

# FRONTLINE

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME

## Salt and Light in Your City and State

- ▶ Four Ways God Judges Nations
- ▶ Christian Influence in a Post-Christian Culture
- ▶ The Salty, Light-Bearing Church
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# FRONTLINE

Volume 34 • Number 2



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Our sincere thanks to Gordon Dickson for coordinating this issue of *FrontLine* magazine.



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# Salt and Light

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In the corrupt and tasteless darkness of this world, Jesus gives us hope. With a remarkable series of blessings that we call the Beatitudes, He explained how His followers become the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Have you noticed how each new day brings news of another shocking descent into deeper depravity? Society goes from bad to worse, but Jesus reverses the curse for His followers. Much of the Bible was written under moral and spiritual conditions that were worse than our own. There have also been some very dark times in American history. Our ancestors have guided us about the right way to use biblical principles to draw near to God and cry out for genuine revival. Through the Beatitudes we can see how the goodness of God leads a nation to repentance. The feature articles in this edition of *FrontLine* magazine show us how these overflowing blessings can be applied in churches, families, and nations.

Taigen Joos explains that, for Christian parents, the four walls of our homes are our first mission field. Here we can make disciples by being salt and light for our children.

Byron Foxx alerts us to the serious dangers that our nation is facing at this moment. His article helps us look in the mirror of God's Word to see the sins of our nation and to heed God's warnings.

Tom Alvis helps us evaluate our Christian influence in a post-Christian culture. Some of our Founding Fathers were men of strong faith. Preachers of the past were not afraid to confront moral issues, even when those issues were embedded in political discussions. His article gives us five steps that will help us maintain a godly influence in our local, state, and federal governments.

"You've seen it on the news: hundreds of people with very different viewpoints swarming state capitol buildings in opposition to bills that would promote righteousness. Much of their rhetoric is presented in a heated or hateful manner." Arin Hess, acting as a chaplain to the leg-

islators in Nebraska, demonstrates how we can be like salt and light to minister to our elected officials.

Steve Thomas reminds us to hold on to the God-given mission of the church. He warns us that the missional church movement is putting the gospel at risk by insisting that the Great Commission includes social responsibility along with evangelism. It's time for churches to return to their God-appointed task.

Don't miss Tim Senter's article about hospice chaplaincy. Here's an excerpt: "We walk into the homes of people who realize their autonomy is fading, that they are in control of less in their life than ever before, and that their helplessness grows with each passing day. Yesterday this patient was a World War II fighter pilot, instructor, historic plane aviator, and successful aircraft restorer. Today, in a moment of lucidity, he realizes he is losing his cognitive abilities and grieves deeply." How would you minister to such a person?

Jim Tillotson's column emphasizes that for our salt and light to be effective, we must make contact with the needs of those who are in darkness. He asks, "When was the last time you did something exceptionally nice for an unsaved person? When was the last time you went out of your way to help an unsaved person, not expecting anything in return, for the opportunity to share the gospel?"

Mark Minnick's column highlights how Horatius Bonar taught us to preach prophecy, reminding us about a much-needed theme in this turbulent world. And among the other columns, don't miss Carl Wood's answer to this interesting question: If you were stranded on a desert island with only your Bible and five other books, which books would you choose? We think you will enjoy his answers.

We hope that this edition of *FrontLine* will help you become salt and light in your city and state by drawing closer to Christ.

Gordon A. Dickson

# SALT and LIGHT

## in Your City and State

**C**ommenting on the 9/11 terrorist attack, George F. Will wrote, “The nation’s decade-long holiday from history came to a shattering end.”<sup>1</sup> That attack on American soil was a wake-up call for the nation. American Christians have also ended their holiday from history. The signs of trouble are everywhere as the fear of God slowly ebbs from our society; like our brothers and sisters in Third-World countries, some American Christians are facing slander and violent persecution. But God’s Word gives us guidance as to how to respond to a corrupt society: Jesus Christ designed His followers to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Lost sinners who become living saints and loving soul winners are like salt and light in their cities and states.

### THE TROUBLE SIGNS

Each new day brings news of another descent into deeper depravity in our corrupt society. Like you, others are reading these words and nodding their heads with understanding. Who would have ever thought that our society would descend into this depraved darkness so rapidly? Yet here we are. Materialism, secularism, and paganism, along with moral indifference, are dragging our civilization down into the depths.

Spiritually speaking, where does America stand? “A new study from Pew Research finds that the religiously unaffiliated—a group comprised of atheists, agnostic and those who say their religion is ‘nothing in particular’—is now the largest cohort in the U.S. They’re more prevalent among American adults than Catholics (23%) or evangelical Protestants (24%).”<sup>2</sup>



In 2021, 46.3 million people aged 12 or older . . . had a substance use disorder . . . including 29.5 million who had an alcohol use disorder, 24.0 million who had a drug use disorder, and 7.3 million people who had both an alcohol use disorder and a drug use disorder. . . . Among adolescents aged 12 to 17 in 2021 . . . 892,000 people attempted suicide in the past year. . . . Among adults aged 18 or older in 2021 . . . 1.7 million people attempted suicide in the past year.<sup>3</sup>

The horrors of addiction and self-murder now plague our society, especially our military.

In 2023, 38% of the students at Brown University self-reported as LGBTQ+; this was nearly triple the number in a 2010 survey of their students. Heritage Foundation senior legal fellow Sarah Parshall Perry observed, “This is not an organic trend, it’s social contagion playing out in real-time.” Such is the nature of a seductive world system that demands conformity to its depravity.

Compounding these troubles is a weak Christianity hobbled by tepid preaching. Even worse, many members of the clergy praise the darkness as genuine enlightenment. They should remember the words of the prophet: “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Isa. 5:20). But this problem is not new. Even about the preachers in his day, evangelist George Whitefield wrote, “Many, nay, most that preach, I fear do not experimentally know Christ.”<sup>4</sup>

## ENCOURAGEMENT FROM HISTORY

It’s important to remember that there have also been times in American history when things were just as bad as they are now, or even worse. Our ancestors can guide us in the right way to use biblical principles to draw near to God and cry out for genuine revival.

Not many people realize that in the wake of the American Revolution (following 1776–1781) there was a moral slump. Drunkenness became epidemic. Out of a population of five million, 300,000 were confirmed drunkards; they were burying fifteen thousand of them each year. Profanity was of the most shocking

kind. For the first time in the history of the American settlement, women were afraid to go out at night for fear of assault. Bank robberies were a daily occurrence. . . . The Chief Justice of the United States, John Marshall, wrote to the Bishop of Virginia, James Madison, that the Church ‘was too far gone ever to be redeemed.’ Voltaire averred and Tom Paine echoed, ‘Christianity will be forgotten in thirty years.’<sup>5</sup>

But Marshall and Paine missed what the Lord Christ could do through His people, the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Even as others were lost in drunken merriment, believers were mourning over sin and crying out to the Lord to bring people to Christ.

## TO ACCOMPLISH HIS PURPOSES, CHRIST POINTED TO THREE GOD-ORDAINED INSTITUTIONS TO HELP HIS PEOPLE BE SALT AND LIGHT.

In his own day, George Whitefield found hope: “God has remarkably, in sun-dry times and in divers manners, poured out his Spirit in several parts of both provinces [America and the UK]; and it often refreshes my soul to hear of the faith of the good forefathers who first settled in these parts.”<sup>6</sup>

From the letters between pastors of that time, we can see parallels to our own days and take heart:

As David Barrow wrote to his fellow minister Richard Furman, God was showing how mistaken man was to trust human power, and thus rob God of his “divine Prerogative.” In his great love for man, God had let his creatures sink into dissipation and irreligion so that they would experience the futility, the absence of fellowship that always accompanied separation from God. Frustration,

mental depression, contention would be the immediate result of this alienation, but out of this experience men would achieve a renewed awareness of the importance of God and of godliness in their lives.<sup>7</sup>

This is the same thing that is happening today: as the fear of God fades from our society we are foundering in frustration, mental depression, substance abuse, and suicide. Like the moon passing over the sun in a solar eclipse, God has hidden His face to get our attention. But in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave us hope.

## BECOMING SALT AND LIGHT

Immediately after He proclaimed the blessings of His Beatitudes, Jesus declared,

Ye [plural] are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. (Matt. 5:13–16)

Jesus told His followers that they were the answer to the corrupt darkness of this world. In context, Christ’s sermon shows us that those initial Beatitude blessings can transform believers to become the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Not everyone agrees that there is a structure in the Beatitudes. Some see them as a cluster, much like the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5. Others see them as the spokes of a wheel: if any one of them were missing, it would be a problem for the whole. From my observations, there is a clear progression: repentant sinners are regenerated as saints who become resolute soul winners.

To Christ’s original hearers, salt was an enduring preservative to stave off corruption. God had given His people “a covenant of salt” to highlight the unchanging nature of His promises (2 Chron. 13:5). Salt is essential for a gross and tasteless society. Using this imagery, Jesus reminded His hearers that the world

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# From the Home to the World

**W**e all know the importance of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20). Going into all the world to proclaim the gospel does not only mean crossing oceans or national borders; it also includes going into your home. Christian families often contain lost people—namely, children—who need to be evangelized, discipled, and sent out for the sake of the gospel. For Christian parents our first “mission field” is within the four walls of our home. Our children need to be saved, and we are commissioned by Christ to make disciples of them. How can we be better “salt and light” to our children to reach them for Christ and further train them for future ministry? Consider the following.

## FOUNDATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

*Parents Must Be Healthy Disciples.* Parents cannot spiritually lead their children to places they have not been themselves. Therefore, both husbands and wives need to spend time daily with the Lord in the Word of God and prayer. They must allow Scripture to shape their own thoughts, speech patterns, habits, and affections, so that they can more effectively lead their own children. Parents should do things such as read the entire Bible, study a book of the Bible that they have never studied before, memorize Scripture, and learn to pray in response to the Word of God.

When parents allow the Scriptures to shape them and mature them in the faith (2 Tim. 3:16–17), their children will see the importance of the Word of God themselves.

*Parents Must Shepherd the Hearts of Their Children.* Christian parents should view every new stage of life with their children as a new opportunity to direct their hearts toward Jesus Christ. Sinful behavior is not a “phase”; it is an opportunity to address the heart with the life-changing truth of the gospel. In every age, beginning with infancy, we must strive to guard their hearts as best we can and seek to earn their trust. If they do not grow to trust us, they will not listen to our gospel pleas. Strive to be the loudest voice in their heads. Communicate with them daily. Ask probing questions about what they are seeing and hearing in this world. Answer their questions with biblically based answers.

*Making Disciples of Our Children Cannot Be Delegated.* Christian schools, camp ministries, and children/youth leaders cannot replace our role of discipling our children. While we can be thankful for various ministries, their purpose (if they have a biblical philosophy) is not to replace us but simply to support us as parents in our God-given responsibility of raising our children “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). The reality is that none of those ministries is essential in reaching our children with the gospel. This task is ours as parents.

## PRIMARY CONSIDERATIONS

*A Strong Biblical Marriage Will Be a Powerful Evangelistic Tool.* The marriage relationship is key to showcasing the glorious grace of God in the gospel. It is therefore incumbent upon Christian husbands and wives to cultivate the kind of marriage that is holy, loving, faithful, gracious, and built on the authority of the Scriptures. Our Christian marriages are vital to the faithful communication of the gospel to our children. When our marriage relationships are characterized by impatience, degrading speech, disrespect, anger, and hatred, we should not be surprised if our children want nothing to do with our (per)version of Christianity. So be the kind of Christian spouse that will demonstrate to the children who Jesus Christ is and what Jesus Christ has done so that the children will more easily and readily come to Christ for salvation themselves.

Husbands, this begins with us. We are to be the spiritual leaders of our home, where we take the lead in demonstrating Christ-like sacrificial love to others. Our children need to see that in action in the family, so that they know what God’s love in Christ looks like. Because the marriage relationship is meant to picture the gospel (Eph. 5:22–33), husbands must genuinely live out Christianity in the home and not merely “act the part” at church. Children, especially teenagers, can see right through that hypocrisy.

## IF PARENTS ARE NOT BEING PROPER “SALT AND LIGHT” BEFORE THEIR CHILDREN, THEY SHOULD NOT BE SURPRISED WHEN SPIRITUAL BLANDNESS AND DARKNESS CHARACTERIZE THEIR CHILDREN.

Likewise, Christian wives must live out Christianity in the home. Children need to see what it looks like for wives to respond biblically to their husbands in a respectful and honoring way. In seeing that, they will understand the kind of response they need to have toward Christ. If wives speak ill of their husbands to their children or within earshot of their children, don't be surprised when the children follow suit.

