 52:13—53:12)
- Jan. 8** Christ Is Above All (Colossians 1:9-23)
- Jan. 15** Alive in Christ (Colossians 2:6-23)
- Jan. 22** Made New in Christ (Colossians 3:1-7)
- Jan. 29** Pure Living (1 Corinthians 6:9-20; Colossians 3:5-6; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8)
- Feb. 5** Attitudes That Please God (Colossians 3:22—4:6)
- Feb. 12** Called to Serve (2 Timothy 2:1-26)
- Feb. 19** Continue in Truth (2 Timothy 3:1-17)
- Feb. 26** God’s Word Stands (1 Peter 1:25; Matthew 5:18; 24:35; Malachi 3:6; Ezekiel 24:14)



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O Christmas Tree!

BY ERIC K. THOMSEN

Putting up the Christmas tree—it's one of the highlights of the season at the Thomsen house. We have a grand time listening to Christmas music, stringing the lights (after we finally get them to work), and fluffing out the branches to my wife's approval. And the ornaments! You've never seen such a variety. We have all shapes and sizes, from birds and mice to reindeers, penguins, and even pigs—yes, pigs! Some ornaments date to my grandmother's childhood, well over a century old. Others are recent additions, received as gifts or snatched up during after-Christmas clearance sales.

We all have our favorite. My wife loves angel ornaments, and she has a wide variety. My daughter enjoys ornaments with lights and motion. If it moves, flashes, or makes some strange (or annoying) noise—right down her alley! I tend to be a little more sentimental. I like ornaments that remind me of family and childhood.

One ornament from the first Christmas of our marriage is shaped like a book. If you open the cover, you find a tiny picture of us on our wedding day—like an old-fashioned locket. I was young and skinny in my tux, and my wife, well, she is just as beautiful today as she was then.

