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ONE

magazine

DECEMBER - JANUARY 2022

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

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We Need Each Other

BY ERIC K. THOMSEN

Each year, my high school football team faced an opponent every player dreaded: the School for the Deaf and Blind. For more than a century (football started in 1913), the well-respected institution has recruited top-notch athletes honed for play by high-level coaches and trainers. Each year, teams overcame any physical challenges to field a competitive, hard-hitting crew with a never-give-up, smash-mouth mentality.

They arrived at our facilities in buses our own school could never afford, wore corporately sponsored uniforms with cutting-edge graphics, and flooded the stadium with their loyal fans.

But none of these were the reason our team dreaded playing the appropriately named Dragons. No, it was because those tough-as-nails players couldn't hear the whistle! The old football mantra about playing to the whistle didn't apply in those games. The opponents kept coming until they saw the refs charge in from the sidelines, arms waving like runaway windmills. Pity the poor player who didn't stay alert after the play was whistled dead. An unexpected bone-jarring, teeth-rattling block or tackle was inevitable.

After sustaining a couple of injuries, our coaches instructed the team to do two things: 1) stand stock-still with arms raised from the moment the whistle blew; and 2) do everything possible to prevent teammates from taking an unexpected hit.

Those games are a great analogy for the Christian life.

Often, it is not the expected "hits" that sideline Christians in their walk of faith. It is the unexpected attack that catches us off-guard, hands down, at our most vulnerable. Perhaps this is what Apostle Paul had in mind in Ephesians 5:15, when he urged readers to "walk circumspectly," or more literally, live alertly, head on a swivel.

The Apostle went on to explain this alert living is especially important during evil days. We must not be distracted from our Christian purpose but listen intently for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. After this terse admonition, Paul switched gears and spent the next 28 verses giving instructions for life together, from marriage and family to church and society.

Why the abrupt shift? Simple, really: we do not live the Christian life alone. We need each other. In a day when attack or temptation may come from the "blind side," we have a responsibility to guard, protect, even confront one another when necessary to prevent the hit. Paul acknowledged this in Philippians 2:3-5, when he urged the Philippians to be like Christ, putting the good of others first and watching out for one another (verse 4).

German martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it this way in his classic book *Life Together*: "Nothing can be more cruel than the leniency which abandons others to their sin."

We need each other. Now, more than ever. ONE

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



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

I really enjoyed your interview article from Bro. Richards. He was such a great influence on our Texas churches and my family in particular. He was my dad's pastor and probably his greatest mentor. Dad preached in small Texas churches for 69 years and was called to preach under Bro. Richards' ministry. I know he wasn't the only one whom Bro. Richards led and influenced. It was always a pleasure to visit with him and Marilu at district and state meetings. Thank you so much for taking time to visit with him and share his words. We all need to hear from examples of consistently faithful servant-leaders like him. I don't know anyone who was more sold out to God.

—J.D. Davis, Thomaston, TX

From the editor: Thank you, J.D. It is certainly true that Walter (Herbert) Richards was a wonderful example of faithfulness.

I am saddened to share with *ONE* readers that October 23, shortly after his article appeared in print, Rev. Richards went to his eternal home. I am grateful for his life, his example, and the wisdom he left with us. Please pray for his family as they mourn the passing of this wonderful man of God.



W. H. Richards

Have something to say? Say it! Your feedback, comments, and suggestions are appreciated.

Email editor@nafwb.org or send correspondence to: **ONE Magazine, Letters to the Editor, PO Box 5002, Antioch, TN 37011-5002**

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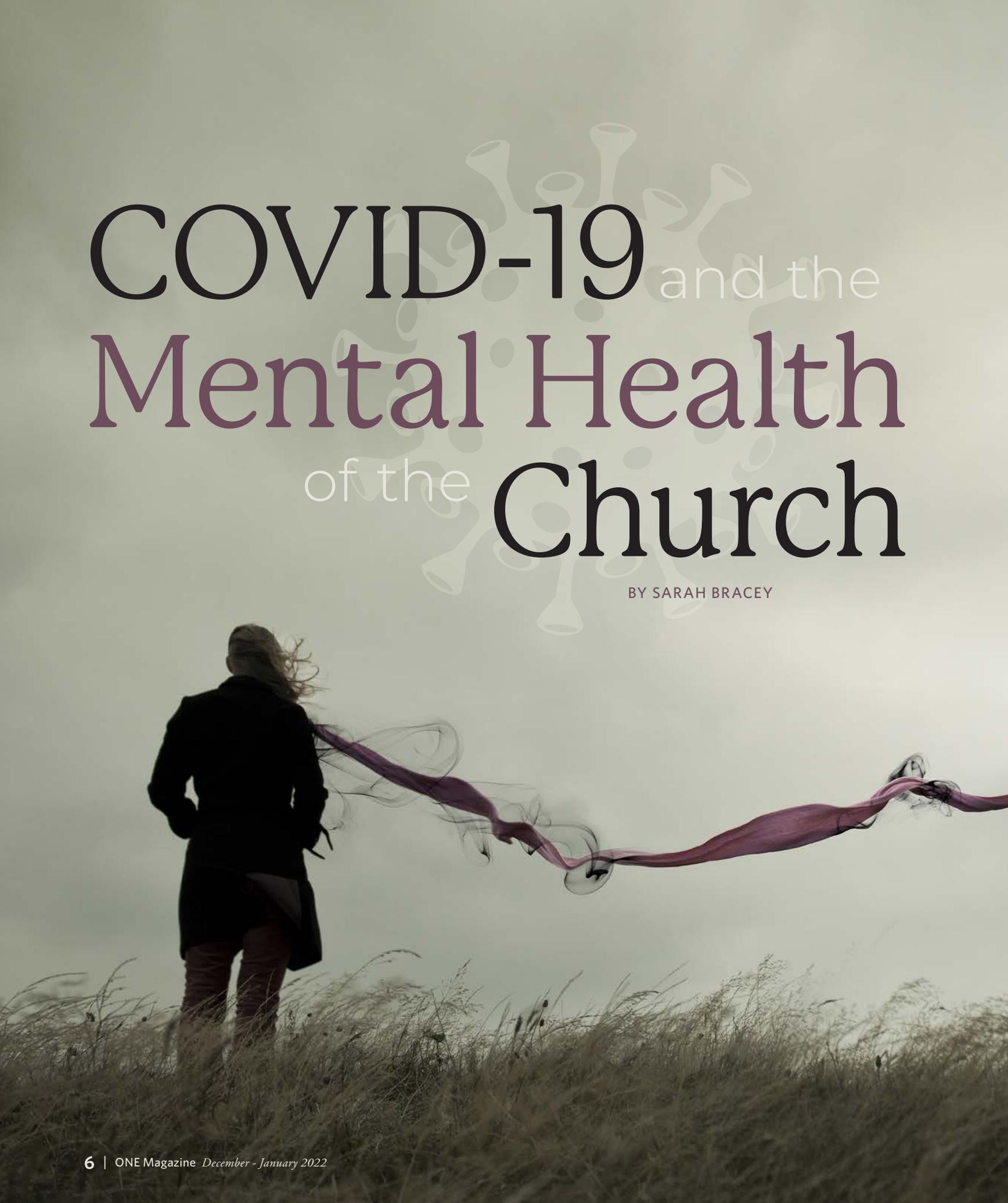
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COVID-19 and the Mental Health of the Church

BY SARAH BRACEY

On March 23, 2021, I stood before my social psychology class, ready to begin my morning lecture. After glancing at the calendar, though, I realized exactly one year had passed since Welch College announced we would not return to campus for the remainder of the academic year. We converted our courses to an online platform. Graduates did not get a graduation. We endured lockdown. It became a year filled with fear, confusion, loss, and grief.

I decided my lecture could wait another day. Instead, we used the time to reflect back on the year and what it meant to each of my students. What has it meant for your congregation? Leadership? Sunday School teachers? Nursery workers? What has it meant for you?

If we polled the readers of this article, I imagine we would receive a wide array of reactions. While we know everyone's physical experience with COVID can be different, we also must consider everyone's emotional and behavioral experience through the pandemic may also vary.

Individual experiences

As Christians, we should be sensitive to and patient with the unique experiences of others; one opinion of COVID may differ from another, or even yours. You may have experienced this within your own family.

The social fallout and aftermath of COVID stirred much discord and hurt feelings between Christian brothers and sisters.

So, I propose a question: How do we, the Church, move forward? How can we (in Paul's words to the Corinthian church) "Be perfect [mature], be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace" (2 Corinthians 13:11a)

To foster unity within our churches, we must understand our congregants' experience. At this moment, depending on the current caseload in your region, many people have gone back to work, restaurants have reopened, and sports events have resumed. In many ways, we are back to "normal." But not everyone is coming back, not everyone is opening, and not everyone has returned to church.

New beginnings can be unpredictable and scary. What about those who suffer from fear, loneliness, or depression? Getting up, getting out, starting again—it all sounds exhausting. Those vulnerable to isolation and depression see everyone else going out, having a good time, returning to normal, despite the lingering dangers of the virus. What if normal was not good to begin with? What if, emotionally, we are lonelier than ever? We think, "What is wrong with me? Why can't I just get out there like everyone else?"

In the past year, we all have been through something significant. For some, it will take time to adjust. We all have stories of what COVID took from us: good health, a job, an opportunity, or perhaps the life of a friend or family member. Personally, I additionally feel a sense of loss—somewhere I lost a year of my life. My husband reminds me of all the things we accomplished in 2020, a trip to the beach with the nieces and nephews and buying a new home. Good, important memories, yet I still feel the heaviness of loss.

Crisis

For most, COVID forced us to endure a crisis for too long. Those who exist in an extended crisis state find a way to cope, one way or another, and usually in a manner that is not positive or helpful. Many are still coping or grieving, and some have become addicted to their coping mechanisms. Many adults turned to drinking, medications, or technology to cope. What was once a distraction from the fear and uncertainty of the pandemic has turned into a crutch they cannot live without.

When humans are in a crisis state for too long, or when we are unsure of a new normal, we unfortunately revert to what we have always done. We lean on our own understanding or look to one another for answers. The bad news is the person next to you may be no better informed than you. In fact, they may have poor decision-making skills.

Consider the children of Israel when Moses went up to Mount Sinai. "And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for

as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him” (Exodus 32:1).

Without their leader, the people went to the next best thing, Aaron, brother to Moses. We know how that turned out.

Godly Leadership

Our churches need godly leadership. Of course, we need Jesus, but we also could benefit from someone on the ground, so to speak—someone worthy of leading us, of showing the way, of tending us in our state of crisis. Earlier, I posed this question: How does the Church move forward? We will find unity and peace in our churches when our leaders put in the hard work of tending the flock.

Of course, spiritual shepherding is not the responsibility of one person. We need a team of leaders within our churches who know and understand suffering and are

willing to exercise patience with the vulnerable and weak. We need ministers willing to give us godly counsel when we are tempted to go elsewhere for answers.

What is the mental health of the church today? We shouldn't allow this crisis state to endure, but we shouldn't dismiss it altogether. As congregations, let's be sensitive, but let's also “Be perfect [mature], be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace” (2 Corinthians 13:11a). **ONE**

We shouldn't allow this crisis state to endure, but we shouldn't dismiss it altogether.

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 University of the Cumberland and is a licensed professional counselor in Tennessee. She and her husband, Matthew, live on a small farm near Gallatin, Tennessee.



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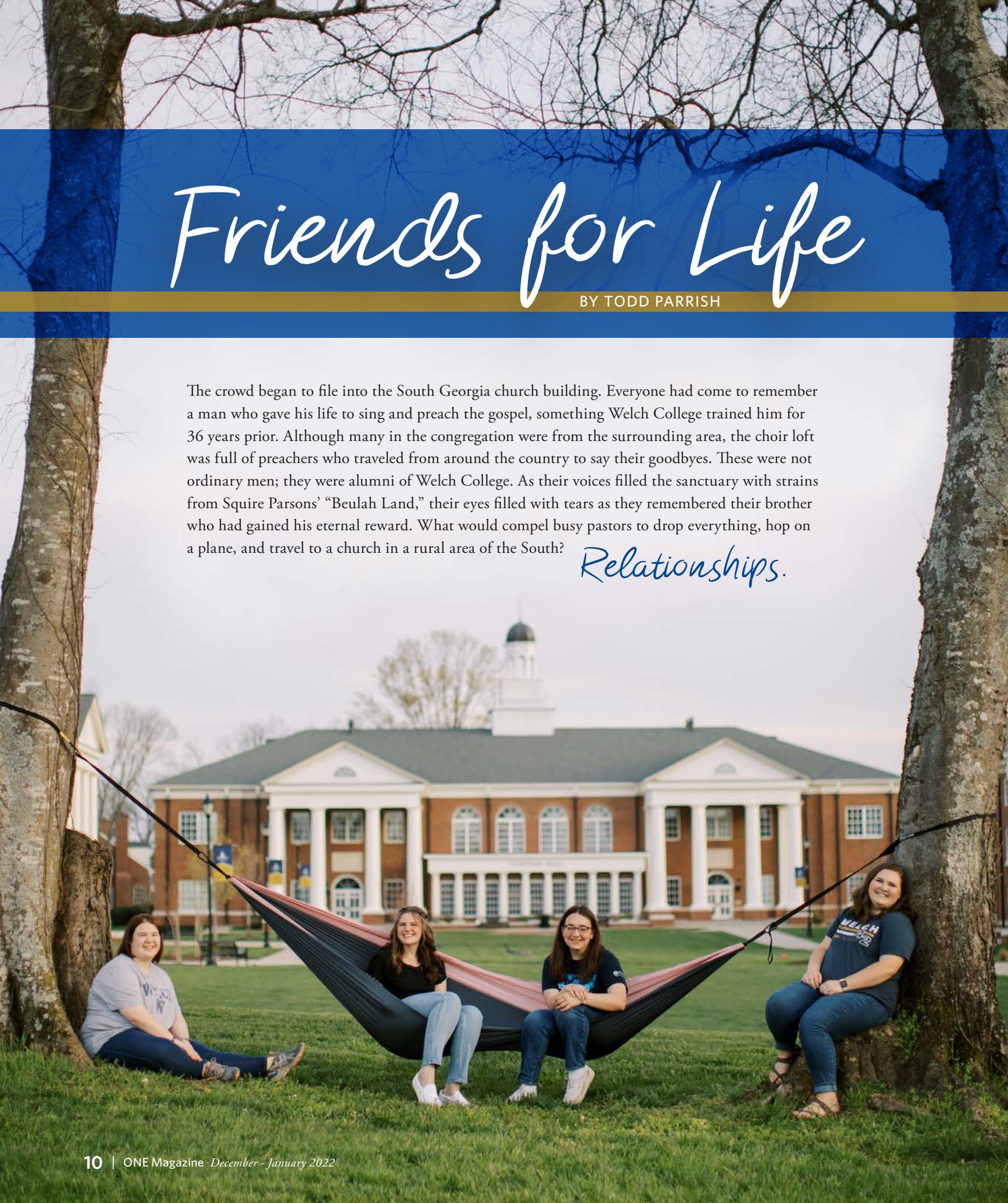
APRIL 20-22, 2022 >> ORLANDO, FL

Friends for Life

BY TODD PARRISH

The crowd began to file into the South Georgia church building. Everyone had come to remember a man who gave his life to sing and preach the gospel, something Welch College trained him for 36 years prior. Although many in the congregation were from the surrounding area, the choir loft was full of preachers who traveled from around the country to say their goodbyes. These were not ordinary men; they were alumni of Welch College. As their voices filled the sanctuary with strains from Squire Parsons' "Beulah Land," their eyes filled with tears as they remembered their brother who had gained his eternal reward. What would compel busy pastors to drop everything, hop on a plane, and travel to a church in a rural area of the South?

Relationships.



Relationships that last a lifetime are the hallmark of Welch College. Young people arrive each fall overwhelmed and anxious at the prospect of starting college life. For most, it is the first taste of adulthood. In a few days, friendships blossom and relationships begin that last the rest of their lives. These are not ordinary relationships. These friendships knit lives and hearts together much like the biblical friendship of David and Jonathan. The Master-weaver uses Welch College as a loom to knit hearts and lives together. The resulting tapestry of lives strongly mirrors the beautiful love of Christ. What happens on Welch campus epitomizes Ross Dowden's words in the college's *alma mater* (1955), "God's truth learned here and friendships dear, will ne'er from us depart."

Welch friendships are loving relationships. Friendships at Welch College are framed in a biblical context that teaches every student the importance of *agape*, selfless love. At many colleges, just as in society, relationships are built on the premise of self-satisfaction, gratification, and mutual benefits. The mantra "What's in it for me?" drives the formation of such friendships. Welch friendships are different. They are the type that lead a person to travel many miles when a classmate is promoted to Heaven to be near the family and comfort the children.

Welch friendships are loyal friendships. For many students, friendships turn into courtships. It is common for students to find their life's mate during their college years. At Welch, students forge these lifelong relationships surrounded by faculty and staff who provide strong examples of biblical marriages and families. Welch professors become confidants and counselors to young couples. Chapels and campus Bible studies often focus on building spiritual relationships.

Welch friendships are lasting friendships. At this year's National Convention, copies of the college yearbook, *The Lumen*, were available. The yearbook editions spanned several decades and were one of

the most popular features at the Welch College exhibit. Alumni from across the country, some of whom work for other colleges and universities, gathered around those yearbooks and thumbed through them with excitement.

Several found their old college photos and reminisced about old friends. Laughter and tales of college days filled the area as people recalled sweet memories. These are the types of lasting, loyal friendships that compelled college buddies to gather in the South Georgia heat to memorialize one of their own.

