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We are grateful to the many ladies who have waited patiently for their articles to be published in FrontLine. We have selected several of these articles for this special edition.
Thanks for the excellent article entitled “The Fellowship Principle” in the May/June 2008 issue of FrontLine. One of the common charges against us Fundamentalists, sometimes even by those within our movement, is that we are too militant and have allowed our movement to be splintered time and time again. This article provides an important balanced statement of our need to take a militant stand and at the same time learn to work together, even with those who might have some areas of difference, without compromising our position as Fundamental Baptists.

The Mincys have done a great job of identifying the true Biblical position for us as Fundamental believers. Our goal is to keep that same balance here in our fellowship in the state of Wisconsin.

Wayne Vawter
Wisconsin

I do pray for the ministry of FrontLine, which has been spread all over the world. I do have encouragement in it. It blesses me when I read it. . . . I ask you to pray for my sons who are in the ministry. My son Kedesh graduated from Bluewater Bible College and is a pastor in Guadeloupe. My son Wefley graduated from Bible College in Puerto Rico and is a pastor here in Haiti. My son Kedner graduated from Bluewater and will be ordained in December and will become a pastor in St. Thomas. Kelando is in Bible College in St. Vincent.

Can you send me some good cassette tapes of sacred music? May God keep you and bless you, in Christ Jesus.

Rev. Octave Jerome
Emmanuel Bapt. Church
Port de Paix, Haiti

(EDITOR’S NOTE: We have collected and sent a box of recordings from the Home Office of FBFI. If any of our readers have cassette tapes to share with Rev. Octave Jerome, who has served as the FBFI representative in Haiti since the mid-90s, they can be mailed to him at P.O. Box 44, Port de Paix, Haiti HT 31-10.)
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sometimes the humor about failing memory is not as funny as it used to be. When the humor hits close to home, it can be painful. I once heard a lady say, “I don’t have a very good memory any more, but I still have some very good memories.” Good memories are some of the greatest blessings we carry with us into the winter of our lives.

Psalm 71 may be a glimpse into the psalmist’s memories. While those around him were shivering in the chill of old age, this man lifted his voice in a winter song.

We know that he had good memories and also either a good memory or a well-worn Bible, because every verse in this psalm appears somewhere else in the Psalms! He collected twenty-four verses and assembled them in a new way. In the first thirteen verses he expresses his thoughts about his trials and troubles. Then in the rest of the psalm he declares his trust and testimony.

Commentator John Phillips calls Psalm 71 “The Song of a Godly Old Man.” Here are the prayers and praises of a man who could tell us about God’s faithfulness because he had proved God faithful.

It is one thing to sing “Rock of Ages” or “A Mighty Fortress.” It is another to author the words, “Thou art my rock and my fortress” (v. 3). As human frailty encroaches, it is comforting to know from experience that divine faithfulness embraces. This old man was firm in his faith because he was on familiar territory. He could say, “Thou art my trust from my youth” (v. 5) and even, “By thee have I been holden up from the womb” (v. 6). He knew that God had been there from the first moment of his life. He would have no trouble trusting God in the winter of his life.

What a wonderful goal it would be for us to frame our own testimonies in the words of this song. “In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust: let me never be put to confusion” (v. 1). Most of the things we forget are temporal anyway, but when we trust the Lord, He puts things into perspective—the perspective of eternity. Retirement can be a wonderful time to reflect on the Word and spend time with the Lord, as we dreamed of doing during the earlier seasons of life. When loneliness creeps in and we are tempted to wallow in self-pity, we can remember “Thou art my hope, O Lord God: thou art my trust from my youth” (v. 5).

How young we must seem to the Ancient of Days! Our children and grandchildren don’t understand—can’t understand—and we think, “I am as a wonder unto many” (v. 7). Yet there is One who does understand, who will hear our prayer. “Thou art my strong refuge. Let my mouth be filled with thy praise and with thy honour all the day. Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth” (vv. 7–9). The winter of life takes us away from the springtime of our dreams, the summer days of labor, and even the autumn of reaping; but if we know the Lord, we still have a ministry. In fact, it may be the time of our greatest ministry. Who among us did not depend on the prayers of our godly elders during the turmoil of our youth?

When we outgrow the need to be up-to-date on every passing fad, we can hold firmly to the truths that have sustained us and encourage those who follow after us. With what is likely to be the greatest credibility we will have in this life, we can speak for the Lord. Yet our testimony need not be some tired reminiscence. It can be a dynamic influence for a new day, and our faith can still grow. “I will hope continu-

On September 15, 2008, Daniel Wayne Vaughn, the twenty-eight-year-old son of Dr. and Mrs. John Vaughn, was taken home to be with the Lord in a tragic accident—giving new and precious hope in the resurrection. Memorials sent to FrontLine will be invested in the Silas E. Vaughn Education Fund.

On the Front Line

A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

A Winter Song

John C. Vaughn

On September 15, 2008, Daniel Wayne Vaughn, the twenty-eight-year-old son of Dr. and Mrs. John Vaughn, was taken home to be with the Lord in a tragic accident—giving new and precious hope in the resurrection. Memorials sent to FrontLine will be invested in the Silas E. Vaughn Education Fund.
When Does Old Age Arrive?
When my grandfather was the age I am now and I was a teenager, I heard him speak often about how much older people had to offer the next generation—wisdom, prudence, experience, the benefit of learning from their mistakes. I did not receive his comments with understanding or appreciation. There is no reason to expect that my grandchildren will think that I know what I’m talking about either, but my generation will, and it is to them these thoughts are addressed. They know how it feels when someone younger says to them, as was recently said to me, “Do you still ski?” Or, when while hunting for bear in Alaska recently, one of my younger and esteemed hunting partners said, “I can’t believe the stamina and energy you have at your age.”

I’d like to make a case for old age being more a state of mind than a chronological occurrence. We all know people who seem old at forty and others who seem delightfully young at eighty. The point is, whenever old age arrives, it can be accompanied with grace, cheerfulness, sweetness, and helpfulness in such great measure that although a look in the mirror says “old,” the spirit says “young.” James Garfield, twentieth president of the United States, said, “If wrinkles must be written upon our brows, let them not be upon the heart. The spirit should not grow old.”

Someone said, “Few people know how to be old.” There is no excuse for despondency about age; there should rather be a vigorous embrace of the advantages it brings. The latter years can be the most profitable and productive years of life. Our work and service are never ended so long as we have breath. The latter years of life bring with them opportunities for increased usefulness in eternal causes. Stagnation and self-pity rob the aged of the vision and purpose of this new stage of life. When the mind and spirit become jaded and the heart bitter, despair becomes a robber of the contribution and blessedness that can make the latter years the best years.

The blessing of old age is not merely a pleasant thought, a euphemism—it is a reality. Albert Edward Wiggam said, “Nearly two-thirds of all the greatest deeds ever performed by human beings—the victories in battle, the greatest books, the greatest pictures and statues—have been accomplished after the age of sixty.” That isn’t surprising, considering that the psalmist said, “They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing; to shew that the blessing of old age is not merely a pleasant thought, but a reality. The key to Abraham’s success in old age was that he believed God. His faith began with saving faith that granted him the imputed righteousness of Christ (Gen. 15:6; James 2:23), the same way we enter into righteousness through faith in Christ. We really don’t know what Abraham did during his working years of life in his hometown, Ur, but the significance of his life began when he became a man who put faith into the action of obedience.

Between the ages of forty and eighty, Moses was a fugitive from justice, a man living in isolation, caring for his father-in-law’s sheep on the backside of the desert. For the next forty years of his life—with all of his warts, complaints, anger, and reluctance—he was the emancipator-leader chosen by God to take His people from Egypt’s curse to Canaan’s comforts.

Perhaps no Biblical character inspires awe or ignites the imagination more than Daniel—the captive prophet, the courageous petitioner, the chief of Babylon’s princes, the conscientious man of prayer. The conundrum of Persia was in his mid-eighties when cast into the lion’s den because he refused to worship Darius, the ruler, as a god. He was probably about forty years of age when deported from Jerusalem to Babylon, and the latter half of his life was spent in distinguished and persecuted service for God.

The advanced years of life are not without their faults. Older people can be cranky, obnoxiously opinionated, derivative of the young, prideful and egotistical, poor listeners, complainers, and colossal bores who speak little else but of the past or of their physical maladies. Goethe admonished, “We must not take the faults of our youth into our old age; for old age brings with it its own defects.”

Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit who resides within must remain in sweet control of the believer. The Christian elderly should look not to the past years of life as though the best is over but to the remaining years on earth as holding possibilities for greater enjoyment of God and active employment in service to Him. The greatest benefit of age was best described by Richter: “As winter strips the leaves from around us, so that we may see the distant regions they formerly concealed; so old age takes away our enjoyments, only to enlarge the prospect of the coming eternity.”

Dr. Bob Jones III serves as Chancellor of Bob Jones University in Greenville, South Carolina.
Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary . . .
1 Corinthians 12:22

Having a loved one diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease is a heartache. We fear the diagnosis itself and also the knowledge of how it will change our lives and our relationships. This malady is as dreaded now as polio was in the early twentieth century and as the plague was decades before that. When the diagnosis came crashing into the lives of our family, leaving disruption and discouragement in its wake, we started researching the sources available to us to help prepare for the road ahead.

According to the Alzheimer’s Association, this disease is the most common form of dementing illness and is the fourth leading cause of death in adults after heart disease, cancer, and strokes. Alzheimer’s has been called “the disease of the century” and is devastating for both victims and their families. It strikes fear in us because it does not just attack the body but also the mind and the memory, erasing the person who was.

In my work as a physical therapist I have had opportunities to work with people in various stages of Alzheimer’s. With them and now with our own loved one, God has impressed upon me that there are some important lessons we can learn from those suffering from Alzheimer’s disease. My intent here is not to gloss over, minimize, or simplify the symptoms that accompany Alzheimer’s but to research God’s Word, my most valuable resource, focus on a few of the spiritual lessons that the Alzheimer’s patient portrays, and compare those to my relationship with my Heavenly Father.

The Early Stages

In the early stages of the disease, the short-term memory is greatly affected and the person will often repeat the same question every few minutes, forgetting that it has already been answered. It is easy for family and friends to become exasperated or frustrated by this. But God sets the example for us in His Word: He never tires of repeating His truths, principles, and commands to us. He knows our frailties and is prepared for them.

For example, there are over sixty references in the Bible
about reading or studying God’s Word. The Lord could have said it just once, but instead He repeated it over and over and over again. There are well over three hundred verses speaking of sin. That concept is repeated so that we will be knowledgeable of our sinful state and our need for a Savior. Twenty-six times the cross is mentioned—that we might grasp the significance of Christ’s loving sacrifice for us. More than one hundred verses emphasize the word “believe,” challenging us to respond to God’s Word. Almost two hundred times God uses the word “faith” so that we might understand that our salvation is a free gift, received not because of works.

The Second Phase

In the second phase of Alzheimer’s one has trouble comprehending the written word. How difficult and frustrating it must be to stare at a page of words and not have any idea as to their significance! It would be like trying to read a foreign language or a page from a complex technical manual. The Alzheimer’s patient no longer has the appropriate mental faculties to understand the meaning of what has been written.

This reminds me of an unsaved person trying to read God’s Word. He doesn’t have the appropriate spiritual faculties to discern the truth of the Word. After salvation the Holy Spirit aids our minds to comprehend His Word and helps us to apply it to our everyday life. We are as spiritually frail and needy as the person with Alzheimer’s is mentally frail and physically needy. Our human nature wants to believe that we can do everything on our own, but Alzheimer’s helps us to see the futility in that.

The Later Phases

In the later stages of Alzheimer’s communication becomes even more difficult. I once worked in a nursing home with a woman I will call Bessie. She had fallen and broken her hip. Because of her Alzheimer’s, following directions was very difficult for her. She was only able to process one-word commands. Our therapy time consisted of: “Stand. Careful. Step. Wait. Again. Stop. Sit. Good.” After each command, Bessie would look at me and say, “What do I do now?” When we were finished with the therapy, I would answer her question with the word “hug,” and we would then embrace to complete our time.

Bessie’s therapy reminded me that God has also filled His Word with many one-word directives to help those of us who have difficulty processing information:

- Love (1 John 4:7).
- Study (2 Tim. 2:15).
- Obey (Deut. 13:4).
- Pray (1 Thess. 5:17).

Each word is full of meaning and requires an action on our part. I wonder how often we, like Bessie, are responding each time with, “Lord, what do I do now?”

With Alzheimer’s it is easy to focus on the negatives and on the loss, but God has reminded me that even in this I am to follow the words of Philippians 4:8.

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

And so I must choose to concentrate on the truth of God’s Word and on His just and honest character. He is the true Teacher and makes each obstacle in my life a lesson if I am open to being His student. I need to make a conscious effort to center my thoughts on the loveliness around me when I am feeling overwhelmed by the unlovely. Sickness of any kind is not beautiful, but there can be beauty in seeing a smile, hearing a laugh, or sharing a memory. I strive to give my attention to what is of good report and not of bad. I ask God’s help that I might make a decision to praise, when in my weakness I would prefer to complain. Praising, I find, is a habit that must be cultivated and especially so during the difficult times. But once the habit is learned, then the focus can shift from self to Savior.

So let me now praise our loving Lord, who sees through disabilities and diseases to the real person. He knows and loves us regardless of our frailties and carries us through the difficult times when we follow His special lesson plan.

Debbie Craven, a former missionary, now works as a physical therapist in Michigan.
Life is what you make it. When disaster hits how do you react? You can choose to sit down and suck your thumb or pick up the pieces and go on. I chose the latter.

After my husband had served for seventeen years as a pastor, his body refused to function correctly. We first noticed it when we took our three small girls up into the North Carolina mountains and stopped our car to take a ten-minute walk back to view a beautiful waterfall. When it was time to return, he couldn’t walk. We rested a while, after which he made it back to the car.

“We’ll see what can be done about this,” I said.