The marriage relationship communicates much about the gospel. Therefore, ask yourselves, “What does our marriage communicate about the gospel?” or “What kind of gospel does our marriage communicate to our children?” Does it communicate a deficient gospel, one that sounds nice but doesn't really change our lives? Does it communicate a beautiful picture of Christ and the church and therefore create a thirst for the gospel in the hearts of our children?

How many young people have stifled the promptings toward vocational Christian ministry because of the stale, hypocritical, and unloving marriages they see in their Christian parents? How many of our young men refuse to proclaim the glorious gospel because they do not see that it has really changed their mom or dad? While it may be much easier to send money to missionaries to reach the world for Christ, parents must faithfully and lovingly do the hard work of living out the glorious gospel and proclaiming it to their children within the home both visually and verbally.

*A Loving Home Will Be a Powerful Evangelistic Tool.* As Christian parents we have a unique ministry with a mission field living within the four walls of our home and the God-given task of discipling our children. In this endeavor the words of Deuteronomy 6:5–7 are important not only to understand but to live out. The more that parents individually embrace and elevate the great commandment to “love the LORD thy God” wholeheartedly (v. 5), individually, the more this love will be seen in their marriage relationship. Selfishness will be repented of, words will be more edifying, and eventually the atmosphere of the home will change.

The more this commandment (v. 5) is lived out by the parents (v. 6), the more easily it can be taught to the children

(v. 7). If we want our children to love God supremely, one of the greatest tools that we have is our own testimony. The saying, “more is caught than taught” is true. Our children will catch more from our daily living than they will from our daily lecturing. While there is a place for parental instruction, what is stated verbally must be consistent with what is taught visually. While no parents can force their children to be saved, and while there is no biblical guarantee that our children will be converted, nevertheless the loving and consistent testimony of the parents will be a powerful tool to help woo their children to be Christians and therefore live as Christians as well.

If Christian husbands and wives do not demonstrate a supreme love for God, why should they expect their children to love God and believe the gospel? If the parents are not showing what healthy, Christ-centered love for each other looks like, then why should they expect their children to love others in that way? If parents are not being proper “salt and light” before their children, they should not be surprised when spiritual blandness and darkness characterize their children.

### CONCLUDING THOUGHT

*Reaching the World Begins with Reaching Our Children.* I fully recognize that there is no magic formula for producing godly children. However, there are certain things that I believe Christian parents can do that can create a much more fertile environment in which our children can be saved, discipled, and sent forth.

If we want more of our young people to enter vocational ministries or simply to be faithful servants of Jesus Christ in their future local churches, the process begins in the home with biblically healthy and loving relationships. When a Christian mom and dad live out Christianity before their children in a biblical, consistent, faithful, and loving way, that will go far in reaching the children for Jesus Christ. However, the

converse is also true. When the gospel is not played out within the marriage and love is not evidenced within the family relationships, true conversions will be more difficult to see.

Now, if your spouse is not saved or living a godly life, then you do your best to model a loving Christianity to your children. Be the godliest spouse you can possibly be and pray for God's grace to overcome any deficiencies in your marital relationship.

The Christian family cannot be underestimated as to its importance in God's economy. The mission field is within the walls of our homes. When Christian parents faithfully pray for the salvation of their children, faithfully model Christ before their children, and faithfully proclaim Christ to their children, the Lord will honor that and bring many of our children to salvation as a result. We can multiply our evangelistic endeavors abroad simply by seeking to raise Christ-like servants in our homes who will faithfully live out Christ in their own marriages, families, and communities.

Let us not forget that in the process of spreading the gospel to “the uttermost part of the earth” it needs to first permeate the “Jerusalem” of our own home (Acts 1:8). If you want your children to be effective evangelists outside your home, then be faithful followers of Christ within your home. Cultivate a strong and loving personal relationship with God. Build a Christ-centered and loving marriage. Model a life-changing gospel before your children, and watch what God will do with you and your children for His glory and for the sake of the gospel—not only within your home, but potentially around the world.

Taigen Joos is pastor of Heritage Baptist Church in Dover, New Hampshire. He and his wife have two children in college who are actively serving the Lord.





# Four Ways God Judges Nations



Someone has wisely said that the Bible is a love letter from God to man. The greatest news anyone has ever heard is “God loves you!” God is love, but He is also righteous, holy, and just. He must be a God of judgment because His justice demands it. Ponder the reality of these sobering words: “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God” (Ps. 9:17). God will not be patient forever. God judged Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:16–24), and He destroyed the world with a flood (Gen. 6–7). Just think about what happened at the tower of Babel and Sodom and Gomorrah. The book of Obadiah was written to express His coming judgment against the Edomites. Nahum records the judgment against the Ninevites. God has judged nations and will continue to do so. The Bible reveals the wrath of God. Is our nation in danger? Yes, and we should heed God’s warnings. There are four primary ways that God judges the sins of the nations: war, natural disasters, pestilence and disease, and corrupt leaders.

## THE SINS OF OUR NATION

Think through this list to see if this sounds familiar:

*Pride:* In Scripture we see repeated warnings about pride, boasting, and a haughty spirit. Psalm 10:3–4 reads, “For the wicked boasteth of his heart’s desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the LORD abhorreth. The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.” What should a proud nation expect? According to Proverbs 16:18, “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.”

*Greed:* Scripture also repeatedly warns us about greed. First Timothy 6:10 says, “For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” Think about how covetous our country has become. Remember Exodus 20:17: “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou

shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s.” As Jesus taught in Luke 12:15, “Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.” Many of our government officials go to Washington with the intention of making a difference, but too often the forces of greed and avarice take hold of them and instead of *making* a difference they *become* different. Sadly, many begin with a normal net worth but leave incredibly wealthy—yet their salary would not explain their new net worth.

*Drunkenness:* There are seventy-five scriptural warnings against drinking alcoholic beverages. In fact, there is more Scripture condemning the use of alcoholic beverages than there is about adultery, hypocrisy, blasphemy, and pride. Proverbs 23:31–33 instructs us to “look not . . . upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things.” Drunkenness, closely associated with reveling, has been the ruin of many in our day; pleasure and self-gratification have become the goal. Personal reputations and marriages have been ruined in a single night of foolish behavior.

*Laziness:* Many people would not consider being lazy to be a sin; however, any able-bodied man who refuses to work is sinning. The Bible distinctly teaches a work ethic—for example, in 2 Thessalonians 3:10: “For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.” Or consider Proverbs 6:9–11: “How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.”

*Violence:* It displeases God when someone destroys another’s property or commits



arson, assault, murder, or rape. Psalm 11:5 states, “The LORD trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth.” God hates the commission of crimes. Dwell on the words of Genesis 6:13: “And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.” Our culture, much like Rome in its demise, glorifies violence. Through movies, TV, and video games, a young person sees and even participates in the imagined murder of thousands. Life is devalued: look at the wicked practice of abortion and the many callous murders in our country.

*Immorality:* Immoral behavior includes any deviating from or altering of God’s commands by committing acts such as adultery, fornication, or any sexual relations outside of God’s plan within marriage. This includes sexual perversion, such as homosexuality, having multiple partners, and so on. The Bible tells us that the advancement of wickedness—including sexual deviancy—is what happens to a culture that will not obey God. God’s pattern for us is clear: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). Hebrews 13:4 states that “marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.”

*Forgetting God:* Psalm 9:17 says, “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.” We have forgotten that God created us and owns us (Ps. 24:1). We have forgotten God’s authority (Jer. 10:10; James 4:7–8). We have forgotten God’s judgment and wrath (Heb. 9:27; Rom. 1:18). We have forgotten God’s love (John 3:16). We have forgotten God’s salvation (Acts 4:12).

Abraham Lincoln believed that the Civil War was a judgment of God upon America. In his Thanksgiving proclamation of 1863 he said,

We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven; we have been

preserved these many years in peace and prosperity; we have grown in numbers, wealth, and power as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us. . . . Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us.

### THE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE SINS OF A NATION

What awaits the country that is characterized by the sins listed above?

*War:* Israel turned from the Lord to false religion, and God allowed invaders to come. Read Judges 2:12–14:

And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them. . . . And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies.

The Babylonian leader Belshazzar hardened his heart against God, and the enemy came and destroyed the nation (Dan. 5: 25–31). Vast social changes under the guise of equality and social justice are weakening our military. Still, many Americans think that our nation’s military is invincible—yet we are being invaded daily. How? By the huge number of illegal immigrants pouring into our nation. Some of them are actually seeking freedom, of course; many, though, are heinous criminals.

*Natural disasters:* God put Pharaoh and Egypt under judgment, and they experienced ten awful plagues as a result. All Egyptians were subjected to these plagues. God used hail in Exodus 9:18–24.

Sometimes God uses storms and earthquakes to judge nations: Isaiah 29:6 states, “Thou shalt be visited of the LORD of hosts with thunder, and with earthquake, and great noise, with storm and tempest, and the flame of devouring fire.”

*Pestilence and disease:* In 1 Samuel 5 the Philistines set the ark of God before their false god Dagon. God then struck the Philistine nation with “emerods” (tumors). In Numbers 16:46–50 God sent a plague among the nation of Israel because the Jews had embraced pagan immorality. Over 14,000 people died of this plague.

*Corrupt leaders:* God uses wicked, disgusting, inept rulers as judgment on countries. In Daniel 4:17, the prophet wrote, “This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.” Have you ever seen worse leaders in America than those we have today? A population that has forgotten God and biblical values lives for personal greed, and poor leadership is the result. We get what we deserve.

Is our nation in danger? Yes! What must the Lord do to awaken us to righteousness and turn us back to Himself? The judgment of God is upon America right now—however, it is still mixed with God’s mercy. America’s only hope is the Lord. Oh, that our beloved country would turn to the Lord! Lamentations 5:21 makes this appeal: “Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old.”

Evangelist Byron Foxx was saved as a boy in a citywide evangelistic meeting. He has been married for over forty years to his wife, Renée. He is based in Virginia but proclaims the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the country.



# Christian Influence in a Post-Christian Culture

Scripture clearly articulates three divinely ordained institutions: the home, the church, and the government. None of us denies God's clear instructions related to the home or the church; however, some believers balk at Christian involvement within the government. When we make the appeal to get involved, we frequently hear, "I just don't do politics," or "We believe in the separation of church and state." These are often the declarations made by pastors and church members who are hesitant to reach out to elected officials or confront legislative issues. Since God ordained the government, isn't it logical that He would give relevant instruction to His people about their responsibility to that government? Indeed, He has! Believers can be a salty, light-bearing influence in their local, state, and national governments by taking five specific steps.

## OUR HISTORY

Many of our founding fathers were men of strong faith; pastors in colonial

times regularly preached messages about political issues and addressed the cultural issues of the day from Scripture. However, the sad reality is that we, as a nation, have moved far away from our early dependence on the Scriptures; we are now living in a post-Christian America. The wickedness and perverseness of our day are almost overwhelming. Our Christian liberties and freedoms are under attack. The right to share the gospel, the right to train our children, the right to pray publicly, and the right to live a holy life and oppose sin are four of the current battles in the war on Christianity being waged in the courts of America.

## BEING SALT AND LIGHT TODAY

Yet God has called you and me "for such a time as this" to shine the light of God's truth into the darkness! In the words of Paul and Christ,

- "Perilous times shall come. . . . Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse. . . . But continue thou in

the things which thou hast learned" (2 Tim. 3:1, 13, 14).

- We are called to be "blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom [we] shine as light in the world" (Phil. 2:15).
- "Ye are the salt of the earth . . . Ye are the light of the world. . . . Let your light . . . shine before men" (Matt. 5:13–16).

The metaphors of salt and light throughout Scripture can be summarized by one word: *influence*. It is impossible to properly influence or truly make a positive difference without a suitable understanding of the objective, without a bold commitment to compassionate action, and without steadfast perseverance in the face of opposition. Gordon Dickson's new book, *12 Ways You Can Make a Difference in This Crazy, Mixed-Up World*, masterfully articulates and illustrates the importance of God's people influencing our culture.



Knowing the truth is commendable, but doing the truth is biblical! Allow me to suggest five action steps that will allow us to have a greater impact on America with God's truth.

## **FIVE ACTION STEPS**

*We must be fervent in PRAYER.* The priority of prayer for government officials is emphasized by Paul in 1 Timothy 2:1–8. Moses, Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel, Habakkuk, and Paul were men who prayed faithfully and fervently for their nations and leaders. How can we pray specifically for those in office? Pray for their salvation; pray for wisdom, for understanding, for those who are giving them counsel, for boldness, and for faithfulness. A prayer list that includes the names and offices of elected officials (local, state, and federal) is a helpful guide and reminder to take these officials before God's throne. Remember that "the king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will" (Prov. 21:1). David Gibbs Jr. recently emphasized that "in the Bible, God never changed a nation without prayer." It is time for God's people to fast and pray for our nation.