While one can attend larger colleges and universities, Welch College is unique. Some feel a smaller college finds itself at a disadvantage. But the Welch community is just the right size for young men and women to forge friendships that encourage one another in their spiritual walk. Larger colleges and universities may brag about frat parties and tailgate experiences. At Welch, students enjoy friendships in such a way that they can have fun on Friday night without a guilty conscience on Saturday morning.

Parents and churches are eager to support a college like Welch. When their students start their college experience, Christian parents are anxious about the environment where their students will begin adult life. Greek life, humanistic philosophy, and progressivism cause many parents and pastors to be concerned about the culture surrounding their Christian students on secular campuses. Many churches that have invested in their young people for 18 years are fearful professors and friends will dissolve that investment during the first 18 weeks of freshman life on a secular campus. At Welch College, faculty and friends complement a freshman's faith; they don't compete against it. At Welch, the environment is different.

After returning from Georgia, a staff member shared about the Welch graduate's funeral with some student body officers. The student-leaders asked, "All those people just dropped everything to come that far for a funeral? You mean, after all those years, college friends would still be that loving and loyal to one another?"

The staff member responded, "That's what makes Welch College special. Love the friends you make now. They will last a lifetime."

After letting those words sink in, one student-leader replied, "That's so amazing. I just love this college!" **ONE**

About the Author: Todd Parrish is associate vice president for Institutional Advancement at Welch College: www.WELCH.edu.

The Welch community is just the right size for young men and women to forge friendships that encourage one another in their spiritual walk.

Through the Eyes of



PART ONE

BY CHRIS*

While completing my training to become a mental health counselor, I worked six months as an intern at an inpatient mental health hospital. Assigned to a unit of people with severe and persistent mental disorders requiring years of ongoing treatment, I provided a safe place for people to work through heavy issues.

One day after a particularly emotional session, I asked my supervisor, “How do you do this every day? How do you listen day after day to the hurt, pain, and trauma people suffer?”

Thirteen years later, his answer still affects my view of ministry. He said, “Never forget you and I are only one life event away from being exactly where our clients are. We do not deserve the blessed lives we live any more than our clients deserve to suffer from their illnesses. Only the unmerited grace of God makes my life what it is.”

Over the years, I have repeated these words a thousand times. I do not have a birthright to the blessings of God. I am not a Christian because I am worthy of God's favor. I am nothing more than the recipient of divine grace and unmerited favor.

After losing everything he owned, Job declared, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21). God was under no obligation to bless Job, yet He chose to do so. After Job's life turned upside down, he continued to acknowledge God's sovereignty. Like Job, we must understand everything can change before the end of the day.

With this perspective in mind, a homeless person ceases to be a dirty, smelly nuisance. The immigrant struggling to communicate in English is no longer an annoyance. The Middle Eastern refugee is not scary or dangerous. They are all people, created by God, who need to experience His grace and love.

Respecter of Persons

In James 2:1-4, the Apostle addressed first-century Jewish Christians guilty of favoritism for the wealthy while treating the poor as undesirable nuisances. If their lives had been transformed by Jesus Christ, how could this possibly be? With strong words, James declared their motives purely evil (verse 4).

When our family first arrived in Spain, we wanted to learn firsthand about the plight of the refugees and immigrants we desired to reach with God's love. We already knew the statistics about this people group from research. But to understand their lives more fully, we began serving as volunteers at various social outreach centers. Most time was spent volunteering with a secular organization that distributed government-subsidized food. Without a doubt, needs were met. However, two things quickly became evident to us: the needs far exceeded the current infrastructure, and ever-present hopelessness haunted the people we helped.

Their stories were as different as night and day. Some refugees had been wealthy professionals whose countries

imploded due to civil unrest or war. Others fled the poverty and disease plaguing their rural villages. Others made their way to a new country seeking medical treatment unavailable in their home countries.

Although their histories were different, they all shared a sense of hopelessness and alienation.

When we prepared to launch our own outreach center, our conviction was to serve each person with dignity and kindness, remembering each one is created in the image of Almighty God. We greet each person with a smile, call them by name, and intentionally communicate they are welcome at the center. Why? We believe each life has worth.

The Lord commands His followers to love our neighbors as we love ourselves (Leviticus 19:18b). Jesus reinforced this idea when He declared this commandment to be second only to the command to love the Lord with all our hearts (Mark 12:29-31). James later deemed this commandment the *royal law* (James 2:8).

This commandment is easier to obey when our neighbor is from a similar socio-economic background, and we merely need to be kind to show them the love of Jesus. But this commandment drastically stretches us when we are called to love someone who has not bathed in a week and is desperately in need of food to survive. Perhaps this same person is exceptionally lonely, ostracized by society, and seeking a friend.

What does it look like to love the marginalized?

Several months ago, a homeless man walked into the outreach center and asked if he could speak with me. I smiled



and said, “Of course.” We stepped into a semi-private area and began to discuss his needs. I had known the man for several months but had never had more than a simple conversation while he picked up his weekly food allotment. Most people stepped aside or ignored him entirely because he smelled bad, looked disheveled, and appeared to have a very loose grasp on reality.

That day I chose to spend ten minutes with him. Afterward, he collected his food and left. In the following months, the conversations became more frequent. I discovered he is highly educated, a published author, and once enjoyed a successful career. But after losing his wife and daughter tragically, he was unable to rebound.

Honestly, he is not the easiest person to love, but God formed him in His image. His life has value. I choose to reach out to him with the love of Jesus and pray he will eventually accept God’s offer of salvation.

Ultimate Example

Read Luke 8:43-48. Jesus, our ultimate example of love, was walking through a crowd when an extremely sick woman sneaked up behind Him and touched His clothes. Chronically ill for years, she had exhausted all possible medical treatment. It appeared she was doomed to suffer for the remainder of her days. To make things worse, her specific illness made her perpetually ceremonially unclean. She was both ostracized from society and cut off from worshiping in the Temple. In an act of desperation, she reached out to Jesus. Even though her touch meant Jesus was now ceremonially unclean Himself, Jesus reacted with kindness. Once the woman revealed herself to Jesus, He tenderly called her “daughter” (verse 48). By faith, she was accepted by God, making her a recipient of His loving care.

An immigrant woman in her mid-60s came to the outreach center. She appeared physically exhausted, so we offered her a seat and a cup of water. After she caught her breath, we attempted a conversation with her, only to learn she did not speak Spanish or English—only Arabic. Thankfully, another immigrant lady we knew arrived and kindly translated for us.

The woman had arrived a month earlier seeking medical treatment. Diagnosed with cancer, coming to Spain was her only hope for survival. Arriving alone, she went directly to the hospital, where she was admitted and treated.

Now, however, she is dependent on the charity of others for survival.

We have since prayed over her and had frequent conversations with her through translation (or even simple hand gestures when translation was unavailable). We have watched her health deteriorate, knowing Jesus is her only hope. Though frustrated by our inability to communicate directly, we are thankful for each interaction God allows. Jesus has not yet called her daughter, although He longs to do so. Nor has He healed her, although He is powerful enough to do so.

Showing the love of Jesus to this poor lady is not easy. It is emotionally exhausting to be moved with the love of Jesus for someone with whom you cannot communicate directly. The easy thing would be to acknowledge we are not equipped to minister effectively, shrug our shoulders, and walk away. But that is not what God has commanded His Church to do. We have been called to love *everyone* we encounter regardless of circumstances, religious background, ethnicity, or “baggage” they carry.

We must always remember two biblical truths. First, we do not deserve God’s blessings any more than the hurting people around us. Second, if we show favoritism or “have respect to persons, [we] commit sin” (James 2:9). Let’s strive to see people the way Jesus sees them and love them the way He does.

What does that help look like? In the next issue, North American Ministries church planters Tim and Amanda York will look to the life of Jesus on earth, how He healed individuals as part of His loving ministry. While we will never wield authority over sickness like Jesus, we can learn from how He met the physical, mental, and emotional needs of people to create an environment where they can best hear the truth of the gospel. ONE

I do not have a birthright to the blessings of God. I am not a Christian because I am worthy of God’s favor. I am nothing more than the recipient of divine grace and unmerited favor.

About the Author: Chris and his wife Tori are graduates of Welch College. A practicing mental health counselor, Chris also served in youth and pastoral ministry prior to the couple’s transition to cross-cultural ministry. They have served with The Hanna Project since 2012, living and working among refugees in southern Spain. Learn more: www.HannaProject.com.

THE “WHY” OF DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS

BY DAVID WOMACK

Why do you have discipleship groups? Whether a traditional Sunday School, Life Groups, or some variation, every church should have a church-wide, group-based, discipleship ministry. There are at least four good reasons why, and they all revolve around growing connection: to help us grow with God in Christ, with each other, with the Church, and in new relationships. These four connections align with the New Testament doctrine of the church and discipleship.

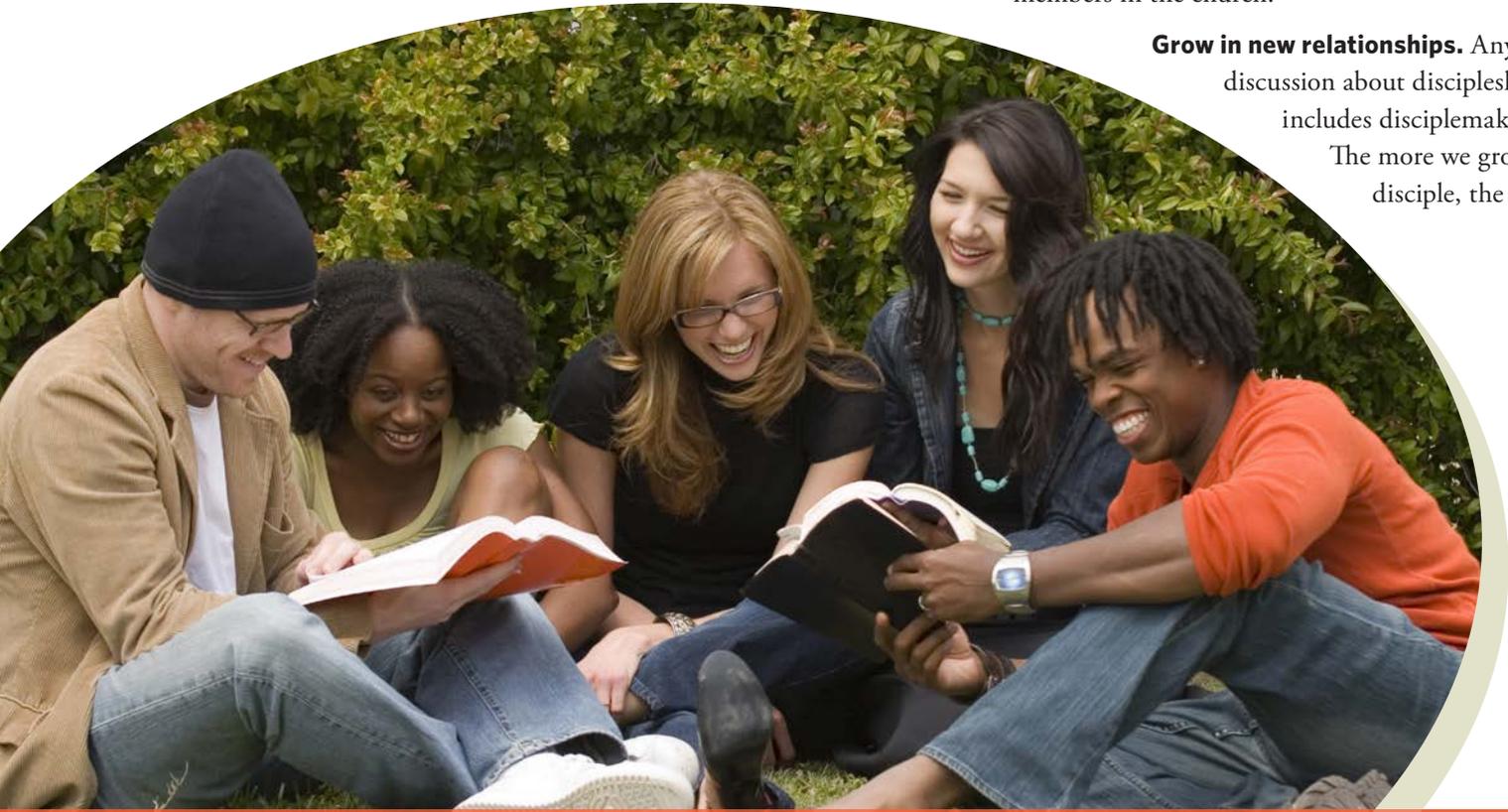
Grow in our relationship with God. First (and foremost), the Church exists to honor Jesus Christ, so that’s a relationship we want to grow in. This need to grow also answers the question of why study the Bible—for rela-

tionship, not just knowledge. We study the Bible to know *Someone*, not to know *about* someone.

Grow in our relationship with each other. Paul filled his epistles with examples and exhortations to foster deep caring relationships with our brothers and sisters in the local church context. We grow closest to those with whom we pursue discipleship as we study the Word, pray, and share life with one another. Healthy personal relationships can be accomplished better in smaller groups.

Grow in our relationship with the church. We want to be connected to God’s work in the world, and we best connect with His work through our local church. Small group members are usually the most connected and committed members in the church.

Grow in new relationships. Any discussion about discipleship includes disciplemaking. The more we grow as a disciple, the more



we care about others becoming disciples. The immediate application of this goal is to encourage group members to work to add more people to their group. The “why” of connection groups also tells us what we should emphasize in our groups.

1. In our groups, we should ask “How does what we’re discussing and learning impact how we know Christ?” We should encourage each other to engage in personal and family devotions. D6 devotional magazines are designed to help every member of the family grow in relationship with Christ and each other.
2. One of the least practiced but most impactful disciplines is spiritual conversation. People talk football or politics, but do we intentionally focus on spiritual conversations? Encourage your group to engage in conversations of spiritual depth, both in and out of meetings.
3. Challenge each other to focus on God’s active presence and providence. God is always “up to something,” and He has invited His Church to be part of it. Regardless of where you look in Scripture you learn something about God’s ways and will; a good teacher or group

leader will lead the group to discover this in every session and grow in understanding the role of the Church in God’s unfolding plan.

4. Encourage your group to have a heart for others, especially the lost. Challenge each other to identify who they really are in the story of the Good Samaritan, to become the character most like Christ in the story. The NAFWB *3 for 30* Reach Prayer Calendar is a great resource to help your group grow in loving others: <https://nafwb.org/3for30>.

Why have discipleship groups?

To help us grow in loving God, loving and building up each other, loving our church and the work of the Church, and loving others, especially the unchurched and the unsaved.

A small group experience coupled with personal and family devotions and participation in corporate worship is a great formula to help us to grow as disciples. **ONE**

About the Author: David Womack is customer service director at Randall House. Learn more: www.D6Family.com.

D6 EveryDay™

NOT JUST SUNDAY. EVERY DAY.

Curriculum Discipleship Plan

Winter 2021-22 Scope and Sequence



- Dec. 5** Comfort for Broken Hearts (Acts 12:1-5; James 5:7-11; Psalm 46:1-11)
- Dec. 12** Hope for Anxious Hearts (1 Kings 19; James 1:2-8; 1 Peter 5:7; Revelation 21:4)
- Dec. 19** Peace on Earth (Luke 1:26-45; 2:1-7)
- Dec. 26** Unity and Wisdom in Christ (1 Corinthians 1:10-31)
- Jan. 2** Purity in Christ (1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 6:9-11)
- Jan. 9** Contentment in Christ (1 Corinthians 7:1-40)
- Jan. 16** The Gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:1-31)
- Jan. 23** The Standard of Love (1 Corinthians 13)
- Jan. 30** The Promise of the Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20-58)
- Feb. 6** Seeking God’s Wisdom (1 Kings 2:1-4; 3:3-15)
- Feb. 13** Seeking God’s Presence (1 Kings 8:1-61)
- Feb. 20** Standing for Truth (1 Kings 18:19-46)
- Feb. 27** Wisdom for Every Day (Proverbs 1:1-33)

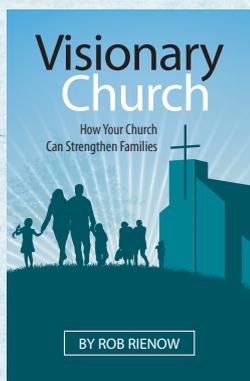


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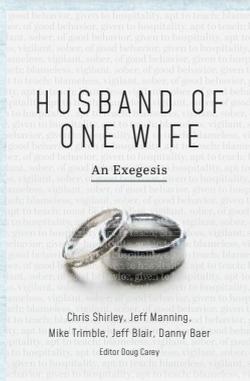
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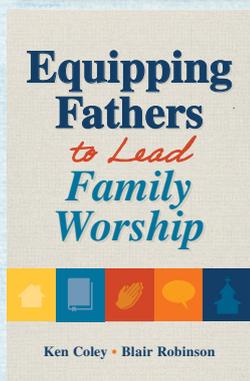
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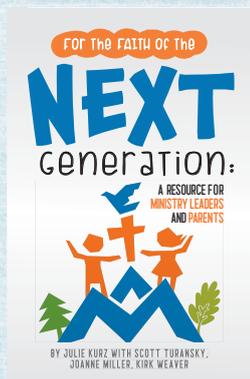


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BIG TASK, BIGGER GOD

BY JOEL TEAGUE

Working with Free Will Baptist churches in France over the last decade, we have pinpointed some of the greatest needs of our churches, including training, resources, communication, fellowship, and ordination. We hope to help meet these specific needs and encourage our churches through the Free Will Baptist association in France. We also desire to help strengthen and grow the denomination in France. We feel strongly the Lord has a role for Free Will Baptists to play in the future of the French evangelical church.

TRAINING

Today, people are busier than ever. However, we still need to disciple and train them. While some discipleship and training should take place face-to-face, much can be done online. We are developing a platform available to all French Free Will Baptists that offers easy access to classes on various subjects: Bible, apologetics, doctrine, missions, Christian life, biblical interpretation, etc. These classes will be web accessible but also available on an app for mobile phones and tablets. This will give individuals the opportunity to grow in their knowledge of God and the Bible, become better equipped for their tasks, and progress at their own pace.