Some time later we had him checked into the hospital. When he returned from the examination, my husband’s face looked sad as he limped along the hospital sidewalk and climbed carefully into our car.

“Well, what did the doctor say about your leg?” I wanted to know.

“It’s not good news, Beth. It’s Lou Gehrig’s disease.”

“What does that mean?”

“The doctor says this is a crippling disease. The nerves and muscles slowly die. It’s progressive, and it’s fatal.”

“There’s nothing they can do?”

“Nothing.” The word hung in the air.

I drove home in stunned silence. How could this happen to my tall, handsome husband who used to walk across a classroom in two steps? besides, he was only forty-two!

“Beth,” his words interrupted my thoughts, “when I got the news I was so troubled. I walked to a porch behind the hospital where I could be alone.” His voice sounded strangely peaceful. “I started reciting the Twenty-Third Psalm. I only got as far as the first phrase, ‘The Lord is my Shepherd.’ My first thought was, ‘That’s all I need.’”

Somehow his peace from God helped me know we’d make it. But the shock sure made me breathe deeply. Faith, our eldest daughter, was almost ready for high school. Hope and Grace were in junior high. How could I become the breadwinner? How could I nurture three young girls, work full time, and take care of my husband?

Our story unfolded like pages in a book as the Lord our Shepherd led us to amazing answers that met our needs. Mercifully, we had a year to prepare. I earned a beautician’s license as my husband finished his last year of pastoring a small church. With our savings we were able to purchase a house. Faith and I remodeled the front room into a beauty shop. Meanwhile, President Eisenhower signed a bill that any disabled person could receive disability checks. So, between Clarence’s checks and my income, along with a summer of assistance from many churches, our financial needs were met.

It wasn’t easy watching my husband limp, then walk with crutches, then sit in a wheelchair, and eventually lie on his back. And it wasn’t easy fixing hair all day, running the household, and taking care of Clarence. But, oh, the blessings along the way!

We all worked together. Our brown-eyed girls and I wheeled him everywhere: ball games, church, the grocery store. “Let’s go, Dad!” and off we’d go like a little parade with a smiling father, three beaming daughters, and a busy mom bringing up the rear. All those smiles could
light up a room in two seconds.

Saturday mornings were more serious. Clarence took charge of the backyard chores while I curled hair in the beauty shop. Peeking out the window, I’d see three busy girls pulling weeds from flowerbeds or mowing grass with a serious-faced dad overseeing the project from his wheelchair. Afterwards I’d see one of the girls standing beside her dad under the shade tree talking out life’s problems. He always listened.

“Let’s look at this from all different directions,” he’d say. Then he’d share some wisdom and encouragement. He was still their dad, and he was still in charge. He never left his position in our family to hide in a dismal corner of self-pity.

Miraculously, the Good Lord protected his brain (the part of his body he needed the most) from ever being affected by the disease. I was so glad he was there for me—especially through the hard times.

“Oh, Clarence, I just don’t know what to do, and I’ve got no time to figure it out.” We’d hash it all out the best we could. Life’s complexities along with tears and laughter were still ours. We weren’t alone. We had God, we had Clarence, and we had our three girls.

For thirty years we fought this battle together—him on his back and me running around doing everything. At bedtime it seemed I always had one last thing to do for Clarence. He’d always say, “Thank you, Beth. I love you so much.” As the stillness of the night wrapped around us, together we entered the throne room of God in prayer.

When Clarence went to be with his Good Shepherd, I was glad for him. After all, he had finally asked us to let him go. His journey had been long and hard. I knew that he was walking again and singing joyful praises with his loved ones in Heaven. I could almost see him talking with his loving Shepherd, who understood the whole plan and could show him how his many prayers and tears for his family and people all over the world were going to be answered. I thought I was fine.

But Saturday night, when I sat down to watch the Lawrence Welk Show (which we had always watched together) I realized I was alone, and I grieved. I miss him. Someday, I know, we’ll be together again in the throne room of God. And between now and then, I’ll remember my husband’s words from long ago when he first heard of the journey he was to take: “The Lord is my Shepherd.’ That’s all I need.”

Beth Wraight’s husband pastored for seventeen years until attacked by Lou Gehrig’s disease. She cared for him for twenty-eight years in their home and for years in the nursing home.
Autumn . . . As the emerald of their chlorophyll deteriorates, the leaves unfurl their warm, brilliant colors. The sky is an incomparable deep blue. As we ramble through the woods there’s a crispy, crunchy sound and the smell of damp earth. The air takes on a tangy coolness that reminds us of change. . . .

The fall of life is also a time of change: it’s the colorful in-between stage of middle age when you sometimes look back with sadness at what is gone and look ahead with uncertainty at the snows and cold to come. Fall is the time when the lovely birds, which bring such joy in spring and summer, fly away—just as our children fly from the nest to pursue their own ways and dreams. Fall is a time of change—change that’s not always welcome, so we need to remember Hebrews 1:10–12: “And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.”

Fall can bring a time of midlife crisis, when people do stupid things because they are restless, discontented, and bored, or because they are trying to recapture lost youth, or because they are afraid of the looming winter of old age. Fall is a time of temptation to weaken and relax our standards and let down our guard. Fall can be a time of fatigue: we are weary after the battles of spring and summer and can begin to feel a temptation to self-indulgence. “I can begin to take it easier now,” we might think. After all, retirement with its imagined pleasures is in closer view.

Fall can be a time of emotional struggles: we dwell on lost dreams and experience a sense of hopelessness, wondering what else there might be to life. “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God” (Ps. 42:11).

Fall is a time of preparing diligently to meet the onslaught of winter: we “winterize” our cars and homes, do the fall cleaning, survey the winter clothing needs, and examine the winter sporting equipment. The autumn of our lives should also be a time of preparation . . . a time to make ready for the rough spots or dangers ahead, as well as the surprises and new opportunities. We can “winterize” our souls by spending more time with the Lord who knows what snowstorms lie ahead in our lives. “Seek the Lord, and his strength: seek his face evermore” (Ps. 105:4).

Fall is also a time of harvest: we harvest what we sowed in younger years, and perhaps we do not like the crops that we see. “For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Gal. 6:7). Sometimes the yield is not what we expected; that reality sobers us and makes us wonder how we could have planted more effectively. So fall is a time of reflection and evaluation—and sometimes, distress. It is a time for rejoicing when we look back and see the victories won by faith. It can also be a time for confessing failure, receiving forgiveness, and correcting our lives so that we will not be ashamed of the produce of our remaining seasons. “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. . . . restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee” (Ps. 51:10, 12, 13).

And—dare I say it?—fall is a time of physical changes that impact our whole being as ladies. How many of us are experiencing hot flashes, aches and pains, and mood swings? As the trees undergo physical changes in the autumn, so do our bodies. (But think about it, ladies: without those changes within the tree, there would be no dramatic, gorgeous leaf colors!) “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Cor. 5:1). Instead of focusing downheartedly on the fact that our bodies are on the way to dissolving, we should ask the Lord to help us just face it, brace up, and accept it. We can meet our responsibility with good nutrition and physical exercise, but
we cannot deny it, for, as the song says, “The old grey mare, she ain’t what she used to be”!

Autumn has long been my favorite season of the year, but I’m still not sure that it’s the favorite season of my life. The fall of life is in some ways the most demanding and challenging season, I think. Fall represents the peak of ripening maturity—the full ripening of the gifts God has given to us. Fall should represent for us a time of richer, more mature understanding, experience, and knowledge, a time when we have more to share spiritually and emotionally than ever before. “Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another” (Rom. 14:19).

Fall is a time of renewing our commitment to Christ as we prepare for the final push to the finish line, a time to rouse ourselves afresh to service and sacrifice. Autumn is a time to exercise faith and courage to face what lies ahead; it is a time to let go of what belongs to former seasons. Fall is a time for perseverance as we prepare to run the final laps faithfully according to God’s rules: the marathon runner must put one foot doggedly in front of another with steady purpose and endurance. We, like the runner, must set our faces toward the goal and not look back. So fall is a time for fixing our hearts firmly, not for letting go or letting down. “My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise” (Ps. 57:7). “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58).
In the autumn winds of our lives, we must not let our love for Christ grow cold! A fervent love for the Lord Jesus must carry us through all the seasons of life—especially through fall. “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength” (Mark 12:30). Love for Christ will enable us to be steadfast, faithful, obedient. “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Autumn is the season for change, but—at all costs—our love for God must not change. Autumn is a season of lessening energy, but we should ask God to revive our zeal—not let it cool. Autumn is a season of alteration, but we must not be among those whose love of the Truth alters, those who let doctrine slip away as youth and strength slip away. “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong” (1 Cor. 16:13).

In fall we need to rouse ourselves to be overcomers and not allow ourselves to slowly and lazily go to sleep as nature around us prepares for winter’s hibernation. “He that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame.” We can gird up our loins and say with Paul, “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14). With the Lord’s help, we need to “rev up” our engines and “crank up” our spirits at this critical juncture when our bodies might start saying, “Slow down! Slow down!” “Thy God hath commanded thy strength: strengthen, O God, that which thou hast wrought for us” (Ps. 68:28).

In the fall we celebrate Thanksgiving, and so it must be in our lives. “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thess. 5:18). Give thanks when you’re missing the children who have grown and gone. Give thanks when the hormonal surges wreak havoc on your day. Give thanks when you go downstairs for something and then can’t recall what you intended to do. Give thanks when you’re tempted to feel that your best years are behind you and it’s all sadly downhill from here. Give thanks when young people begin to think of you as “old.” Give thanks when you can’t remember what a good, solid night’s sleep is. In the autumn season we need more than ever to be thankful to our Savior, for the Christian can look back and see that the sins of past seasons are covered by the blood, and she can look ahead to see that the hope of future days is eternal life. When we look back at summer and spring and wish that we had been better farmers, we can thank “the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort” that He still answers prayer, and that He is still able to work, even though the season would seem to be over.

It is difficult to put numerical boundaries on “middle age,” but most say it runs from the ages of forty to sixty. According to an online Psychology Today article on “Mid-Life,” during these years many people experience “confusion about who [they] are or where [their] life is going.” Individuals also “feel a need to reassess where they are and make changes while they feel they still have time.” That brings up an important point: as we evaluate the earlier seasons of our lives, we should resolve by God’s grace that the harvest or produce of the remaining seasons will be “gold, silver, precious stones,” not “wood, hay, stubble” (1 Cor. 3:12). In the power of the Holy Spirit, we should use both our mature spiritual and natural gifts more than ever before. “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13)—this applies through all the seasons of life, and as we enter the challenges of fall we need to remember that.

As autumn is a time of wonderful, rich hues that glorify our Creator, so our midlife time can be a season when we glorify God by adding rich color to the lives of others; a time when others can look at our lives and see, in all of its beautiful variety, a love for God, a ripening and maturing of spiritual gifts and understanding, a determined endurance, a solid doctrinal position, and a steadfast faithfulness.

If we press on in autumn, we will know the blessedness of a daily walk with the King of Glory and know what it is to cry out in love to Christ, “O my God, I trust in thee” (Ps. 25:2). If we press ever onward as the seasons change, we will know the joy and assurance of Psalm 23:6: “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.”

Linda and her husband, Perry, were missionaries in Lebanon and Canada for twenty-four years. They have three children and now reside in Greenville, South Carolina.
... I will fear no evil: for thou art with me (Psalm 23:4).

We are often told that the senior years of life are supposed to be the golden years—years of enjoying the fruits of our labor and handing the tools over to the next generation. Robert Browning describes these years as “the last of life for which the first was made” and comments that “the best is yet to be.” When we turn fifty or even sixty and are in good health, it is easy to romanticize these years and enjoy the privileges of being a “senior citizen,” but as the years go by—faster than we had anticipated—realism begins to set in and lead us into the path of two very common and disturbing traps: the trap of regret and the trap of fear. Falling into either of these traps can ruin the enjoyment of this very important time in our lives and destroy our peace and productiveness.

The Trap of Regret

The point of realization comes at different times to different people. It seems more traumatic, however, as we approach our seventieth year—God’s allotment of threescore and ten. Suddenly we are forced to confront our position: Even if by God’s grace we should live ten more years, seven-eighths of our journey is already over. We begin to look back on the road behind and to evaluate our progress. We remember words of encouragement or praise that came to mind but were never spoken, and we remember words spoken in anger that were never retracted. We mourn the unwise decisions, the selfish choices, and the missed opportunities. We wish we could redeem the unproductive hours, days, or years and the wasted resources. We fear that God will never be able to say to us, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”

Paul tells us to forget those things which are behind and to press on. The past is past. Deeds cannot be undone nor time retrieved. Time is in God’s hands, and a life that has been committed to Him is never wasted. God knows our hearts and our intentions as well as our deeds and our failures. He promised the Israelites to restore the years the locusts had eaten. He can do the same for us.

The Trap of Fear

When we come to terms with our past mistakes, we begin to look at the road ahead. It is not death that we fear if we love the Lord and yearn to be with Him. It is what comes before that gives us concern. What is ahead for us? Will the Lord give us one more year, or five, or ten or more? Will we retain our health, our strength, and our mental capacities until the end? Will we become dependent on our children for our physical or our financial well-being? Will is over, or can the Lord still use our diminished strength and productivity for His purposes? Can we continue to grow in spiritual maturity? Can we still have an influence on the lives of our children and grandchildren? The temptation often is to give up because the journey is almost over and we haven’t much time left to go forward. Satan would love to see us turn off our motor and just coast the rest of the way.

Our predicament is really no different from that of anyone else. None of us knows what tomorrow holds. So what is the answer? In the words of Oswald Chambers, “God never gives strength for tomorrow, or for the next hour, but only for the strain of the minute” (My Utmost for His Highest, Aug. 2). We cannot predict today how we will respond tomorrow when that inevitable strain comes upon us. But we can give our fears over to the Lord with the confidence that when strength is required He will be there to supply all that we need.