*We must faithfully PREACH God's truth.* As we pray, we must address the cultural confusion of our day through the lens of Scripture. Life, marriage, education, gender identity, financial responsibility, one's work ethic, sexuality, and similar concerns are not merely political hot potatoes. While they have been politicized, each of these issues is clearly addressed by God Himself through His Word. By the way, He has not changed His mind! We must boldly and compassionately confront the culture with the truth of Scripture. Faithful pastors must preach and teach God's people what it means to have a biblical worldview. In his book *We Will Not Be Silenced*, Erwin Lutzer challenges believers to respond courageously to our culture's assault on Christianity. He reminds us that equipping the saints involves helping them "move beyond fear and boldly accepting the challenge of representing Christ to a watching world that needs Him now more than ever." We must compassionately stand for righteousness that exalts a nation; we must stand against all sin, which is a reproach to any people.

*We must develop and maintain PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS with those in authority.* Do you know your local elected officials? Have you reached out to your city council members or board of supervisors or school board members? Have you visited the police, sheriff, fire chief, and other officials in your community? When was the last time you invited them to a church service? These same questions could be asked regarding state and federal officials. The Old Testament prophets spoke truth to the kings. It is my firm belief that every elected official needs a pastor or some spiritual leader who can pray with him, who can offer godly, biblical direction, and who can encourage him with truth. Candidates and elected officials are usually very open to and appreciative of genuine efforts to establish relationships. Compassion makes the difference—they must see the love of Christ in us. They need to hear from us—not just when there are issues of concern. They need to know that we are praying for them faithfully and that we are genuinely concerned about them.

*We must PARTICIPATE in our system of government.* Voting is a privilege; with every privilege comes responsibility; to neglect our responsibility is sin. In the words of David Gibbs Jr., "Your vote does not belong to you; you have been bought with a price; therefore glorify God with your vote!" God's people should be the very best citizens possible; we must be registered to vote; and we must vote for biblical values. We must be engaged, informed, and involved. It is legal for churches to help people register to vote, to take people to the polls, to preach on sin, and to inform congregations about a candidate's or elected official's position and/or voting record. ([www.ChristianLaw.org](http://www.ChristianLaw.org) has some helpful information and resources for pastors and churches.)

*We must passionately PROCLAIM the Gospel "for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."* As ambassadors of the Most High God, we must keep the main thing the main thing; we must focus on the exaltation of His Name, the expansion of His kingdom, and the execution of His will. God is always advancing; so must be the gospel! The only hope for America (or for any nation) is the revival of God's people and a mighty heaven-sent awakening of the unsaved. Faithfulness to the greatest commandment and obedience to the Great Commission are paramount to our calling as salt and light. We must lovingly confront a godless culture with the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ! Our focus must be on the furtherance of the gospel: looking for opportunities to share it wherever we are and whatever we face.

Believers can be a salty, light-bearing influence in their local, state, and national governments. God has called every believer to be pungent salt and brilliant light in the culture in which He has called us to live. The goal for each of us is to *influence* in such a way that unbelievers see our "good works, and glorify [our] Father which is in heaven." We have been commissioned to shine the light of the gospel into the darkness and depravity of our culture. Evangelist Scott Pauley grabbed my attention recently when he encouraged us to do all we can while we can because it is exciting to live on the edge of eternity. We have been silent for too long; it is time for us to show up, stand up, and speak up.

Tom Alvis has pastored at Mount Moriah Baptist Church in Powhatan, Virginia, since July 2003 and with Faith Wins since 2020.



**BELIEVERS CAN BE LIKE A SALTY, LIGHT-BEARING INFLUENCE IN THEIR LOCAL, STATE, AND NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS. GOD HAS CALLED EVERY BELIEVER TO BE PUNGENT SALT AND BRILLIANT LIGHT IN THE CULTURE IN WHICH HE HAS CALLED US TO LIVE.**



# Lobbying for Jesus

**Y**ou've seen it on the news: hundreds of people with very different viewpoints swarming state capitol buildings in opposition to bills that would promote righteousness. Much of their rhetoric is presented in a heated or hateful manner. Elected officials often have to have police escorts to avoid being accosted. Adding to these stresses are ten-to-twelve-hour pressure-filled days of legislative wrangling. As you can imagine, it is easy for these elected representatives to become weary in well-doing. One senator told me, "Sometimes people ask me how I enjoy being a senator. Honestly, much of the time I do not enjoy it, but the Holy Spirit has reminded me that this is where God has placed me, so I say, 'I am glad to be where God wants me to be.'" How can we help these elected representatives as they try to serve their fellow citizens? We can pray for our elected officials and give them biblical wisdom as they seek to govern the people.

## HERE IN NEBRASKA

Here's my story of what is happening in Nebraska. For forty-one years God graciously allowed my wife, Anne Marie,

and me to minister at Community Bible Church and Park Avenue Christian School in Norfolk, Nebraska. During that time I served as a regional "minuteman" for the American Association of Christian Schools and also served on its national board. This meant that I was in Washington, DC, once or twice a year presenting the concerns of Christian education to our senators, congressional representatives, and their staff members, thanking them for any help they could give, and praying with them. Little did I realize how these experiences would later prove beneficial in another ministry. My wife and I loved our church family in Norfolk, but we both felt God moving us in a different direction. It was hard to say good-bye, especially since we did not really know what we would be doing.

We transitioned to Lincoln, Nebraska, the home of three of our children and their families. I began driving a bus for the Lincoln Public Schools that fall and was enjoying the opportunity to positively impact young lives. Then one day, a board member of Capitol Studies International contacted me concerning their need for a new chaplain to the Nebraska Legislature. The former chaplain had unexpectedly

died of COVID. Hardworking volunteers were doing their best to provide continued Bible studies and support ministry to Nebraska's senators and their staff, but they needed someone to take the leadership of CSI again. Their prayer was, "God, it's Your ministry. You'll have to find someone for us."

## A MINISTRY TO LEGISLATORS AND STAFF

As we prayed about this ministry opportunity, we thought back on the ways God had led and prepared us for this. We agreed with one of the CSI volunteers, who said, "It truly feels like a God-orchestrated thing." We will soon begin our third full year of ministry to Nebraska's Capitol community. During the actual legislative session we host a weekly breakfast Bible study for the senators at 6:45 a.m. With their busy schedules, this seems to be the best time for them to meet. We host an additional lunchtime Bible study each week for Capitol staff as well as other elected officials and state employees. The senators' study ends when the year's legislative session ends since senators usually return

Continued on page 14



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## Lobbying for Jesus

Continued from page 12

to their homes during the off session. The senators' staff continue their work year-round, so we continue to host their Bible study and lunch.

Sometimes we forget that spiritual warfare is taking place and that it is very obvious in our legislative assemblies. Ephesians 6:12 reminds us that "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Senators often tell me that they can "feel" the satanic oppression when they walk into the legislative hall. Most of us are probably aware of the filibustering of God-honoring legislation and verbal attacks against officials taking a stand for righteousness. But what you may not think about is that these officials often face extreme personal and family "attacks" as well. During our last legislative session, one of the senators came very close to an amputation because of a serious infection, another was battling difficult kidney issues, another had major

sinus surgery as well as chemotherapy treatments, and three daughters of senators spent time in the ICU.

For staff members it can be equally difficult. I often tell people that I believe the staff members of our elected officials are just as important, if not more so, than the officials because they determine what their "boss" sees. They sift through e-mails, provide research, respond to constituents, and report constituent response to their boss. They get surrounded by hatemongers as they move through the legislative halls. For many on the frontlines of the battle for righteousness, it is, as one staffer said, "a breath of fresh air to come to the Bible study each week." Another said, "I have been looking at my watch all morning wishing time would move faster so I could come." The lunch study facilitates supportive, godly friendships which carry over through the rest of the week. What a blessing to see camaraderie based on like-minded desires for encouragement in the truths of Scripture!

In preparation for the Wednesday studies, I walk the halls on Tuesday and personally offer hard copies of the study to senators and staff. I wish I could say that everyone is accepting and appreciative, but that, unfortunately, is not the case. Some people clearly do not want to hear what God has to say. I try very hard to keep the Bible studies focused on the Bible and away from legislation, though at times, the paths do cross. I can't tell senators how to vote, but I can remind them that Scripture should be their ultimate authority. I can also pray with them and send out a prayer alert to hundreds of faithful supporters.

### FACING ATTACKS

This past session many legislative battles arose over clear biblical issues. A group in our state, Common Cause, filed a complaint with the Accountability and Disclosure Commission, stating that I needed to file as a lobbyist because I had

influenced specific legislation. Looking back, I believe it was their way to attack God, godly senators, their legislation, and me at the same time. I was able to respond to the allegation, sharing that if I was lobbying, I was lobbying for Jesus. The phrase "lobbying for Jesus" went across the state on the front page of several newspapers. Later, I could joke, saying that I received thousands of dollars of free publicity and many new prayer and financial supporters. The commission ruled that there was "no probable cause to believe a violation [had] occurred" and dismissed the case. But months later it occasionally comes up, and I get asked, "How's the lobbyist?" To which I always respond, "Still lobbying for Jesus!"

As I walk the halls of Nebraska's unicameral (only one house) legislature, I try to build relationships not only with senators and their staff but also with the governor, supreme court justices, cleaning personnel, security members, tour guides, and others. I tell people, "I am still a pastor. I just have a different congregation." Doors continually open to share the gospel or pray with people. Rarely will someone turn down an offer of prayer. And people still need to be saved.

After several months of one-on-one time, starting with basic Bible truths and leading up to the plan of salvation, I was privileged to lead a rough, outspoken, former military man to saving faith in Jesus. Week by week over the past year and a half we have had the privilege of seeing the gospel at work in his life. His colleagues see the difference. He looks at legislative issues in a different light. His questions in the Bible studies show depth of thought, and he is sensitive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. His wife is amazed. The transforming power of the gospel (Rom. 1:16) continues to thrill my heart.

People often have a negative opinion about politicians, and obviously, many politicians *are* unscrupulous. But Romans 13:1 reminds us "there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." God has allowed us to have the leaders that we have. They need the gospel to lead effectively. We believe God brought us to the capital city for this reason. Our desire is to glorify Him by edifying believers who are serving in our Unicameral, while at the same time sharing the light of the gospel with those who have not yet believed.



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# **The Salty, Light-Bearing Church**

## A VERBAL MYSTERY

A little over twenty years ago, the neologism<sup>1</sup> “missional” began to appear frequently in Christian publications. For some, it still has a jarring effect similar to hearing the verbized (yes, that is a word—regrettably) noun “disrespect.” Such distortions of perfectly good nouns seem to develop in one of two places: either on the street as slang or in academia as specialized terminology. Both probably gain traction for the same reason: buzzwords seem cool for a season.

What does “missional” mean? Definitional (oops) clarity remains elusive, perhaps because the word form broadens the scope of the more precise “mission.” Grammatically, as an adjective, it identifies things pertaining to or connected with a mission. The problem is that apparently everything is connected to “the mission.” The abundant and growing literature displays an ever-widening application: missional living, missional counseling, missional preaching, missional communities, missional coffee (seriously!), and so on.

## CORE ELEMENTS

Past generations of Christians (who usually preferred their nouns to function as nouns) insisted that Jesus Christ commissioned His followers to carry out one mission: make disciples in every nation (Matt. 28:19–20). He established and empowered an agency to carry it out: the local church (Acts 2). He entrusted a message to her to protect and proclaim: the gospel (1 Tim. 3:15). If “missional” is just a way of repackaging and encouraging renewed effort, then one can applaud the work while cringing at the grammar. However, that does not seem to be the case. The actual missional movement (as opposed to those who simply like the cool new terminology) promotes theology and practice that threaten the health of the agency and the integrity of the church’s message.

*Missio Dei and the Church.* The Latin expression *missio Dei*, or “Mission of God,” lies at the heart of missional theology. It describes God’s entire interaction with the world as mission. Consequently, the church exists simply as a subset of what God is doing in the world. Advocates frequently say, “The church does not have a mission, the mission has a church.” This perspective

will certainly erode the longstanding biblical understanding of the importance of the local church. For example, according to promoters of missional theology and practice . . .

- The mission is much broader than church—thus undermining the primacy of the local church.
- The mission is decentralized—thus undermining the authority of the local church.
- The mission is transdenominational—thus undermining the doctrinal purity of the local church.

*The “Missional-Incarnational Impulse” and the Gospel.* Missional theology and practice place the gospel at risk. Advocates strongly emphasize a realized eschatology. The kingdom is now, and mission work expands the kingdom. Many streams of tradition share this view but narrowly define kingdom work. Charles Hodge and many others argued for the spirituality of the church, a doctrine that helps maintain a separation between the goals and functions of two kingdoms (the kingdom of God and the kingdom of man).