We pray this platform will be a great tool to encourage people to learn, read, grow, and become more involved in churches and communities.

RESOURCES

Finding books on Arminian doctrine in the French language is virtually impossible. It is crucial to translate and publish Free Will Baptist books to teach and train future pastors and leaders and answer the questions of church members. We are already working on translating books. The Free Will Baptist Heritage Series of booklets offer a deeper understanding of distinctive Free Will Baptist doctrines. Other books in progress include *Free Will Baptist Doctrines* by J. D. O'Donnell and *Grace, Faith, Free Will and Understanding Assurance and Salvation* by Robert E. Picirilli. These volumes will become priceless resources for French churches and pastors and will be a great tool for creating online classes.

An IMPact Project called **IMPact France—Discipleship and Training Program** supports translating and printing





these important Free Will Baptist doctrinal works. The project will enable us to move forward quickly to fill the void of doctrinal materials. If you wish to give to this important project visit IMinc.org/impact-projects. We greatly appreciate your gifts.

COMMUNICATION AND FELLOWSHIP

Recent years have been difficult for Free Will Baptist churches in France. Obviously, the COVID-19 virus just made things worse. These complicated times amplified the

need for churches to collaborate, support, and encourage one another. We hope to address this in two ways. First, bring the churches together physically by setting up joint services among the various congregations. We also hope to bring people together by appointing certain people in each congregation to providing updates on news and prayer needs of other churches. We pray these two things will foster better community among our established churches.

We want to help the French people realize they are part of a much bigger group of churches and Christians. As a Christian in France, it is easy to feel alone or isolated, especially in the western part of the country where so few Christians live. We are developing ways to share information about the worldwide efforts of Free Will Baptists, including social media. We also plan to create a website for the French Free Will Baptist Association to convey who Free Will Baptists are and what we believe.

French Free Will Baptists need to know thousands of FWB churches worship weekly. They need to hear we are working hard for His Kingdom around the globe, and they have many brothers and sisters praying for them. They need to feel they are part of what God is doing through our movement on an international scale.

ORDINATION

Another vital need for our churches is ordination. Currently, no ordination system is set up, but it is something we definitively want to pursue. We want to help future pastors with training and educate our churches on the process of choosing a pastor.

CHURCH PLANTING

Finally, of course, we hope to see the denomination grow in France through church planting. As a whole, France has only a handful of evangelical churches. Churches are especially sparse in the western part of the country where our churches are located. Many large cities are without a single effective witness. Even fewer of those churches reach out to those around them. **WE NEED MORE FREE WILL BAPTIST CHURCHES IN FRANCE.**

I could sum our vision up with three simple words: **encourage, strengthen, and grow.** I know we face a big task, and perhaps I am too optimistic. But I choose to put my faith in God, not in my own abilities. The task is big, but God is bigger! *Nothing* is too big for Him or His Kingdom. **ONE**



About the Author: Joel Teague and his wife Lydie were appointed as career missionaries to France in April 2016 after completing a two-year internship. Learn more: www.iminc.org.



Building

LEADERS

BY STEVE TORRISON

Of the many channels on cable television, my wife and I almost always watch some kind of home renovation show. We enjoy commenting on the problems they face or the choices they make. Often one of us will say something like, “How on earth will they get *that* fixed?” To which the other (usually Lori) replies, “Yes, they put that in there so you will react. It’s just for TV.” She’s right. However, it’s not just television for the homeowners living through the renovation.

I see two realities in this scenario. First, the television consumer expects difficulties to occur, even cheers for them. The viewer is sorely disappointed when things go “as planned” with no major problems to resolve. Of course, everything must be completed within the allotted show time. Second, the homeowner has a completely different viewpoint. What takes an hour to watch may take several months for those living through the renovation.

How does this apply to leadership? Too often, leaders approach leadership training from the consumer’s viewpoint. Either we want to get it done as quickly as possible, or we want to delegate it to someone else and watch the TV special once all is said and done. Truth is, we need to approach leadership with a long-term mentality.

I confess, when I arrived in Uruguay in 2015, I came with—not a consumer’s viewpoint—more of a DIY/You-tuber’s viewpoint. I knew exactly *what* to do because I had taught a few classes in another seminary in Panama. I brought my toolbox with me. I guess you could say I was a contractor’s worst nightmare. I had all the confidence in the world, with little actual understanding to back it up.

I do not refer to my understanding of Scripture, the material I was teaching, or even the methodologies available. However, I did not come with the open mind needed to teach effectively in the culture and context of Uruguay.

Snapshots Around the World



Kenya—On July 21, 2021, Samburu Christians in Sesia celebrated new life in Christ through baptism. While waiting on everyone to arrive and head to the river, one of the Samburu leaders led a man to the Lord.



Panama—Pastor Uriel Gonzalez of the Chame FWB Church baptized five people Sunday, September 19.

Bulgaria—FWB Bulgarians gathered for their annual church conference the first weekend in September. About 130 people from five works across Bulgaria participated, heard messages, and enjoyed fellowship. Four people were baptized. Jonathan Postlewaite requested, “Pray God will work in the lives of the non-Christians who attended and the truths they heard will lead them to saving faith in Jesus Christ.”



Côte d’Ivoire—*Témoins de Christ* (Christ’s Witnesses), a Free Will Baptist evangelistic group, held an outreach September 24-25, 2021, in Maféré, Côte d’Ivoire. Pastor Pokiné Kambou preached, and team members provided music. Several salvation decisions resulted from the well-attended events. Additionally, a few people demonstrated evidence of demon possession, disrupting services as they threw themselves on the ground in contortions. Team members prayed for their deliverance.



Panama—Pastor Efrain González baptized four people from the Camino de Santidad FWB Church in Las

Tablas, Panama, Saturday, July 17. Friday, August 20, he baptized a couple from the Parita FWB Church.

Côte d’Ivoire—The church in Doropo is growing. Even though they built and added benches, they still do not have enough room. Plans are underway to start a second church in the town.



Brazil—The couple working as missionaries in the isolated village of Boa Esperança,

Alagoas, Brazil, continue to see fruit for their labor. Pastor Leandro reported the salvation of a young man, Juarez, on Sunday, September 19. In addition, children’s church attendance has increased as has those preparing for baptism through Bible studies.



Panama—Saturday, September 25, the Panamanian FWB association ordained Helilín Hernandez as a pastor.

Helilín and his wife began witnessing in a settlement near Las Tablas called Las Palmitas. Several have been saved and a church plant is growing.

Brazil—Pastor Paulo César baptized five people at the Nova América FWB Church in Campinas, Brazil, July 18.





France—On September 12, congregants of the St. Nazaire FWB Church gathered at the ocean to witness the baptism of four people, including missionary

kids Madeleine and Emilie Price. Prior to the baptismal service, during the worship service, the candidates recounted how they came to faith in Jesus Christ.



Kenya—On August 27, Eddy and Amanda Simmons recounted how a woman and boy walked five hours for medical help at their clinic. Francis, one of the Samburu evangelists,

led the woman to the Lord while she waited. She left the clinic for a five-mile trek home after receiving medical help, the joy of the Lord in her heart, and a solar player containing large portions of Scripture.

Ivory Coast Holds Open-Air Convention

Bouna, Côte d'Ivoire—Free Will Baptists from around Côte d'Ivoire gathered in Bouna for their annual convention August 16-20, 2021. Holding many events outside to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the four-day meeting included preaching, business, and fellowship.

Friday, August 20, attendees celebrated Bible institute graduates and pastoral ordinations. During an open-air ceremony, three men received diplomas as graduates of the Bible institute. These men mastered three years of class-work plus a one-year internship.

Attendees also witnessed the ordination of two pastors: Ollo Palé and Timothée Sib. Both men currently serve

churches. Ollo Palé leads several churches in the area around Piebly and Timothée Sib leads the congregation in Ondefidou, near Bouna.

Pastor Silas Noufé was reelected to a four-year term as president of the association. **ONE**

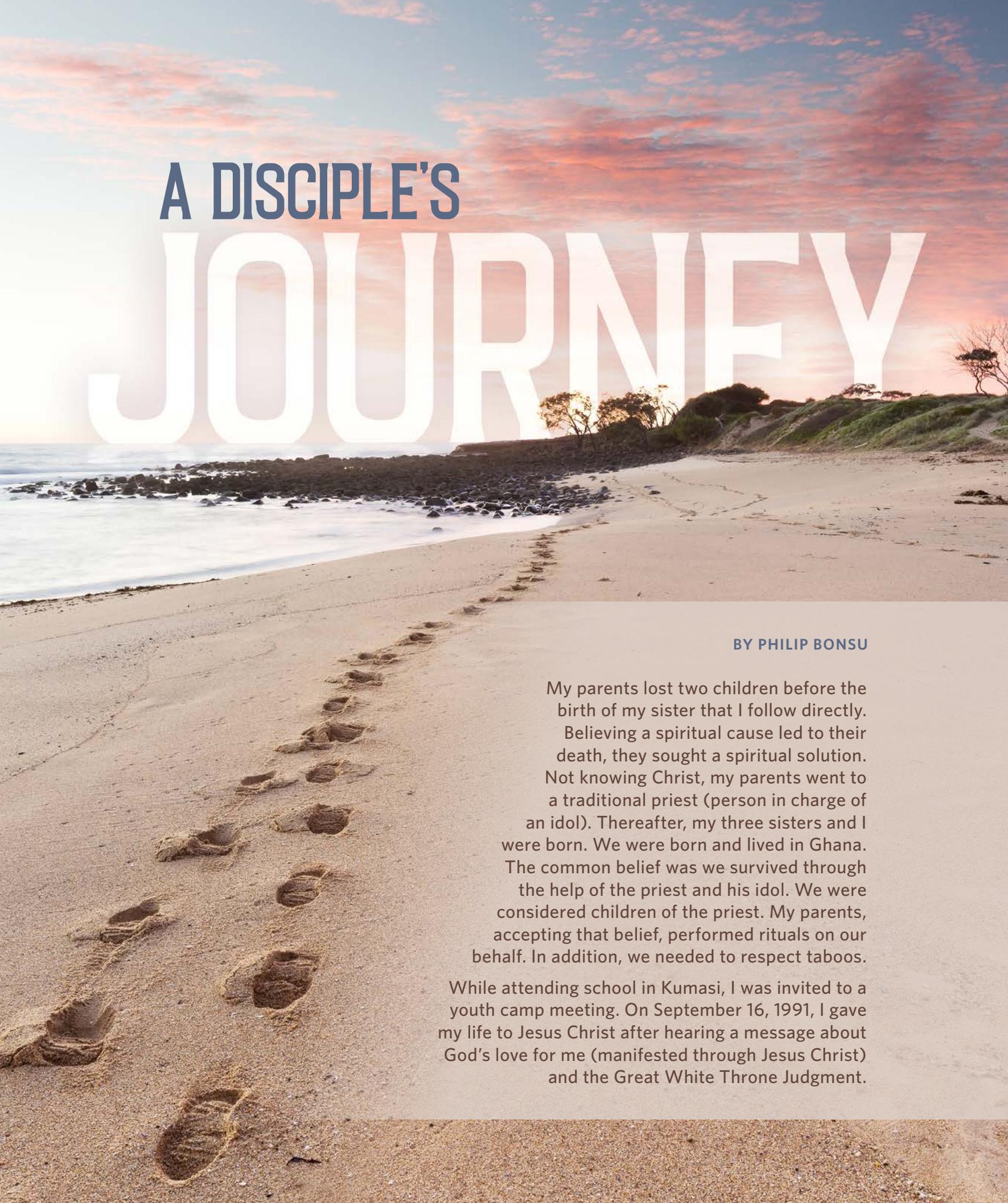


JPense Resumes

Nantes, France—Joel and Lydie Teague and their team relaunched JPense October 2, 2021. COVID-19 restrictions prevented any events in 2020.

Set up during heavy rain neither dampened the excitement nor deterred 126 people from attending. The team welcomed many non-believers who expressed positive feedback. Several said the event touched them. Others said it gave them answers to their biggest doubts about the existence of God. Some even said they were now sure God is real. **ONE**



A scenic photograph of a beach at sunset. The sky is filled with soft, colorful clouds in shades of orange, pink, and blue. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm glow over the scene. In the foreground, a series of footprints are visible in the sand, leading from the bottom left towards the right side of the frame. The beach curves along the water's edge, with some rocks visible in the distance. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

A DISCIPLE'S JOURNEY

BY PHILIP BONSU

My parents lost two children before the birth of my sister that I follow directly.

Believing a spiritual cause led to their death, they sought a spiritual solution. Not knowing Christ, my parents went to a traditional priest (person in charge of an idol). Thereafter, my three sisters and I were born. We were born and lived in Ghana. The common belief was we survived through the help of the priest and his idol. We were considered children of the priest. My parents, accepting that belief, performed rituals on our behalf. In addition, we needed to respect taboos.

While attending school in Kumasi, I was invited to a youth camp meeting. On September 16, 1991, I gave my life to Jesus Christ after hearing a message about God's love for me (manifested through Jesus Christ) and the Great White Throne Judgment.

After camp meeting, I returned to boarding school. My faith in the Lord grew so strong I told my mother I no longer belonged to the idol but to the Lord Jesus Christ. After praying seriously and specifically about our relationship with the idol, I asked my mother to go and dump the ritual pot in a pit in our village. She did. Soon after, I started breaking the taboos and prayed for my sisters, encouraging them to do the same. Praise the Lord, from that time till now, nothing, absolutely nothing, has happened to any of us.

In 1999, I moved to France, where I met Matthew Price and worshiped with the Free Will Baptist church in Nantes. In 2001, the Lord used Clint Morgan to convince me to come to Ivory Coast to be trained as a pastor. After a period of hesitation, I decided to obey God. Not long after I began my second year at the Bible institute, civil war broke out. I moved to Abidjan, began seminary in 2004, and graduated with a master's degree in theology.

After graduation, I moved to northern Ghana to plant churches. A village called Sighn had no church. I began walking through the village praying in my heart and greeting people. I performed wound care, especially with the children, and offered to pray for people who wanted me to pray for them. This opened the door for me to interact with people. By God's grace, Muslim friends offered me a meeting place where everybody could come and listen to the gospel.

Soon after we began the church, I decided to host a Bible study on Saturday mornings with the young men who had accepted Christ. Some have since become leaders and preachers of the church in Sighn. Also, two of my translators became pastors. Moses Akura was convinced of God's calling on his life while still my main translator. During his Bible school training, he stayed in our house when on vacation. He became a good friend and comes to Ivory Coast to visit us. Moses has been a pastor in the northern part of Ghana for some years. It is always a great joy to hear what God is doing through the work that started with us.

I returned to Bouna, Ivory Coast, in July 2012, to help train pastors at the Free Will Baptist Bible Institute. I have helped train three groups of students. Some students became friends, and I shared my experience with them.

One, Hein Germain, often seeks counseling when he needs to make important decisions. I am proud of him, and I am grateful to God for the number of churches he has planted during his few years of ministry.

While praying one morning in 2014, the Lord laid it on my heart to go to the prison in Bouna. I went with my wife and a group of people from the Bouna church. Through this ministry, we started a fellowship with the inmates. In addition to the gospel, we provided food, clothing, and met other physical needs. Sometimes, I also did wound care. A group of inmates soon gave their lives to Christ. With permission of the prison authorities, we baptized 15 of them.

Through this prison ministry, I disciplined a young man named Kambou Sebmaté. Today, he is one of the leaders of the Bouna church and president of the local youth.

Temple Schilo, the second Free Will Baptist church in Bouna, was planted by Pastor Noufe Sié, the president of the Free Will Baptist association in Ivory Coast. Seeing he needed help, I chose two young men (Martin and David) with leadership potential and spent two hours with them on Saturdays. Martin is training as an electrician while serving the Lord as one of the preachers at Temple Schilo. Also, he and David jointly take care of our church in Nakirdou (a village just over four miles from Bouna).

This is how the Lord has led me so far. He continues to lead me toward another conviction He gave before I left Nantes in 2001. I will soon work with the Connect Church in Arkansas. I share a common vision with the Connect Church—making disciples. I look forward to working with them to reach people of various ethnic backgrounds with the gospel and to help make disciples of these nations for the Kingdom. **ONE**



About the Author: Born in Ghana, Philip Bonsu Kwame Osei has followed Christ to France, Ivory Coast, and soon, the United States. Currently a teacher and assistant director of the Free Will Baptist Institute in Bouna, he is married to Claudine and has a son and daughter (Blessing and Lissa).



A Good Name **PERSONIFIED**

BY KEN RIGGS

As an ordained minister, I have been asked to conduct numerous funerals. My typical answer is “I would be honored to do so, but I hope it is not anytime soon.”

Such was the case when my Uncle Lehman wrote and asked me to preach his funeral. The letter is dated April 2, 2018, and he was 98 years old at the time. Uncle Lehman and my father Raymond were two of four boys and seven girls born to Reverend and Mrs. C.E. Riggs. I told Uncle Lehman I wasn’t going to wait for his funeral but would go ahead and tell him what I had to say.

I reminded him my father used to say, “If you want to give me flowers, do it while I can smell them.” I told Uncle Lehman I wanted to “give him some flowers so he could smell them now.” Those flowers used each letter of his name to share a characteristic I observed in him. I told him I planned to use Proverbs 22:1 as my text because, in my opinion, he personified what Solomon said about a good name.

Uncle Lehman responded in a letter August 23, 2018. As I suspected, he thought my words were too kind, but he thanked me for them. And, now, please allow me to share with you those “letters” that characterized his life:

L LOVE and LILA: Love for his country, love for his family, and love for His God. Lila was his first wife. As a boy, I never saw one without the other.