Avoiding the Traps

God has given us a road map for our journey—His Word. Over and over in Isaiah, God pleads with Israel to “fear not.” In Isaiah 30:15 he tells them, “In returning and rest shall ye be saved, in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.” And in Isaiah 43:1–3 He says, “Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour.” He further promises, “And even to your old age I am he, and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you” (Isa. 46:4).

We, too, have been redeemed by the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, our Savior. If we belong to Him, we can claim these promises as ours. We can avoid the traps by pressing onward, secure in the knowledge that our past, our present, and our future are all in His wonderful and loving hands.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever (Psalm 23:6).

Betty Mitchell is a retired English teacher. She is the editor for “Monday Morning Manna,” an e-mail devotional for the ladies of her church.
Death, Grief, and Hope
This past year we Christians have once again been reminded that the “wages of sin is death.” From celebrities to government officials, to people in our church and community, and even to loved ones in our immediate family, death has taken its toll. Many times this past year I have had to stop and think about death, grief, and hope.

I work in a nursing home, a place where dying and death are all too common. When I started working here, we had 119 residents. And now, four years later, only thirteen of those original residents remain. Granted, a few of our residents got better and went home or moved to a different facility, but some of those rooms have seen several deaths in that four-year span of time. Usually when I feel a person doesn’t have much time to live, I put a hand on his forehead and pray for him that God will help him as he’s going through this present trial.

Because of my time spent working here at Pisgah Manor and because of my relationship with God, my view of death is different from that of many of the residents. However, it hasn’t always been this way. To most humans death is viewed as a very permanent end. I remember growing up in an ungodly home and having problems sleeping at night because of my fear of death and dying. Sometimes I would whisper to my pillow, “God, I hope You’re real; I don’t believe in You, but I sure wish You were real.” Then I’d drip tears on that pillow. Sometimes Mommy and Daddy would come in, and I would lie very still. I didn’t want them to think I was a sissy. I didn’t want them to be bothered by a kid blubbering about death and dying.

I can remember only one close relative dying between the time I was age four and age twenty. My Grandpa Reese died on a Friday night when I was in the fifth grade. I remember Mom telling me the next Saturday morning, when I got up to go to the Scouts pool party. After Mom told me, she urged me to go ahead and have a good time swimming with my fellow scouts. I remember to this day how my heart just wasn’t in it. When they buried Grandpa the following Monday, I wasn’t allowed to attend. I was too little. I remember doing a lot of sobbing in school that day.

Because I’d experienced the death of only one family member growing up, I didn’t know a lot about the grieving process. And then after I became a Christian I learned how God’s beckoning voice can wake His sleeping saints from death’s slumber. Because I hadn’t been around death that much, and because I knew God would raise His saints from the grave, I really wasn’t very comforting to be around when someone was grieving. My rationale to everyone who had lost a loved one was, “No use crying about it. They’ll be in Heaven. You’ll see them someday!” When my wife, who had lost her dad at age eleven, lost her mother to cancer, we were both in our late twenties. My wife seemed to sob endlessly. I kept telling her things like, “Get over it; you’ll see her again in Heaven. Toughen up!” I even threw Scripture at her—John 16:20-22 comes to mind. I was a heartless Christian. I thought I knew all there was to know about death and dying.

It wasn’t until several years later that I realized I did not have total knowledge on how people should be reacting when they’re going through the loss of a loved one. And then one summer a fellow teacher gave a talk to several of us on the grieving process from her own personal vantage point. (I have changed the name of her and her family members to protect their privacy.)

Connie told us of one sunny day in June in her home state of Ohio. Her son Daniel had recently gotten his pilot’s license, so he and their other son, Jacob, set out in a light twin-engine craft. Their daughter, Rachel, decided at the last minute not to go up with her brothers on the first flight. She watched them take off, but it wasn’t long after takeoff that something went wrong. Horrified, fourteen-year-old Rachel witnessed her brothers’ plane crash. She ran to the scene, certain they’d crawl out of the mess.

The mangled bodies amidst the wreckage were so shocking that Rachel had to be hospitalized. Connie and her husband, upon learning of the accident, became extremely upset at the thought of almost losing all three of their children in one day. Daniel, engaged to be married in six months, died as a result of his injuries.

Rachel was in a psychiatric ward for a month, and Jacob underwent operations for a full year and a half afterwards. He will have both physical and mental scars the rest of his life. Rachel had to be hospitalized several more times because of recurring anxiety, nightmares, and spells of depression.

How long is this grieving process? It may last a few weeks, or it may last for years! Don’t rush the grieving process.

IT MAY LAST A FEW WEEKS, OR IT MAY LAST FOR YEARS! DON’T RUSH THE GRIEVING PROCESS.
Death takes a toll. Here are several statistics Connie shared with my colleagues and me:

- The divorce rate goes up fifteen percent among couples who’ve lost a child.
- The surviving siblings of such a family have a forty-three percent greater chance of divorce when they grow up.
- During the first six months after a sibling dies, teenage siblings stand a fifty percent greater chance of attempting suicide.

So where do Christians come in on all of this? We want to help, but we don’t want to do the wrong thing. We don’t want to hurt people any worse, but what are we to do?

Just be there! Be ready to listen, but don’t expect the grieving person to talk. And don’t sermonize. Preaching one’s loved one into Glory doesn’t really help. The grieving person needs to deal with the here and now. He’s not necessarily ready to deal with the hereafter. Give him space and time.

Connie and her family continue to work through the grieving process. Their hardest times are birthdays and holidays, particularly Father’s Day. But they’re now to the point where they can help others going through the grieving process.

Connie tells of one friend who was a special source of comfort. Janice had been a sixth-grade classmate of Daniel’s. Connie had taught the both of them that year. What was it about Janice that helped Connie? What expertise was it that helped Janice to get through to Connie?

Did she have a degree in psychology or psychiatry? What could a former student teach her teacher?

The year Connie had taught Janice in sixth grade, Janice had been walking to school with her little brother, and as they walked around a curve a drunk driver struck and killed her little brother. Janice shared with Connie that for years she had harbored guilt that it was her fault, that somehow she could have prevented her brother’s death.

After Janice’s call, Connie began to be her old self again. A compassionate friend with whom she could identify helped Connie overcome her own grief.

When we sometimes go through severe trials like little Janice did, it may be that down through the corridors of time we may be able to help someone else through a tight spot, where we’ve once been. It might be that someday we might teach our teacher about death, about grief, and about hope.

Ron Reese is a freelance writer. He now works as an emergency department technician at Haywood Regional Medical Center in Clayton, North Carolina.
She was a beloved relative. Her frequent visits brought laughter and magic into the house. What joy she brought! Then when age and weariness crept into the house, she stopped coming. She had only come when it was pleasant for her to come. The old folks looked longingly for her. They’d say, “Maybe today.” But she never came again. As a young teen who adored her I couldn’t understand it. How could one be a friend one day and no longer a part of a life the next?

Now, in maturity, I understand it. She was afraid. She didn’t want to be reminded of her mortality. I can understand that, but I cannot condone it.

At the wedding altar we vow to be faithful “in sickness and in health.” The vows of friendship are intangible but nevertheless real.

Are we friends only in health? What about your home-bound or institutionalized friend? If you could observe the eagerness when a voice or a step is heard in the hall. The effort to look and see if someone is coming to the door. If you could observe the huge difference in the person when someone comes to visit and bring news of their daily life. The weary person sleeping on the bed comes alive, smiles, jokes, feels loved and cared for.

If we are honest with ourselves we must admit that we don’t visit because it is not pleasant for us. But we should visit because it is pleasant for them.

We are uncomfortable if their speech shows that they are not the same people they once were. Who does that hurt? The elderly may ramble about the past. Listen and learn. They may ramble about dreams they’ve had but can’t sort from reality. Agree with them. Tell them it sounds like an exciting adventure. It may make no sense at all. So what! If you are a friend, you remain a friend. A step in the hall and they look. Could it be a visitor to enliven the routine days? Could someone care enough to stop and talk and make them feel a part of the world they served and loved?

I know one senior citizen who worked for fifty years in a segment of a large organization. Now that the person is institutionalized, of all the scores of colleagues only three have come to visit—and they have stopped too. Fifty years of service and instantly forgotten. How sad. What a reproach to those friends.

I admire your honesty. Just ponder the Golden Rule and perhaps you will change your mind. The Lord’s admonition will place a new light on it.

“Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matt. 25:40).

The author has asked to remain anonymous.
# FBFI NEWS AND EVENTS

## 2008 Meetings

**October 20–21, 2008**  
**New Mexico Regional Fellowship**  
Northwest Baptist Church  
402 San Clemente NW  
Albuquerque, NM 87107  
505.344.5544

**October 20–21, 2008**  
**South Central Regional Fellowship**  
Stony Point Baptist Church  
7938 Barnett Ave.  
Kansas City, KS 66112  
913.299.4774

**November 10–11, 2008**  
**Southern California Regional Fellowship**  
Camp Ironwood  
49191 Cherokee Rd.  
Newberry Springs, CA 92365  
760.257.3503

## 2009 Meetings

**November 13–14, 2008**  
**Northern California Regional Fellowship**  
Castlepoint Ministries  
3700 Country Club Dr.  
PO Box 487, Lucerne, CA 95458  
707.274.1164

**November 13–14, 2008**  
**South Central Regional Fellowship**  
Beth Eden Baptist Church  
2600 Wadsworth Blvd.  
Wheat Ridge, CO 80033  
303.238.7711

**March 2–3, 2009**  
**Southwest Regional Fellowship**  
Tri-City Baptist Church  
2150 E Southern Avenue  
Tempe, AZ 85282  
480.838.5430

**March 6–7, 2009**  
**Upper Mid-West Pastors’ and Laymen’s Meeting**  
Pillsbury Baptist Bible College  
315 S. Grove Avenue  
Owatonna, MN 55060  
507.451.2710

**April 6–7, 2009**  
**South Regional Fellowship**  
The Wilds  
1000 Wilds Ridge Road  
Brevard, NC 28712-7273  
828.884.7811

**April 6–7, 2009**  
**Northwest Regional Fellowship**  
Monroe Baptist Church  
1405 West Main Street  
Monroe, WA 98272  
360.805.6200

**June 16–18, 2009**  
**89th Annual Fellowship**  
Bethel Baptist Church  
200 N. Roselle Road  
Schaumburg, IL 60194  
847.885.3230

**June 23–25, 2009**  
**Pacific-Rim Regional Fellowship**  
Dep-Ed ECOTECH Center  
Cebu City, Philippines  
dynamis06@yahoo.com

**July 27–29, 2009**  
**Alaska Regional Fellowship**  
Maranatha Baptist Church  
7747 East 6th Ave.  
Anchorage, AK 99504  
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What’s an Evangelical to Do? Part 2

Resurrecting the Question

The last issue’s column began discussing a persistent problem confronting conservative Evangelicals: How should they respond to unorthodox “Evangelicals”? A case in point is their position toward British theologian N. T. Wright. Wright insists that almost all Christians for the last fifteen hundred years have misunderstood the doctrine of justification. Leading conservative Evangelicals such as D. A. Carson, Sinclair Ferguson, and, most recently, John Piper have analyzed Wright’s position minutely. They find it seriously defective. Therefore, how should conservative Evangelicals relate to Wright in the future? But Wright is just one recent example of a whole company of aberrant theologians whose heterodoxy leavens Evangelicalism. Yet orthodox Evangelicals don’t seem to know how to come to Scriptural closure about them. What’s an Evangelical to do?

John Piper’s Approach

For the sake of continuity, let me repeat the conclusion of the first article in this series. British theologian N. T. Wright is widely accepted among Evangelicals as a fellow Evangelical. Yet the consequences of his ministry duplicate everything the Scripture warns that wolves do (Acts 20:29, 30). He causes dissensions and hindrances. He teaches and writes contrary to apostolic doctrine. He speaks perverse things. He makes disciples in his aberrant image. So for the flock’s sake and for the Chief Shepherd’s sake, why not say it? N. T. Wright is a wolf. If there’s an outside chance that he’s not, then the burden of proof lies entirely with him.

But conservative Evangelicals hesitate. Let me illustrate. One of the most rigorous recent analyses of N. T. Wright’s teaching is John Piper’s The Future of Justification (Crossway Books, 2007). In it Piper voices his concerns: His portrayal of the gospel—and of the doctrine of justification in particular—is so disfigured that it becomes difficult to recognize it as biblically faithful. . . . In my judgment, what he has written will lead to a kind of preaching that will not announce clearly what makes the lordship of Christ good news for guilty sinners or show those who are overwhelmed with sin how they may stand righteous in the presence of God (15). Following N. T. Wright in his understanding of justification will result in a kind of preaching that will at best be confusing to the church (165). It is more likely that his view will be co-opted as confirmation for the Catholic way (183).

Yet when it comes to his assessment of Wright himself, John Piper doesn’t so much as suggest that the unorthodox theologian may be fencing himself out of Christ’s fold (Matt. 7:15–23). Here is his assessment: My conviction concerning N. T. Wright is not that he is under the curse of Galatians 1:8–9. . . . It may be that in his own mind and heart Wright has a clear and firm grasp on the gospel of Christ and the biblical meaning of justification (15). . . . N. T. Wright loves the gospel and justification (17). . . . Wright loves the apostle Paul and reverences the Christian scriptures (27).

The disconnect between Piper’s conclusions about Wright’s twisted teaching and his convictions about Wright’s loves and reverences is simply stunning. To my mind, it’s nearly incomprehensible.

Why did Piper even bother to expose Wright’s insidious errors? He states, My hope, most remotely, is that Wright might be influenced to change some of what
Teaching things that the Bible doesn’t, or teaching things contrary to the Bible, is bad fruit. That’s clear. But this ought also to be clear. Refusing to say what the Bible says is also telltale.