The missional church movement blurs these distinctions. Missional guru Alan Hirsch described one of six essential components of missional work as the “missional-incarnational impulse.”<sup>2</sup> The label coopts another neologism popularized by John Stott. In 1975 he articulated an *incarnational* model of missions: “The actual [Great] Commission itself must be understood to include social as well as evangelistic responsibility, unless we are to be guilty of distorting the words of Jesus.”<sup>3</sup>

The words of Jesus he referred to are, “As thou hast sent me into the world [incarnation], even so have I also sent them sent them into the world” (John 17:18). So, if Jesus healed the sick, His followers must do likewise—and so on. Over the next few years Stott’s writings grew progressively radical, leaving churches up to their steeples in social action, promoting global economic equality, lobbying against wars and nuclear armament, and calling for social justice. One critic raised the alarm: “Stott has dethroned evangelism as the only historical aim of mission.”<sup>4</sup>

An incarnational mission attempts to unite gospel proclamation with social and ethical transformation in the world.

Ostensibly, social action and gospel proclamation have equal standing. However, history repeatedly shows that things visible and tangible will always eclipse the invisible and spiritual. This is the threat fostered by collapsing kingdom norms into the present age.

## A SHAKY FOUNDATION

Matthew 5:13–16 appears frequently as biblical grounds to transform the mission from proclamation to social action.

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Salt, with its well-known preservative qualities, has become a missional metaphor for using Christian presence and influence to preserve that which is good in society. Missional theology describes “light” as individual disciples living “on mission,” revealing truth, publicly and globally, by means of their good works (v. 16). At first glance, this sounds plausible to some, but a closer look reveals insurmountable flaws in the missional application of this passage.

*A Closer Look.* The immediate context of Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:13–16 helps clarify His intended meaning. Jesus addressed His hearers with an emphatic “you” at the beginning of verses 13 and 14 to imply a distinction between His disciples and an unnamed group. He identifies that group in verse 20: “For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

The scribes and Pharisees *said* they believed the written Word, but they opposed the Living Word (they had lost their “savour”). In contrast, Jesus’ disciples believed the written Word and thus followed the Living Word. The written Word is the theme that unifies chapter 5:



- Jesus identified persecuted disciples with the prophets, 5:10–12.
- Jesus declared His intention to fulfill the law, 5:17.
- Jesus affirmed the prevailing authority of the law, 5:18.
- Jesus warned against spurning the law, 5:19.
- Jesus explained the true significance of the law, 5:21–48.

In keeping with this overarching theme, Jesus used the salt and light metaphors to illustrate the disciples' role as conveyors of the message of the Word of God. Their good works were not the primary focus. Their works served as corroborating evidence that, unlike the scribes and Pharisees, they belonged to Christ and were thus qualified to speak for Him.

*A Wider View.* Churches must never implement radical changes without strong biblical justification. Missional theology lifts this brief section from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and uses it to cast off centuries of established ministry norms. Supporters seem to ignore the fact that Jesus delivered His famous sermon before the church existed. At best, Matthew 5:13–16 provides a general principle of discipleship, but later revelation fleshed out what it looks like in this age. The risen Christ, by the Holy Spirit, created and empowered the church (Acts 2) for the sake of the mission (Acts 1:8). He instructed the church through the apostles (Eph. 2:20). The missional movement gives great weight to the words and works of Jesus (incarnational

ministry). At the same time, it gives too little attention to the words and works of the apostles, who were specifically ordained to guide the churches in fulfillment of the mission.

### BEING SALT AND LIGHT

No one can deny the responsibility individual Christians have to shine the light of the gospel into this dark world. But God does not intend for individuals to engage in the mission apart from the local church. As the church gathers, the preaching of God's Word trains and inspires each believer to be salty and light-bearing. At the birth of the church, its *raison d'être* was to bear witness to Christ by preaching and teaching the Word of God (Acts 1:8; 2:42). Paul, the veteran missionary, penned thirteen letters to churches and pastors, yet he never made societal transformation a goal for the church. That change awaits the return of the King (Phil. 3:20–21). God's people *do* perform deeds of mercy as incidental acts of compassion, but not as a corporate strategy (Gal. 6:10). Scriptural instructions and patterns reveal that God intends churches to proclaim the gospel of Christ our King and gather believers into local assemblies where they are taught the truth and equipped for service. In this way, churches proliferate throughout the world.<sup>5</sup>

A close friend of mine confessed that upon graduating from a well-known seminary in the South he was convinced that preaching was the least productive thing he could do. This is the legacy of the incarnational or missional model of ministry. The first order of business for salty, light-bearing

churches today must be to return the pulpit to its rightful place. Do this because it is biblical for the church to give priority to preaching (1 Tim. 4:13). Do this because it is the way God has chosen to accomplish things that He alone can do (1 Cor. 1:20–31).

The "missional" neologism is probably here to stay, though one hopes its shine will dim with age. Remember that the problem does not lie in the word itself: it lies in the direction it points. May cool speech never distract Christ's people from the biblical pattern for the mission.

Now, about this other neologism, *preachment*. . .

Steven Thomas is the senior pastor of Huron Baptist Church in Flat Rock, Michigan, where he has served since 1983. He also teaches as an adjunct professor in the D.Min. program at Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Plymouth, Minnesota.



<sup>1</sup> A new word, whether newly coined or new to popular use.

<sup>2</sup> Alan Hirsch, Jeff Vanderstelt, and Ed Stetzer, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating Apostolic Movements*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2016), 127–48.

<sup>3</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1975), 23.

<sup>4</sup> Arthur P. Johnston, *The Battle for World Evangelism* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1978), 303.

<sup>5</sup> David F. Hesselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980), 20.

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## Mailbag

I am wondering if you publish a list of churches seeking pastors? After twenty years of ministry in Greater Vancouver area, it seems that my ministry is closing here and [I] need to consider where the Lord is leading me and my family.

*Darren Hammermeister, Pastor  
New Life Baptist Church  
Surrey, British Columbia  
CANADA*

Editor's response: *Pastor Hammermeister, thank you for reaching out to FrontLine with this question. We do not*

*offer a list of churches seeking pastors; however, by publishing your letter here, we hope that churches with such a need will take the initiative to contact you. May the Lord continue to direct your steps in the days to come!*

**T**hank you for your faithful ministry. The magazine has been a blessing to us. We appreciate the timely articles. . . . Keep on keeping on. Stay faithful to the Lord. Never give up.

*Mr. and Mrs. James Clark  
Blairsville, Georgia*

## Finding Calm in the Quake

Continued from page 28

on His promises, and then I found His peace completely sufficient. Once I released my grip on that desire, I saw His plan unfold. Instead of filling our home with biological or adopted children, He filled our New Zealand home with spiritual children who came to know the Lord through our ministry. Most families can count their children—ours were without number. I had no idea how these bundles of joy would fill the hole that seemed to remain in my heart for so long. I finally saw God's plan, and it was perfect!

How do we find stability when it seems our life is crumbling around us? I like what David said in Psalm 16:8-9: "I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth; my flesh also shall rest in hope." Focus on God and see Him at the center of the circumstance. Then claim Psalm 46:1-3: "God is our refuge and

strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof."

We are living in turbulent times. Many things are being shaken economically, politically, and culturally. The Lord wants us to know that we belong to His unshakable kingdom (Heb. 12:28). Therefore, we can be confident and continue serving "with reverence and godly fear." We need not fear or doubt God's goodness. Instead, we must be steadfast and stay busy doing the King's business!

Linda Craven and her husband, Jerry, served for twenty-five years in New Zealand with Gospel Fellowship Association. During her time in New Zealand, Linda served as a pastor's wife, biblical counselor, and mentor. She and Jerry transitioned back to the USA in 2022.



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HOLD FAST THE FORM OF SOUND WORDS—2 TIMOTHY 1:13

## FIRST PARTAKER

*“The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits” (2 Tim. 2:6)*

### Preach Prophecy!

If Christians today know the name of Horatius Bonar at all it is probably because they have sung some of his many hymns, perhaps at least the grand old “Hallelujah for the Cross,” which Charles Haddon Spurgeon referred to as the Church’s national anthem.

But among nineteenth-century Scottish Presbyterians, Bonar (1808–89) was a nearly revered household name. He and his brothers, John and Andrew, pastored, preached, wrote, and widely influenced not only their own but several succeeding generations. Even today, over a century later, the Bonar family name endures through the reprinting of some of the best of Andrew’s and Horatius’ books.

My resurrecting Horatius Bonar’s name is for the purpose of calling attention to one of his most important theological positions: premillennialism. He and his brothers, their dear friend, Robert Murray M’Cheyne, and a handful of other ministers within the Church of Scotland embraced and promoted premillennialism convincingly. Horatius contributed through his editing of the *Quarterly Journal of Prophecy* for nearly twenty-five years (1849–73). He also published *Prophetical Landmarks*, a nearly two-hundred-page work in which he argued for the imminency of Christ’s return and a literal (not figurative) interpretation of Revelation 20 and other significant eschatological passages.

It is from the first two chapters of this book, *Prophetical Landmarks*, that I’d like to excerpt portions of Bonar’s case for our giving more attention to prophetic themes.

Deep interest in the climaxing of all God’s purposes in future events is bred by the Holy Spirit into all those born again. A true child of God is instinctively predisposed to listen gladly when the Spirit exercises His ministry of disclosing *what is to come* (John 16:13). But fanatical, false prophesiers and imaginative novelists have so discredited prophetic study that the inborn impulse to listen to prophetic themes with great joy seems to be increasingly checked among serious believers. And, on the other hand, one of the unhappy effects of the popularization of Reformed theology (spiritually rich though it is in some areas) is the damping down of the very significance of eschatology. Reformed theology’s failure to interpret literally many of the most prominent prophetic passages results in vast confusion. That confusion seems to confirm a notion that much of what the Scriptures say prophetically cannot be understood with certainty. And that notion of hopeless uncertainty suggests that prophecy is the small change of theology.

These discouragements to prophetic study are not new. Bonar wrote his book, in part, to respond to them. His opening two chapters—“The Call to Prophetic Study” and “The Use of Prophetic Study”—are simple, insightful, and resurrecting of keen interest in the Bible’s prophecies. I hope that you will find the following lightly edited excerpts from these chapters to be a welcome push to preach more prophecy in 2024.

Objections have been taken to the study of the prophetic word, and Satan has done his utmost to give force and color to them. Fearing for his kingdom and knowing how mighty a weapon the word of prophecy is against himself and his devices, he has labored to discredit such studies. He has misled many a man of God into sad and manifold error, making it at the

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same time appear as if it were prophecy that had thus bewildered and perverted him.

### **DOES IT BREED ERROR AND FANATICISM?**

It is certainly to be deplored that error and fanaticism have been so often mingled with prophetic studies. God has been thereby dishonored, and his Word profaned. The lips of scoffers have been opened in taunt and derision, while timid believers have kept silence, as if unable to reply. But we need not keep silence. Let us admit the *fact* on which the mockery is founded, and there let it rest. It will humble us; it will inspire caution, it will teach us wisdom; but it will do no more. It will not deter us from such studies, nor will it lead us to impeach the Word of God for consequences in which man alone is the delinquent. It will not lead us to join in the fears of the over-prudent, respecting the perilous nature of these investigations, nor to relinquish the field as either impracticable, or barren, or injurious.

### **IS PROPHECY AMONG THE “SECRET THINGS”?**

“Secret things belong to God,” says an objector. Most certainly; and whosoever insists on prying into God’s secrets will only proclaim his own pride and plunge himself into profounder ignorance. But prophecy is no secret thing; it is a thing revealed. It is not one of the things over which God has drawn the veil. It is just the opposite. It is that from which God has *withdrawn* the veil, on purpose that we may know it and profit by it. The very name of the chief prophetic book is a declaration of this, and a call on us to “come and see.” What does “the Apocalypse” or “the Revelation” mean but the book which reveals, the book which takes the veil or covering from the future, and presents that future to our gaze? Into what is not written we may not search, but into all that is written we may and must. Necessity is laid upon us. Yea, woe is unto us if we turn away our ears from the voice of God speaking to us concerning things to come!

### **IS PROPHECY AN UNESSENTIAL SUBJECT?**

We hear much of the difference between things essential and things nonessential; but who will undertake to draw the dividing line? Or who will venture to affirm that the prophetic portions of the Word are its nonessentials? Do not such truths as the advent, the resurrection, the judgment, form some of the chief scenes of prophecy; and are these nonessentials? Strange, truly strange, that man should make such a division of the Word of God! Stranger still, that he

should make it for the purpose of excusing himself for the neglect of so large and precious a portion of revelation. Is not the fact of its being revealed enough to show us that God thought it essential—or, if not essential absolutely and with reference to salvation, at least essential relatively and as pertaining to holiness? If a man will persist in calling it nonessential, surely he will not irreverently pronounce it *unimportant*? And if it be admitted to be *important*, then surely all further argument is at end. It *must* be studied. We dare not overlook or postpone the duty.