We called them Uncle Lehman and Aunt Lila, and they were married 60 years. They had no children of their own, so they decided all the children of his ten brothers and sisters would become theirs. Lila was a unique person, a mixture of Tammy Faye Baker and Dolly Parton rolled into one. I often wondered if they saw her somewhere and modeled their “look” after her.

E ENTHUSIASTIC ENERGY: When my stepmother died several years later, Lehman made the trip with me to attend her funeral. We were the only Riggs to make the trip. It was ten hours from Nashville (and Uncle Lehman also drove 90 minutes from Cookeville to Nashville). We made the trip to Monet, Missouri, spent the night in a hotel, attended the funeral the next day, and then drove nine hours back to Nashville.

Uncle Lehman spent the night before returning to Cookeville the next morning. I asked him to call me when he arrived home, so I would know he made it safely. I didn’t hear from him for quite some time and finally called to check on him. I soon learned he had stopped to visit with a sister in a nursing home in Nashville. I’m not sure of Uncle Lehman’s age at the time, but he sure covered a lot of ground in a four-day period for a man his age.

H HUMBLE, HONEST, HOLY...HERO: Humble about what I was planning to say at his funeral; humble when his army buddy was killed in action, and he wondered why God had spared his own life; honest in his Christian faith, and holy in his character and demeanor. During his funeral, one of his nephews described him as a hero, which I added when it the time came for me to speak.

M MODEST, MANNERLY, MALIGNED without retaliation: Modest in appearance and language; mannerly in behavior; maligned without seeking revenge when other Christians disagreed with him.

A ARMY...and a little ARGUMENTIVE: Uncle Lehman served courageously as a soldier in World War II. He served with distinction and honor and was awarded for valor on a variety of occasions. After his first wife died, he moved to Cookeville, Tennessee, joined the Cookeville Honor Guard. He attended 1,046 funerals for fellow veterans. The words “a little argumentative” aren’t intended in a mean way. When Uncle Lehman was 98, plans were made for a special birthday party when he reached 100.

I mentioned the plans to him, and he asked, “What if I don’t live that long?”

I responded that at least we would feel better knowing we tried to do it.

Uncle Lehman promptly said, “Well, let me help pay for it.”

I told him, “Uncle Lehman, you don’t give someone a birthday party and ask him to help pay for it.”

I’m thankful he did make it to age 100, and we did give him a party. During the party, I learned something about him I didn’t know. He was a fan of Dolly Parton. I called the local fan club, and they assisted me in getting a very nice black and white picture of Dolly with Lehman’s name on it. I wondered if the picture reminded him of Lila, but I didn’t dare ask him.

N The Letter N: When I wrote Uncle Lehman about what I wanted to say at his funeral, I told him I didn’t know what to say about the letter “N.” When the time came, I assured him, I would know what to say.

I also told Uncle Lehman I wanted to share his love for gospel music. I did that by having the audience sing just a few lines from each of the following songs:

“I will meet you in the morning by the bright river side, when all sorrows have drifted away.”

“What a day that will be when my Jesus I shall see, and I look upon His face, the One who saved me by His grace.”

“There will be a happy meeting in Heaven I know, when we see the many loved ones we’ve known here below,” because “When we all get to Heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be, when we all see Jesus, we’ll sing and shout the victory.”

“Until then, my heart will go on singing. Until then, with joy I’ll carry on, until the day my eyes behold that city, until the day God calls me home.”

At his funeral, I read parts of the letters dated April 2, 2018, and April 23, 2018. I told listeners I was glad Uncle Lehman took me at my word and did not have me speak “anytime soon.” He lived three years after he asked me to preach the funeral. When Uncle Lehman died, I still hadn’t come up with anything to say about the letter “N.” It was there, staring at me the whole time I was preparing, and it finally hit me. The letter “N” stood for his NAME. That’s what Solomon said in Proverbs 22:1. Your *name* identifies you. When people hear your name, they get an image in their mind about you. Your name is either good or bad to them. Your name represents everything you are. Your name proved those who maligned you were wrong. I told the audience if I could say anything else to Uncle Lehman, I would give my regards to all the members of

the Riggs clan in Heaven with him. I would thank him for just being who he was. I also found three other words that, to me, describe him best. Those words are *soldier*, *student*, and *servant*. He was a soldier for the U.S. Army and the cause of Christ; he was a student of the Word of God. He was not a preacher, but he knew his Bible well and loved to teach it. He was a servant, evident by the many funerals he attended with the Honor Guard.

I ended my message by saying, “Uncle Lehman, you asked me to speak at your funeral, but in reality you preached your own funeral through your life of goodness, grace, and godliness. You did the preaching. I merely read the manuscript.” 

About the Author: Dr. Ken Riggs received his B.A. degree from Welch College, his M.S. from Old Dominion University, his M.Ed. from Middle Tennessee State University and his Ph.D. from George Peabody College. Contact Ken at kennethriggs2001@hotmail.com



Legacy of Integrity

Over five decades, theologian and professor F. Leroy Forlines dedicated his life to gaining and sharing a deeper understanding of biblical knowledge. Described by Welch College President Matt Pinson as “the greatest Free Will Baptist systematic theologian,” Forlines clarified and fleshed out the details of Reformed-Arminian thought stemming from Jacobus Arminius, Thomas Helwys, Thomas Grantham, and others. **Forlines also fought the rising tide of theological liberalism and post-modernism**, leading the Commission for Theological Integrity to identify and confront imminent threats to the Free Will Baptist faith. More than a theologian, Forlines was a man of deeply-held convictions, high moral integrity, and compassion for those around him. Today, his legacy endures in the lives and ministries of thousands he taught and mentored.

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Planning and Collaborating

BY RON HUNTER JR., PH.D.

Ben Franklin warned, "If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail." John Buckley softened those words with, "Nobody plans to fail; they just fail to plan."

Prophetic warnings apply to so many areas: retirement, parenting, trips, projects, lessons, and sermons. Imagine going on a long trip. The distance determines how accurate you need to be with packing. If traveling to the next town, forgetting something has fewer consequences than for a cross-country or international trip. As a leader, your ability to plan adds credibility to your vision casting.

The difference between leaders and dreamers is the capacity to plan and execute big goals.

To keep you from being a dreamer no one takes seriously, consider the benefits, methods, and timelines for planning. Planners make sure not to overlook items that could sabotage the success of a project. Effective planners include diverse minds to increase the breadth of ideas, buy-in, and quality. Also, more minds evaluate risk more

effectively. Collaboration ensures greater adoption rates. In contrast, authoritarian plans devalue the people around you, most of whom will soon lose passion. Collaborative planning offers the most effective means of vision casting.

Numerous methods aid in collaborative planning: meetings, polling, and surveys. Create a platform that solicits other people's ideas, thoughts, and expertise. Don't just involve others and hope to gain agreement. Followers would rather you simply dictate orders rather than waste their time making suggestions when they know you will not change your plans. However, without follower buy-in, you may need to ask if you are leading or dictating. Adding input from other people takes more time in the planning process,



and, when leaders skip that step, the adoption rate is lower.

What trips up most leaders, other than authoritarian style, is not planning far enough ahead. The ratio rule of thumb is 4 to 1: 80% preparation and 20% execution. The military teaches the backward planning model. Envision what a successful outcome looks like and work backward from implementation day to the present. How long should lead times or backward plans take? Size, moving parts, duration, and people determine how far out planning should begin. State-wide projects or events take longer to plan than a local church activity, and a national initiative takes even longer. More churches or organizations included or attending requires more lead time. Many great ideas fail because planning is done too close to an event.

Pursuing God's plans usually involves others. Don't pretend to be the only gifted one in the group. Listen. The Bible often speaks of counsel; we should never forget the importance of listening, collaborating, and then planning effectively. **ONE**



BIBLE VERSES

Proverbs 15:22

Proverbs 24:27

Proverbs 21:5

Proverbs 16:3, 9

Psalms 90:12

Luke 14:28-30

LEADERSHIP QUOTE

"Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success."

—Henry Ford

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



Faith *and* Reason: *A* Wholistic Approach

BATTLING THE DECONSTRUCTION OF BELIEF

BY IAN HAWKINS

Recently, I have heard too many stories of Christians “deconstructing” their faith. Deconstruction can be a frightening experience and lead one to lose his or her belief system altogether or alter it in some significant way. I experienced a deconstruction of my faith during graduate school and endured a crisis of faith, mostly due to issues surrounding the Bible’s veracity. Thankfully, I did not lose my faith in Christ.

Why are so many following this treacherous path and leaving Christianity behind? It seems we have entered the period J. Gresham Machen (famous Princeton theologian at the turn on the 20th century) described when he said, “We permit the whole collective thought of a nation...to be controlled by ideas which...prevent Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion.”¹

How can the church respond to this? How can we protect our members from this slippery slope?

Faith Versus Reason

One of the primary factors causing this anxiety and leading to faith deconstruction is the cultural belief faith and reason are incompatible. More generally, our knowledge

¹ Originally Called “The Scientific Preparation of the Minister.” Accessed: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/machen-false-ideas-as-obstacles-to>

and understanding of the world is compartmentalized. This idea that faith and reason are incompatible is a product of western thinking, leading many (especially in the sciences) to claim reason is the only way to truth.

Proponents claim on false history that science (reason) and religion (faith) are at war with each other, and the church has been instrumental in stopping science. The dichotomy between the two has led modern man to display a split personality. For example, we claim all men have inalienable rights. This claim is built on the understanding a Creator has given us these rights, yet many deny a Creator.

This leads to hypocrisy of thought. We agree humans have rights, freedom, and purpose. Yet many scientists believe we simply evolved, and our survival as a species is contingent on a struggle with nature and one another.

Scripture does not speak of this dichotomy, although it warns us of the dangers of misplaced faith and faulty human reasoning. For instance, on Mount Carmel Elijah used an experimental test (reason) for faith in the true God for the Israelites, and yet Paul warns us in 1 Corinthians God’s ways look foolish to human reasoning. So, how do we help Christians avoid compartmentalized lives that result in a dichotomous perspective and perhaps the loss of their faith?



Wholistic Discipleship and Sacrificial Community

First, I believe the answer is found in wholistic discipleship. We must disciple Christians to create a robust, wholistic, non-dichotomous faith, and to be able to give reasons behind their faith. This whole-life approach is the approach both Francis Schaeffer and our own Leroy Forlines expressed in their apologetics. Both Schaeffer and Forlines realized the importance of shaping all of life with the gospel.

The best way to defend the faith is by demonstrating the effectiveness of the Christian worldview in all of life. We must help our congregants build their lives on Christ in every area. If Christ is only one part of their foundation, when struggles and doubts come—and they will—it will be easy for them to replace that single Christian pillar with something else. Wholistic discipleship is what we need. Christ should fill Monday through Saturday as well as Sunday—our jobs, our leisure, our dreams, our responsibilities, our families, and our communities.

Second, living out the gospel in a sacrificial community is crucial. Joel Furches and Joan Harmon recently shared their research on conversions of both atheists and Christians.² Both types of people, those who converted to Christianity or de-converted to atheism, began the process

² <https://www.premierchristianradio.com/Shows/Saturday/Unbelievable/Episodes/Unbelievable-Conversion-and-de-conversion-Why-atheists-become-Christians-and-Christians-become-atheists.-Jana-Harmon-and-Joel-Furches>

when they felt their community was not honest with them.

For Christians, this could occur when they first hear about “evidence” for evolution, or they find apparent inconsistencies in the Bible, or they realize biblical manuscripts may differ slightly in some areas—any area where they feel they have been misinformed. This was also true of the atheist conversions to Christianity.

It is important for us to realize when people ask questions, we don't have to have the perfect answer for them. But we must be willing to give of our time and energy sacrificially, walking alongside them as we search for answers together. When they realize their questions have been around for hundreds of years, and sometimes almost two millennium, and good answers are available, they are assured the Christian faith has not duped them.

During my own deconstruction process, this was vitally important. Many people spent time with me. They did not always have satisfying answers, but they were willing to help and were willing to sit with me and wrestle with these questions. Not only did my community demonstrate sacrificial living by walking with me through my struggles, but they also highlighted the contrast between the Christian worldview and other worldviews in the way they lived.

Many who leave the faith do so because the community of believers has hurt them in some way by living in non-Christlike ways. Developing and promoting a wholistic disciple-making strategy in your church and creating a self-sacrificing community modeled after Christ will go a long way toward helping those whose faith is unraveling.

ONE

About the Author: Dr. Ian Hawkins is chairman of the Department of Arts and Sciences and Biology program coordinator at Welch College: www.Welch.edu.

World Class Masters



INTRODUCING THE MASTER OF ARTS IN THEOLOGY AND MINISTRY AT WELCH COLLEGE

BY JESSE OWENS

While conversing with a fellow student in the hallway at a Southern Baptist seminary, we began to discuss our various theological interests, but the conversation eventually turned to what church my wife and I attended in the Nashville area. Thinking he expected we attended a Southern Baptist church, maybe one that he'd be familiar with, I told him we attended a Free Will Baptist church. He replied—and I don't think he meant anything by it: "So, why are you here?"

What he likely meant was *Why would a Free Will Baptist Arminian attend a Southern Baptist school known for its Calvinism?* While I think the question was a bit misguided in the first place, the answer was simple. Though I had no interest in becoming a Calvinist, I wanted to prepare for

a life of ministry, and at that time, Free Will Baptists did not offer an accredited master's program in theology and ministry. Thankfully, that has changed.

Since 2016, Welch College has offered a world-class Master of Arts in Theology and Ministry. The aim of this program is to further prepare Free Will Baptists to serve their churches and engage their communities with the hope of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We live in an increasingly complex and confused society that struggles to make sense of issues we once took for granted, issues such as sexuality and gender. At Welch College, we believe the answer for our society and the need of the world is still the Good News. But we also recognize the need to think deeply and prepare rigorously for ministry and cultural engagement in the twenty-first century.

Previously, the Master of Arts in Theology and Ministry at Welch College permitted students to study from home, traveling to the Welch campus in Gallatin for one-week intensives while completing most of the coursework online.

However, this year, we have taken the program entirely online. Rather than delivering the lectures during a one-week intensive on campus, lectures occur weekly via interactive video. We believe this achieves the same goal: allowing students to remain in their work or ministry context while simultaneously furthering their education. The advantage of the new format is that students interact more regularly with professors and fellow students. This additional interaction allows them to ask more questions along the way, which will only strengthen the learning experience.

It would be difficult to overestimate the significance of an accredited Master of Arts in Theology and Ministry for

Free Will Baptists. Our program is steeped in Free Will Baptist history and theology, rooted in the Reformed Arminian tradition, and geared towards equipping men and women to answer life's biggest questions with the truths of Scripture.

We have already seen incredible fruit from this program in the lives and ministries of our recent graduates. Within the last few months, enrollment has more than doubled. We firmly believe our best days are ahead as we prepare students to face challenging times with the hope of Jesus Christ. **ONE**

About the Author: Jesse F. Owens, his wife Tiffany, and their sons Gavin and Carter live in Gallatin, Tennessee, where Jesse serves as pastor of Immanuel Church and adjunct faculty member at Welch College. Jesse holds a Ph.D. in historical theology from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Read more from Jesse: www.TheHSF.com.



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Welch College Ranks Eighth among Best Regional Colleges—South by *U.S. News & World Report*

Welch College was recently ranked eighth among “Best Regional Colleges—South” in *U.S. News & World Report’s* 2022 edition of *America’s Best Colleges*, according to President Matt Pinson. This also included a ranking of #1 for “Top Performers on Social Mobility” in the Regional Colleges—South category, which comprises 92 other colleges and universities in the South.

“We’re so pleased Welch is moving up in the rankings,” President Pinson said. “We’d hoped to get into the top ten in our category in the next five to seven years. So, this is welcome news. This respected national study confirms the college’s academic programs are recognized not only by our supporters but also by the broader academic community. It’s also another reminder to prospective students and their parents Welch College remains a top-quality institution of higher learning that delivers its educational promise.”

“We’re delighted that, for the first time, we were ranked #1 in ‘Top Performers on Social Mobility’ for our category,” Pinson continued. “This ranking measures how well colleges and universities do at graduating students from economically-disadvantaged backgrounds. We are especially thankful for this distinction.”

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 50 graduate degrees annually.

Provost Matthew McAfee said, “To be among the top ten institutions in our category is remarkable. This accomplishment is a testimony to the hard work of our faculty and staff over the years and its cumulative effect on our institutional success. Our rise to eighth place indicates measurable success. It demonstrates to our constituents Welch College is increasingly being recognized by the broader educational community as a quality institution of higher learning.”

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 of them go on to graduate, student-faculty ratio, faculty quality, financial resources, alumni giving, and more.

“To put our ranking in perspective,” Pinson said, “the other institutions in the top ten in our category have an average enrollment of 1,952—five times higher than Welch’s—and an average endowment of \$77 million—17 times higher than Welch’s.”

U.S. News ranked the top ten institutions in the Regional Colleges—South category as follows:

- High Point University (NC)
- Ouachita Baptist University (AR)
- Florida Polytechnic University
- Flagler College (FL)
- (tie) Maryville College (TN) and University of the Ozarks (AR)
- Claffin University (SC)
- (tie) Catawba College (NC) and **Welch College** (TN)
- LaGrange College (GA)

Welch received especially high marks in several strategic areas, ranking as follows:

- 1st in student-faculty ratio
- 1st in classes under 50 students (tied)
- 3rd in graduation rate
- 5th in classes under 20 students
- 8th in freshman-to-sophomore retention
- 8th in alumni giving

For more information about the rankings, visit www.usnews.com/best-colleges/rankings/regional-colleges-south. For more information about Welch, visit www.welch.edu. 