All of us can sympathize with the difficulty of making some determinations. On the one hand, we don’t want to accuse falsely. We do well to remind ourselves from time to time of the ninth commandment, Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour (Exod. 20:16). On the other hand, because there are false individuals so adroit at disguise that they’re nearly undetectable, we must be alert to their infiltration. That, in fact, is the very point of our Lord’s warning, Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves (Matt. 7:15). Let me call our attention now to two of the most informative examples in history.

First, take the case of Balaam (Num. 22–24). Let’s begin with the positives. Here’s a man ostensibly committed to speaking nothing but precisely what God said. Again and again, even under fierce pressure, he refuses to budge on that point. The Scripture makes sure the reader catches this (cf. Num. 22:38; 23:3, 12, 26; 24:13).

Scripture affirms that Balaam did exactly what he professed. It wasn’t that Balaam deceptively claimed a homiletic that wasn’t really the case. To the contrary, The LORD put a word in Balaam’s mouth (23:5). The LORD met Balaam, and put a word in his mouth (23:16). The spirit of God came upon him (24:2).

To top it off, Balaam’s sermons eventually became inerrant Scripture. Talk about a guy whose sermons make good books! And some of it is even breathtaking Christology (24:17–19). Balaam preaches Christ!

Yet the New Testament’s warning is that Balaam is False Prophet Exhibit A. He’s the ancient archetype for first-century religious teachers who have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam (2 Pet. 2:15). Woe unto them, for they . . . ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward (Jude 11). The Lord indicts the church in Pergamum, I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam (Rev. 2:14).

It’s beyond our scope to analyze thoroughly what makes Balaam a negative example. In brief, the two things for which God faults him were his mercenary motives (Jude 11) and his counsel to Balak to seduce Israel sensually (Rev. 2:14; cf. Num. 25:1–9; 31:16). Obviously then, these are two of the distinguishing evidences of a wolf. It isn’t my purpose here to enlarge on these at present. I simply want to hold up the case of Balaam as an illustration of the fact that what a man preaches can be entirely God’s Word, including its Christology, and that what he preaches can end up in good books, and yet he himself can be false.

Second, let’s investigate a New Testament example of the same phenomenon. Think about how Judas must have appeared to the other apostles. What did they see? To begin with, they saw him as one of only twelve companions chosen by Jesus out of all of the hundreds of thousands of possibilities in Israel. Like themselves, this man was picked by the Master for the rare privilege of the closest possible hour-by-hour fellowship. He also appears to have been trusted implicitly. Judas had the bag, and bare what was put therein (John 12:6). This trust elevated Judas even among the apostles! Further, to Judas also, like the others, Jesus imparted His very own authority to exorcise demons, heal the sick, and preach the Kingdom (Matt. 10:1, 7). It’s no wonder that the other apostles never suspected him to be a counterfeit. Even after our Lord explicitly revealed that one of them was at that very time betraying Him (Luke 22:21), they seem to be utterly blind to the possibility that it was Judas (Luke 22:23; John 12:21–29). Yet inwardly this man truly was the son of perdition (John 17:12).

In all of our discussions about associations in ministry, have we seriously considered the phenomenon of an influential Evangelical leader who (1) seems to enjoy an almost unique relationship with Jesus Christ, (2) appears to be elevated by Christ Himself among even other spiritual leaders, and (3) is remarkably gifted, but tragically (4) is actually a son of perdition and an instrument of Satan? A Satanic masterpiece?

The applications of these considerations are mind-boggling. They’re almost so beyond the realm of believability that it actually takes a while to come to...
terms with them. I don’t think any of us can really be adequately prepared to accept the implications of these two examples unless the Lord Himself opens the eyes of our understanding.

The Scripture teaches the possibility that there are respected theologians, pastors, and influential church leaders among us of whom other Christian leaders say: I don’t think I’ve ever known a man much closer to Christ (he’s one of “the Twelve”); he’s clearly been entrusted providentially with great leadership (he carries “the bag”); his spiritual gifts are incredible (he has authority to cast out demons and heal every kind of sickness and preach the kingdom); his commitment to the exact words of Scripture is unshakable (he refuses to say what God has not said); I seldom hear preaching that impresses me any more profoundly as being exactly what God has said (it’s nothing less than the Lord’s Word that comes out of his mouth); God’s power is obviously on his life (the Spirit of God is with him)—but in actuality, the man is a false prophet.

We acknowledge, of course, that Scripture warns that Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light and that his ministers also are transformed as the ministers of righteousness (2 Cor. 11:14, 15). So we have a place in our theoretical paradigm of church leaders for the man who is a counterfeit. But practically speaking, how are we to detect him?

Back to the Question of Fruit

We’re back to the question of fruit. Our Lord says that wolves in sheep’s clothing cannot produce good fruit. But that raises a question. How then do you explain bad men (e.g., Balaam and Judas) who apparently did and spoke so much good? The answer to that question can evidently be complex. But I think that there are certain considerations that point toward the answer and start us on our way.

The first might be to remember that it takes time for fruit to make its first appearance and even longer for it to ripen fully. The Lord Himself seems to remind us of this when He warns that some professing Christian leaders are such masters of disguise that it won’t be until the Judgment that they’re exposed beyond all doubt (Matt. 7:21–23). However, it doesn’t seem likely that He intends us to understand from this that we’re hopelessly at the mercy of wolves that we can’t ever identify in this life. He assures us at both the opening and closing of the section on identifying false prophets, Ye shall know them by their fruits (16). . . . Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them (20).

My heart explodes in a mighty “YES!” when I read the wording of the vow which the early Princeton Seminary professors were required to take publicly in a clear voice, “In the presence of God . . . I do solemnly promise and engage not to inculcate, teach, or insinuate any thing which shall appear to me to contradict or contravene, either directly or impliedly, any thing taught in the said Confession of Faith or Catechisms.” That’s the spirit!

Belief

Many years ago J. C. Ryle stated the evidences of a true minister as Biblically and succinctly as anyone could: Sound doctrine and holy living are the marks of true prophets. It comes down to a man’s beliefs and behaviors. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine (1 Tim. 4:16). These are the two things Scripture joins inseparably as the evidences of our regeneration. This is especially true of the doctrinal fundamentals about Jesus Christ (Whosoever . . . abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God, 2 John 9) and our personal separation away from the world and unto God (holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord, Heb. 12:14).

I’m going to begin with the matter of a man’s theological positions and frame it in this way. It’s indisputable that someone can, Balaam-like, parrot in his preaching or teaching exactly what God has said while not being true to it himself. No contest here. This is what makes it possible for an unbelieving scholar to do...
accurate textual criticism or to produce a helpful work of exegesis. But what he does with that text theologically and homiletically will eventually betray what He is in his heart. I may be wrong here, but I think that this is almost always the case. As he is in his heart, he will eventually be in what he makes out of the text for which he professes so much reverence.

Many years ago I was impressed with this dynamic as it surfaces in the commentaries of William Barclay. His Daily Study Bible series on the New Testament is renowned for its insights into the text. Barclay will employ the Scripture’s precise Scriptural terminology as he explains a text’s context and general content. But it’s when he turns to theological interpretation that his unbelief shows, often—and this is extremely important to note about all theologians of this kind—not in what he says, but in what he won’t say.

This is the first thing Evangelicals ought to do. They ought to require . . . unfeigned, unqualified, dogmatic assent to every single fundamental of the Christian (that is, “evangelical”) faith. . . . Interminable, deferential, academic fencing will not do. There’s no Scriptural paradigm for it whatsoever.

Teaching things that the Bible doesn’t, or teaching things contrary to the Bible, is bad fruit. That’s clear. But this ought also to be clear. Refusing to say what the Bible says is also telltale. It’s fruitlessness. This is how men like Barclay are sometimes detectable. They don’t bear Bible theology when you give them the seed of a text and ask them to produce. They can accurately classify it, get its taxonomy correct. They can break it apart and describe the pieces. But they won’t take that seed, plant it like a growing thing in their own hearts, and produce from their tongues and their pens healthy doctrine springing up into men’s everlasting life and godliness. This is what our Lord was referring to when He said that it was a thing which they cannot do. They are constitutionally incapable of it.

We don’t have the record of anything Balaam said apart from what he was given by direct revelation and commanded to pronounce verbatim without variation. And yet the New Testament identifies as “the doctrine of Balaam” the fact that he “taught” Balak how to cause God’s people to sin by creating opportunities and arguments for them to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit fornication (Rev. 2:14). Balaam’s “doctrine” was a personal contradiction of everything else wonderful that came out of his mouth.

It is in the interest of screening out Balaams and Barclays that churches and other Christian institutions have found it necessary to formulate constitutions and creeds stating clearly their doctrinal positions, and to require that their members subscribe to these without mental reservation. My heart explodes in a mighty “YES!” when I read the wording of the vow which the early Princeton Seminary professors were required to take publicly in a clear voice, In the presence of God . . . I do solemnly promise and engage not to inculcate, teach, or insinuate any thing which shall appear to me to contradict or contravene, either directly or impliedly, any thing taught in the said Confession of Faith or Catechisms. That’s the spirit!

Certain truths are Scripturally incontestable. They are holy ground, doctrines before which men ought to remove their shoes and bow their heads. In the presence of God, ministers and teachers of theology ought solemnly to promise never to teach or insinuate anything that in any way contradicts them. And it ought to be spelled out what the terms and Scriptures are that we’re employing to define and demarcate those truths, so that no applicant for a trusted position can manipulate semantics to his own ends. It’s not sufficient to ask a William Barclay, Do you find God in Jesus? Or, When you see Jesus, do you see God? Or, Do you believe that he who has seen Jesus has seen the Father? A William Barclay says “yes” to all three of these questions (see his autobiography, William Barclay, 56–57). But if you press him, if you force him to reckon with the wording of the old, time-tested confessions of the Christian faith, he’ll finally flush out. It is not that Jesus is God, he’ll clarify. Nowhere does the New Testament identify Jesus and God, he’ll argue. Jesus did not say, “He who has seen me has seen God.” He said, “He who has seen me has seen the Father.” That’s what Barclay says when you keep his feet to the fire.

This is the first thing Evangelicals ought to do. They ought to require that any organization to which they belong for Christian endeavor or any professing Christian theologian with whom they enter into any spiritual cooperation whatsoever give unfeigned, unqualified, dogmatic assent to every single Fundamental of the Christian (that is, “Evangelical”) faith.

If, after repeated appeals, an organization or individual refuses to do so, those who are truly Evangelical ought to withhold Christian recognition and avoid him (Rom. 16:17), and for the love of the Truth and the safety of Christ’s flock, cry “wolf!” Interminable, deferential, academic fencing will not do. There’s no Scriptural paradigm for it whatsoever. Well-intentioned or not, it’s a betrayal of Christ and the gospel.

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Bring . . . the Books

The last column introduced J. Theodore Mueller’s valuable but little-known work, Great Missionaries to China. Writing in 1947, Mueller had a goal of stirring the Western Church to consider again a great country that needs Christ—China. Even as Communism was entrenching itself and a bamboo curtain was falling that would once again isolate China from the outside world, Mueller appealed along these lines.

Half a century later a new opportunity is at hand to reach China, and believers would do well to become reacquainted with Mueller’s little work. The previous column explored the early missionary activity in China that proved to be the foundation upon which the more familiar work of men like Hudson Taylor was built. The final half of Mueller’s book presents a brief, informative, and inspiring portrait of seven missionaries whose work produced a Chinese church that today numbers more than 100 million believers who have endured some of the harshest persecution brought against Christians in this century.

The first of those men was Karl F. A. Guetzlaff, who arrived in China in 1827. After answering the call to foreign missions as a young man, he went to Berlin and entered a seminary dedicated to training missionary workers. He joined the Netherlands Missionary Society and was initially sent to the East Indies. While in Java he became burdened for the Chinese and was greatly encouraged to go to China by English missionary Walter Medhurst. After learning Chinese, Guetzlaff arrived in China and eventually settled in Hong Kong. Guetzlaff was an excellent linguist, and his greatest contribution to Chinese missions was his revision of the Chinese Bible produced by Robert Morrison.

His passion for reaching Chinese led him to perhaps one of the greatest missionary blunders on record. He sought to encourage national converts to become evangelists by providing them with funds and literature. They were to return at an appointed time to report on their labors. Initially, the reports were unbelievably encouraging. These evangelists brought back reports of scores of converts and gave credible evidence of the suffering they endured for the gospel’s sake. Motivated by a desire to seize the moment, Guetzlaff went to England to recruit men and funds to expand his program. However, when the men he recruited arrived, they uncovered a horrible deception. The native evangelists were in fact impostors who had been spending the money they had received on sinful pleasures and had fabricated an elaborate ruse that had been completely deceived Guetzlaff. Guetzlaff never recovered from this blow; he died in 1851 at forty-eight years of age. He never saw the fruit that God eventually brought from his endeavors. Two years after Guetzlaff’s death, a young man whose interest in China had been fueled in part by Guetzlaff’s enthusiasm set sail for that country.

His name was Hudson Taylor.

Germany, Europe, and England had all been represented in the great Chinese missionary endeavor, and in 1829 an American missionary named Elijah Coleman Bridgman arrived to work alongside Robert Morrison. Bridgman labored for thirty years to bring to completion a reliable Chinese translation of the Scriptures. He was soon followed by another American from North Carolina, Matthew Yates. Trained as a teacher, Yates turned down several lucrative teaching offers to go to China, where for forty years he labored in Shanghai. His instincts and abilities as a teacher served him well and gained him a hearing among the learned and scholarly elements of Chinese society. In 1855, seven years after his arrival, Yates baptized his first Chinese convert. He continued to serve with distinction and faithfulness until his death in 1887.

Mueller devotes a chapter each to sketch the life and ministry of men such as John Livingston Nevius, who arrived in China in 1854 after studying under the famous Charles Hodge. Nevius went on to introduce theological training in China as one of the important pillars for the indigenization of the Chinese church.