Never did we more require such a light to guide our uncertain steps, and to strengthen our wavering faith, broken down with overflowing iniquity, sick and weary with the long disappointment of hope deferred. Never did futurity wear so wild an aspect, never did God’s ways seem so strange and intricate, never were the Church’s prospects more perilous and perplexed, or “the world’s turns so slippery” as now. Above all, never was there a time when events developed themselves with such rapidity. This seems especially one of the characteristics of the last days. As the world moves onward, it appears to accelerate its speed, and precipitate itself with headlong recklessness and feverish haste. Events, alike the evil and the good, though specially the former, seem to ripen before their season, as if Satan were in haste to carry through his devices, knowing that now he hath but a short time.

What, then, are our prospects? *Prophecy* alone can inform us. This is our only guide. It is our watchtower, into which we must betake ourselves, in order, on the one hand, to note the troubled scenes that are passing below, and on the other hand to watch for every token of the ascending dawn.

How intense the interest which the Church ought to feel in the “sure word of prophecy”; how earnestly ought she to take heed to it as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawn and the daystar arise! We are fallen upon evil days and perilous times. Iniquity abounds, and the love of many is chilled. And shall not this awaken us to watchfulness? Shall it not lead us to trim our lamps and gird up our loins?

At present, we are too much at ease, resting securely, in league, or at least at truce, with the world. Thus we forget our *common* interests, and think solely of our individual concerns. The prophetic chart is thrown aside; the prophetic lamp is allowed to burn on unheeded. But should a day arrive when the world’s slumbering hostility shall awake and burn red against us, when our long dream of peace shall melt away, and darkness overcloud us,—then shall we turn with no careless eye to the “more sure word of prophecy,” dwelling with deeper delight upon its glowing visions, wearying more anxiously for the day of promised rest,

praying more fervently for the shortening of the time of tribulation, the coming of the kingdom, and the arrival of the long-expected King.

## ARE PROPHETIC STUDIES UNPROFITABLE?

It has been sometimes strangely said that such studies are unprofitable, and though some ought to give heed to them, yet Christians in general may find some safer and more useful employment. We have said enough, we trust, already to disprove this, as well as to show the sinfulness of such a thought. But besides what has been stated, the very nature of things forbids and condemns the idea. Prophecy is not designed for the mere gratification of curious men; it is the nourishment of part of our very nature. We should be but half fed without it. We are by nature as instinctively *prospective* as retrospective creatures. Our eye was formed to glance forward with as intense and eager an interest into the uncertainties of the future as to hold intercourse with past and present realities. We cannot help this. It is instinct. It may often be in a state of diseased extravagance, but still it is our nature. We cannot help our anticipative propensities any more than we can extinguish memory. We are formed to look into the future; and we feel that nothing can be more *natural*; for the sunshine or the shadows of that future are hastening on to us apace, and we shall soon be compassed about with them on every side. Our picture of that future, then, must be filled up either with shadows—phantoms of our own creation—or with the revelations of inspired prophecy.

We speak not of the vain curiosity that would fain sink the insipid monotony of present duty in the restless anticipations of change and novelty, but that wise and needful concern about the future which our Lord did not condemn when he said, "Take heed! behold I have foretold you all things"; which Peter cherished when he said, "Ye have a more sure word of prophecy to which ye do well to take heed, as to a light shining in a dark place"; and which the Old Testament saints exercised when they "searched what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow."

## ARE PROPHETIC SCRIPTURES TOO OBSCURE?

To complain of obscurity in the prophecies is an attempt to palliate our own guilt by fastening blame upon the Word. To plead this fancied obscurity as an excuse for omitting their study, is strange obliquity of logic as well as of conscience. It makes the very circumstance which in everything else *is* deemed

the strongest argument for doubling the intensity of thought and appliance, a reason for indifference and pretermission. To say that these obscure parts cannot be so profitable as the rest, is to maintain that God has written difficulties in his Word which will not repay the labour of investigation, even when successful. Surely there is no part of revealed truth so unimportant as that we should grudge the toil of searching it out! And if "the testimony of Jesus be the spirit of prophecy"—that is, if HE be the theme and burden of all its visions—can we count any effort a toil which is put forth to understand that testimony? How can we consent to forego the study of those oracles which reveal to us the Messiah, not merely in the sufferings that are past, but in the glory that is yet to come?

How shall we look for the "blessed hope," if we know not from prophecy what that hope is? How shall we become pilgrims and strangers here, if we have not made discoveries of the inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away? How shall we prepare to meet the Bridegroom, if we know not what the prophets have forespoken concerning his arrival, and concerning the signs of his approach? How shall we put on the bridal dress, if we know not the dress, nor have heard of the marriage-supper of the Lamb?

## THE SCRIPTURE ATTITUDE AND POSTURE

The attitude of the Church ought to be one of watchful expectation. "What I say unto one, I say unto all, WATCH!" "When ye see these things come to pass, lift up your heads, for ye know that your redemption draweth nigh."

That expectation and watchfulness must be founded upon, and regulated by prophetic truth; and how then is it possible that the Church can maintain her attitude, if she turns away from such a guide? How can she steer her way amid clouds and billows if both her chart and her compass be set aside as useless or unintelligible?

The position of the Church, then, must be shifted, and her posture reversed, ere she can withhold her vision from the future; or else she must be watching for she knows not what—a something which cannot be the object of any definite, substantial, soul-sustaining hope. Is she not like some beleaguered fortress, round which stretch, gloomy and far, the hostile encampments of the prince of this world?

It is well that she is versant in all the tactics which her perilous post demands. It is well that she has the experience of many a siege to perfect her skill and discipline. Yet of what unspeakable moment to



be put in possession of her enemy's schemes and counsels; to know the changeful progress and final issue of the long and exhausting conflict; to calculate upon every movement of the enemy; to understand his well feigned retreats, ambuscades, and endless stratagems, not merely as practiced against each individual in her army, but against herself as a body; to stand upon her watchtowers, marking each distant sign, and comparing every event with her prophetic chart; to ascertain how near she is approaching the day which is to be the last of her struggles—the first of her triumphs; when the great Deliverer shall arrive, and when upon the field of victory she shall ungird the sword, the helmet, and the shield, to exchange them for the palm of conquest, the sceptre of royal dignity and dominion!

*What, then, are our prospects? Prophecy alone can inform us. This is our only guide. It is our watchtower, into which we must betake ourselves, in order, on the one hand, to note the troubled scenes that are passing below, and on the other hand to watch for every token of the ascending dawn.*

Most Christians, we fear, content themselves with very vague and general views of prophecy. They have caught up some of the prominent statements of Scripture regarding the future—such as that there will be a millennium, a resurrection, and a judgment day; and with these, or very little more, they are satisfied, quite satisfied. Here they consider that their prophetic creed ought to terminate. They advance to no details. They shrink from all minuter investigation, condemning it as presumptuous, or at least refusing it as barren speculation.

With regard to such details of the future as we speak of, there are two sorts of inquiries,—inquiries into what God *has* revealed, and inquiries into what God has *not* revealed. As to the latter, I would hand them over freely and without scruple, to the unsparing condemnation of all who love the truth. With these the student of prophecy has no concern at all. But so long as our investigations relate to the former only, so long are we in the clear path of duty, from which it is at our peril if we step aside. Nay, the very example of these timid friends refutes their own arguments. They have gone a certain way along the same path; and all that we want is that they should go a little farther, but still

only so far as the road lies open and as God gives light. We would not have them move one step beyond that. They have fixed certain landmarks of prophecy; and all we desire is that they should gather up all the information that Scripture gives, in order to fill up the spaces between.

## UNSCRIPTURAL PREJUDICE

We know how sadly many are fettered with prejudices upon this subject and haunted with the idea of the presumptuous nature of the study. But surely the mere fact of prophecy forming part of the Divine revelation is quite sufficient to satisfy us of the lawfulness, nay the strict *duty* of studying it, not only in its general heads, but in its most minute particulars. "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of the prophecy of this book!" are the words of encouragement; and though we had not another similar text in Scripture, that single one would be enough for us.

I confess that not only do I not sympathize with, but I do not at all understand the principle or reason of this prejudice; nor is it very easy to trace it to anything like a scriptural or rational source. Surely no one can think of maintaining that the mere futurity of a thing renders it unprofitable, and stamps with the charge of rashness any attempt to investigate it minutely? Yet this is the only conceivable meaning of the objection. And if so, how foolish, how sinful is it, when calmly weighed! For the unlawfulness or unprofitableness of our inquiries into any subject consists not in the matter being either past, present, or future, but simply in its not being revealed.

It would be just as wise to bar all minute search into Scripture history on the ground of its being *past*, as it is to inhibit all minute inquiry into prophecy because it is *future*. The fact of God having revealed so many particulars regarding the future, settles the whole question as to the duty of every believer to examine these. It is as plain as truth can be that no investigation, however minute, can be called presumptuous so long as it restricts itself to what is written: nay, the more minute, the more accurate it is likely to be, and therefore more accordant with the mind of the Spirit.

The presumption is all the other way around. It is presumption to close the ear against the voice of God, presumption to profess to decide how much of God's Word may be studied with safety, and presumption to neglect some as mysterious and unprofitable.

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Dr. Mark Minnick pastors Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina. His sermons are available at [mountcalvarybaptist.org/sermons](http://mountcalvarybaptist.org/sermons) and on your favorite podcast app: search for "Mount Calvary Baptist Church" and subscribe.

## Five Books for a Deserted Island

When I was asked to write on the topic of selecting five books (beyond the Bible) I could have on a deserted island, I immediately began to ponder the possible predicament and asked, “What would be most helpful to my mind and soul in such a situation?” My selections are based on that specific situation and are not simply what my top five favorite books are. In no particular order, here are the books my deserted island library would contain.

*Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission: The Growth of a Work of God* by Howard Taylor: The account of Hudson’s preparation for foreign service gives details of his intentional austerity. He moved to an economically depressed section of London, which he referred to as Drainside. On March 12, 1852, he wrote, “We dwell too much on the things that are seen and temporal and far too little on those that are unseen and eternal” (141). In 1852 Taylor recorded a lengthy entry about God’s providence and supply for him in an unexpected course of events. Taylor’s landlady asked him to pick up her husband’s wages, which she needed for a pressing expense, at the payroll office. Taylor was pressed for time, so he opted to personally cover the expense and be reimbursed later. When he later attempted to pick up the seaman’s paycheck, the payroll office explained that the husband had quit, and there were no wages. That very evening, Taylor pricked himself with a sewing needle. The next day he was handling a disease-infested corpse and found himself growing ill later that day. Based on the previous events, he was instructed to go home quickly and put his affairs in order, for he would certainly die. Taylor took assurance in the thought that since God had called him to mission work in China, he must survive. The Lord provided medical care for Taylor that exceeded his funds. After a lengthy recuperation and the restoration of his health, he returned to the shipping payroll office and was informed that another seaman by the same name had run off—not the husband of his landlady. The money was remitted. Soon after, the medical specialist checked Taylor’s condition. Taylor used the opportunity to give a lengthy testimony of God’s divine handling of the events from beginning to end. Taylor relished the lessons learned even during such hardships, for they strengthened his faith in God (161–69).

*The Unsearchable Riches of Christ: An Exposition on Ephesians 3*, by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: While I wish that I could take all eight books of this set, I will follow the stipulations and select this as my favorite among them. I find the teaching of Ephesians 3 particularly helpful in confronting spiritual doubts and the depression that arises from those doubts. The unsearchable riches in Ephesians 3:8 are “Jesus Christ Himself. . . . The essence of the gospel is Christ and what He gives to us. Not what

we do, not what He asks us to do. That comes later” (59). Lloyd-Jones is particularly skilled at using other passages from the Bible to support and illustrate the explanations and applications he makes from the primary text. I sense the entirety of God’s Word being brought to bear on a single chapter.

Of my many daily devotional books, none can compare to *Morning and Evening* by Charles H. Spurgeon. I would want the very copy that now sits on my shelf, for it formerly belonged to my mother, and I love seeing what she underlined with her red pen. Arguably, no writer compresses so much thought into so few words. He comments on Romans 11:36, “You are not acting as you ought to do when you are moved by any other motive than a single eye to your Lord’s glory.” Reflecting on Jesus in Revelation 1:13 Spurgeon asserts, “Our Lord presents all His people with an example. We must never unbind our girdles. This is not a time for lying down at ease.” The 730 one-page messages seem fresh and relevant with every reading.

Knowing that isolation might lead to depression, I’d also select *The Life and Diary of David Brainerd*. His entries reveal the raw emotions and thoughts of this faithful servant of Christ. Perhaps I, too, will one day have the joy of sharing the gospel with visiting natives from a nearby island. Brainerd’s entries for June 1744 encourage perseverance in prayer. He recorded, “Had more freedom and fervency in prayer than usual of late. Especially longed for the presence of God in my work . . . and in the evening prayer my faith and hope in God were much raised.” Another excerpt helpful to my soul is from October 19, 1742: “This morning and last night, I felt a sweet longing in my soul after holiness. My soul seemed so to reach and stretch towards the mark of perfect sanctity that it was ready to break with longings.” His transparency in his journal provides a model of candor before God in private.