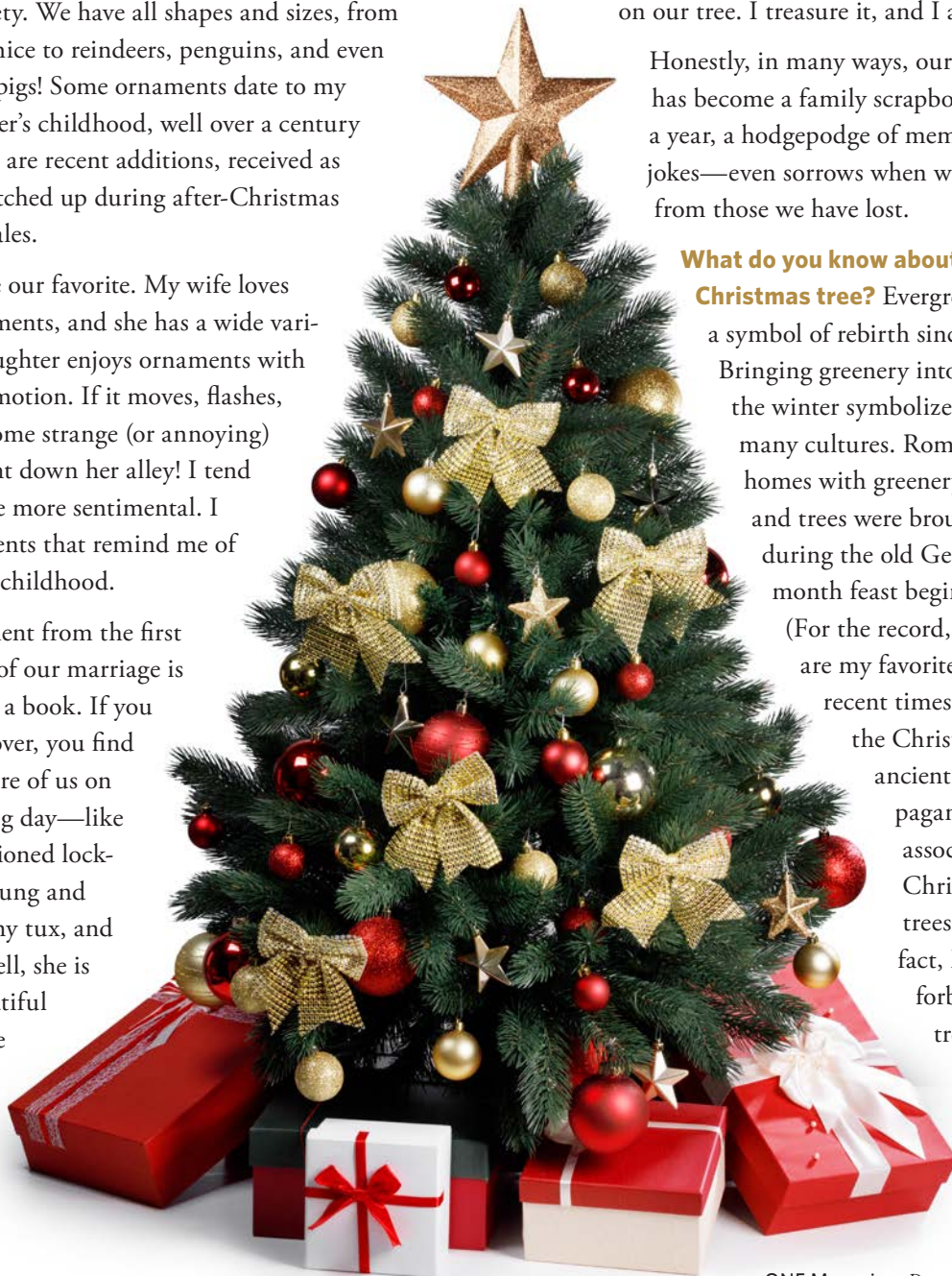
Another is from the

year my daughter was born: baby's first Christmas. I will always remember holding that tiny bundle in my arms, knowing she was dependent upon us for everything. And still another was made by my daughter when she was three or four. I will never forget how proud she was to hang it on our tree. I treasure it, and I always will.

Honestly, in many ways, our Christmas tree has become a family scrapbook we add to once a year, a hodgepodge of memories, laughter, jokes—even sorrows when we hang ornaments from those we have lost.

What do you know about the origin of the Christmas tree?

Evergreens have been a symbol of rebirth since ancient times. Bringing greenery into the home during the winter symbolized life amid death in many cultures. Romans decked out their homes with greenery in winter months, and trees were brought into homes during the old German Yule, a two-month feast beginning in November. (For the record, two-month feasts are my favorite kind.) In more recent times, Christians adopted the Christmas tree from these ancient, and sometimes pagan, traditions, an association leading some Christian groups to view trees with suspicion. In fact, English Puritans forbade Christmas trees, and offenders had to pay a penalty of five shillings! A widely held (though difficult



to verify) tradition points to the reformer Martin Luther as responsible for the first Christmas tree. As the story goes, one crisp, clear Christmas Eve, Luther was walking home through a snowy wood. As it was a beautiful starry night, Luther paused for a moment to gaze at the sky in reverent meditation. Standing in a grove of tall evergreens, it looked as though thousands of stars had settled on their branches. According to the legend, Luther cut a small evergreen, took it home, and decorated it with small candles in metal holders to recreate his experience for his children. That glittering tree became a tradition. Again—pure legend, though often repeated.

The earliest documented historical record of Christmas trees dates from 1521 in northern Germany. The document describes those early trees as decorated with paper roses, apples, strings of communion wafers, sweets, and ornate wooden dolls.

The truth is, no one knows for sure where the Christmas tree originated. Wherever it started, today the Christmas tree is among the most popular and cherished traditions. Each year, approximately 35 million live trees are purchased and decorated in the United States alone. And each element of the Christmas tree has come to represent a part of the Christmas story.

The angel atop the tree represents the heavenly messengers who appeared to shepherds on the first Christmas. Luke 2:8-14 records the encounter: “And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night. And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”

The twinkling lights symbolize the miraculous star that marked the place where Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were staying. The Book of Matthew tells us wise men from the East (we are not sure just how far east) saw the star and traveled a great distance to find the child. Speaking of the wise men, **the gifts under the tree** and the exchanging of gifts at Christmas symbolize the gifts these wise men brought the Christ child. In Matthew 2:11, we read they brought gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh—gifts for a King!

The ornaments in all shapes, sizes, and colors remind us Christmas is a celebration of salvation for the whole world—people of every shape, size, color, and creed.

Now, I realize you might be wondering where I am going with this. You probably didn't expect to read the history of the Christmas tree in *ONE Magazine*. In fact, you may wish I hadn't even mentioned a tree. For some, Christmas may simply be a painful reminder of Christmases gone by, loved ones who have died, or children long moved away. You might even be tempted to leave your tree in the big box in the hall closet.

But that is where the final symbol comes in, and that is **the tree itself**. You see, the Christmas tree represents life and hope—hope that came in the form of the tiny baby in the manger on that first Christmas. God in the flesh, Emmanuel, *God With Us*, the Savior who left his home in Heaven to endure a body like yours and mine. He crawled, walked, laughed, and sang. He cried, hungered, hurt, and suffered. And, eventually, He died to pay the sins of the world on a cross carved from...a tree. A sad end for that beautiful baby in the manger.