Welch Master of Divinity (M.Div.) Degree Program Approved by Accreditor

Earlier this summer, Welch College President Matt Pinson received official M.Div. implementation notification from Dr. Kevin Sightler, director of substantive change for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. The letter stated the accreditor had “reviewed the materials seeking approval of the Master of Divinity (M.Div.) degree program” and had voted “to approve the program and include it in the scope of the current accreditation.”

Pinson said, “The offering of an M.Div., the first offered by a Free Will Baptist institution, and the establishment of a divinity school attached to Welch College, is a dream come true for us. Free Will Baptists will no longer have to go outside our denomination for their M.Div. We have hoped and dreamed for an M.Div. program for many years.”

Partial funding for the conception and implementation of the program was provided by a generous grant of almost \$500,000 from the Kern Family Foundation.

Welch College began offering the M.Div. this semester. The program will be offered in an accelerated B.A. to M.Div. five-year program. A high school graduate with at least 15 dual enrollment college credits can complete both a B.A. and an M.Div. degree in five years. The M.Div. will also be available to students who already have a bachelor’s degree.

Provost Matthew McAfee noted, “With this new program, it’s possible for students to begin at Welch and complete a B.A. and a regionally accredited M.Div. in five years—something that normally takes seven. But people who already have a bachelor’s degree, even if it’s not in a theological field, are eligible to study for and complete this M.Div. We’ve been hearing from more and more people in our denomination who feel the need for further ministry education in our increasingly secular society.”

The M.Div. degree is composed of 85 credit-hours and makes use of 25 hours of existing undergraduate ministry courses augmented to the graduate level. It will be a full



on-campus program in a traditional format. The M.A. degree in Theology and Ministry will now be able to be earned on-campus or completely online.

Now that accreditor approval has been received, Welch College is currently processing admissions and enrolling students in the M.Div. program. Applications are being accepted for the next course for both the M.Div. and M.A., which began in October.

For more information about the Master of Divinity program in either its accelerated B.A.-M.Div. or traditional framework, or the M.A., contact the director of administration for Welch Divinity School, Dr. Martin Sheldon at msheldon@welch.edu. **ONE**

**SACSCOC is the primary accrediting body for colleges and universities in the Southeast. It provides the highest level of accreditation that an educational institution can receive. Welch College has been accredited by SACSCOC since 1994. To gain or maintain accreditation with the Commission on Colleges, an institution must comply with the standards contained in the Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement and with the policies and procedures of the Commission on Colleges. The Commission on Colleges applies the requirements of its principles to all applicant, candidate, and member institutions, regardless of type of institution (public, private for-profit, private not-for-profit).*

The Unique Story

BY BARRY RAPER

MATTHEW 1:18-25



Creative gender reveal celebrations are trending in the United States: confetti canons, exploding soccer balls, pink and blue smoke bombs, exploding golf balls, and on and on. If this custom continues, I'm sure the creativity will grow as well. Yet, during the Christmas season, we celebrate a baby announcement that included not only a gender reveal but also the purpose of His life. There will never be a more interesting and important "reveal" than the dream Joseph experienced.

In the first chapter of his gospel, Matthew did not record every detail of Jesus' birth, but his quick account reveals the most unique story in human history. *Unique* means one of a kind, unlike anything else. In these verses, several unique elements converge to form a unique story with a unique problem, person, and purpose.

A Unique Problem

Joseph and Mary's situation was certainly problematic from a human vantage point. First, there was a **social problem**. Mary was *pledged* to Joseph. This meant more than simple engagement. In ancient Jewish culture, marriages were typically arranged. The husband's father paid the bride's father an agreed-upon amount, since her father would lose a worker in his home.

The pledged marriage was seen as binding. Generally, the couple would not live together until the full marriage ceremony took place, but any unfaithfulness was considered adultery. Herein lies the problem. Matthew's text emphasizes Joseph and Mary had not yet come together when her pregnancy became evident. The logical conclusion, both for Joseph and others, was unfaithfulness on Mary's part. To Joseph's credit, he wanted to "put her away" or divorce Mary privately, to avoid putting her through public shame.

Then, there is a **biological problem**. Mary, a virgin, was pregnant. This is mentioned twice in the opening verses and again later by Mary herself. Her question is poignant:

"How can this be, since I am a virgin?"

This is the million-dollar question, isn't it? The question you would be asking as well. This doesn't seem to be a question of unbelief, simply a question of "How?" When she said she "hadn't yet known a man," Mary made it clear she had not entered a sexual relationship with a man. Evidently, she and Joseph took their engagement seriously and had standards for purity. Even at her young age—many scholars believe 15—Mary understood basic biology.

How can this be since I am a virgin? God created this world with normal processes—natural absolutes. The law of gravity, for example. If you jump off a building, you are not going to float. Or the way God designed our bodies for eating and digestion (something we often test this time of year). We could go on and on. But God also can override these natural laws and processes. When He does, we call it a miracle. And a miracle is what we find in the virgin birth.

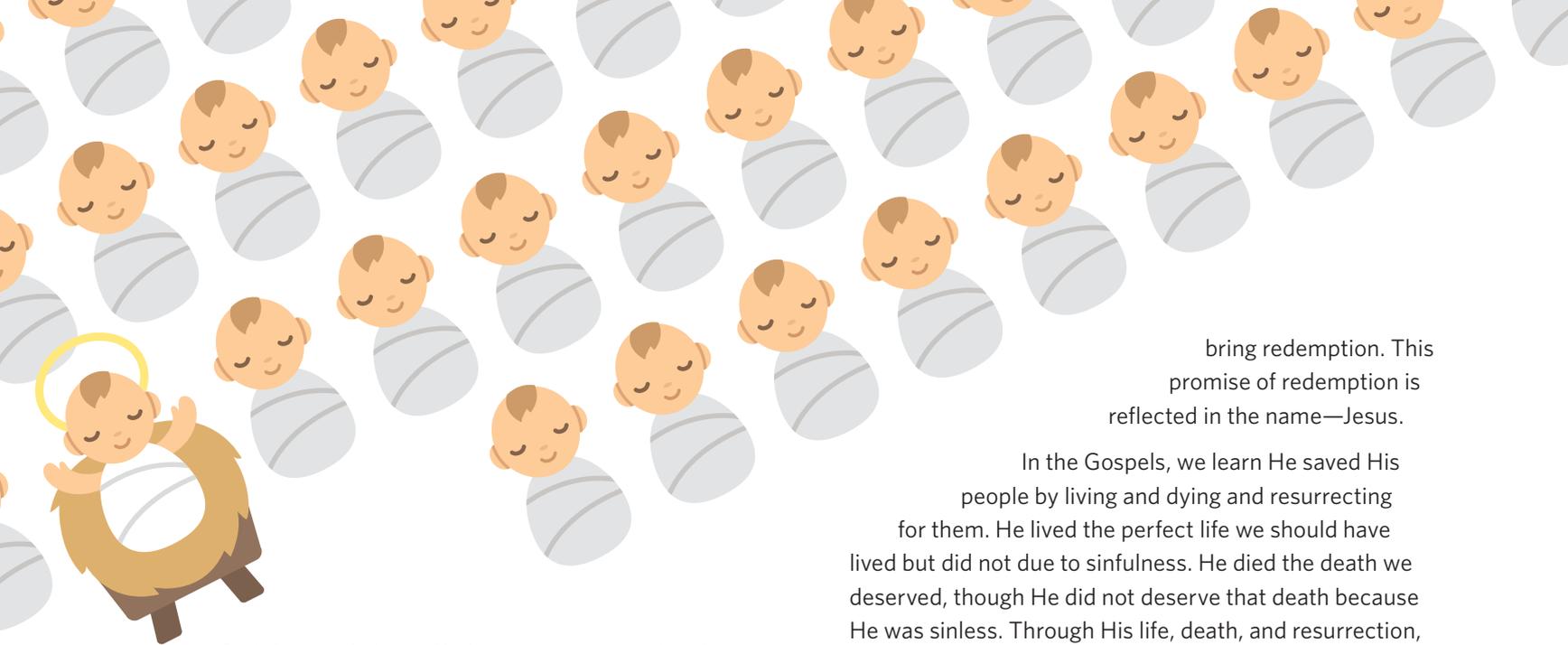
A Unique Person

Matthew's account also reveals a unique person: Jesus, the eternal Son of God who has assumed humanity. The theological term is *incarnation*, and we find it emphasized several times:

- *Found with child of the Holy Ghost* (verse 18)
- *That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit* (verse 20)
- *They shall call his name Emmanuel* (literally, God with us; verse 23).

Of course, this doctrine is found throughout Scripture. Perhaps the most familiar passage is John 1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This eternal Word, Jesus, was "made flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).

Or, recall the words of Philippians 2:6-8: "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with



God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

In these verses, the full deity of Christ is revealed: eternal, omnipotent, all-knowing, self-sustaining, Creator, holy, loving, righteous, saving. Yet scriptural accounts also clearly demonstrate the full humanity of Christ. He attended synagogue worship. He worked with His hands. He ate and drank. He cried. He displayed righteous anger. He rested and slept when tired. He cared deeply for the spiritual and physical needs of others. He sang, prayed, preached, and thought. He was fully human, fully God, two natures in one person. One unique person.

A Unique Purpose: Salvation

“Thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21b). Mary and Joseph didn’t need to consult a book of baby names. They didn’t have to debate about which name would sound best. They didn’t need to look back through their family records for a name with rich meaning. No, the name was given by God Himself. Jesus, because He would *save His people from their sins*.

Jesus was a direct descendent of David. This tie is important because centuries earlier, God had promised King David a descendant would sit on Israel’s throne forever. Mary’s boy was not just any son. He was the One predicted for centuries. The son first predicted all the way back in Genesis 3:15, when God promised Adam and Eve the “seed of woman” would crush the serpent’s head and

bring redemption. This promise of redemption is reflected in the name—Jesus.

In the Gospels, we learn He saved His people by living and dying and resurrecting for them. He lived the perfect life we should have lived but did not due to sinfulness. He died the death we deserved, though He did not deserve that death because He was sinless. Through His life, death, and resurrection, He saved His people from their greatest problem—sin. He saved them from sin’s destructive power and penalty. And, one day, He will eternally deliver them from even the presence of sin.

As a young boy, I enjoyed duck hunting with my dad. One day, while hunting with a good-sized group of people, our Labrador Retriever fell through a hole in the ice while retrieving a duck. We tried many things to get her out, but nothing worked. Her struggles slowly weakened, and it seemed death was imminent. But my dad began breaking the ice and wading into the water himself, rope in hand. Despite the risk, he was able to reach her with the rope and pull her to safety.

Looking back, every person there wanted the dog saved, but only one person cared enough to enter the dangerous water for the rescue. In a much deeper and more profound way, humanity was sinking in sin with no hope of rescue. Jesus left Heaven and stepped into the waters of death on our behalf.

As you celebrate Christmas this year, ask yourself if you have allowed Him to save you. The message of the Bible, the message of Christmas, isn’t one of reformation but salvation. It doesn’t matter what your sins are, Jesus is willing and able to save when you respond with genuine repentance and faith. That is the greatest Christmas gift of all.

“Born that man no more may die, born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth. Hark! The herald angels sing, ‘Glory to the newborn King!’” 

About the Columnist: Dr. Barry Raper pastors Bethel FWB Church near Ashland City, TN. He is associate dean of Welch Divinity School.



Speaking of the Practical

BY BILL AND BRENDA EVANS

Talk to Matthew Steven Bracey 15 minutes, and he will raise the word *practical* at least once. Rattle on with him for three hours or more as we did recently, and *practical* may turn up a dozen times. That's not surprising from the 35-year-old who asked so many questions at age 14 that his youth group took matters into their own hands. As Matt tells it, "I was asking a thousand questions—being so annoying that some people in my youth group bound me to a tree with duct tape, feet off the ground and mouth taped shut. According to a personality test I took much later, I'm an introvert."

Go figure that.

But it's good Matt didn't stop asking questions. His questioning, then as now, has spurred him to more serious inquiry, especially in ethics, history, law, and theology. In fact, the topic for his ongoing Ph.D. dissertation considers aspects of practical theology from the writings of Edmund Burke.

For Matt, the practical is about a Christian's *lived* life—ordinary actions rooted in sound reason, logic, ethics, theology. Practical living that does not hide behind abstractions. *Ordinary* is another word that shows up often. As a teen, Matt decided to live in "ordinary day-to-day faithfulness." That decision was the first of three unswerving commitments that have shaped the past two decades of his life. Three *applied* decisions, not just ideals or concepts. Steadfast actions in real time and at the right time.

The first decision arose around a bonfire at Cumberland Youth Camp when Matt was 14. "It was a Thursday night. Some were doing testimonials; I was quiet. But there was a sense of conviction going on in me and a question: *What am I doing to get where Eric is?* (Eric Thomsen was his youth leader and Christian model.) It was like an image, a picture to me—ordinary, not mystical. I wanted and

needed to get things right. It was a wrestling with faith, an exercise of the mind. I decided to focus on ordinary faithfulness each day, and I committed myself to that and did it.

"Later, when Eric taught through 1 John, he said, 'Memorize 1 John and I'll take you on a trip.' So, I did. Eric's father, Neal, was a mentor, too. When I turned 16 and Mr. Neal turned 64, I said he was 16 like me because he was born on Leap Day, with a true birthday every four years. I still have a four-inch binder of things he mailed me from Florida where he lived. Ordinary things: reflections on how to be faithful, persevere through trials, use time wisely, and have a clean thought life."

Matt's second practical decision was to attend Welch College after high school. The third was to ask Sarah to be his wife. She said yes, got her Ph.D. in psychology and counseling, and now works at Welch College, as does Matt. "Time has a way of maturing our thoughts," he reflects. "When we make decisions, we don't know how momentous they are until we look back. The Lord has led me through ordinary choices. Now I can see what He's done in my life. All glory to Him—Lord of Light, Lord of Rescue."

After Welch College, Matt continued his education, earning a J.D. (Doctor of Law) and M.T.S. (Master of Theological Studies) from Samford University. He is currently in the dissertation stage of a Ph.D. in Christian Ethics and Public Policy with a minor in philosophy at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

At Welch College, Matt is a professor of ethics, doctrine, foundations of law, and church and culture. He is also the cross-country coach and vice provost. Matt sees connections in the courses he teaches. "The application of ethics rests in doctrine. In the law course, we talk about defining



justice; we go
back to the Bible,
Aristotle, and ferret
out what it means to be just.
We address current buzz words
like *equity*, as we Christians engage in
our culture. We look at the arts, entertain-
ment, economics, politics, our vocations.” And as
cross-country coach, Matt practices what he teaches.
He runs at least 30 miles a week. And, on their rural five
acres, Matt says he’s an “academic agrarian,” planting a
garden and raising animals. Ordinary. Practical.

As vice provost, Matt says, “Lots of plates are spinning,
but I like it. I’m a detail person and very particular.”

Attention to details is requisite for an administrator who
deals with academic affairs such as contracts, who teaches
what and when, adjunct professor interviews, building
curriculum around degree programs, faculty evaluations,
graduation requirements, and accreditation processes.

In addition, Matt is an ordained Free Will Baptist minister
who speaks and writes often. “God’s work in my life has
been through teachers and writers, so it’s no wonder He led
me to teach and write. It’s my duty to write, and I do so
because there is something within me I must get out. It’s
a snapshot of where I am, on that topic, at that moment.
I don’t claim to be the last word on it. I also write to figure
out what I think; it’s a way to work out ideas.”

In 2011, Matt, Jesse Owens, and Jackson Watts founded

the *Helwys
Society Forum* (helwysocietyforum.com)

as an outlet for broader dialog
on social, theological, cultural,
and ministry issues in essays, articles,
interviews, and book reviews. In early 2020,
the *HSF* launched a new arm called *HSF Conversa-
tions*. Matt explains: “In spoken words, rather than essays,
we address current issues, bounce ideas back and forth,
debate, and offer wider perspectives and broader conversa-
tions on various topics.” These videos may be accessed at
helwysocietyforum.com under the tab “conversations”
or at Helwys Society Forum Conversations on YouTube.

Among Matt’s many topics for writing, two stand out:
adoption and death. Matt speaks first-hand about adop-
tion. His father adopted him after marrying Matt’s
mother. “He was my daddy. I always knew I was adopted,

but I was as much his own as his two biological daughters. Some people say, ‘I want my own children.’ Well, adopted kids *are* your own kids. I’ve written about adoption for the *Forum*. It is a pro-life ethic, a theological issue that communicates the image of God as Father, the God of life and human flourishing. A pro-life ethic is not only about abortion. It’s also about fostering, adoption, orphan care.”

At age 69, Matt’s father died of cancer. In a moving article in *ONE Magazine*, Matt wrote about his father’s life and death. When his father asked Matt the best way to legally prepare for his death, Matt recommended the Free Will Baptist estate plan through Free Will Baptist Foundation and partner Cornerstone Estate Planning. The centerpiece of the plan is a revocable living trust that gives participants more control, is simpler to settle than a will, and keeps probate court out of the settlement. His father arranged the trust and named Matt successor trustee. After his father’s death, Cornerstone saw to it the settlement went smoothly.

While the legal side was quick, divvying up his father’s personal things took time. “Daddy was a millwright and

mechanic with a shop, a shed, and various other holdings on his property—not just a house. He kept everything. I went through every piece, every page, remembering what Neal Thomsen once told me: ‘Don’t take shortcuts or you’ll get cut short.’ The legal part went well. I needed to do that other part well, too.”

Matt notes that settling the estate was not easy. “By nature, I am a cheerful person, but during those days, a cloud hung over me. The legal side was easy, but the personal side...there was that cloud. People said hurtful things—true words at the wrong time, words that hurt. The most meaningful people were those who shared my sorrow without attempting to fix it. What should you say to those in anguish? My experience suggests less is more.”