If you have never read the original version of *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe, you may not realize the deep spiritual life this castaway has in Christ. What an appropriate work of fiction for desert island existence! I am particularly fond of the session Crusoe has with the native Friday about God’s timing in the final judgment of Satan. Friday asks, “Why not kill the devil now?” Crusoe responds all are equally deserving of God’s wrath, and yet can be grateful for His grace and mercy. Crusoe comes to see that his being a castaway was the wise plan of God to bring the gospel message to an unreached native. What a blessed thought!

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Carl Wood pastors Anchor Baptist Church in Little River, South Carolina.

## Does God Guarantee Healing?

For the past ten years I have been working on the Book of James. Using G. Campbell Morgan’s expository method (similar to Schreiner’s chapter “Tracing the Argument” in *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles*), the read-and-reread phase reveals some interesting emphases. James appears to have three sections, each with its own goal. The first goal for his readers is that each would love the Lord with his whole soul (1:12) rather than with a divided soul (1:8—“double-souled” in Greek). James selects two problems that often hinder one’s love for God, namely, one’s response to trials (1:2–12) and temptations (1:13–18). Then he explains that the Word of God, if heard and obeyed, is the solution for these two problems (1:18–25).

The second goal James has for his readers is that they would love their neighbors (2:8). After a brief introduction to the second section in 1:26–27, James selects five sins that hinder one’s love for others: partiality/judgmentalism (2:1–13), callousness towards others’ needs (2:14–26), evil speech (3:1–12), bitter jealousy/selfish ambition (3:13–18), and covetousness (4:1–5). The solution for these five sins is grace (4:6), which the Lord will provide if one is humble but will withhold if one is proud (4:6–12).

The third goal James has for his readers is that they have a soul that is established and unwavering (5:8). What can shake the soul so badly that one is no longer established? In this third section, James selects four things that human beings strongly desire. Our souls can shake when our plans for ourselves are different from God’s plans for us (4:13–17), when our desires for wealth are not God’s will for us (5:1–6), when our desires for comfort and ease are not God’s will for us (5:7–12), and when our expectations of health are not God’s will for us (5:13–16a). What has the power to adjust our will to God’s will? It is prayer (5:16b–18). For when one is earnest or serious about prayer, one of two things will occur: prayer will change either a person’s circumstances or a person’s will.

With James’s overarching purpose in mind, we are ready to look at a small but controversial passage. In the third section the reader is forced to look introspectively and battle four deep-seated desires. To have an established soul—a soul that is not divided when life does not go as planned—one must willingly admit the following. My will is not my right (4:13–17). My wealth is not my right (5:1–6). My comfort is not my right (5:7–12). And my health is not my right (5:13–16a). Now, this last statement is the crux of the controversy. Is James saying that healing is guaranteed (5:15)? Or does the larger context inform the certainty of healing? Put another way, is James saying that healing is guaranteed, or is he

saying that God will heal (5:15) if it is His will (4:13–5:18)? Most Pentecostal/charismatic readers will opt for guaranteed healing, provided that either the faith of the elders or the faith of the one who is sick is strong enough. Many cessationists will also opt for guaranteed healing. The Reformation view, espoused by Luther and Calvin, argues that 5:13–16a refers to a miraculous type of healing that ceased along with other miraculous gifts by the end of the first century. Many today hold this view. But one might argue against both these views from NT evidence.

There are passages in the NT that might be problematic for the previous views. I say “might” because this issue calls for an irenic spirit. But consider the following. The apostle Paul possessed a “faith” strong enough to heal the sick. And yet there are times when it was not God’s will to heal. Paul prayed three times for physical healing and did not receive it (2 Cor. 12:8–10). He was unable to heal Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25–27). Timothy was to take a little wine for his stomach’s sake (1 Tim. 5:23). And Paul left Trophimus ill in Miletus (2 Tim. 4:20). Yes, there are ways to counter each of these texts if one believes that James is teaching guaranteed healing. However, Paul’s inability to heal coupled with the larger context in James about submitting to God’s will provides at least a plausible argument for another interpretation of 5:15a: God will heal if it is His will. The sick should send for the elders of the church. The use of oil signifies that the power for healing comes not from the elders but from God. And if the sick one has simple faith (based on context it is the sick person’s faith, not the elders’ faith), then he will be healed if it is God’s will.

Perhaps one more matter should be addressed. James has two causes of illness in mind. There is innocent illness (5:14–15a) and guilty illness (5:15b–16a). Most illness is not due to God’s punishment for sin (cf. Job in 5:11). But some illness is the result of God’s punishment for sin. Guilty illness, for example, could result from partaking of the Lord’s Table with unconfessed sin against another (1 Cor. 11:27–34). Confession by the sick person, forgiveness from the one wronged, and prayer from both will lift the punishment, resulting in healing.

Prayer has the power to change either our circumstances or our will. The sick will be healed if it is God’s will. And if illness remains, then we follow Jesus’ lead: “Not my will, but thine, be done.”

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Curt Lamansky pastors Immanuel Bible Church in Sheboygan, Wisconsin.



## Listen!

**M**editate for a moment on the memorable Verizon commercial where an average Joe American asks, “Can you hear me now? Can you hear me now?” Today someone in your realm of influence, possibly in pain, is asking you the same question. *“Can you hear me now? Can you hear me now? Please listen to me!”*

Most of us long to be heard, possibly because we seek approval, recognition, or anything that makes us feel worth something to somebody. Or we are in such horrible pain that sharing our burden in words with another human eases the pain. *Maybe someone will understand if I can only get him to listen.*

Listening is a skill that can be developed, improved, and used to minister truth, encouragement, and even grace to a friend in need. Several top businesses now train their employees in effective listening skills. Their studies show that employees *who listen more than they talk* generate increased productivity, foster creative ideas, and waste less time. Of course, this results in more profits for the company. The ticketing company Eventbrite, Inc., began a leadership development program in 2020 for all managers that included lessons on active listening. So why should believers in Jesus learn to listen?

*Though our pride hates to admit it, we all crave attention and affirmation. There is probably a tiny narcissist somewhere inside each of us crying, “Listen to me. I want to feel important, approved, and heard.” I doubt we recognize how we come across to others.*

### WHEN WE LISTEN, WE IMITATE GOD; GOD ALWAYS LISTENS.

Psalm 121:4 says, “Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.” When you wake during the night and cry out to God, He listens. He never says, “So sorry, My child. I am too busy to listen. I have others who need Me more than you do. Besides, I don’t want to miss a life-changing text or e-mail. Check back with Me later.”

God tells us the importance of listening during worship. “Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be *more ready to hear*, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil” (Ecc. 5:1, emphasis added). When the scribes asked Jesus, “Which is the first commandment of all?” He replied, “The first of all the commandments is, *Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord. . . .*” (Mark 12:28–30, emphasis added). Just as a submissive wife imitates Jesus, who submitted to God on the cross, a believer who listens imitates God, who always listens.

### WHEN WE LISTEN, WE MAY HEAR GOD SPEAK.

Believers are often quick to ask God to speak but slow to listen to His voice. In his book *Directions* James Hamilton tells of a man who lost his wristwatch while working in an icehouse. He searched carefully, raking through the sawdust, but could not find it. A young boy heard about the problem, entered the icehouse during the lunch hour and soon came out with the watch. The man asked how he found it. “I closed the door,” said the boy, “lay down in the sawdust, and kept very still. Soon, I heard the watch ticking.” Listen to God as you read the Word, hear preaching, and talk to Him in prayer.

### PEOPLE ARE DRAWN TO THOSE WHO LISTEN.

David Augsburger said, “Being heard is so close to being loved that for the average person they are almost indistinguishable.” We all want to be loved. When you sacrifice talking about yourself to listen, you are saying, “I love you.”

Two psychiatrists met at their twentieth college reunion. One was vibrant, while the other looked withered and worried. The older-looking psychiatrist asked, “So, what’s your secret? Listening to other people’s problems every day, all day long, for years on end, has made an old man of me.” “I get it,” replied the younger-looking one. “But who listens?” (*American Health*).

Most people talk, few people listen. But the man of wisdom in Proverbs says:

“A wise man will hear [listen], and will increase learning.” (1:5)

“Incline thine ear [listen] unto wisdom.” (2:2)

“He that answereth a matter before he heareth it [before he listens], it is folly and shame unto him. (18:13)

And Jesus said to His followers in Luke 8:18, “Take heed therefore how ye hear [listen].”

Though our pride hates to admit it, we all crave attention and affirmation. There is probably a tiny narcissist somewhere inside each of us crying, “*Listen to me. I want to feel important, approved, and heard.*” I doubt we recognize how we come across to others. Forgive me for broad-brush judgmentalism, but I believe the person who talks most in a meeting is probably the one with the deepest insecurities. Hungry for credibility? Be the person in the room who talks little and listens much. “A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards.” (Prov. 29:11)

“Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding.” (Prov. 17:28)

Harvard neuroscientists write, “It feels so rewarding, we can’t help but share our thoughts. This makes sense when you realize that talking about our own beliefs and opinions, rather than those of other people, stimulates the meso-limbic dopamine system, which is associated with the motivation and reward feelings we get from food, money, and sex.”

## WHEN WE LISTEN, WE BECOME BETTER COUNSELORS.

Listening helps us gather information to identify the problem and offer solutions. When you listen to understand, you are saying, “Your feelings make sense. I want to understand so I can help.”

Teenage prostitutes, during interviews in a San Francisco study, were asked, “Is there anything you needed most and couldn’t get?” Their response, invariably preceded by sadness and tears, was unanimous: “What I needed most was someone to listen to me. Someone who cared enough to listen to me.” (Jim Reapsome)

“The most basic of all human needs is to understand and be understood. The best way to understand people is to listen to them.” (Ralph Nichols)

“Formula for handling people: 1. Listen to the other person’s story. 2. Listen to the other person’s full story. 3. Listen to the other person’s full story first.” (Gen. George Marshall)

“Good listening is like tuning into a radio station. For good results, you can listen to only one station at a time. Trying to listen to my wife while looking over an office report is like trying to receive two radio stations at the same time. I end up with distortion and frustration. Listening requires a choice of where I place my attention. To tune into my partner, I must first choose to put away all that will divide my attention. That might mean laying down the newspaper, moving away from the dishes in the sink, putting down the book I’m reading, setting aside my projects.” (Robert W. Herron)

“Christians so often think they must always contribute something when they are in the company of others, that this is the one service they have to render. They forget that listening can be a greater service than speaking.” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Charles Swindoll once found himself with too many commitments in too few days. He got nervous and tense about it. “I was snapping at my wife and our children, choking down my food at mealtimes, and feeling irritated at those unexpected interruptions through the day,” he recalled in his book *Stress Fractures*. “Before long, things around our home started reflecting the pattern of my hurry-up style. It was becoming unbearable. I distinctly remember after supper one evening, the words of our younger daughter, Colleen. She wanted to tell me something important that had happened to her at school that day. She began hurriedly, ‘Daddy, I wanna tell you somethin’ and I’ll tell you really fast.’ Suddenly realizing her frustration, I answered, ‘Honey, you can tell me—and you don’t have to tell me really fast. Say it slowly.’ I’ll never forget her answer: ‘Okay, Daddy, then listen slowly.’”

## HOW THEN, SHOULD WE LISTEN?

*Listen to Understand, Not to Respond.*

“Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.” (Stephen R. Covey)

The story is told of Franklin Roosevelt, who often endured long receiving lines at the White House. He complained that no one really paid any attention to what was said. One day, during a reception, he decided to try an experiment. To each person who passed down the line and shook his hand, he murmured, “I murdered my grandmother this morning.” The guests responded with phrases like, “Marvelous! Keep up the good work. We are proud of you. God bless you, sir.” It was not till the end of the line, while greeting the ambassador from Bolivia, that his words were heard. Nonplussed, the ambassador leaned over and whispered, “I’m sure she had it coming.”

*Show interest with eye contact.* Toss your cell phone into the nearest river. Focus on that person who may be considering you his last resort. Think of how Jesus would look at you if He were on earth listening to your problem.

*Silently ask for the filling of the Spirit* to have humility to forget yourself and come up with ideas to help the speaker.

*Remember that eighty percent of a successful conversation involves listening.* Someone in your life needs you to listen.

“Can you hear me now?”

---

Dave Barba has been a pastor, church planter, and evangelist for over fifty years. Through their itinerant ministry, Press On! Ministries, Dave and his wife, Claudia, have helped plant thirty independent Baptist churches in the USA.