A chapter is devoted to the ministry of the Welsh missionary Griffith John, who arrived in China in 1855 and labored in the interior for over half a century. The pioneer translation work of earlier missionaries had produced a Chinese Bible but one that was written in the scholarly dialect rather than in the more familiar language of the common man. Griffith John set his hand to this task, and the result was the first translation of the Bible in Mandarin.

A sketch of James Gilmour of Scotland, who went to Mongolia, completes Mueller’s list of famous missionaries to China. Arriving in Peking, Gilmour became burdened to reach the Mongolian people. After arduously learning their language he spent the next twelve years traveling from tribe to tribe learning their customs and adopting their dress. Eventually he compiled a Mongolian grammar dictionary and linguistic tools that would prove invaluable aids in producing a Mongolian translation of the Scriptures. Mueller says of him, “He loved a strange people with sincere, saving love.”

May we never forget the lives and ministries of these great missionary heroes. And may we remember that they were common men who responded to God’s call with an uncommon fervor, who achieved great things for God by means of their simple, faithful obedience to His call. As it happened in their day so may it happen again in ours!

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Who Is Entering the Door? John 10:9

“I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.”

This has been a favorite verse for many people in their evangelistic efforts. Indeed, it would be difficult to improve upon the simplicity of its gospel invitation. A careful reader, however, senses at least some degree of tension. If entering the door of the sheepfold represents salvation through Christ, why does the verse go on to portray the sheep as passing out of the same door? Most Bible-believers instinctively reject the possibility of losing one’s salvation and look for some other explanation, but the suggestions are few and tend to be vague and unsatisfying. At the very least Christ seems to be guilty of confusing the imagery of the passage by having the door of the fold function in two different ways in the same story. There is another problem as well: the word rendered “man” in this verse is actually the Greek indefinite pronoun in the masculine form. One would expect the neuter if the antecedent is the “sheep” (a neuter word in Greek) referred to in the previous verse.

The search for a masculine antecedent leads to an alternative interpretation, if one is willing to consider the possibility that verse 9 is not portraying sheep entering the fold. Who else would go through that door? The shepherd would. This suggestion not only has the advantage of providing agreement with the masculine pronoun, it also matches the context perfectly. In fact, Christ has already referred to the shepherd’s use of the door in verse 2: “But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.” Many assume that Christ is describing Himself as the shepherd. He cannot be the shepherd in this passage, however, because He is the door. Christ states that point emphatically in two places (verses 7 and 9) in response to His hearers’ failure to understand. It is not until verses 11–18 that Christ changes roles and presents Himself as the Good Shepherd. He can function in two different roles in successive passages, but not in the same passage. Since Christ is the door in verses 1–10, someone else must be the shepherd.

This shepherd is actually the main subject of the passage, so properly identifying him should help us discern the message of this text. He clearly represents spiritual leadership. I would suggest that in our day he corresponds most closely to a pastor shepherding a local church. Based on his familiarity with the sheep and his pattern of faithful leadership (v. 3), the sheep know his voice and willingly follow him (v. 4). He fulfills Christ’s plan for the sheep by selflessly providing their nourishment (v. 9) and promoting their welfare (v. 10). By contrast, “a thief and a robber” (v. 1) is “a stranger” (v. 5) who is destructive to the life of the sheep (v. 10). In this passage, the primary point of distinction between the stranger and the shepherd is their means of access to the sheep. Whereas the shepherd enters through Christ, the door (v. 2), the stranger enters “some other way” (v. 1). Thus everything in the story hinges (pardon the pun) on Christ.

Taking this contextual evidence as the interpretational key, verse 9 actually portrays the shepherd, not the sheep, as entering the fold through Christ. This seems to encounter the same problem we faced earlier, however, except now it is the shepherd going in and out. It is necessary, then, for the exegete to re-examine the presupposition about what it means to enter through the door. Perhaps it is not referring to salvation at all. In fact, one would expect a shepherd entrusted with the responsibility of caring for the sheep to have entered a relationship with Christ previously. What else could “saved” mean? Frequently in Scripture it means “rescue from danger” (see Peter’s cry for help in Matt. 14:30, or Paul’s admonition in 1 Tim. 4:16, neither of which refers to regeneration). Apparently, shepherds face some kind of danger against which Christ provides protection. That point needs some additional exegesis, but for now simply note that this interpretation relieves the passage of any hint of doctrinal aberration. If entering the door does not portray salvation, then going in and out repeatedly is not a problem. Why does the shepherd go in and out? He does so in order to lead the sheep to the nourishing pastures. By the way, this answers yet another problem with the traditional interpretation, because sheep do not “find” pasture: they depend on the shepherd to lead them there.

What, then, is the danger that shepherds face? In this context, it is the danger of misleading the sheep, withholding the nourishment they need, and causing their destruction. Those are all characteristics of the stranger, who corresponds to the false shepherds in Israel’s past (Ezek. 34) and the religious leaders who were currently opposing Christ (John 9). God’s Word warns both groups about dire consequences for their abuse of God’s people. How can the shepherd avoid that danger? There is only one way: enter through Christ. That means on every occasion of ministry to the sheep the shepherd must consciously submit to the Lord, depending on Him for grace to fulfill the tasks of shepherding exactly as Christ directs. R.C.H. Lenski captures the sense with this urgent call to all pastors: “Use the door, use the door!—Then all will be well” (The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel, 717). Such submission to Christ is a message every pastor, as well as those who follow him, must understand and obey.

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Bryant Northern had the world at his fingertips as a walk-on guard with a full scholarship at basketball powerhouse University of Louisville. He dreamed of dead-eye jump shots, March Madness, even a pro career. But the six-foot-tall Northern also had a hidden problem, one more common than Americans may want to admit—a problem that created by what is now a half-trillion-dollar-a-year industry in this country. He was addicted to gambling. Caesars Indiana, the riverboat casino across the Ohio River from Louisville, was Northern’s hangout in high school. It became his scourge. A run of bad luck left him short of money and in trouble with the police. He dropped out of college at age twenty-three after being sentenced to five years’ probation for trying to cash stolen checks to pay his gambling habits.

Jim Chesser, fifty-five, a former Louisville bus driver, jokes that he was “born on a card table and raised on a race track” because of his parents’ love of bingo halls and horses. When Casino Aztar opened in Evansville, Indiana, in 1995, it was only natural he’d be a frequent patron. “That’s when recreational gambling crossed the invisible line to irresponsible, uncontrolled, compulsive gambling,” Chesser said. “When we’re gambling, we will lie, we will cheat, we will steal from everybody,” he continued. “It will take you places you never thought you would go.” He finally left those places, quitting gambling cold turkey to save his fourth marriage.

These stories are not uncommon in the USA, where less than thirty years ago legal gambling existed in just three states. It has now spread as an “engine of economic development” to every state in the union except Utah and Hawaii. America is sold on lottery gambling with its annual payoff of $20.9 billion to state governments. With its promises of new jobs and schools, more pay for teachers, smoother roads, and financial aid to other public services, it has become one of the biggest and most powerful political special interests in the land of the “free” (which is what gambling promises to deliver—something for nothing).

Gambling sounds simple: “to play at any game of chance for stakes, to stake or risk money or anything of value on the outcome of something involving chance or hazardous uncertainty” (Random House College Dictionary). It is taking a calculated risk for monetary or personal gain.

But this “simple” activity involves billions of dollars. Gambling in America says that the total spent in America on gambling is greater than the combined profits of US Steel, General Motors, and General Electric—in fact, more than the combined profits from all the one hundred largest US companies. Gambling generates more revenue than movies, spectator sports, theme parks, cruise ships, and recorded music combined. In Las Vegas, one of the fastest-growing cities in America, players lose more than $6 bil-

lion a year at casinos. In the twenty-one-year period from 1974 to 1995, the amount of money Americans wagered increased 3200%, from $17 billion to $550 billion!

Gambling in America

Gambling was not a part of early America, but it has been accepted and embraced as America has aged and morally declined. Here are some significant dates in our gambling history.

• 1624—The Virginia Assembly decreed: “Mynisters shall not give themselves to excesse in drinking or yet spend their tyme idelie by day or night, playing dice, cards or any unlawful game.”
• 1656—Card fiends in the Plymouth Colony were fined forty shillings.
• 1748—Benjamin Franklin helped organize the Pennsylvania lottery “to raise 3000 pounds for military supplies to defend Philadelphia against the Frenchmen and Indians.”
• 1777—President Washington issued orders forbidding “all officers . . . and soldiers . . . playing at cards, or other games of chance . . . At this time of public distress [they] must find enough to do in service of God and their country without abandoning themselves to vice and immorality.”
• 1963—No state had a lottery.
• 1975—The federal government allowed state lotteries to advertise on radio and television.
• 1976—Casinos were legalized in Atlantic City. The number of state lotteries doubled.
• 1998—Over forty riverboat casinos operated in Illinois, Missouri, and Iowa. Nearly fifty riverboat and dockside casinos were in Louisiana and Mississippi. About 298 Indian casinos and bingo halls operated in thirty-one states. Some form of gambling was legalized in forty-eight states—lotteries, casinos, riverboat casinos, Indian casinos, video lottery machines, pari-mutuel betting (horse racing, dog racing, jai-alai).

Pathological Gambling

According to Gamblers Anonymous, at least 12 million Americans are compulsive gamblers, with an average personal debt exceeding $80,000 (Dallas Morning News). They are victims of their own incurable optimism, always believing they have a pretty good chance to win. But statistics say that a gambler is seven times more likely to be killed by lightning than to win a million dollars in a state lottery (Harper’s Magazine). They are also duped by the Gambler’s Fallacy—the mistaken notion that repetition changes the odds.
flip a coin five times, always getting tails, there’s still a 50-50 chance that you’ll get tails on the next flip. But a gambler thinks instead: “Tails has come up five times in a row, so now it’s ‘time’ that heads comes up.”

Pathological (compulsive) gambling is recognized as a diagnosable mental disorder by the American Psychiatric Association and the American Medical Association. The American Family Physician, a periodical published by the American Academy of Family Physicians, says pathological gambling affects 5-to-15 million Americans, is prominent in young people, and is often accompanied by alcohol abuse and depression. Following is a typical case history.

A 51-year-old businessman presented with complaints of fatigue and weight loss. Findings revealed evidence of alcohol dependence and depression, withdrawal from the family and social activities, and a lifelong history of compulsive gambling. In the previous three years alone, he had lost $13,000 playing the state lottery and slot machines. His spouse was concerned about possible economic and personal ruin if his gambling persisted. The patient admitted that he had claimed nonexistent winnings, gambled more than intended, felt guilty, had difficulty stopping, hid the evidence of his gambling, and secured loans to cover gambling debts.

Here are some diagnostic criteria to help recognize compulsive gambling.
- Preoccupation with gambling (reliving past gambling experiences, planning the next venture, thinking of ways to get money to gamble)
- A need to gamble with increasing amounts of money to achieve the desired excitement
- Repeated unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back, or stop gambling
- Restlessness and irritability when attempting to cut down or stop gambling
- Gambling to escape from problems or moods
- Losing money one day and returning the next to get even (chasing losses)
- Lying to family members and others to conceal the extent of gambling
- Committing illegal acts such as forgery, fraud, and theft to finance gambling
- Jeopardizing or losing a significant relationship, job, or career opportunity because of gambling
- Relying on others to provide money

**Sports Gambling**

Sports gambling is illegal in almost every state, but there are efforts to legalize it—thus inviting organized crime into every arena and threatening the integrity of officials, coaches, players, and fans (as recent scandals illustrate).

Several years ago, a Gallup poll reported by Psychology Today revealed that one in four American men and one in eight women planned to gamble on the next Super Bowl.

**Virtual (Online) Gambling**

It is now possible to gamble twenty-four hours a day from the comfort of home using the Internet and a credit card. In addition to traditional games such as poker, roulette, slots, card games, and blackjack, one can bet on virtual reality TV shows, World Cups, Saturday matches, the weather, etc. It is touted as “fun” and “safe” online because of the difficulty of cheating in that medium. Satan sponsors these free gambling sites as bait and as stepping stones to gambling addictions.

**Teens and Gambling**

With their friends at parties, at school, or in solitude on the Internet, millions of American teens are taking up gambling. Much of the action is small-time—underage purchases of lottery tickets, playing cards or dice games for spare change. But experts say the long-term stakes are high because gamblers who start young are the most likely to develop addiction problems.

A parent’s passion for gambling may be passed on to an adolescent. Sarah, now a thirty-one-year-old executive in New York City, became hooked after accompanying her parents to Atlantic City casinos as a teenager. She now attends regular sessions of Gamblers Anonymous to shake an addiction that plunged her into a six-figure debt.

“I wouldn’t want to get up even to go to the bathroom” said Sarah.

**A Biblical Perspective**

1. The Bible emphasizes the sovereignty of God (Matt. 10:29, 30), but gambling is based on chance.
2. The Bible tells us to produce gain by working (Eph. 4:28), while gambling encourages a “something for nothing” attitude.
3. The Bible warns about the sin of materialism (Matt. 6:24, 25), while gambling promotes it. One Greek word for covetousness is epithumeo, a compound of epi (upon) and thumos (passion). The mindset of gambling is to fix passion upon something which we can obtain by doing nothing. Greed and covetousness characterize gambling, whether it is a simple office bet on a sporting event or a visit to an extravagant all-night casino.
4. Gambling destroys families. It leads to neglect, deceit, and strained relationships. First Timothy 5:8 warns that a person who refuses to provide for his family is worse than an infidel.
5. Gambling can become a form of state-sponsored greed. Romans 13 teaches that the government is to be a minister of God. When government promotes gambling in any form, it subverts the moral fabric of society through greed and selfishness.

Dr. Dave Barba, in full-time ministry for thirty-four years, planted Falls Baptist Church (Wisconsin), Trinity Baptist Church (Tennessee), and spent nine years in itinerant evangelism. He and his wife, Claudia, now assist church planters in the USA through the work of Press On! Ministries (www.ipresson.com).
Last March I was in the waiting room of our local hospital. The chairs were fairly comfortable. There were a few magazines to read. There was even a large window that overlooked a beautiful pond surrounded by trees. But I found it difficult to focus on those things because I was too worried about why I was in that particular waiting room. I had been called in for additional tests because of irregularities discovered in my annual mammogram the week before. There were other women in the waiting room with me, exhibiting a variety of emotions.