But Jesus didn't stay in the tomb; He rose three days later, defeating sin, death, and the grave. He gave us hope for life beyond the grave—eternal life with Him that never ends. He gave us hope we will see our loved ones again.

Luke 2:25-30 recounts the moment an elderly man named Simeon first saw Jesus. He had waited all his life for the Messiah. In the moment he first saw his Savior, his response was beautiful: “Lord, now let thy servant depart in peace...for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.”

Because of Jesus, Simeon no longer feared death, and the same can be true for us. You see, the Christmas tree is a wonderful symbol, a visual reminder of life—eternal life—and hope for all those who put their faith in Jesus Christ.

*O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree,
Your boughs can teach a lesson. ONE*

About the Author:

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



Reaching for

R A L E I G H

BY TORI MATLOCK

In 2023, Free Will Baptists will reach for a new location when Raleigh, North Carolina, hosts the National Convention for the first time. Located not far from where the Free Will Baptist movement in the South began in 1720, Raleigh is one of the oldest settlements in America. Named after Sir Walter Raleigh, who attempted to colonize the region, the “City of Oaks” is a unique community, steeped in history and culture.

North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences



Images: VisitRaleigh.com

While the city is charming, with oak-lined streets and historic brick buildings, Raleigh also numbers among the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the nation, with 25% growth over the last decade. Raleigh-ites are proud of their heritage. The city has been described as the “Smithsonian of the South” because of three major state museums—Museum of Art, Museum of Natural Sciences, and Museum of History. If museums aren’t your thing, don’t worry; Raleigh has something for everyone. Leisurely explore over 150 miles of trails and parks or paddle several nearby waterways.

And the barbecue! The city is famous for its one-of-a-kind, vinegar-based barbecue. Be



Raleigh Outdoors




RDU Observation Park

sure to try some for yourself. Raleigh hosts 30 barbecue restaurants and stands in the city, so choose wisely.

Videri Chocolate Factory additionally offers free samples and self-guided tours. Visitors can follow every step of the chocolate-making process. Finish up the visit at the onsite coffee and chocolate shop, with plenty of tasty samples and souvenirs available.

RDU Observation Park is tucked alongside the Raleigh-Durham Airport on the west side of the city. The beautiful park offers a full view of incoming and departing flights, making it a unique place for a family or youth group picnic, or simply to let children marvel as airplanes take off and land.

We are excited about next year's convention. Raleigh is a hospitable and historic city, and we hope you will join us there.

To learn more about the upcoming convention, visit www.nafwb.org/convention. 

About the Author: Tori Matlock served as a staff writer for the Press Office at the 2022 National Convention in Birmingham. She and her husband Cody work with children at Beulah FWB Church in Pensacola, Florida.

Start planning your trip:

VisitRaleigh.com

NCartMuseum.org

NaturalSciences.org

NCMuseumofHistory.org

VideriChocolateFactory.com

RDU.com/observation-park



Videri Chocolate Factory

2022 Theological Symposium Honors Picirilli

Gallatin, TN—The Commission for Theological Integrity hosted the annual Theological Symposium on the campus of Welch College October 3-4. This year's presentations honored the legacy of **Robert E. Picirilli**, who was present for all sessions and presented a paper also. Arguably, the highlight of the symposium came when Picirilli participat-

ed in a final Q&A session. He discussed his early family life, his call to ministry, his experience as an author, and his reflections on the state of the denomination. This session, along with others, can still be viewed at the Commission's Facebook page or website: fwbtheology.com.

Picirilli was joined on the program by seven other presenters serving Free Will Baptist churches or schools.

First-time presenter **Alejandro Johnson** discussed how Picirilli understood important concepts such as faith, reason, truth, and revelation. **Matthew McAfee** focused on 2 Peter's discussion of apostasy, engaging with a wide range of Picirilli's works on the subject. **Matt Honeycutt** presented Picirilli's work in the book of Galatians, and how this informed his views of legalism and the sufficiency of Christ. **Jackson Watts** presented Picirilli's view of the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts, and the illegitimacy of tongues in the modern church. **Kevin Hester** tackled the complex topic of free will and election, a topic Picirilli has published at various times throughout his career, even as recently as this summer. **Charles Cook** changed gears a bit by focusing on an understudied part of Picirilli's legacy, his time as moderator of the National Association. Finally, **Jesse Owens** explored Picirilli's approach to the extent of the atonement.