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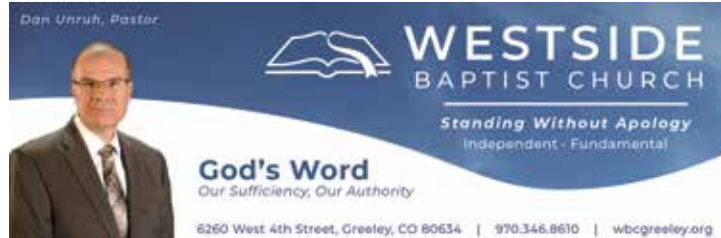
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## News From All Over

### 2024

**April 12, 2024**

**New Mexico Regional Fellowship**

Manzano Baptist Church  
12411 Linn Ave. NE  
Albuquerque, NM 87123  
Coordinator: Dan Mauldin

**April 18-19, 2024**

**Northern California Regional Fellowship**

Campbell Bible Church  
151 Sunnyside Ave.  
Campbell, CA 95008  
Coordinator: Dan Pelletier

**April 29-30, 2024**

**Wyoming Regional Fellowship**

Grace Baptist Church  
905 Pine Ave.  
Kemmerer, WY 83101  
Coordinator: Jay Sprecher

**May 20, 2024**

**Mid-America Regional Fellowship**

(Combined with Conference on the Church for God's Glory)  
First Baptist Church  
5304 Charles St.  
Rockford, IL 61108  
Coordinator: David Huffstutler

**June 10-13, 2024**

**FBFI Annual Fellowship**

Tri-City Baptist Church  
6953 West 92nd Lane  
Westminster, CO 80021

**August 23, 2024**

**Chesapeake Bay Regional Fellowship**

Calvary Baptist Church  
3200 Ridge Road  
Westminster, MD 21157  
Coordinator: Kent Ramler

**September 10, 2024**

**NYC Regional Fellowship**

Bethel Baptist Fellowship  
2304 Voorhies Avenue  
Brooklyn, NY 11235  
Coordinator: Matthew Recker

**October 18, 2024**

**New Mexico Regional Fellowship**

Manzano Baptist Church  
12411 Linn Ave. NE  
Albuquerque, NM 87123  
Coordinator: Dan Mauldin

**October 19, 2024**

**New England Regional Fellowship**

(Meeting with the New England Foundations Conference)  
Heritage Baptist Church  
186 Dover Point Road  
Dover, NH 03820  
Coordinator: Taigen Joos

**October 21-22, 2024**

**Central Regional Fellowship**

Faith Baptist Church  
1001 South Scenic Dr.  
Manhattan, KS 66503  
Coordinator: David Byford

### 2025

**June 9-11, 2025**

**FBFI Annual Fellowship**

(Combined with New Testament Association)  
Calvary Baptist Church and  
Maranatha Baptist University  
Watertown, WI 53094



**Greg and Janie Kaminski**

headed to Oregon in 1979 in an old sixty-six-passenger school bus because they couldn't afford a U-Haul. They were on a journey to start Westside Baptist Church in Eugene. "Little did we know," they recall, "what lay ahead, but God did. Forty-five years and six kids and fifteen grandchildren later, God has allowed us the privilege to serve Him at Westside Baptist and Camp Northwest in Mossyrock, Washington." Greg will officially retire on April 28, 2024.

**Charity Baptist Church**

in Huntington, Indiana, announces the calling of a new pastor. **Pastor Stephen Arney**, joined by his wife, Dina, and their four children, became pastor on November 12, 2023, at a special service at which **Dr. Wally Morris**, pastor since July 1994, officially retired. Dr. Morris and his wife, Susan, now plan to spend more time with family, in writing, and on mission trips.



### Lobbying for Jesus Continued from page 14

How can each of us help the elected officials in our respective states? We can pray for them and give them biblical wisdom as they seek to govern the people. Across America, fewer men and women with biblical convictions are in positions of leadership. I think this is partly because of the overall moral decline in America, but it is also because people don't want to stand for truth even if they believe it. It's lonely. They don't want to deal with the opposition. It hurts. There are easier ways to make a living . . . at home. We need godly leaders, but we must support them.

Paul recognized this, as we can see in 1 Timothy 2:1-4:

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

Let's be as Aaron and Hur were to Moses. Let's uphold our leaders' hands. Let's pray for them and find ways to encourage, not just complain. Let's share the hope and help we have in Jesus.

Arin Hess pastored Community Bible Church in Norfolk, Nebraska, for about forty-one years. He now serves with Capitol Studies as a chaplain to the Capitol community in Lincoln, Nebraska. You may reach Arin at [arin@capitolstudies.org](mailto:arin@capitolstudies.org), and the website is [www.capitolstudies.org](http://www.capitolstudies.org).



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# Shall We Disdain What God Ordained?

**T**ake a drive through any city and you will see beautifully designed murals that brighten the walls of buildings. Drive on into the countryside and you will probably see barn quilts and other signs and murals that beautify farm buildings. As you can imagine, artists (and their teams) spent hundreds of hours planning every aspect of those attractive designs. Then, when everything was in readiness, they carefully executed their plans, paying close attention to the nuances of color and shape.

The next time you see those murals, think of your elected legislators and judges. Spending hundreds of hours, these officials design the nuanced laws that we refer to as legislation (or revised code). These laws are frequently challenged, so judges are called upon to carefully evaluate this legislation by the pertinent state or federal constitution. All of these, working together, have given us a system of carefully balanced laws, many of which have stood the test of time. But now there are those who are attempting to use a sand blaster and harsh chemicals on the beautifully designed murals that we refer to as the laws of the land. They are doing so by attacking constitutions—which constitute us as a people—in order to subvert those carefully nuanced laws. Backed by millions of dollars (from donors who are frequently from out of state or even out of the country), liberal groups are attempting to use a sand blaster on constitutions and to replace them with their own designs. What should believers do when they see these developments taking place? Most believers would agree that they try to honor God in their families and churches. After all, those are God-ordained institutions. But believers often neglect another God-ordained institution: the government.<sup>1</sup> But we should not despise or disdain what God has ordained.

Here in Ohio, our state constitution was recently ravaged by the techniques described above. The same state constitution that protects human life (Article 1, Section 1) now codifies the death of human infants on demand (Article 1, Section 22). But do those infants—even those conceived during crimes—deserve a bloody death penalty? Of course not. But liberal groups, using millions of dollars in ads to appeal directly to an uninformed populace, have changed the Ohio constitution—undermining decades of carefully crafted legislation. Now what constitutes us as a people is that people can freely destroy other people, as long as those people are still in the womb. Obviously, we have become a casually murderous society. But here's the great tragedy: many Christians didn't even bother to vote to stop this moral atrocity.

This article is not intended to cause you to commiserate with Ohio but to alert you to the fact that well-funded liberals are coming for your state constitution using



the same techniques. Since the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, abortion advocates are working to enshrine that murderous right in each state's Bill of Rights. According to a recent article by the *PBS News Hour*, the following states will face these same well-funded attacks in November 2024:<sup>2</sup>

- A constitutional amendment to enable abortion on demand is already on the ballot in New York and Maryland.
- In Arizona a movement is currently collecting ballot signatures to place abortion on demand on the November ballot.
- Dueling factions are also trying to place abortion on demand on Colorado's ballot, where it must pass by 55% of those who are voting.
- In Florida groups recently collected 900,000 signatures to place the right to abortion in their state constitution—which would effectively erase all their carefully crafted legislation about the matter.
- Abortion is currently against the law in Missouri. But abortion advocates are seeking to collect enough signatures to enable abortion in the first twenty-four weeks of pregnancy via constitutional change.
- In Nebraska abortion rights advocates are attempting to place their amendment on the ballot.
- In Nevada a ballot initiative will place the matter in the state constitution to make abortion a right.
- Similar moves are underway in Pennsylvania, South Dakota, and Washington State.

If Ohio is any indication, slick media ads, costing millions of dollars, will bombard the people with twisted half-truths and propaganda. Many have worked to elect good representatives, but this time believers will need to have a “salt of the earth, light of the world” influence on their fellow citizens.

### WHAT SHOULD BELIEVERS DO?

1. Do not disdain what God ordained. Our government is “of the people,

by the people, for the people.” If you are part of “the people,” then it's time to exercise good stewardship of your God-given citizenship. Get informed and vote according to your values.

2. Persist in prayer. Jesus taught His disciples via a parable that “men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1). In that parable a widow made her persistent appeals to an unjust public official who did not fear God. You are confronted with the same kind of public officials today, so it's time to pray. But you are appealing to the God of truth and justice.
3. Pray the “Ahithophel prayer” (2 Sam. 15:31). When faced with a well-armed, well-funded conspiracy, David prayed that the Lord would “turn the counsel” of Absalom's advisor “into foolishness.” Why not pray that way today when you see dark forces taking aim at the laws of your land?
4. Learn how to reverse “The Abimelech Effect” using Judges 9. Jotham, the surviving son of Gideon, proclaimed to that murderous band, “Hearken unto me . . . that God may hearken unto you” (Judges 9:7). His parable teaches us how to use good stewardship of our citizenship and take leadership—even as we honor God in other areas of life.

Do not disdain what God ordained. In our churches and families, we seek to glorify God. Now it is time to do the same thing in the God-ordained institution of government.

After thirty-nine years of pastoral ministry, Gordon A. Dickson continues to minister as a freelance writer and conference speaker. His newest book is *12 Ways You Can Make a Difference in This Crazy, Mixed-Up World*. He blogs at [LiveServeLead.com](http://LiveServeLead.com).



<sup>1</sup> Romans 13:1–7.

<sup>2</sup> See Geoff Mulvihill, “Here are the states where abortion access may be on the ballot in 2024,” *PBS News Hour*, November 8, 2023, (<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/here-are-the-states-where-abortion-access-may-be-on-the-ballot-in-2024>).

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# Finding Calm in the Quake

One sleepless night on November 14, 2016, I was startled by what I thought was the sound of an approaching train. We didn't live near a train track, so when the house started shaking, I knew it was an earthquake—they sound like a train coming toward you. Seconds seem like minutes, and you never know if this is the “big one” or if the earth is just making another “slight adjustment” beneath. However, that night I knew it was a big one. The house seemed to sway like a big ship at sea for about two minutes. Thankfully we didn't experience any damage to our home or in our area. But the Kaikōura coast on the South Island of New Zealand suffered ruptures that occurred on twenty-one fault lines across 111 miles. Most of the earthquake's energy was released far north of the epicenter, which is why we felt it so strongly on the North Island. Portions of the coastline rose six-and-a-half feet. In other areas, smaller portions of the coastline rose around eighteen feet during the quake, which startled the survey teams when they later measured the extent of the uplift. What a demonstration of God's power! Even with all the advanced technology today, seismologists still can't predict earthquakes.

## TREMORS

In New Zealand we lived across the lake from an active volcano that constantly puffed steam. Steam vents in rural areas and along parts of the lake edge reminded us of the thermal activity that churned beneath us. We were often unaware of many of the frequent, small tremors, but when the dishes rattled, the lights swayed,

and the earth shook, that got our attention. Although I knew God orchestrated those events, it was still very frightening.

Often without notice in our own lives, too, the ground churns and shifts beneath us much like an earthquake—when parents divorce, churches split, teens rebel, pregnancies end in miscarriages, bank accounts go into debt, a diagnosis reveals cancer, or a loved one suddenly dies. Although we know that God controls each event, it can still be frightening and emotionally devastating. The landscape changes dramatically. The Kaikōura earthquake not only changed the shape of the coastline: it also blocked land access to the town from all directions. The roads we normally travelled were now completely gone or covered with debris. People were ferried to safety on boats.

## VACANCY

When the ground suddenly shifts beneath us, it often leaves a vacancy. Church splits leave vacant pews. Divorce or death vacates the place of a spouse and a dad or mom for the children. Miscarriages leave an empty womb and empty arms. Like earthquakes, the landscape of our lives changes dramatically and permanently. At least to us, it looks like utter destruction.



Such emotional “earthquakes” completely alter what used to be the normal path of life. The roads we used to travel don't exist anymore because the quake either destroyed or left a gaping hole in the path. We are devastated and overwhelmed with loss and grief. Perhaps we want to catch that next ferry out of town to a place of refuge and safety. However, as we initially work through those emotional waves, we must come up for air and “see” God's lifeboat full of enabling grace. He is that “ferry” waiting to pick you up and transport you to that place of refuge and comfort: “God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work” (2 Cor. 9:8). His grace is sufficient for the events that He orchestrates. He didn't make a mistake when He decided to entrust us with certain trials. Scripture tells us to commit our souls to our faithful Creator (1 Pet. 4:19). He knows what He's doing. The One who created it all and controls it all will comfort and carry us through it all. The same power that changed the Kaikōura coastline will enable us to meet our earthquakes with His enablement and comfort. Seeing God in our circumstances provides the channel through which His peace can freely flow. We can then press forward, clinging to His promises while continuing to remember and practice the things we've learned, heard, and seen about God (see Phil. 4:7–9).