Fear was there. Fear of the test results, of the future, of cancer, and of the unknown. Worry was there. How will I handle it if the news is bad? How will my family respond? Will we have the finances necessary to make it through if I need to quit my job? What if I need to have surgery?
I could see from the faces of those around me that impatience and boredom were also in the waiting room. What’s taking so long? Why isn’t the schedule more organized? Whose idea was it anyway to schedule these regular mammograms? Anger and resentment were there as well, evidenced by a response to the news that someone’s tests had been lost and would have to be repeated. All in all, for a quiet waiting room where nothing was supposed to be happening, there were an awful lot of emotional gymnastics going on!

I thought of other waiting rooms that I had spent time in and how I had passed the time in those situations. Although reading the magazines is always an option, it has never been my personal choice because I don’t want to leave without finishing the article. But then again, who would stay in the waiting room just to finish an article in an old magazine? I prefer to bring a book of my own to read or to do something productive to pass the time. If I have my daytimer, I can review my calendar, plan the next day’s activities, look ahead to various projects, and begin planning the steps necessary to move toward completion. I have been known to pass the time doing pre-Christmas shopping, writing down gift ideas and suggestions for various family members. Because I keep the prayer requests from Sunday school in my daytimer, I can also productively use my time by praying for those requests as well as for my family. Sometimes I chat with others, knowing that they understand the tensions in the waiting room. All of the projects above help me to wait because they direct my focus away from self and onto others.

There are times in my life when I am not in a medical waiting room but find myself, instead, in God’s waiting room. I have waited for direction regarding what I should study in college, for answers to prayer while on the mission field in Brazil, for God’s timing in having a family, for God’s results in God’s timing.

In God’s waiting room, peace must replace worry. Patience needs to replace impatience. James 1:4 teaches us to be patient. ‘But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.’

Patience needs to replace impatience. James 1:4 teaches the necessity of patience when it states, “But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”

Thanksgiving is the replacement for anger. Ephesians 5:20 reminds me to “[give] thanks always for all things...”

BEING IN GOD’S WAITING ROOM IS NOT A PUNISHMENT; IT IS NOT A PLACE OF BOREDOM
WHERE TIME IDLY PASSES BY; IT’S A PLACE OF PURPOSEFUL WORK WHILE WE WAIT FOR GOD’S RESULTS IN GOD’S TIMING.
unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” If I am continually giving thanks for the many blessings that my Lord has given me, there is no room left for anger, and it has no choice but to leave the waiting room. To help me in my own waiting room at this time in my life I have begun a gratitude journal. I am documenting all the positive things that I am thankful for so that my focus will not be on the negative, which can lead to anger and hinder the growth God has planned for me.

Contentment must replace resentment. First Timothy 6:6 states, “But godliness with contentment is great gain.” Resentment is much like covetousness. In both cases we compare ourselves to others and then get frustrated at the comparison. In the former we are upset because we don’t have what others have or because we are afflicted with an ailment that another does not suffer with, and in the latter we just want what another person has. From possessions to medical conditions, Satan has a field day with our emotions by getting us to compare ourselves with others and then envisioning ourselves coming out on the short end of the stick. Learning contentment is the solution, and the classroom is often God’s waiting room.

Being in God’s waiting room is not a punishment; it is not a place of boredom where time idly passes by; it’s a place of purposeful work while we wait for God’s results in God’s timing. In the past I have spent much of my waiting time crying out for God to end the wait rather than working to learn His lessons and to draw closer to Him. But God has been teaching me, for He is never pleased when I am stagnant in my Christian walk. He will help me to be God-centered instead of self-centered and to cultivate and incorporate the character qualities necessary for growing in Christ while I find myself in His waiting room.

Debbie Craven was a missionary in Brazil for ten years. She now works as a physical therapist in Michigan.
On Making Decisions

Christians ought to have some clear pattern to follow in making decisions, whether major or minor. We are constantly making choices. Many things we do out of habit, and establishing commendable habits is important in every life. Some, when they face an important decision, wonder, “What would a parent do?” A good question to ask is, “What would Jesus do?” We make some decisions quickly, without much thought. We may mull over pros and cons of some matters for days and never come to a solution. Too often we only mentally flip a coin. (Yes, that’s a type of gambling.)

There are principles in the Word of God that a believer needs to keep in mind for every decision he makes each day. The first and most important principle is not really a decision open for discussion, and so, although it is primary, it does not involve any “process.” If Scripture says do it, do it; if Scripture forbids it, don’t do it. Many choices are just that clear cut. Should we ever lie? Ought we ever to steal? Should we spend time or money on lascivious living? Should we encourage a grieving brother? Our response to whatever God expects should not be just meeting “the letter of the law” but a joyful willingness to do His will.

Many moral issues and personal choices are that simple: obey God; do what the Scripture teaches. Should I be a witness to others? That is clearly commanded. Should I go as a missionary to Germany? Several choices and decisions are involved. For such nonmoral and unrevealed matters, a simple pattern seems helpful: Ask, Search, Believe. This ASB pattern for decision making should be easy to understand, easy to remember, and easy to put into practice. To repeat, it is not to be employed for anything that is clearly commanded or forbidden in God’s authoritative instruction book (2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

Adam was given only one restriction: do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Of the other trees and other fruits he saw day after day, he could freely choose. The number, the variety, the color, the taste—for all of those fruits Adam had full freedom of choice. Whatever he chose and for whatever reason he chose it, he was honoring God. Similarly, we today may freely choose to wear a green sweater or a blue one. We may prefer pie to cake.

Our choices, thus, are not always right vs. wrong, but good vs. better, acceptable vs. preferable. Making a “wrong” choice is not involved in nonmoral or nonrevealed decisions. Although many decisions are personal preferences within the scope of God’s provision, they pertain to matters which we consider really important: Which college? Which job? Knee replacement? To a nursing home? For these decisions involving the outcome of the choice, we desire to have guidance from One who knows us and who knows the future—that is, our Lord. Try it: ask, search, believe.

Ask. You have not because you ask not (James 4:2). A quick, unspoken prayer will do it. Ask God for guidance, for wisdom, for discernment (James 1:5). Clear your heart of personal preferences and be open to whichever choice will most honor Him. Ask God for a proper attitude (see 1 Tim. 6:17–19) while weighing which choice to make and in the full confidence of being guided by Him.

“Ask” does not take long. “Search” though, means, do not make a hasty or unfounded choice. You have asked for wisdom, now use the grey matter and expect God to guide you. You have the Holy Spirit residing within to guide you. He can lead you to Scripture verses or to important principles. He can call to your remembrance things you should weigh. In His Word God has given us all the guidance we need to make proper decisions; expect the Holy Spirit to impress those principles on your heart.

Do the “smart” thing—God does not honor dumbness. Confer with godly advisors. Check with those most familiar with matters that are involved. Do not “put out fleece” or expect a lightning bolt. Carefully consider everything involved, and, as you face a deadline, make the best choice you can based on all you have considered.

Then trust that God has guided you in your decision. That’s the B of our formula: Ask, Search, Believe. You asked God; now believe He heard and answered and guided you in your choice. Believe that the Holy Spirit directed in the wisdom employed in reaching your decision. Accept that God has provided the principles and the special wisdom needed. He has directed you to make the decision that will best glorify Him. Do not doubt. Do not replay the pros and cons over and over. You asked God to guide—why doubt that He has done so?

Does this mean that if we employ the ASB pattern every decision we make will be the “right” decision? Will we always profit financially? Will all problems always be cleared up? Any who expect that are missing one important phase of the process: the decision we make will glorify God.” Sometimes that may not mean “success” or “profit” as the world sees it, but in God’s supreme plan for our spiritual maturity, it is that which will accomplish His best. We believe and accept that. We know that all that God wants for us is for our good. All that God allows to happen to us is for some eternal benefit. Till we see Him face to face, we just trust Him and rejoice in His grace and goodness.

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These objects probably don’t immediately imply “college,” but for many Bob Jones University students, they are a real part of college life. Each week students, faculty and staff are involved in local churches in the Greenville area and beyond. In fact, more than 15 BJU grads pastor churches in the local area, and many more faculty, staff and grads serve in other positions in those churches. Because local church ministry is essential, BJU has more than 200 outreaches helping local churches (in four different states). These outreach ministries include children’s church, youth group, visitation, music ministry and many others. To find out more about BJU’s programs or our local church emphasis, please call 800-BJ-AND-ME.
The seven-year-old twins were trying to be helpful. They had positioned themselves outside the University Dining Common. The boy was standing by the button that would automatically open the doors for wheelchairs and scooters. The girl was watching for someone they could help.

As I was coming toward the door the little girl shouted, “Push the button, here comes an old one!”

My friend, who had just had surgery, came sailing through on his scooter. We were both vastly amused. He came out, I went in, and they netted two old ones. “Push the button, here comes an old one!”

We’ve enjoyed many laughs over that, and the quote has become part of the family vernacular. I wonder what buttons are pushed in our thought processes when we see an “old one.”

For some it is the IGNORE button. Young clerks and waiters often stand and chat and polish their nails as a senior customer waits. If we ignore them, they’ll go away. If we ignore them, I won’t have to face up to my own mortality. I don’t have to be reminded of disabilities, wrinkles, dimmed eyesight. I can pretend that they do not exist. How very sad... not for the elderly but for you.

Any life that does not have friends of all ages is an empty life. Each of us needs children in our lives. We also need the elderly. We need their wisdom. We need their overview of history and world affairs. We need their perspective. We need their examples, and we need to be reminded of the passage of time.

For some it is the FEAR button. They are a bit afraid of the old. Sometimes they don’t feel that they know how to carry on a conversation. They are fearful of crutches, walkers, urine bags, and dim eyes. These are kind folk who just don’t know what to do, so they just ignore their old relatives and friends. It’s the feeling that many of us have at funerals—we just don’t know what to say.

But many push the selfish ME FIRST button. Nothing unpleasant for me. I only do what I like and what is fun for me, and visiting Aunt Peggy at the nursing home is no fun. Maybe not for you but it surely is fun for her. Push the button of unselfishness.

What better use of time could we invest? Visit or contact someone who loves you. Love is such an amazing gift. How can we take it for granted? But we do.

“Push the button, here comes an old one!”

Push the button of MINISTRY. Can’t visit? Send a card. Pick up the phone and call. Schedule a visit. Put it in your date book. Then keep your promise to yourself and do it. Once every three months? Once every two months? Once a month? Schedule it and do it. So many people are always “going to visit,” but it never happens. Being remembered is such an important thing.

Am I being simplistic to mention “do unto others”? If the Lord allows you long life you may one day be the lonely old person who is delighted with every kindness shown. Do you really want to be treated as you treat the old folk in your life?

“Push the button, here comes an old one!”

Be sure you push the right button.

Doris Fisher Harris teaches in the Communications Department at Bob Jones University. She has been a freelance writer for many years and has marketed nearly seven hundred pieces.
As we grow older, our bodies get shorter and our anecdotes longer. —Robert Quillen

Age: The only thing that comes to us without effort. —Unknown

Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be, The last of life, for which the first was made. —Robert Browning

Old age comes from God; old age leads on to God. —Pierre Teilhard De Chardin

My, my, sixty-five! I guess this marks the first day of the rest of my life savings. —H. Martin

Old age ought to be a brighter and a calmer and a more serene thing than early manhood. —Frederick William Robertson

In the days of my youth I remembered my God! And He hath not forgotten my age. —Robert Southey

God gave us memories that we might have roses in December. —Sir James M. Barrie

Live your life and forget your age. —Frank Bering

The evening of a well-spent life brings its lamps with it. —Joseph Joubert

Wrinkled was not one of the things I wanted to be when I grew up. —Unknown

Winter is on my head, but eternal spring is in my heart. —Victor Hugo

Whenever a man’s friends begin to compliment him about looking young, he may be sure that they think he is growing old. —Washington Irving

The average life span of a woman is constantly increasing, thus enabling her to stay 29 much longer. —Unknown

An octogenarian was told that a friend of his, aged seventy-five, had said that a man is at his best in his seventies; the octogenarian replied, “He will know better when he grows up.” —Henry Durbanville

Believe me, when you’re my age, you just love hearing about alternative sources of energy. —Ronald Reagan

You don’t grow old; when you cease to grow, you are old. —Charles Judson Herrick

The time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. —Paul the Apostle

Compiled by Dr. David Atkinson, pastor of Dyer Baptist Church, Dyer, Indiana.

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Pastor Rob Campbell and the people of Bethel Baptist Church in Sellersville, Pennsylvania, did a superb job of hosting this year’s annual meeting. The facilities were immaculate and had been well prepared in every way. The program and people were equally prepared. The gracious church family offered their facility and staffed it with people and with everything that was needed to provide a great meeting. Each day sweet-spirited folks served at a table in the display area stocked with snacks and drinks.

Tuesday night during the service the leadership of Bethel Baptist displayed their preparedness in a special way. During the first service a thunderstorm took out the electricity to the building just as Dr. Sam Horn was about to begin preaching. The men at the church responded in an exemplary way. Undaunted by the lack of our normal conveniences, the ushers provided candlelight for the preacher and worked during the remainder of the service to assure that our exit would be equally as orderly. They had arranged additional lighting in the foyer area and stationed men along the back roads to point us in the right direction. As Dr. Vaughn noted the next morning, their response to the situation was exemplary.

I wish our critics could have been at the 2008 FBFI annual meeting. Those who claim that we are too “old fashioned” in our beliefs would not have been disappointed. The preachers clearly outlined the Biblical position of the FBFI on uncompromising fellowship, balanced Biblical discernment, separatist Baptist Fundamentalism, and several other topics. Compromise is the ever-present enemy of those who serve the Lord. The mission statement of the FBFI declares that we will “provide a rallying point for Fundamental Baptists seeking personal revival and the opportunity to work with committed Bible-believers in glorifying God through the uncompromising fulfillment of the Great Commission.” Our resolve was strengthened by the preaching during our annual meeting.