Timing is everything. Say less, not more to the grieving. Live practically. Be faithful in the day-to-day. Words of wisdom and sound advice Matt often speaks and writes about. **ONE**

About the Author: Bill and Brenda Evans live on the banks of Rockhouse Fork Creek in Ashland, Kentucky. They may be reached at beejayevans@windstream.net.



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The Power of Endowments

BY DAVID BROWN, CPA

Free Will Baptist Foundation has a standard payout rate of 5% on endowments, which means we distribute to designated ministries 5% of the beginning balance for each period, and whatever it earns above 5% stays in the endowment to help it grow. The policy further states we will not go below the original value of the endowment when we issue a payout. When we have several good earnings periods and have accumulated excess earnings, it becomes possible to make a payout even when earnings are negative. Thus, this policy smooths out the payout so there are few (if any) interruptions in payments.

Louis Brautigan was a military man. His wife died before him, and the couple was never blessed with children. Louis came to faith late in life, but the Lord really touched his heart. Because the Lord had blessed him, he wanted to be a blessing to ministry. He established an endowment while he was still alive, leaving his entire estate to this endowment and two others.

Louis Brautigan established these endowments with the Foundation over 20 years ago. The original amount for one endowment was \$209,000, and the earnings were

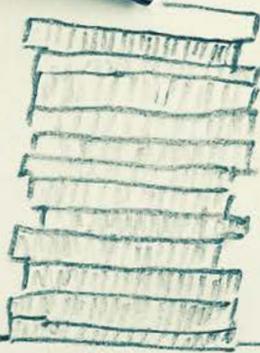
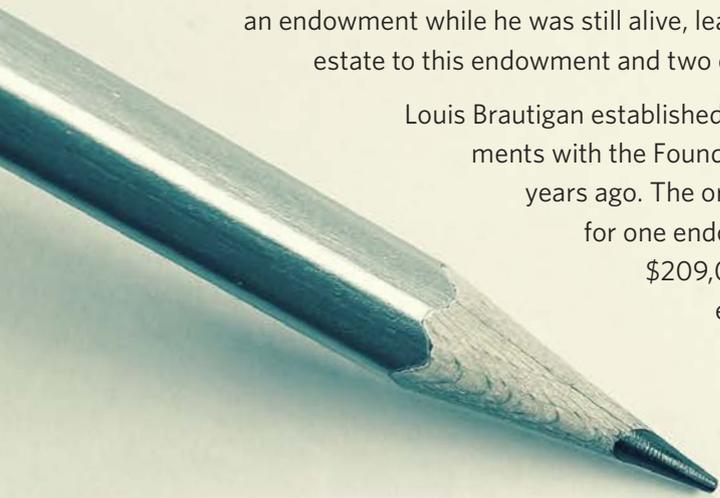
to be paid to three ministries: IM, Welch College, and North American Ministries. Since Brautigan established the endowment, the Foundation has distributed \$80,000 to each of these three ministries, for a total of \$240,000. Because the endowment has continued to grow, the endowment value is now \$263,000.

So, the endowment has gone up in value by \$54,000 over the last 20 years while, at the same time, paying out to ministry \$240,000, more than its original value. What a testimony to Brother Brautigan! Though dead for more than 20 years, he has given \$240,000 to three ministries, and the endowment he established is poised to continue making gifts to ministry until Jesus comes back.

All of us can have similar impact on future ministry by tithing on our estates and directing the tithe be placed in an endowment. Every 20 years, the original amount in the endowment will be paid out to ministry, and yet, on average, the future value will be worth more than when the endowment was first established.

This is the power of endowments. 

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



When I Think of My Dad

A TRIBUTE TO GLEN H. WRIGHT BY HIS SON

BY PHILIP WRIGHT



*When I think of my dad,
many things come to mind.*

First, he was a man of prayer. Growing up, I remember waking up early on several occasions to find my mom and dad praying together, and I knew it was a regular habit. I remember him and his friends praying together when we gathered with their families. We still joke about those prayer meetings and how long they prayed. After he retired, he had his preacher over every week for coffee and prayer. Even as Alzheimer's progressed, he still prayed for us kids (and for my sister's dog of which he was very fond).

Second, he was always appreciative. He appreciated his employees. He was appreciative of those who served the Lord in full-time ministry. Most of all, he was appreciative of my mom. In the closing stages of his disease, many people become grumpy and difficult to live with. Not my dad! He always told Mom how much he appreciated her and loved her. He was also appreciative of anyone who came to see him, although, he always asked me why I wasn't at work.

Third, Dad was a giver. I knew that all my life. He gave when he had much, and when he had very little. He was always a big supporter of Free Will Baptist churches, pastors, missionaries, and various other ministries. When

our church was going through financial difficulties, he borrowed money to make sure payroll was met for the school and church. He

not only gave financially, but he also gave of his time. He served as a deacon, as a member of the school board for our church, and on the Board of Free Will Baptist Family Ministries. (I was particularly fond of this duty. We would visit the farm where the children's home was located and look at the livestock and machinery. For lunch, they always served Kentucky Fried Chicken, which is hard to beat.) Dad also served as a trustee on the national Free Will Baptist Board of Retirement.

Continued on page 47

TODAY is the best time to start!

Sure, if you planted a tree yesterday, last month, or last year, it might already be tall and strong, with deep roots. But, if you didn't act then, it's not too late.

To grow a strong tree in the future, the best time to plant is **TODAY**.

And to have a strong plan for long-term ministry, the kind that will reach others for Christ long into the future, **TODAY** is the day to start.

It all begins with starting your church's institutional investing. Your seedling will grow, and over time, it will shade your ministry with its strength.

Pastors and church leaders, reach out to the Board of Retirement now. Because **TODAY is the best time to start.**



**Free Will
Baptist
Board of
Retirement**

BoardofRetirement.com





The Giving Tree

BY PHYLLIS YORK

*“Do good and share what you have, for God is well pleased with such sacrifices”
(Hebrews 13:16).*

I love fruit trees. Apples, peaches, pears—it doesn’t matter. I like them all. I find it amazing to watch the trees bud and flower in the spring, with tiny fruits slowly replacing the blossoms. As summer arrives, the fruit gradually grows to maturity, finally ripening. As a child, I found it enjoyable to walk among the trees on my grandparents’ farm, picking ripe fruit anytime I wanted. It always seemed sweeter when it came right off the tree.

Too Much Fruit?

An amazing phenomenon happens if a fruit tree doesn’t receive proper care and maintenance. Unpruned fruit trees (and, sometimes, even pruned trees) will set more fruit than the tree can support. While “too much fruit” sounds like a good thing, it can lead to major problems. In some trees, individual fruits do not receive enough water. As a result, the fruit is small, hard, or bitter.

More commonly, the excessive fruit grows so large and heavy that branches begin to break. In extreme cases, the branches grow so heavy the trunk itself splits, damaging the tree beyond repair.

Fruit cannot be produced without the tree. And that’s why it is so important to take care of the tree that bears the fruit.

The WNAC Tree

For 87 years, WNAC has been “bearing fruit” as one of the most effective supporters of Free Will Baptist missions work. In the last decade alone, the ministry has given over \$2 million to home and international missions. And this does not include the hundreds of thousands of dollars in supplies given to missionaries and church planters from the Steward Provision Closet. It does not include gifts to children’s homes, annual college scholarships both nationally and internationally, and local missions projects and objectives. To the glory of God, WNAC has produced excessive fruit!

But we need to take care of the tree.

While Free Will Baptist ladies always have been faithful in giving to missions, supporting special projects, and donating to the Provision Closet, we have not given enough attention to the WNAC office itself—the tree bearing the bountiful fruit.

As a result, the WNAC office is currently understaffed and underfunded. The budget has already been pruned to the breaking point. If something doesn’t change soon, the office could experience lasting damage.



The Giving Tree

To meet financial needs, the WNAC Board has established the WNAC Giving Tree, a fundraising campaign designed to increase annual income to the office by \$35,000, relieving financial pressure and making future growth possible. You can join the Giving Tree by partnering with WNAC in one of the following categories of monthly giving:

White leaf : \$10 per month

Bronze leaf : \$25 per month

Silver leaf : \$50 per month

Gold leaf : \$100 per month

How many monthly givers will it take to meet the \$35,000 per year goal?

30 individuals, groups, or churches to give **\$10** per month

25 individuals, groups, or churches to give **\$25** per month

20 individuals, groups, or churches to give **\$50** per month

10 individuals, groups, or churches to give **\$100** per month

WNAC Board member and CPA Jonda Patton (KY) encourages Free Will Baptists to join this exciting campaign: “Through the Giving Tree, we are laying the financial roots for Free Will Baptist women’s ministries to branch out and grow even more. Working together in Christ, we can *continue* to bear much fruit. Will you help us?”

Learn more about the Giving Tree and the important work of Free Will Baptist women at www.WNAC.org. 

About the Author: Phyllis York serves as director of WNAC.
Contact her: phyllis@nafwb.org.

When a LITTLE Is a LOT

BY AUDREY HOLLIFIELD

When I was a child, my mom created scavenger hunts for me and my brother. We would search for an old jewelry box that was hers when she was younger. Sometimes, we found stickers in the box at the end of the hunt. Other times, we found candy, and sometimes, when we were lucky, we would find some loose change. At four years old, a handful of pennies, nickels, and dimes felt like real treasure. A little seemed like a lot.

All of us had those moments as children, whether it was a trip for ice cream, a quarter under our pillow for losing a tooth, or a sticker for a job well done. These moments made us excited and held so much meaning. Though small, they felt huge. As time goes by, and we start adding years to life, I think it is easy to lose this “little is a lot” mindset. We start to compare our lives with others, seeing what they have and noticing what we do not. We become

aware of more responsibilities and anxieties. We go from thinking a little is a lot to adopting the opposite mindset, where what we have seems like too little.

We can learn a great deal from children. One of the most well-known lessons is found in the New Testament when Jesus told His followers to receive Him and His Kingdom with the same vigor, excitement, and enthusiasm as a child. In the same way, I think children teach us another



valuable lesson when they take small, seemingly insignificant things and turn them into momentous moments. It is a good reminder for us to do the same. Adults find great value in adopting the “little is a lot” mindset, and it can especially be helpful when it comes to money and finances.

When I was growing up, my dad often said, “How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.” Just as taking things step-by-step is helpful and important when you may have too much on your plate, the same can be said when trying to build something up, small piece by small piece. Maybe

A wonderful sweetness comes from enjoying and appreciating what we normally overlook or think trivial or insignificant.

you want to start a savings account but are disheartened because you are starting from scratch. Just like eating an elephant, starting and building a savings account is best done a bite at a time. No amount you save is insignificant. Every penny, dime, or dollar is valuable. The amount may feel small, but over time, if you keep putting it away bit by bit, you will see it grow.

I wouldn't say I am the world's best budgeter or saver, and sometimes I forget the “little is a lot” mentality. However,

I can say that I've tried my best to tuck a small amount away into my savings account each month. I'm not always

consistent, but I have seen firsthand the benefits and value of these small “bites,” and how they grow into a substantial amount.

As a result, I have gotten to see some corners of the world I never thought I would. In 2018, I visited London, England, with my friend Katy. In 2019, I walked the streets Jesus walked in Jerusalem and Galilee. These are small examples of how I reached some personal goals (traveling) because of the small amounts I put away, piece by piece. Each of those small amounts were valuable.

Ultimately, I think we could all use the reminder to appreciate the little things in our lives, from the value of a single dollar being tucked away for later or putting our phones down to appreciate the scenery along the way. A wonderful sweetness comes from enjoying and appreciating what we normally overlook or think trivial or insignificant.

Let's be more like ourselves at four years old. Let's find joy and value in the small and remember a little is a lot. **ONE**

About the Author: Audrey Hollifield joined the Board of Retirement in September of 2017. She is a Nashville native and received a Bachelor of Science degree in Human Development with a Business Emphasis from Lee University. Learn more: www.BoardofRetirement.com.

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To continue his diligent work and legacy of giving, our family set up the **Glen H. Wright Memorial Fund** to benefit the North American Ministries Hispanic Bible Institute (formally Gwen Hendrix Bible Institute). The institute welcomes students from other countries, teaches them how to start churches, and then sends them out to do just that. Over 380 students have graduated to date, and these graduates are doing some phenomenal work.

One of the graduates started an orphanage in Puerto Rico with the help of the institute. Jesus told His disciples, “Let the little children come.” This ministry is meeting the needs of these children, showing the love of Jesus, and reaching them with the gospel of Christ.

The institute also has a correspondence program, which equips believers for their missionary efforts. This was

another ministry dear to my dad's heart. He was impressed with the zeal they had to reach people with the gospel. He gave generously himself and traveled many miles to churches to raise support for the institute.

To help get this fund started, our family initiated a matching campaign. We will match dollar-for-dollar everything given up to \$50,000. This is a great opportunity to double your financial efforts for the Kingdom. To contribute, please send donations to: North American Ministries, PO Box 5002, Antioch, TN 37011, or call 877-767-7674. Earmark checks to *Glen Wright Hispanic Bible Institute*. **ONE**

About the Author: Phillip Wright is a corporate risk consultant for the Wright Risk Consultant Company in Jackson, Tennessee.

Updates from Across the Nation

GOD STILL AT WORK THROUGH DIFFICULT DAYS

Antioch, TN—At North American Ministries (NAM), we thank the Lord for the many exciting things happening in our works. We acknowledge 2020 and 2021 have been difficult years for church planters due to the pandemic. And, just as 2021 began to mark progress, the Delta variant caused new outbreaks of COVID, prompting many churches to pull back once again from hosting outreach events and special services. Still, throughout these difficult days, God has been at work. We have much for which to be thankful, including the following blessings reported by our teams:

Brad Ransom, Chief Training Officer: “One of NAM’s long-term goals was to institute an on-site assessment center where we can bring church planting candidates to Nashville for an intensive assessment process before they are recommended for approval. To date, six couples have completed assessment and more are on the schedule in the near future. This is a huge step toward making our church planting ministry the best it can be. We are extremely thankful for the progress.”

Terry Austin, Chaplain Support Officer: “It is good to know Free Will Baptists have a host of chaplains ready to serve and share the gospel at home and abroad.”

Daryl Grimes, Erie, Pennsylvania: “We are thankful to be in our new location. We’ve welcomed guests from the community and several individuals have been saved and baptized since spring. Please continue to pray for us, as we plan to go self-supporting in May 2022.”

Don Ellerd, Mariposa, California: “God made a way for us to move to Mariposa, helped us get our home ready to sell, and supplied a job for Teresa. God also has been traveling with us up and down the state of California and supplying for us financially through new partners and support. We are excited to meet so many wonderful Free Will Baptist people as we share our vision for Mariposa.”

Note: Just prior to printing, Don Ellerd lost a battle with COVID-19. We will honor him in the next issue.

Timothy York, Buffalo, New York: “NorthPoint FWB Church’s deaf ministry has doubled in the last six weeks. One deaf person has been baptized in that time. God is really moving among the deaf community in Buffalo.”

Chris Willhite, Princeton, Texas: “CV Church turned three at the end of September. After surviving a pandemic and leadership change, CV is still moving forward. We continue our mission to fully experience and personally share the real and eternal life found in Jesus Christ.”

Joel Franks & BJ Eaton, Athens, Alabama: “We are excited to announce Amilcar Castro from El Progreso, Honduras, joined the Athens team in October to begin a Hispanic ministry.”

Chad Kivette & Marcus Stephens, Sevierville, Tennessee: “The 24/7 Church has experienced wonderful growth over the last few months. We have seen the monthly average grow into the 70s and just baptized two new converts. We celebrated our one-year anniversary in November 2021.”

Frank Webster, The Villages, Florida: “Debbie and I are getting to know people in our area and learning more about the unique demographic here. We have had conversations with fellow believers, those who feel Jesus is fantasy, and those who have had little spiritual influence in their lives. The need for more Christian influence in the area is evident.”

Steve Schmidt, Albuquerque, New Mexico: “We have a core group com-



Erie, Pennsylvania



Mariposa, California



Princeton, Texas



Athens, Alabama



Missoula, Montana



Buffalo, New York

mitted to meeting in-person through New Mexico's eventual fall/winter shutdown."

Zach Parent, McPherson, Kansas:

"I am excited to be more involved in the local community since being appointed as chaplain of the McPherson Police Department. Pray opportunities for Awaken Church to minister will come from this appointment."



McPherson, Kansas

Josh Hampton & Clayton Hampton,

Missoula, Montana: "Summit Church had a grand opening at our new location with 109 in attendance and one salvation in August."

Jim Kilgore, Waco, Texas: "We have been extremely busy on itnerate since June. We've traveled thousands of miles to churches in California, Arizona, Missouri, and, of course, Texas. The churches have been incredibly gracious in their support, and we are raising funds much quicker than anticipated. The response to the message preached has been fantastic."



Waco, Texas

Amos Dillard, Chula Vista (San Diego) California: "A strong team of 20 people has moved to Chula Vista in efforts to help plant City Lights Church. We have been able to build relationships quickly in our neighborhoods and have been sharing the gospel regularly. We have already multiplied our Community Group by launching four families to start a second home group. This will provide more space for people who feel far from God and from home to know they belong."



Chula Vista, California

Kris Willis, Anchorage, Alaska: "We are now in our home in Wasilla, Alaska, after four and a half months in an RV. God provided just what we needed and the perfect place for our ministry. Our neighbors helped plant a church (as part of the launch team) a few years ago, and we are enjoying Bible study together on Sundays.



Burlington, Vermont

I believe they will become part of our launch team, Lord willing. Joshua, our oldest son is now attending South-eastern FWB College. The main reason he decided to go to Bible college is that moving to Alaska to plant a church increased his faith and gave him a renewed desire to serve the Lord. Rebecca, our oldest daughter, is moving from North Carolina to Alaska to help us plant the church. I know she will be a big help to the team and has recommitted her life to God's will."