(left to right) Dr. Robert E. Picirilli, Jackson Watts, Cory Thompson, Dr. Kevin Hester, Rodney Holloman



Attendees represented several states, including a strong contingent from Oklahoma and Randall University as commission member **Cory Thompson** presided over his first symposium as program chairman. Approximately 125 people participated in the two-day event, with more viewers online. Former Program Chairman Jackson Watts remarked, "I can't remember a symposium so well attended and enjoyed by so many."

Next year's symposium will be held October 2-3 in Moore, Oklahoma, on the campus of Randall University. For more information about the commission's work, or to purchase a digital digest of this year's papers, visit www.fwbtheology.com or contact Cory Thompson: fwbtheology@gmail.com. **ONE**



Influence

BY EDDIE MOODY

Pew Research models indicate Christianity trending toward a minority in the next few decades.¹ Back in the 1720s, similar predictions may not have come to fruition because of the Great Awakening. We hope and pray for another awakening!

Recently, I received the U.S. Religion Census results.² The map at right shows a county-level compilation of Free Will Baptist (reporting) congregations compared to the population of their counties.

Free Will Baptists are a small percentage of 622 counties, often less than 1% of the population. How can they influence their community as such a small part of it?

Coincidentally, I received this report while traveling to Varna, Bulgaria, and the statistics were on my mind as I toured the city with Pastor Trif Trifonov, his wife Vanya, and our friends from the International Fellowship. In Bulgaria, evangelical Christians are often viewed with suspicion and as a cult. It is estimated 1.1% of the Bulgarian population is Evangelical Christian,³ so Bulgarian Christians provide a good example of how to influence people toward Christ as the minority.

Be in the community. We must live, work, play, and eat in the community...love our cities and towns. The Trifonovs embodied this as we toured Varna. They were excited to share their city, its history, and current events.

Serve. A woman—a nonbeliever—stopped Trif and asked about an English class she had attended, and whether the church would offer an advanced class in the future. This indicated her interest in an ongoing relationship with the church. Another nonbeliever thanked Trif for the way the Varna Church ministered to Ukrainian refugees. He recognized Pastor Trif and remembered the ministry of the church.

1 Pew Research Center, September, 2022. "Modeling the Future of Religion in America." <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/09/13/modeling-the-future-of-religion-in-america/>

2 US Religion Census: <http://www.usreligioncensus.org>

3 Evangelical Focus Europe. Bulgarian Evangelicals United in Prayer. Accessed at <https://evangelicalfocus.com/europe/8345/bulgarian-evangelicals-united-in-prayer>

Give. The Trifonovs are givers, sharing their time with others. When we passed the Pension Club (senior center), we learned Trif often speaks to them about Christian holidays and other subjects. The Trifonovs also give tangible gifts—to our hotel employees, to first-time visitors at church, and even to those new to the faith. These gifts are reminders of the gospel, and I suspect others in the community hear about them.

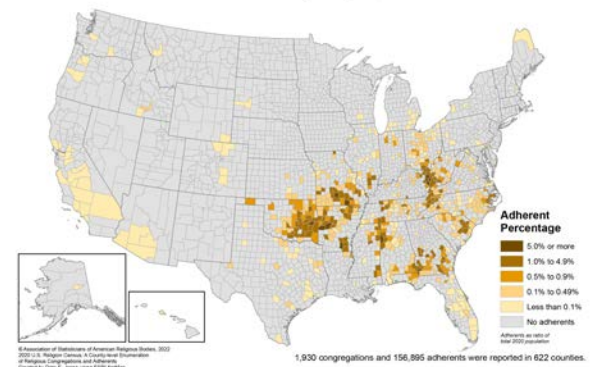
Persevere. Not every effort has been well received. Trif offered to teach a religious class in community schools. A teacher accused Trif and the church of being a cult. She started a letter writing campaign against the church, and that door has not opened. However, it should be noted that another teacher defended the church, saying, "But they are the only ones who help us!"

The results of these efforts are obvious. On Sunday, as we walked to church, we could hear the praise team practicing. People trickled in, old and young, from different backgrounds, and at different levels of spiritual development. Eventually, the auditorium was full, and I'm sure at least one person heard the gospel for the first time.

Being part of the Christian minority in Bulgaria is sometimes seen as unpatriotic and can lead to ridicule, strained relationships with family members, or even jeopardize a career. Yet, attendees seemed glad to be there and reluctant to leave. They ate and chatted long after the service ended.

We in the U.S. can learn much from Bulgaria. If Christianity does become the minority, we can still influence our community by loving them, living before them, and pointing them to Christ. **ONE**

National Association of Free Will Baptists: Adherents as Percentage of Population, 2020



Eddie Moody
Executive Secretary,
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