On the other hand some of our brethren who claim that they will not fellowship with us because we “hold the right position, but with a wrong disposition” would have been greatly disappointed. The position of the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship International was clearly delineated in the preaching, but as importantly the disposition was also clearly displayed. One needs only to attend the national meetings to sense the heart of the preachers in this fellowship. A man expecting to hear a harsh message with steady personal attacks will have little ammunition in his belt after spending a few days with our brethren. One young man commented that this meeting did more to help him in his understanding of Fundamentalism than any meeting he had ever been to. The camaraderie and clarity of the message were refreshing.

The 2009 annual meeting is June 16–18 at Bethel Baptist Church in Schaumburg, Illinois. Set aside the time in your schedule. You might be surprised how profitable these meetings are.
The Lord’s Pleasures for His People

Jerry Sivnksty

In Psalm 16:11 the psalmist declares, “Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” The pleasures that this verse refers to are different from the pleasures of this world. The pleasures of the world and the flesh are fake and shallow. They never satisfy but always bring guilt and shame to those who yield to their enticements. Proverbs 14:13 states, “Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness.” Not only do the pleasures of the flesh produce heaviness, but they also lead to poverty. Proverbs 21:17 says, “He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man.”

I have observed that seeking the world’s pleasures always involves taking something from the outside in order to satisfy a desire on the inside. Many years ago Dr. Charles Britt had me for a week of meetings in Memphis, Tennessee. One day he said, “Jerry, I know you speak to a lot of teenagers at youth camps. Would you like to visit Graceland, where Elvis Presley lived? I think you could tell teens across the country about the tragedy of his life.” Well, it was quite an eye-opening experience for me. When I walked into Elvis’s house at Graceland, I noticed mirrors everywhere. I asked the guide why there were so many mirrors, and he replied, “Elvis liked to look at himself.” I saw his collection of handguns, his expensive cars, and his lavish entertainment room—he had everything you could imagine. He was a living idol; if he walked into a store, fans would tear his clothes off of him, so he had to have bodyguards around him whenever he went out in public. The guide said that Elvis started taking drugs to perform, other drugs to help him sleep, and more drugs just to help him get through the day. As we were walking through the house, I started to enter a bathroom. The guide told me I wasn’t allowed to go in there; when I asked why, he answered, “Because that is where Elvis Presley died.” He fell off the toilet and died due to an overdose of drugs. The king of rock music died on his throne! Remember, seeking the pleasures of this world involves taking something from the outside in order to satisfy a desire on the inside.

But just the opposite is true for the child of God. And unlike the fleeting pleasures of this world, the Christian can enjoy the pleasures of God both in this life and in the next. In this life, pleasure for the Christian is an internal peace and joy that come as a direct result of doing the will of God. Many years ago, Dr. Wendell Heller and I went to India for three weeks and preached all over the southern part of that country. I was overwhelmed by the masses of people and cattle there. In half the land space of America, India has more than a billion people and a billion cattle. Because the Hindus worship the cow and will not kill it for food, we ate their standard of rice and curry for all three weeks. I got sick and lost fifteen pounds; when I went back home to America, I outlawed rice from our home for a whole year! In one town of India where we were holding a revival, so many people got saved that an independent Baptist church was established. My heart was thrilled by what took place during that trip! Even though I was so sick and weak, it was worth it all to see the Lord work so wonderfully; I thought my heart was going to burst with joy at the result He gave. Pleasure is an internal peace and joy that come as a result of doing the will of God.

The second aspect of the pleasures of God concerns eternity. In his Treasury of David, C. H. Spurgeon wrote, “The soul that is once landed at the heavenly shore is past all storms. The glorified soul shall be forever bathing itself in the rivers of pleasure. This is what makes heaven to be heaven; we shall be with the Lord.” When I was a little boy, my mother would bake homemade cakes. After she poured the cake batter into the pans to bake, she would let my two brothers and me eat the leftover batter in the bowl. We would shove each other out of the way trying to get a mouthful of batter—it was just a foretaste of our mom’s coming cake. We as God’s people are getting just a little foretaste of God’s coming eternal pleasures. I trust you will know His pleasure now as you serve Him and anticipate His eternal pleasures waiting for you in Heaven!

Evangelist Jerry Sivnksty may be contacted at PO Box 141, Starr, SC 29684 or via e-mail at evangjsivn@aol.com.
Personal Note: Recent events have conspired to push this topic to the forefront of my life, so if I don’t write this column now I probably never will. Our family recently buried what the NT teaches us to think of as the temporary “tent” of both my mother and my father who, though they had been separated by 200 miles for the last 30 years, passed away within 8 days and fifteen minutes of each other. Though their stories are very different, both came to know Christ and were ready spiritually. Both were experiencing increasing health issues and were physically ready as well. In my mother’s case, sixteen years of Alzheimer’s disease concluded with sixteen days of taking no food or water. Two weeks watching someone slowly pass away in your own home gives you a lot of time to reflect on life and death. The unique privilege of personally bathing and preparing the body for burial, laying it in a hand-crafted pine casket, and burying it in a forest provides the evidence and express ourselves, so that it mirrors the evidence of sight and experience, our tendency is to tweak its terminology and adjust its embarrassing overstatements so that it fits more comfortably with our perception of reality. We need to learn instead to readjust how we interpret the evidence and express ourselves, so that it mirrors God’s depiction of reality.

As fallen and sinful beings, our habitual way of thinking and speaking is naturally at odds with reality as God expresses it. When confronted with Scriptural assertions that seem to conflict with the evidence of sight and experience, our tendency is to tweak its terminology and adjust its embarrassing overstatements so that it fits more comfortably with our perception of reality. We need to learn instead to readjust how we interpret the evidence and express ourselves, so that it mirrors God’s depiction of reality.

Do Christians Die?

Let’s begin by sampling the teachings of Jesus recorded in John. (The following verses reflect my own translation.)

The one hearing My word and believing the one who sent Me has eternal life and comes not into judgment but has crossed over out of death into life (5:24).

Jesus describes Himself as the bread that comes down out of Heaven so that anyone may eat of it and not die. . . . if anyone would eat of this bread, he shall live for ever. . . . This is the bread that came down from Heaven, not like [your] fathers ate and died—the one eating this bread lives forever (6:50, 51, 58).

On another occasion Jesus solemnly affirmed, If anyone should keep My word, he should not see death ever (8:51).

Jesus introduced a new way of describing a believer whose spirit had departed his body. Knowing that Lazarus had passed away in His purposeful absence (11:5, 6), he said to His disciples, Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going to waken him (11:11). John explains that the disciples misunderstood what Jesus meant by sleep (11:12, 13), so that Jesus had to put it in terms that they would plainly understand: Lazarus died (11:14). But Jesus’ description of choice for Lazarus’ condition was not “death” but “sleep.”

Jesus assured Martha in the most absolute language possible, The one believing in Me, even though he may have died, will live; and all who are living and believing in Me will not die ever. Are you believing this? (John 11:25, 26).

Jesus’ question continues to challenge us today: Do you believe this? Or do you rationalize His language as a well-meant metaphor designed to comfort us, but you fall back on your sight and experience as the final arbiter of reality? We should understand New Testament references to believers who are “dead” or who have “died” as occasional accommodations to our flawed human perspective (like Jesus in John 11:14), or as references to their physical, bodily existence only. Jesus stated the reality repeatedly and unambiguously—believers do not and will not ever die. Pastor and reformer Rowland Taylor fully grasped this when, five days before he was burned at the stake by Roman Catholic loyalists in 1555, he wrote to his family and friends, “Count me not dead, for I shall certainly live and never die” (J. C. Ryle, Five English Reformers, p. 83).

What Is Resurrection?

James—in proving a critical theological point about salvation—stressed that “the body without the spirit is dead” (2:26). Is that not an unequivocal statement of the universal reality of death, even for the believer? Yes, but note his wording: it is the body that is dead—and the body only—because it is without the spirit. The Biblical doctrine of resurrection, by definition, has nothing to do with the spirit. Only the body is resurrected, because only the body dies. Spirits do not await resurrection. Spirits are not resurrected because spirits never die; they are immediately transported. As foundational and distinctive as the doctrine of resurrection is to Christianity, the regularity with which it is misunderstood and misrepresented (especially at funerals) is remarkable.

At the same time, it is a mistake to assume that, because your spirit is the real “you,” your body or what happens to it is inconsequential. The human spirit is not all-important, nor the body unimportant—contrary to the kinds of Greek philosophies that confronted Paul in Athens and the proponents thereof who openly mocked him when he spoke “of the resurrection of the dead” (Acts 17:32).
OF DEATH—A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON DYING

NT describes the body as the tent of the spirit, but it is not a disposable tent. God attaches enormous importance to the human body that He fashioned when He made man in His own image; so much so, that He repeatedly assures us that He will raise the body from the dust of the earth from which it was first formed and to which it returns at its death.

1 Corinthians 15

The Bible’s most extensive discussion of resurrection is located in 1 Corinthians 15. Paul’s habitual reference to the “dead” almost makes us suspect that we have overstated our case. But Paul has picked up on Jesus' expression; he teaches that by virtue of Jesus' bodily resurrection, “Christ... [has] become the firstfruits [of resurrection] of them that slept” (15:20; cf. 11:30). He does so again when he affirms that “we shall not all sleep” (15:51). The intervening explanation makes it clear that what is “dead” and “resurrected” is the body (15:35–49 contains ten references to “body”).

What Paul teaches in this passage (15:50–53), then, is that some will be physically alive (“we shall not all sleep”) at the transformation into our glorified bodies, while “the dead [bodies]” of those who have fallen asleep will likewise be transformed at the moment of resurrection. In either case, at that moment “we shall all be changed.” Who will experience that transformation first? Or will it be a simultaneous experience for those who are alive and those who are “asleep”? Paul answers that question in 1 Thessalonians 4.

1 Thessalonians 4

The facts about the rapture and the resurrection are not supposed to be obscure or mysterious; Paul plainly states that he does not want Christians to be ignorant about these matters (4:13a). Then, once again, he refers to believers who have passed away as being “asleep” (4:13b) and teaches that the dead in Christ who are “asleep” will be transformed first, followed by the transformation of those who “are alive and remain” to the coming of the Lord (4:15-17). Paul’s language in 4:14 is curious. What fact or assurance both alleviates our ignorance and prevents us from the kind of hopeless sorrow that characterizes the world’s experience of death (4:13)? Here it is: “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose, even so also God will bring with Him those who were laid to sleep through Jesus” (4:14, literal).

Both “the dead in Christ” and those who are “asleep” describe believers who have passed away, but from the earthbound and human perspective. Their bodies, being now without their spirits, are “dead”; yet, in reality, those bodies are only temporarily “asleep” because those bodies will be wakened, raised, and gloriously transformed into incorruptible bodies that are reunited in an eternal union with the spirits that once dwelt in them as a man lives temporarily in a tent.

The resurrection and glorification of our bodies is a future confidence unique to the Christian, and one of the distinctives of Biblical Christianity. But the present confidence, equally unique to the Christian, is that every believer whose body dies (or falls asleep) is immediately “present [at home] with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:6, 8).

Conclusion

The word “cemetery” comes from a Latin word originally derived from a Greek noun meaning a sleeping chamber (a bedroom or dormitory). It is a noun form rooted in the very verb Jesus and Paul use throughout the NT to describe Christians who enjoy the immediate presence of God while their bodies “sleep” in anticipation of future resurrection.

Obviously, believers’ bodies expire and pass away like anyone else’s. That is part of the fallen human condition. Scripture takes us far deeper than the physical body. Scripture forces upon us the penetrating reality that every person is born dead. In Ephesians, Paul addresses believers as “you . . . who were dead in trespasses and sins” (2:1) because we were “alienated from the life of God” (4:18). “But God,” he continues, “. . . even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ” (2:4, 5).

We are born and “live” dead in sin even while our bodies are alive. We are made alive at the new birth, never to die. If we can, being spiritually dead, inhabit living bodies, it should not be surprising or objectionable to insist that we, in fact and reality, do not die even if and when our bodies do.

For the unbeliever, physical death is the ultimate kiss of death, sealing one in eternal spiritual death. Though the unbeliever’s body is raised, it is a “resurrection of damnation” (John 5:28, 29) unto a “second death” (Rev. 20:6, 14). For the believer, physical death is “to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better” (Phil. 1:23)—the portal through which the soul passes into the very presence of God. While the spirit is “with the Lord,” the body sleeps in anticipation of its resurrection and refashioning like Jesus’ body of glory (Phil. 3:21), fitting us for our full entrance into our eternal inheritance of life (Rom. 8).
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No Sound Doctrine

Brian McLaren is known quantity in the emerging church movement. In a recent ChristianityToday.com interview, McLaren revealed his perspective on the new Christian era as "more about the Christian way of life than it is about a rigid and polemicized systems of belief." In that same interview McLaren also believes that the future of Christianity will also require Christians to "join humbly and charitably with people of other faiths—Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, secularists and others—in pursuit of peace, environmental stewardship," and other things that "matter greatly to the heart of God."

This article can be referenced at http://www.onenewsnow.com/Church/Default.aspx?id=197306.

Abducted Children

A Pakistani court has awarded the custody of two children, Saba Masih (13) and Aneela Masih (10) to their alleged kidnappers. The basis for this court ruling, said Judge Main Saem Sardar, is that the children had converted to Islam, a move that invalidated their Christian parents’ right of guardianship.

Saba told the court that she and her sister had been inspired by Islam and had run away. She had stated her age to be seventeen and changed her name to Fatma Bibi and married (which could be done without parental consent only after age sixteen). The children’s parents were not permitted to give evidence regarding their children’s true ages, nor were they allowed to talk with their daughters.