Stephen Kimbrell, Irvine, California: "After 11 months of holding services outdoors, Grace City Church held its first indoor service after a year and a half. Our people were beyond grateful to worship together in such close proximity to our previous location in a beautiful facility. We're excited about this next phase of our journey. Please keep us in your prayers as we make disciples that make disciples in this new location."

Dan Houghton & Brooks Phillips, Burlington, Vermont: "We praise God for several accomplishments, including being a point of contact for all donations to foster care in our county. Associate planters Brooks and Jennifer Phillips have moved to Burlington, and we now have 30 people on our launch team. Dan's parents, who have been in ministry for many years, have moved to help with the church. Every leadership need has been filled!"

Jim Martin, Rochester, New York: "Our first back-to-school giveaway led a new family to the church. They have been looking for a good church, and the great thing is, they connected with another couple in our church. We are excited we gave away nearly 100 book bags of school supplies, and we had the opportunity to help the family of a fire fighter who recently passed away, leaving behind six children. We started a men's and women's Bible study in October. One man told pastor Jim: 'I am very interested in learning to become a pastor. I'm hungry to dig deep into the understanding of His Word and to take up my cross for the service of others.'"

Carl Spruill, Waipahu/Kaneohe, Hawaii: "We praise God we have grown to a faithful 70 in attendance every Sunday and have had several salvations and baptisms. We have been discipling people and training them on what/how to teach Sunday School classes. We remain busy with church renovations in preparation for relaunch in 2022."

Rufo Gomez, Smyrna, Tennessee (Hispanic ministry): “We are excited to see how God is working in all our efforts. Iglesia El-Shaddai is focused on house-to-house evangelism and apartment Bible studies. Iglesia del Rey, our church in Honduras, has about 250 members and two new missions.”

Gene Wooton, St. Croix, US Virgin Islands: “We are thankful to begin the 54th year of ministry (church and school) in St. Croix, USVI. The school has increased enrollment from last year, praise the Lord! Both church and school are learning to adapt to new regulations due to COVID. The church now has all services streamed on Facebook and YouTube, so anyone can join us every week!”

Bill Reynolds, North Kingstown, Rhode Island: “We praise God for the five people baptized this month.”

Maitland Bailey, Morgantown, West Virginia: “We praise God for guiding us and keeping us through the COVID storm. Although we have experienced loss, we are looking forward to a new beginning. We thank the Lord for a new perspective on ministry because of the passing storm.”

Terry Miller, Ft. Collins, Colorado: “We praise God for 21 people present on Sunday. A young man we have been

praying for came to the service, and we have had guests almost every Sunday since Easter.”

Coming out of a global pandemic, when things are difficult for all of us, we tend to forget God is still at work. Yes, plans had to be altered and some folks chose to step away from leadership, ministry, church, and even society, but God knew all along what was going on. He has continued to bless the ministry of NAM and our team, and we are grateful for all He has done. Much work remains, and we are excited to see what God will continue to do in the future.

Your continued prayers and financial support are vital to see our church planting efforts continue. We are grateful for the sacrifices many have made, and we are thankful for and depend on God and our faithful partners. Find regular updates: www.fwbnam.com. 



Irvine, California



Ft. Collins, Colorado



Waipahu/Kaneohe, Hawaii

Church Extension Loan Fund Turns Forty

In the January-February 1982 issue of *MissionGrams* (former NAM publication), John Gibbs, then director of development, wrote the following:

Your Money: Building While Earning

The greatest hindrance to Home Missions establishing self-supporting churches is the lack of sufficient funds in the Church Extension Loan Fund. Almost all missionaries are needing funds to buy property and build first unit buildings, so they can get out of the inadequate rented facilities where they meet.

Feeling the urgent need for Home Mission churches to have their own meeting places, the National Home Mission Board authorized the Church Extension Loan Fund investment program to be incorporated as a religious, not-for-profit organization. As the list of participants grows, it will open doors of opportunity never

realized by Free Will Baptist National Home Missions.

The Investment Program exists solely to provide a financial base for the Church Extension Loan Fund. The Loan Fund in turn issues loans to Free Will Baptist National Home Missions projects. The loan fund is perpetual, as the new church repays the loan.

Dr. Richard Adams was employed as the next director of development, and CELF continued to grow under his leadership. In time, the Loan Fund began to loan funds to other churches and organizations, not only the church planters working with NAM.

January 2022 will mark the 40-year anniversary of the Church Extension Loan Fund as we know it today. With assets totaling more than \$100 million, we are truly thankful for all who have invested their money with us to enable us to help churches purchase land and construct buildings. Happy Birthday, CELF! 

A Church Revitalization Success Story

BY BRAD RANSOM

I recently had the opportunity to ask Rev. Dale McCoy, pastor of the Glad Tidings FWB Church in Asheboro, North Carolina, about his experience with revitalization. Glad Tidings has seen a turnaround and is on a healthy pathway. Below is our discussion.



Ransom: Why did you get involved in church revitalization?

McCoy: When asked to consider the pastorate of Glad Tidings Church, I

discovered the church was in crisis. Many people left the church after the previous pastor's departure. Since the church was a product of North Carolina Home Missions, we approached them about the possibility of working with Glad Tidings in a revitalization effort.

Ransom: How long have you been at Glad Tidings?

McCoy: I just entered my fourth year. By April 2022, we hope to have completed the mission and returned the church to complete self-supporting status.

Ransom: What are two or three specific things you learned about church revitalization you think would be helpful for other pastors to understand?

McCoy: First, it is important to know when a church needs revitalization. We sometimes wait until a church has declined to the extent of having little left to work with before revitalization is considered. Regardless of size, a church needs revitalization when it is more inward focused than outward focused. Second, accept the reality that revitalization is difficult. You must lead the church through change. Sometimes, that becomes very uncomfortable for everyone involved.

Ransom: What is the first step you would suggest pastors take if their church is struggling?

McCoy: I suggest pastors be unafraid to admit that the church, and perhaps

themselves, need help. Then reach out to those available to help. Take advantages of resources Free Will Baptists offer through Refresh, including training for pastors, the ReKindle program, and Fresh Wind resources from North American Ministries. An outsider can be more objective in evaluating a church than those within.

Ransom: What have you learned about yourself through this process?

McCoy: Strong leadership is imperative. That leadership needs to be reproduced in the men of the church. Above all, I have learned asking for input from those more knowledgeable is a sign of strength, not weakness.

Ransom: What advice would you give a pastor struggling in his current ministry?

McCoy: Don't lose heart! The church is promised victory. Simply recognize you can't do this alone. Not only do you need the power of the Holy Spirit, you also need the power of fellow servants who want God's best for you and your church. **ONE**

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



MINISTERING TO VETERANS

BY TERRY AUSTIN



Outside my window stands a 30-foot flagpole flying the American flag. I had it installed as a testament of my love and commitment to our country and to serve as a daily reminder of the many service members who have sacrificed their lives for our freedom. Recently, I lowered the flag to half-mast to honor 13 of America's sons and daughters killed in Afghanistan by suicide bomb attack August 26. Our country mourns the loss of these service members, and I know their families will be changed forever.

Many people have been affected by this tragedy and will be trying to make sense of it for a long time. Veterans

especially will wrestle with their own experiences, their sense of loss, a sense of betrayal, and their personal faith among many other things.

Soldiers experience things that are not the norm for Americans. They see and hear things that should never happen. They experience cultures vastly different than their own and do things they would not normally do. For example, they train to fight and win America's wars. They adopt a different mindset and see things differently because of their training and experience.

Their training is designed to instill confi-

dence in their fellow soldiers and the equipment they use, and when either has been compromised they feel betrayed and deeply hurt.

The U.S. departure from Afghanistan and resulting loss of the country to the Taliban has many veterans questioning whether their sacrifices were worth it. They question our country's leadership, and they question their own actions in accomplishing their own missions. These sacrifices include the loss of time at home, broken marriages, and strained friendships, which cause deep hurt and disappointment. Although we pray for our leaders and trust

God to influence their hearts, the sense of loss and betrayal is very real to veterans.

Ministering to veterans is only one of the many outreaches of the local church. It requires patience and an appreciation of what veterans may have experienced. But this ministry strengthens their faith and their sense of belonging. They need to experience God's love and forgiveness through you and others as they struggle with these issues in their lives. They need to know Jesus will never leave them or forsake them (Hebrews 13:5).

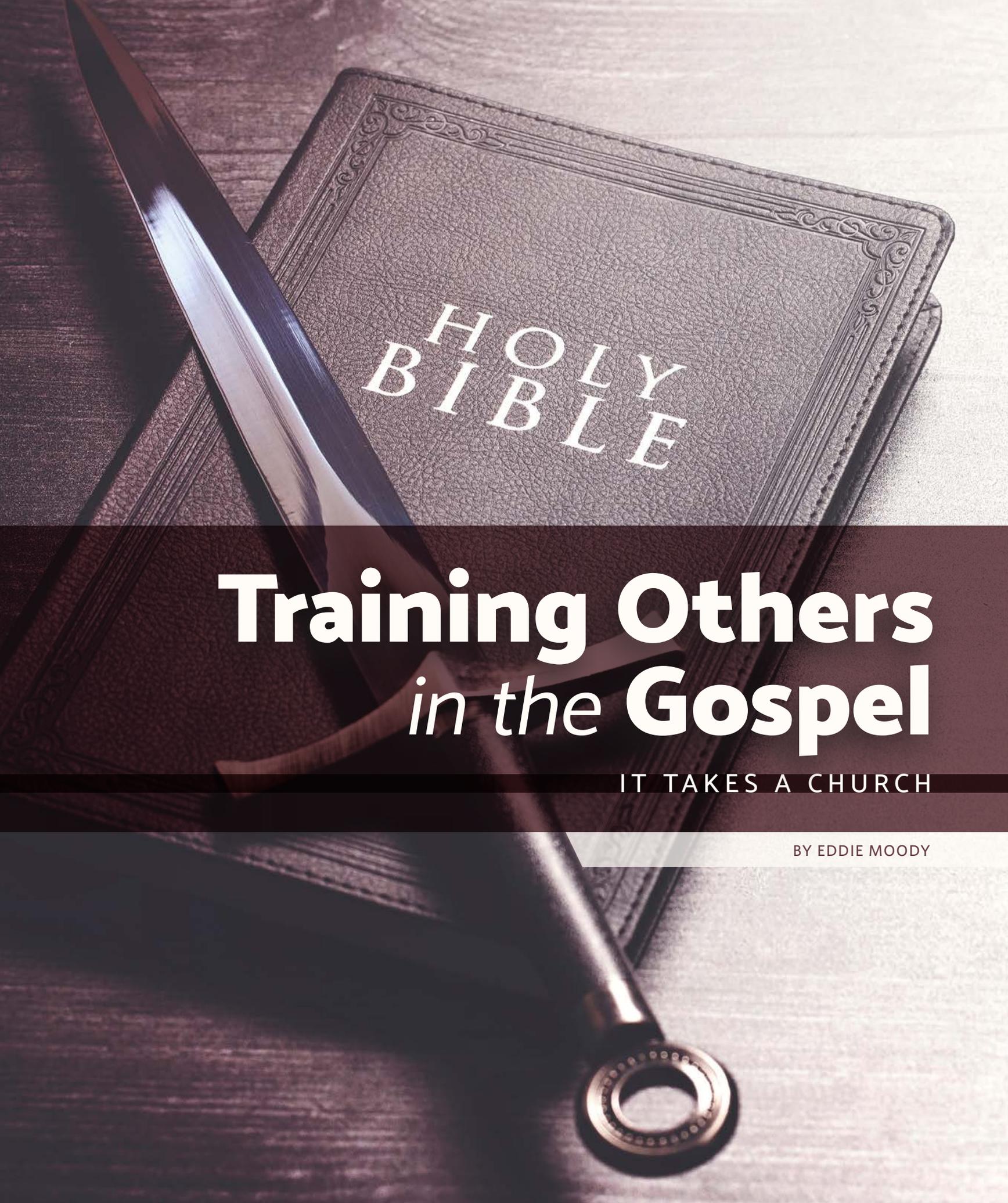
Our faith in Christ will carry us through dark days, for we know He is unchanging, and His love for us endures forever. Veterans need to know God has forgiven them, and they need to forgive themselves for anything hindering their faith in God. Many resources are available online and in print, but it is always good to be reminded of these truths in person and see them practiced in the lives of our family and friends.

Ministering to veterans and serving in the military is not new for Free Will Baptists. The founder of the Free Will Baptist movement in the North, Elder Benjamin Randall, not only served in the army during the Revolutionary War but also provided services as a chaplain. Jesus Himself supported soldiers and instructed them on how to carry out their duties (Luke 3:14). Serving in the military has its challenges, but it is honorable. Veterans should feel appreciated, especially in our churches, and even more during difficult days like the ones described above.

If I can help you minister to veterans, please contact me. It would be my pleasure to assist you. **ONE**

About the Author: Terry W. Austin is chaplain support officer for Free Will Baptist North American Ministries. Learn more about the chaplaincy: www.fwbnam.com/chaplaincy.

Soldiers experience things that are not the norm for Americans. They see and hear things that should never happen.



HOLY
BIBLE

Training Others *in the* Gospel

IT TAKES A CHURCH

BY EDDIE MOODY

As a kid, when another child was behaving badly, my mother would often say something like, “Poor kid, he hasn’t had any training!” She made two points with her statement. First, don’t do that. Second, don’t judge others; we would all be there without the proper training.

The Bible says much about training. Parents are to train their children (Deuteronomy 6:7; Proverbs 22:6; 23:13-14; 29:17; Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21), the Church is to train leaders (Titus 2), and Christians are to train others in the faith (Matthew 28:19). The tool for training is the Bible (Romans 15:4; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Sometimes, I hear echoes of my mother’s words when I read God’s comments to Jonah at the end of his book. When referring to Nineveh God told Jonah, they “cannot discern between their right hand and their left” (Jonah 4:11). Why? Because they had not had any training and did not know better.

Every day, it seems our world becomes a little crazier due to an overall lack of training. Every day in the United States, 2,362 babies are aborted¹ perhaps because of a lack of training about the value of human life. Confusion about gender is increasing,² which could be reduced through training about how to deal with our culture. Similar confusion exists over what constitutes a marriage. For example, about half of Gen Z and Millennials say same-sex marriage is good for society.³ There is delusion about humanity. Increasingly, more people see humans as no more important than animals.⁴ A rising group of

people even argue that having children is morally wrong.⁵ When we feel anger at people who believe such things, I hear God’s words to Jonah. How can they know if they have not been trained?

I fear we view these as someone else’s problems. Yet, Free Will Baptists have our own training issues. Consider, in 1985 we had 4,458 ordained ministers; in 2019 that number had fallen to 3,000. In 1985, we had 5,666 deacons; in 2019 only 3,145. In 1985, we had 589 licensed ministers; in 2019 only 386 were licensed. Have we trained our people in the value of ministry and the service of the Lord? It appears we have had a training breakdown, just like the rest of the U.S. We see this reflected in the downward spiral in Sunday School enrollment from 163,335 in 1985 to 55,977 in 2019.⁶

For some time now, other things have become more important than training: entertainment, leisure, and much more. Less training has not led to better results. Training impacts *everything*—the quality of life, the health of a church, and the length of a person’s life, or even eternal life. It does little simply to bemoan the situation, especially since we have so many good training role models. Let us examine some and get busy training!

TRAIN YOUNG CHILDREN

Perhaps the most encouraging model of training in Scripture is Jochebed’s training of Moses. Jochebed found herself in the middle of a corrupt culture where children were being murdered daily (Exodus 1:15-22; 2:2-3). She had limited time with Moses under stressful conditions, yet she trained him effectively (Exodus 2:9-10).

What did Jochebed teach him? First, she taught him who he was—his identity. We find this in the book of Exodus

1 National Right to Life Abortion Statistics: <https://nrlc.org/uploads/factsheets/FS01AbortionintheUS.pdf>

2 R. Kaltiala-Heino, H. Bergman, M. Työljäärvi, & L. Frisén. Gender dysphoria in adolescence: current perspectives. *Adolescent Health, Medicine, and Therapeutics*, 9, 39-41 (2018).

3 K. Parker, & R. Igielnik. On the Cusp of Adulthood and Facing an Uncertain Future: What We Know About Gen Z So Far. *Pew Research Center*. (May 14, 2020): <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/05/14/on-the-cusp-of-adulthood-and-facing-an-uncertain-future-what-we-know-about-gen-z-so-far-2/>

4 Human Lives are Not More Important than Animal Lives. *Outdoor Journal*. June 8, 2016: <https://www.outdoorjournal.com/slider/human-lives-are-not-more-important-than-animal-lives/>

5 T. Rieder. Science proves kids are bad for Earth. Morality suggests we stop having them. *NBC News*: <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/science-proves-kids-are-bad-earth-morality-suggests-we-stop-ncna820781>

6 See 2021 *Digest of Reports* and *Free Will Baptist Yearbooks*, 1985-2018.

(which Moses wrote), Stephen's account in Acts 7:23, and again in Hebrews 11:24-27. Moses chose to *identify* with Israel. It appears Jochebed also trained Moses about the value of people. When Moses observed an Israelite being beaten (Acts 7:24-25) and a later incident at the well we see him standing up for the oppressed (Exodus 2:16-17).

How did Jochebed do it? It is good to remember it was Moses who wrote Deuteronomy. Randall House has instilled in us the power of Deuteronomy 6:4-6. This is our prescription, our formula for training children. We train them everywhere and constantly—in the morning, throughout the day, and at night. It works.

Scripture is full of other examples of godly parents training their children. We must follow their examples and learn to take every opportunity for reading, talking, and sharing the gospel with children, even before they learn to talk. These biblical role models started when their children were very young and made every moment count.