Christians make up less than two percent of Pakistan’s 168 million citizens. This makes Christian children a largely unprotected minority. Though charges have been filed regarding the kidnapping of these two girls, the police refused to believe the parents. No formal investigation ever left the doors of the police station.


New Christian-Muslim Statement

On Thursday, July 31, 2008, over 140 conference participants gathered at Yale University for a “Loving God and Neighbor” meeting. The purpose was to investigate ways that Christians and Muslims could work together to address world poverty, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, future wars, and religious freedom. The result was a cooperative statement that indicates further collaborative efforts are ahead.

Among the document signers are Leith Anderson, president of the National Association of Evangelicals, and Geoff Turner, international director of the World Evangelical Alliance.

The document expresses respect for each other’s faiths and a commitment to the unity and absoluteness of God. Each commits not to desecrate the other’s religious sites and to permit freedom of religious beliefs. The statement also affirms that dialogue is not a departure from the faith and that each side should maintain its faith’s distinctiveness.

Also alarming is the statement that each side would commit a week each year to preach to their congregations the good aspects found in the other’s faith.

This conference is the first in a series of conferences yet to come that are designed to “promote peace and understanding between the Abrahamic faiths.”


Mass Arrests at Pro-Life Demonstration

Many pro-life demonstrators were arrested without formal charge in Bel Air, Maryland, in August of this year. The group stood on public property and moved at the request of police only to be arrested later. The following day the charge was revealed as loitering, failure to obey a lawful order, and disorderly conduct. All adult participants arrested spent the night incarcerated. Minor children were released shortly after being taken into custody. The group is considering a legal challenge to “civil rights violations.”

This article can be referenced at http://christiannewswire.com/news/186327360.html.

California on Homeschooling

In the last edition of FrontLine, Californian homeschooling woes were articulated. The California 2nd District Court of Appeals had ruled that a homeschooling parent must possess teaching credentials in order to homeschool his children. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger promised to promote legislation to combat the 2nd District Court’s ruling. In a rare but welcome move the state Appellate Court ruled in early August to reverse the previous court’s decision. The laws in question usually exempt homeschooling but are intended to address private schools that in the eyes of the state are promoting substandard education. Legislation in thirty other states exempts homeschooling families.

This ruling does, however, issue the caveat that the rights of parents who homeschool can be overridden if the child is in danger.

This article can be referenced at http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-homeschool9-2008aug09,0,2128476.print.story.

America on Marriage

In a recent USA Today/Gallup poll of 1007 adults, 49 percent of those surveyed believe that cohabitation prior to marriage will
reduce the chance of divorce later. Thirteen percent said cohabitation would have no influence. Seven percent had no opinion. Only 31 percent believe that cohabitating would increase the risk of the marriage’s termination through divorce. The logic: Cohabitation helps you know the other person better before you say “I do.” The facts, however, say just the opposite. A 2006 study that has been published in the journal Demography states that one-half of all unions formed after prior cohabitation fail within one year. Ninety percent fail within five years.

This article can be referenced at http://www.lifesitenews.com/ldn/2008/aug/08080106.html.

No More Fidelity and Chastity

The July 12/19 issue of World magazine reported on the June biennial assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) meeting held in San Jose, California, where 54 percent of the delegates present voted to abolish church law that required all clergy and lay leadership to “live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, or chastity in singleness.”

This revision would be a change to the constitutional provisions of the denomination. Hence this revision would require the approval of a majority of the denomination’s 173 presbyteries over the course of the coming year. Concerning it and other leftward leaning revisions, one liberal caucus rejoiced the assembly had agreed to “open the door to the gifts and callings of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer members.”

This article can be referenced at World Magazine, July 12, 19, 2008, Presbyterians vote against fidelity and chastity.

John Piper Interview

A recent YouTube interview between John Piper and Adrian Warnock is available for online viewing. It regards John Piper’s ministry with the New World Alive conference in Wales. When asked why he and other Americans continue to come to this particular conference, Piper responded with an affinity for the common cause which in his words surrounded “the penal substitution as being precious beyond words.”

His broader purpose for his involvement was stated as: “I thought it had, up to this point, a kind of unifying effect because I’m contaminated with charismatic influence and I’m reformed to the core—like I say I’m a seven-point Calvinist—that sort of thing. And so that’s an unusual combination. So I’ve been to the Leister Conference with the Banner of Truth books, I’ve been to the Brighton Conference with what, Newfrontiers? And I’ve been to FIEC, and I’ve been here now, and that seems to be broad. So evidently my role is to function as a kind of voice that can attract a broad array of evangelicals. So that’s the bigger reason. I like serving that purpose, so if I can serve that purpose, I’ll come over. I didn’t know that, but I’m told that, and I’m pleased to help draw exegetically serious, Bible, gospel people, whether charismatic or not, together. I think that’s a wonderful calling.”

This article can be referenced at http://adrianwarnock.com/2008/06/interview-john-piper-on-new-word-alive.htm.

Compiled by Robert Condict, Fundamental Baptist Fellowship International Advisory Board member and pastor of Upper Cross Roads Baptist Church, Baldwin, Maryland.

Noteworthy is presented to inform believers. The people or sources mentioned do not necessarily carry the endorsement of the FBFI.
In the last Global Focus we looked at the need for expanding our ethnic evangelism as Fundamental Baptist churches and at some ways we can develop our focus on the opportunities around us. In this article we will present some ways our church has practically moved forward in reaching our diverse community with the gospel.

First of all, you must know your community. There is an abundance of demographic information available online for your region. Some organizations also provide a custom study of your area, which includes growth trends, ethnic analyses, socioeconomic statistics, etc. If you truly believe that you are God’s church in one particular location, then knowing your community will help you know who you need to reach. If your church is older, your community has likely changed and your evangelistic opportunities have broadened.

Second, provide evangelistic material in other languages for your church. Once you know the various ethnic groups present in your community, order materials in the languages spoken around you. Bibles are available in most languages. Most evangelism and discipleship works are available in Spanish and other languages. Make these resources available to your church members.

Third, reach out to international students at the local university. We were shocked to realize there were thousands of students from unreached mission fields studying at a university less than ten miles from our church. When we offered to get involved with them, we were warmly accepted. Since then, we have started a campus ministry, and the Lord has blessed with many opportunities. The possibilities for ministry and outreach abound as God burdens church members for international students.

Fourth, invite interns to spend a summer with you. If you are not sure you have the time to pursue opportunities or even to investigate them, contact a Christian college and offer to host an intern or two for the summer. By providing housing and a small stipend, you can host an intern burdened for cross-cultural ministry. It is a win-win for you and them, as they can dedicate their summer to reaching out to those they are burdened for, and you can guide their outreach, research, and ministry opportunities to help move your church forward. We have had what we call “Global-Local Interns” as well as single ladies who have come and lived in our Muslim community for the summer. These interns have been a tremendous blessing to our church.

Fifth, translate your events and services for first-generation immigrants and internationals. We purchased a set of headsets that can be worn anywhere in the auditorium while someone translates the sermons in the sound booth. This is very helpful for first-generation immigrants and internationals whose English is limited but whose children can fully participate in the English ministries of the church. For outreach events we have provided translation in Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, and Russian, and noted this on advertisements. It is difficult for these families to cross language barriers. Make sure they know they are welcome at your church.

Finally, seek to plant churches in diverse areas beyond your reach. The best hope for many lost people is a renewed church-planting effort in urban ethnic areas. Much of our church planting is focused on growing suburban areas. However, changing urban populations provide immense opportunities for church planting and missions work in our country. By planting churches, we can penetrate areas that Fundamental Baptists have long since abandoned.

We certainly have more work to do in our community, but we are thankful that God has been at work to open our eyes to see the opportunities here. We pray God will do a work among all of our Fundamental Baptist churches for His glory among all peoples.

Pearson Johnson is the Pastor of Missions and Evangelism at Inter-City Baptist Church near Detroit, Michigan. If you have questions or comments, please contact him at pjohnson@intercity.org.

1 See the Jan/Feb 2006 FrontLine Global Focus by David Shumate for helpful information on demographic research.
2 See www.majestic-media.com for “God’s Bridge to Eternal Life” in Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, and other languages.
Joining the Army was supposed to be simple—filling out the forms was the only confusing part. But as we learn from Job, life sometimes takes confusing turns without warning. Believing that the Lord called me to serve Him as a United States Army Chaplain, I applied to become a chaplain candidate, never expecting how the Lord would use the process to try me, confuse me, and draw me closer to Himself.

Since high school, I have felt a burden—a calling—to serve my country. Even before I was called to preach, I enrolled in Air Force ROTC (Det. 770) at Clemson University. Then, after transferring to BJU to complete my degree in Bible, I began to explore the possibility of serving as an Army chaplain. My family rejoiced when the FBFI Commission on Chaplains approved me as a candidate in February 2007 during the spring semester of my senior year. It seemed to my fiancée (now my wife!) and me that this was God’s will. Every arrow pointed toward the Army.

In my FBFI application process I wrote that “the men of our Armed Forces greatly need moral direction. Many have come to the Army searching for answers, wondering what will happen if they become the next casualty of war. Many brave soldiers are fearful for their future, having no confidence in their soul’s eternal destiny. They need loving companionship, wise counsel, and strong guidance in the Word of God so that they may know God, face the future in faith, and better serve their country.” I still believe that the United States Armed Forces are home to an open mission field with countless young men and women confronting the realities of death and God. My heart’s desire is to reach them with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But during final exam week, I received a phone call from the Chaplain Recruiter informing me that my condition prevented me from entering the chaplaincy. I didn’t say anything but “okay.” She reiterated, “Do you understand, sir? You will not be allowed to be a chaplain.” Stunned, I simply answered, “Yes.” I hung up the phone wondering, “What happened? What now?”

The health forms I had filled out months before included a question about allergies or reactions to any kind of insect sting. My response had to be given in a small box, “yes,” or “no.” While working at the Wilds Christian Camp as a counselor, I had been stung by bees on two occasions. Both times I had experienced minor swelling, so I checked “yes” and explained in the “comments” section below. I simply told the truth; it was, after all, just a couple of bee stings. Or so I thought.

The Army often “waives” some manageable physical conditions—nearsightedness, asthma, and even shellfish allergies. I thought my condition would be no different, but so far, I’ve had no success. Regarding my future chaplaincy, I am, somewhat like Hamlet, left to ponder, “Two bees, or not to be?” I know the Lord could simply heal me of this allergy, and there is a treatment (immunotherapy) that could prevent an allergic reaction in the future, but it is costly and not covered by my health insurance.

If you regularly pray for chaplains, and I sincerely hope you do, I ask that you also pray for those of us who really want to become chaplains. When a young man is called to the ministry, there is a long road of preparation before he is ordained or called to a church. Over the past two years I have felt the highs and lows of that preparation. I know for certain that the grace of God and the prayers of my parents, friends, and family have kept my focus on the goodness and love of my God. More setbacks may come, as they come to everyone. We need your prayer support and encouragement to become chaplains as certainly as we will need your support when we become chaplains. Our hopes are still high that if God so wills, He will resolve this setback. But even if God should not allow me to become an Army chaplain, would you pray we would be faithful as we seek to reach military families wherever we meet them in the future?

Marshall Fant is an FBFI chaplain candidate. He attends Bob Jones Memorial Seminary.

Editor’s Note: We requested that Marshall Fant write this article because he exemplifies the heart and character that the FBFI seeks in its chaplains. Would you pray with us that the Lord would open this door, and if He wills, that He would provide the necessary funds for immunotherapy so that Brother Fant will be able to pursue this ministry opportunity further?
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Harvest Media has been serving the design needs of the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship for the past 17 years. We are passionate about helping Fundamental churches look their best and reach their communities for Christ. Call us today to talk about what we can do for your ministry.
You are tired of the mainstream media’s take on how the Global War on Terror is progressing and would appreciate the perspective of an unashamed “born-again” Christian who shared that perspective from behind the lines, literally, you should read the recently released book entitled Articles from War. In it, South Carolina lawyer-turned-infantry officer Lt. Col. Bill Connor details his compelling story as the senior American advisor in the Helmand province of Afghanistan during a recent period of resurgent Taliban activity.

Originally published as a chronological series of short articles for South Carolina’s Times and Democrat newspaper, Connor’s work retains a rough, unrefined style that can be distracting unless the reader remembers the circumstances in which each article was dispatched. The goal in preserving the original content is to expose the reader to the initial thoughts and emotions of a man enduring the stresses of a combat environment. Several sections were written either prior to or after his return from Afghanistan, and provide commentary on a number of fundamental and peripheral issues facing America and her military today. The first two appendices (“Defeating Enemy Ideology in the War on Terror” and “The ‘Global War on Terror’ Should Be Called by Its Proper Name: ‘The War with Radical Islam’”) are especially noteworthy and deserve serious consideration.

Articles from War will expose you to the wide array of trials our Christian service members are experiencing and will offer ways to best support them and their families during this long war. It puts forward a perspective that flies in the face of most current liberal war pieces, which depict America’s struggle against radical Islam as pointless, misguided, or hopeless. The book dispels many exaggerated or deceitful media claims routinely heard about Islam. According to Lt. Col. Connor’s firsthand experience, our military members are not only winning on the battlefield, but they are gaining the hearts and minds of the people through selfless and heroic service. There are many interesting reports, from the author’s account of his personal dealings with England’s Prince Harry and a persecuted Afghan Christian to his harrowing experience with close-quarters combat. At times intriguing, this senior Infantry Officer’s story was not written for profit but as a witness to the truth. It is an easy-to-read and refreshing Christian perspective on the nature and importance of America’s current conflict.

Rob Johnson currently serves as a Battalion Chaplain with the 2nd Marine Division, located at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

Articles from War was released by Infinity Publishing on August 22. It is available on www.buybooksonteweb.com for $12.95 (search the author’s name). All proceeds from the sale of this book will be donated to Christian schools in South Carolina.
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