The church also has a role in training children as we interact with them in the nursery and toddler classes. When a child attends the same church regularly throughout childhood, relationships are developed that will help carry them safely into adulthood.

TRAIN SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN

A model for training school age children is found in the story of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. The only information we have about their parents is the names they gave their boys (Daniel 1:6). Yet, each name is significant: Daniel (God is judge), Hananiah (God has been gracious), Mishael (Who is what God is?), and Azariah (God is help).

From the rest of the story, we can also deduce these parents provided biblical training to their children. They taught them who God was, what He could do, and the relationship one could have with Him. They taught them to live without defiling themselves (Daniel 1:8), to put God first in their lives (Daniel 3:16-18), and to follow the spiritual discipline of prayer (Daniel 6:9-10). They helped their children become psychologically mature (Daniel 2:13-15). In other words, as young men they were capa-

ble of handling the pressure of a challenging culture and environment. They also understood the value of work and excellence (Daniel 1:20; 5:12; 6:3).

How did these parents do this? We don't really know. Perhaps we get a hint from Mordecai's training of Esther. Mordecai's instruction to Esther about not revealing her ethnicity was a specific instruction about dealing with the challenges of the corrupt environment of the palace (Esther 2:10). Perhaps the parents of the young Hebrew men also taught them how to apply Leviticus 11 and Exodus 20 to various situations. We, too, must train our children to keep their bodies pure, avoid harmful substances and addictions, and deal with people antagonistic to the faith.

In the case of Mordecai, we see monitoring and follow up, when he checked on Esther in a very dangerous time when she was part of a harem (Esther 2:11). When needed, he prodded her to do what was right (Esther 4:14). We should also follow up on young people when they go off to college, serve in the Armed Forces, or begin a new job.

This is the role of parents, but the church has a role to play as well. As children get older, their parents lose influence upon them. For this reason, it is critical children be tied into the local church. Indeed, the data tell us long-term faith is tied to six or more adult mentors.⁷ In addition to a youth leader, Sunday School teacher, and other adults, we need youth to build relationships with numerous Christian adults. When youth are involved in a church, the mentoring process becomes natural.⁸

Today, youth are struggling because they lack adults who mentor them. In fact, it is estimated one in three young people grow up without a single adult mentor, placing them at risk for a myriad of problems.⁹ The church can reverse this.

7 D. Nuesch-Olver. Don't Make Jesus Cry. *Journal of Youth Ministry*, 4 (1), 99. 2005.

8 J. Lanker. The Family of Faith: The Place of Natural Mentoring in the Church's Christian Formation of Adolescents. *Christian Education Journal*. 2010;7(2):267-280.

9 The National Mentoring Partnership: <https://www.mentoring.org/mentoring-impact/>



We often say we are better together. It is true. But we aren't better together until we work together for the future of the church.

TRAIN YOUNG COUPLES

A model for training young couples is provided in Titus 2. Paul says older men are to train younger men, and older women train younger women. In what should they train them? How to be a good spouse, parent (Titus 2:4-5), worker (2:9-10), and to live pure lives (Titus 2:12). All are key components for success. How can this training be done? Paul assumes couples across generations will interact. Informal training can take place over a meal, leisure outings, or during special projects like home improvement. The church also can arrange this through more formal marriage-mentoring models in which an older couple takes a younger couple under their wings and discusses crucial issues such as budgets, intimacy, and child rearing practices. Much of this mentoring happens naturally when a couple becomes part of a Sunday School class or small group. As members “do life” together, they do not have to face life challenges alone.

Today, much is said about the marriage failures of evangelical Christians. In fact, areas with the most evangelical churches have the highest divorce rates in the United States.¹⁰ Evangelicals have some of the highest divorce

10 J. Glass, & P. Levchak. Red states, blue states, and divorce: Understanding the Impact of Conservative Protestantism on Regional Variation in Divorce Rates. *American Journal of Sociology* 119(4):1002-46. 2014.

rates, and atheists claim some of the lowest divorce rates.¹¹ Paul warned Titus if deliberate training did not take place, this would happen (Titus 2:5, 8). However, couples who attend church together on a regular basis have stronger relationships and happier marriages.¹²

TRAINING IN DISCIPLESHIP

Another good discipleship model is the way Barnabas trained Saul (later Paul). Barnabas was a giver (Acts 4:36-37) who was not afraid to get involved in the lives of others (Acts 4:36-37; 12:25). He introduced Saul to other Christian leaders, and undoubtedly Saul learned from Barnabas as they ministered together (Acts 13-22). Eventually, Paul succeeded Barnabas in the ministry. Today, this would be like serving in ministry with someone who eventually replaces you or goes on to another ministry. For pastors and other church leaders, it includes taking along others to share the gospel, minister to the sick, or attend associational meetings and activities like the Leadership Conference and National Convention.

We must take every opportunity to engage in training the next generation of faithful leaders. This requires a shift in attitude and attention. This requires working together and using the tools God has provided. Deliberate training will have a major impact on children, couples, future leaders, and our churches. We often say we are better together. It is true. But we aren't better together until we work together for the future of the church. Let us work together to train others with and for the gospel. **ONE**

About the Author: Dr. Edward E. Moody, Jr. is executive secretary of the National Association of Free Will Baptists. Find more training resources: www.nafwb.org/3for30.

11 A. Cline. August 7, 2015. Atheism and Divorce: Divorce Rates for Atheists are Among the Lowest in America: Why do conservative Christians defenders of marriage get divorced more often? Accessed at: <https://www.learnreligions.com/divorce-rates-for-atheists-248494>

12 W. B. Wilcox, & N. H. Wolfinger. Better Together: Religious Attendance, Gender, and Relationship Quality. February 11, 2016. Institute for Family Studies. Accessed at <https://ifstudies.org/blog/better-together-religious-attendance-gender-and-relationship-quality>

Fresh Start at Hilltop

Three Free Will Baptist agencies have come together in a joint project initiative to replant Hilltop Church in Ardmore, Oklahoma. The First Oklahoma Association Mission Board and the Oklahoma State Office recently asked North American Ministries (NAM) to partner with them to replant the church.

The Oklahoma agencies appointed Bob Thomas to supply leadership to the church. He will continue to be active throughout the revitalization. “The greatest purpose for this endeavor is to engage God-ordained principles to bring individuals and families to Jesus and grow believers into holy, mature, productive followers of Christ. Revitalizing Hilltop is a Great Commission project,” Thomas told us.

The strategy is to find a God-called team to minister in Ardmore. We are actively praying and searching for the next leader and team. Team members must be able to lead in their strengths and “cross serve” in various ministry expressions. This is an “all-hands-on-deck” effort.

With a population of 50,000-plus, Ardmore is an employment and educational center in south central Oklahoma. Ardmore is home to Southern Oklahoma University and Southern Oklahoma Technology Center. On August 5, *The Daily Oklahoman* published the news that the Chickasaw Nation is leading a \$124 million project to turn Ardmore Airport into a major shipping hub that “will bring thousands of jobs to southern Oklahoma.” Many believe Ardmore is the next Oklahoma “boomtown.”

The Hilltop congregation is dedicated to the stated purpose and strategy for replanting the church. They transferred control of the church and the property to Oklahoma Free Will Baptist leadership. Thomas commented about the congregation: “These people are consistently good and kind and willing to do their part.”

Hilltop owns ten acres of land atop the highest hill west of downtown Ardmore, and is easily seen from I-35, the major north/south interstate linking Oklahoma City and the Dallas/Ft. Worth metroplex. Hilltop has two spacious buildings, including a fan shaped sanctuary that seats 400, surrounded by offices and classrooms. The campus also includes a 50 by 100-foot multi-purpose building.

God has put everything in place for the Hilltop Church to move forward. We need a God-called team to lead the effort. If you are interested in learning more, please contact North American Ministries at 615-760-6137. 



Theological Symposium Meets at Welch College

The Commission for Theological Integrity hosted its annual Theological Symposium on the campus of Welch College on October 4–5, 2021. After last year’s digital symposium because of COVID-19, the members of the commission gladly hosted an in-person meeting this year. Attendees came from as far west as Oklahoma, as far south as Florida, and as far north as New York, and even

Canada, in addition to the hundreds who attended digitally. Christian brothers and sisters gladly extended the hand (and hug) of fellowship.

Because papers did not revolve around a particular theme this year, presentations ran the gamut:

- Daniel Webster, “Clement’s Use of Music in Exhortation to the Greeks as a Model for Cultural Engagement”

- W. Jackson Watts, “Should Pastors Be Obeyed? Pastoral-Theological Reflections on Hebrews 13:17”
- Matthew Steven Bracey, “Imagination: God, Man, and Ethics”
- Ben Campbell, “Reformed Arminianism and Real Assurance: An Analysis of John 6:37 and Assurance of Salvation”
- Anna Forlines, “Has God Cast Away Israel? The Abrahamic Covenant and the Church” (a paper by Leroy Forlines)
- Jason Myers, “The Marriage Covenant and Reformed Arminian Soteriology: Theological Parallels Considered”
- Josh Hunter, “Ecclesial Individuality and the History of the Free Will Baptist Church Covenant”
- Jeff Blair, “Jesus and the Jewish Wisdom Tradition”
- Christopher Talbot, “Co-opted, Coordinated, or Contra Mundum? A Critical Reappraisal of Francis Schaeffer’s Public Theology”

Lively discussion followed a number of these presentations, demonstrating brothers and sisters can disagree about the particulars of theology in a charitable and constructive manner. This format offers a good model for us to follow. If you missed any of these presentations, you may watch them on the commission’s website (fwbtheology.com) or Facebook page.

In addition to the presentation of papers, the commission introduced its newest member Cory Thompson, pastor of First FWB Church in Poteau, Oklahoma. He will also serve as the program chairman of the symposium going forward; previously, Jackson Watts occupied that position for eight years. Finally, the commission has announced next year’s theme (The Legacy of Robert Picirilli), dates (October 3-4, 2022), and location (Welch College).

Interested parties may purchase issues of *Integrity* and symposium digests from the website, as well as submit paper proposals for next year’s program to fwbtheology@gmail.com. **ONE**

Becky Beverly Honored for Service



David Womack, Becky Beverly, and Dr. Ron Hunter

Nashville, TN—Randall House recognized Becky Beverly for 42 years of faithful service and ministry during an appreciation dinner October 21, according to CEO, Ron Hunter.

Becky’s first day on the job was August 5, 1978. She served under three CEOs: Dr. Roger Reeds, Dr. Alton Loveless, and Dr. Ron Hunter Jr. Becky contributed significantly to each era, and it would be hard to imagine Randall House’s care for mission and customer service without her influence.

The Randall House bookstore outlasted many others in the Amazon era because of Becky’s leadership. She understood how to reinvent herself and adapt during the growth of the organization. She took the same skills and personality into the sales team, ran the distribution and warehouse, and ultimately defined the balance of product and end user.

Hunter noted, “Serving 42 years in the way Becky served is quite an accomplishment. She will be sorely missed.”

ONE

Going the Second Mile *to the* Magic City

BY HANNAH DRIGGERS

Next July, Free Will Baptists will pour into the city of Birmingham, Alabama, for the 86th meeting of the National Association. Those attending the annual event on July 24-27, 2022 will discover a unique and revitalized city, distinct in its history and heritage.

Magic City

Founded in 1871, Birmingham was built around the natural resources of coal, iron ore, and limestone. A major crossroads in the South, the city grew so quickly it was soon nicknamed “The Magic City” because so many writers said it “appeared by magic.”

Named for its counterpart in England, the largely industrial town was heavily impacted by the Great Depression. However, after World War II, the city blossomed again as medical research centers, engineering firms, and other industries replaced the iron and steel mills.

While the 1960s tarnished the city’s reputation with disturbing images of dogs and fire hoses turned on Civil Rights demonstrators, Birmingham has risen above that shadowed past, establishing the Civil Rights

Institute and Museum and developing a worldwide reputation as a city that promotes and protects human rights.

Today, the city describes itself as young, traditional, vibrant, friendly, and complex. It certainly paints a different picture from the city that hosted previous conventions. Postponed a year by COVID-19, Birmingham will host the World Games in 2022, in the weeks just preceding the convention. While the games pushed the National Convention back a week, the event also gave Birmingham an incentive to give downtown Birmingham a major facelift.

The I-20/I-59 bridge has been replaced, complete with LED ribbon lighting. The 31-acre CityWalk BHAM has become an outdoor gathering place for visitors and the community, with a quarter-mile walking trail. The city has constructed a challenge course, amphitheater, and sports area with artificial turf. From 16th Street to 18th Street, space has been created for food trucks, a roller-skating rink, and an activity zone. Check out the unfolding master plan for Birmingham at www.citywalkbham.com/masterplan.

The Uptown District, located on the campus of the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention



Complex (site of the convention), has new restaurants and cafés within walking distance. Pizza restaurants, hot chicken, and burgers are among the diverse types of food available. Also in the Uptown District, the Alabama Sports Hall of Fame gives fans an opportunity to explore 5,000-plus sports artifacts. Interested in getting in the game instead of reading about it? TopGolf™ is located nearby and is perfect for people of all skill levels.

For those who enjoy free, educational activities, visit the Civil Rights District, with six blocks of free historical sites. The Alabama Jazz Hall of Fame boasts exhibits to honor musicians such as Nat King Cole and Lionel Hampton. Other free attractions include the Birmingham Railroad Park and Birmingham Botanical Gardens. The city of Birmingham also offers a large zoo featuring 230 species of animals across 122 acres. And, if you enjoy unusual attractions, check out Sloss Furnaces, a free national historic landmark, currently the only 20th century blast furnace preserved in the United States. View the city from amazing heights from the observation deck at Vulcan Park, home of the world's largest cast iron statue, built for the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis.

If you prefer the great outdoors, head to Red Mountain Park with hiking trails to explore, aerial adventure tours, and team building activities. Visit redmountainpark.org to reserve your adventure.

Put July 24-27, 2022, on your calendar! We look forward to seeing you enjoy a fresh, new Birmingham. For convention updates, visit www.nafwb.org/convention.

Did you know this about Birmingham?

- Birmingham is Alabama's largest city.
- Birmingham was the first city in the country to celebrate Veteran's Day.

- The corner of 20th Street and First Avenue is referred to as Heaviest Corner on Earth because the four gigantic skyscrapers there were once the largest in the South.
- Birmingham has its own replica of the Statue of Liberty. Originally commissioned for the Liberty National Life Insurance Company in 1956, the statue stood over the downtown headquarters until 1989.
- In 1995, Mercedes Benz built its first assembly plant outside Germany near Birmingham.
- Birmingham is the only place in the world where all the ingredients for making iron—coal, iron ore, and limestone—are found within a ten-mile radius.
- *Southern Living*, the nation's most successful regional magazine, is published in Birmingham.
- Birmingham is home to the nation's oldest baseball park: Rickwood Field. It opened in 1910 and hosted baseball legends Jackie Robinson, Ty Cobb, Babe Ruth, Willie Mays, and "Shoeless" Joe Jackson.
- The Alabama Theatre is one of only a handful of 1920s movie palaces still operating. A pipe organ still rises from beneath the theater floor for live accompaniment to silent movie screenings and other events.

ONE

About the Author: Hannah Driggers is the librarian at Olanta Elementary School (SC) and owner of Hannah's Coffee. She has served as a member of the press team for the past two National Conventions.



God Works in You

BY EDDIE MOODY

*For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure
(Philippians 2:13).*

Recently, on a Better Together Podcast, Chaplain Frank Gregory said, “God’s way is perfect!” He was describing how God prepared him for the work he does in prisons today. When Frank was nine years old, his father died. Frank was devastated, but today, when he notifies a prisoner about the death of a father, spouse, or child, he is grateful for what God taught him during that difficult childhood. God is using his pain from 50 years ago.

After Frank’s podcast was published, James Benedict, president of Arms of Compassion, called me and said, “Have you ever noticed how God works through such difficult situations to do His good pleasure?” Arms of Compassion has a wonderful ministry to people who are homeless and impacted by natural disasters. James, too, has experienced difficulties, including learning his daughter was homeless. That pain propelled him to help more people than we will know until we get to Heaven.

There is a great deal of pain today. We have been rocked by the pandemic and are also heartbroken by recent tragedies in Afghanistan, Haiti, and around the world. At home, we have witnessed relentless destruction from floods and fires. Yet, in the face of all the pain, we have a God working in us to do His good pleasure. How will God use these tragedies in the future? Only He knows, but we can be assured He will use this pain for our good and His glory.

As a counselor, I often worked with people who had Romans 8:28

quoted to them out of context. “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.”

We should not quote that passage to a widow who just lost her husband or a parent who has lost a child. But all of us should hold that passage in our minds. It is important for us to think about and apply to our own lives. How might God use abuse, abandonment, rejection, loss, or pain we have experienced?

Joseph could not have known how God would use his imprisonment to mature and prepare him to be prime minister. Saul could not have known how God would use his persecution of Christians to later propel the gospel. In fact, we may not know in this life how God is working in and through our own situations (the case with Job) until we are with the Lord.

As we experience pain, we can take refuge in the Lord (Psalm 46). We can know that somehow, some way, God will use the pain to perfect us as His instruments, and even use it for our own good. Even when we lose, in Christ, we win. **ONE**



Eddie Moody

Executive Secretary,
National Association of
Free Will Baptists

One Gift...Three Pastors

Louis Brautigam came to faith late in life, but he wanted to be a blessing to the Lord's work. So, he left his estate to ministry. He established a \$209,000 endowment through the Foundation to benefit three ministries: IM, Welch College, and North American Ministries. Twenty years later, the Foundation has distributed \$80,000 in earnings to each of these ministries, a total of \$240,000. And, because the endowment continued to grow, the value is now \$263,000—more than the original gift!

Though Louis has been dead more than 20 years, he has paid the full cost of sending three pastoral students to college, while the endowment he established will continue making gifts to ministry until Jesus returns.

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