## PEACE, POWER, AND A PLAN

Riding the disappointing waves of childlessness and three failed adoption attempts held me in doubt of God's goodness. Finally, I purposed to focus

Continued on page 20





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## Treeology

The last five columns have surveyed the Pentateuch book by book. It's time to step back for a wide-angle, whole-Bible theological theme that has its roots in three of those books of Moses. I've chosen to call this theme "treeology." The term is not original with me, though I'm not aware that it has ever been used to denote the theme explored here.

Stories often incorporate symbols. There is a reason C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* opens with Narnia in the frozen grip of an endless winter ("always winter, but never Christmas"); it's a symbol of misery and hopelessness under the tyrannical reign of sin and evil.

One of the broad biblical theological themes that keeps bobbing like a log to the surface of Scripture's redemptive river has to do with trees. The tree is a recurring image in Scripture and figures centrally in the salvation storyline. That doesn't mean, of course, that every time a tree shows up in the Bible it bears some symbolic soteriological meaning. But it does appear periodically, in different forms, as a significant "prop" on the stage of redemptive history.

### TWO TREES IN A GARDEN

The first appearance was in the Garden in Genesis 2–3, though we didn't pay much attention to it in the previous column discussing Genesis. In fact, two trees figure into that part of the Story. The *tree of the knowledge of good and evil* was central to the testing of humanity's loyalty and obedience to God (see Gen. 2:9, 17; 3:3, 6, 11, 12, 17). Failing that test, of course, plunged humanity into the sin and separation from God that we talked about earlier. But there was another tree in the Garden—the *tree of life*—to which God graciously barred their access, lest they "take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever" in their fallen, sinful condition (Gen. 3:22–24). That prohibition was an act of infinite kindness on God's part, for "length of days with an evil heart is only length of misery" (C. S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*). So, the Bible's redemptive storyline begins with a tale of two trees: one involved in our sin and alienation from God, and one that holds out hope for healing and reconciliation to God.

### A TREE THAT MADE POISONOUS WATER POTABLE

After God delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt through the Red Sea—a graphic picture of salvation in itself—the people thirsted in the wilderness. When they found water, it was bitter and undrinkable (Exod. 15:22–23). Moses "cried unto the LORD; and the LORD shewed him a tree; which when he had cast into the waters, the

waters were made sweet" (Exod. 15:25). Why a *tree* of all things? Why not a stone? Why not Moses' rod, which had been used for many other miracles? Because God is the One writing this Story, and He is going somewhere with this imagery of yet another tree endowed by God with miraculous life-giving, life-saving qualities.

### THE DIVINE CURSE UPON ONE HANGED ON A TREE

After the exodus, God gave Israel His laws for the ordering of their life and worship as His redeemed people. One of those laws stipulated that a condemned criminal guilty of a capital offense who was executed by being impaled on a tree was under a divine curse: "he that is hanged [on a tree] is accursed of God" (Deut. 21:22–23). No record exists that the Jews ever inflicted this particular punishment, though they may have and it simply was not recorded. In any case, what was the purpose of this particular law? Why was divine curse pronounced specifically and exclusively upon someone executed in this particular manner? This law would probably pass unnoticed along with the many other laws incorporated into the covenant at Sinai, were it not for the fact that the New Testament explicitly highlights the significance of this otherwise obscure statement. It's clear that God gave this legislation in express anticipation of an event that He planned and executed 1500 years later.

### TREE IMAGERY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament makes a special point of connecting this Deuteronomy passage with the death of Jesus by crucifixion—being hanged on a tree. That is not just a poetic way of referring to the cross in hymns. That's explicit New Testament language describing the crucifixion.

"The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a **tree**." (Acts 5:30)

". . . whom they slew and hanged on a **tree**." (Acts 10:39)

"And . . . they took him down from the **tree**, and laid him in a sepulchre." (Acts 13:29)

"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the **tree**." (1 Pet. 2:24)

Some versions translate the Greek word in these verses (*xulon*) as "cross," "wood," or "stake." But this is the very Greek word used in the Septuagint translation of all the Old Testament passages cited above in Genesis, Exodus, and Deuteronomy. The apostle Paul explicitly links Deuteronomy 21 with the significance of Jesus' death



by crucifixion on a tree: “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a **tree**” (Gal. 3:13).

John Stott underscores the significance of the cross (the tree) as the providential and historic symbol of Christianity. His observations are so pertinent to the present discussion that they are worth quoting at length.

Every religion and ideology has its visual symbol, which illustrates a significant feature of its history or beliefs. . . . A universally acceptable Christian symbol would obviously need to speak of Jesus Christ, but there was a wide range of possibilities. . . . [T]he chosen symbol came to be a simple cross. . . . The Christians’ choice of a cross as the symbol of their faith is the more surprising when we remember the horror with which crucifixion was regarded in the ancient world. . . . The fact that a cross became the Christian symbol, and that Christians stubbornly refused, in spite of the ridicule, to discard it in favor of something less offensive, can have only one explanation. It means that the centrality of the cross originated in the mind of Jesus himself. (*The Cross and Salvation*, 25–31)

The crux of Christianity is soteriology, and the crux of soteriology is the cross. That is not just a clever wordplay (*crux* is the Latin word for “cross”), but a profound truth. God has used a foolish thing to confound wise people to ensure that salvation, from beginning to end, is of the Lord (1 Cor. 1:18–30). All the Gospel writers demonstrate their perception of the centrality of the cross. Luke dedicates over a fourth of his Gospel to the final week of Jesus’ thirty-year life (Luke 19–24). Matthew and Mark each devote over a third of their Gospels to that week and its culmination (Matt. 21–28; Mark 11–16). John spends nearly half of his Gospel on the final week (John 12–20) and, in fact, a full third of his Gospel focuses on the events of the single day of crucifixion (John 13–19). Martin Kähler’s famous description of Mark is apropos to all the Gospels; each is “a passion narrative with an extended introduction.” That doesn’t mean that the “introduction” portion of each Gospel is unimportant; but each Gospel biography of the life of Christ consistently magnifies the supreme significance of the death of Christ.

In addition, the early preaching recorded in Acts not only calls attention to the death of Christ but makes no effort to hide, avoid, or ignore the shame attached to Jesus’ death by crucifixion. In fact, as we have already seen, they repeatedly referred to the cross on which he died as a “tree.” Why?

The only possible explanation is to be found in Deuteronomy 21:22–23 . . . “anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse.” The apostles were quite familiar with this legislation, and with its implication that Jesus died under the divine curse. Yet, instead of hushing it up, they deliberately drew people’s attention to it. So evidently they were not embarrassed by it. . . . They must, therefore, have at least begun to understand that it was our curse which he was bearing. Certainly both [Peter and Paul] stated this plainly in their later letters (Gal. 3:13; 1 Pet. 2:24). (Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 39)

## THE RESTORATION OF THE TREE OF LIFE

But this redemptive storyline includes one more reference to a tree. Near the beginning of the Story, when Adam and Eve sinned, God barred their access to the tree of life (Gen. 3:22–24). What was lost in Eden will one day be restored. The final volume of the Story—the Book of Revelation—promises the overcoming people of God access to the fruit of “the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7). Interestingly, the Greek word translated “paradise” is exactly the same word translated “garden” all through Genesis 2–3 in the Greek Septuagint version, including Genesis 2:9, which refers to the original “tree of life . . . in the midst of the *garden* [Greek, *paradise*].” The final chapter of the story reveals that the benefits of “the tree of life” will be available freely and unendingly to all the redeemed (Rev. 22:1–2, 14).

“Human history begins in paradise with a tree of life and here ends in a paradise with a tree of life. But it is not a mere circle; it is a spiral, for the paradise here is on an infinitely higher plane” (Stewart Custer, *From Patmos to Paradise*, 254). It is, in that sense, not an end but a new beginning. From beginning to new beginning, from creation to new creation, the tree is a recurring symbol in this Story—a symbol of death, of life, and of God’s astonishing self-sacrifice in suffering under His own curse in our place to redeem and reconcile us to Himself and to restore us to the dominion for which He created us. Hallelujah, what a Savior!

**Note:** This column is an excerpt adapted from the epilogue of my most recent book, *Soteriology for Beginners: What Does the Bible Say about salvation?*, available on Amazon.

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**Dr. Layton Talbert** is professor of Theology and Biblical Exposition at BJU Seminary in Greenville, South Carolina.

## Being Salt and Light

It is early December as I sit to write this article, and by the time you read this, Christmas and New Year's Day will be in your rear-view mirror. As I think of Christians being salt and light in our community, I wonder how we are doing. It seems clear in Matthew 5:13–16 that for salt and light to be effective they must encounter needs and darkness. Salt that has lost its flavor is worthless, and light hidden under a basket is worthless. Matthew 5:16 states, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." John 13:35 states, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." And Galatians 6:10 tells us that as we have opportunity, we are to do good, especially to the household of faith.

It seems clear that to be salt and light we need to be doing good works. When was the last time you did something exceptionally nice for an unsaved person? When was the last time you went out of your way to help an unsaved person, not expecting anything in return, for the opportunity to share the gospel? When was the last time you helped a believer or performed an unexpected act of kindness for a believer who was not related to you?

In Luke 10:25–37 a lawyer asks Jesus a great question: "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus responds by asking him what the law says. The lawyer replies that you must love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind and that you must love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus says that that is the correct answer: if he can do those two things perfectly, he can go to heaven. The Bible then tells us that the lawyer, desiring "to justify himself," asks, "Who is my neighbour?" The lawyer acts as though he has the first commandment down and, depending on how Jesus defined "neighbor," he probably had number two down as well.

So, as Jesus often does in the Gospels, He tells a story. This time it is of a man travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho. Everyone listening to the story knew that stretch of road and knew that it was dangerous. And the predictable happened. The man was attacked by thieves who took everything he had, including his clothes, and beat him severely, leaving him in critical condition. However, by chance a priest came by—someone who would have been an expert in the law like a lawyer, someone who would know the first and second commandments. When the priest saw the man in critical condition, he passed by on the other side. Then came a Levite—an assistant to the priest—who should know the law. He also saw the severely beaten man, and he also chose to walk by on the other side. Next came a Samaritan, a person Jews would look down upon. The Bible tells us that when he saw the wounded man, he had compassion on him. He bandaged him up. Most likely he wasn't traveling with bandages and may have had to rip up some of his own clothes to make them. He took him to an inn and paid between twenty-four and sixty days of lodging and then gave the innkeeper a blank check to charge him for whatever else was necessary to care for the man.

Jesus then asks which of these three was a neighbor. The lawyer won't even say "the Samaritan"; instead he says, "He that shewed mercy on him." Jesus then says, "Go, and do thou likewise." It seems this is a pretty important part of being salt and light. It seems that many of us see the needs of a lost and dying world headed to hell in critical condition, and yet we join the priest and Levite and walk by on the other side. Perhaps because we are busy or selfish, we don't want to share our resources, or we want to protect ourselves. We are not willing to give it up to gain it all as Mark 8:34–38 challenges us to do.

In September of 2023 Robyn Stearns, the wife of Andy Stearns, a Bible professor

at Faith Baptist Bible College, was told that after six weeks of chemotherapy treatments her cancer had continued to spread. Doctors told her she had six weeks to live. Andy and Robyn have two children ages six and nine, and, as you can imagine, this was devastating news.

I told our student body on a Tuesday that Joan and I were going to sing to Andy and Robyn on Thursday night and would love to have anyone join us who would like to. On Thursday morning I asked our student body to provide snacks that we could give the nurses to thank them for taking such good care of Robyn. After only four hours' notice our students brought enough snacks to fill two of the largest baskets we could find as well as three garbage bags! The nurses asked us to sing on the back deck so they could bring Robyn's bed out to the atrium, which would allow her to look through the glass and see everyone.

We had 373 members of our faculty, staff, and students show up. We sang four songs. Many from the hospice home joined Robyn to hear everyone singing. There were a lot of tears that night. When we left, the head nurse told me that in all her years, she had never seen something like this happen. Our students were salt and light.

Robyn passed away November 29, 2023. The next day a student contacted me to let me know a group of guys had gotten together who wanted to take care of all of Andy's yard work for the rest of the school year. Again, this is what it means to be salt and light.

Being salt and light in this world is taking time to make a difference in someone else's life. May God help us to love our neighbors as ourselves. May our good works open the door to take the Word to the world.

**Jim Tillotson** serves as the president of Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary in Ankeny, Iowa.





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March/April 2024





# Regional Reports

## ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGIONAL FELLOWSHIP

Joe Willis

*“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.”*  
(2 Cor. 6:17)

It seems as though when we speak of “separation” in this day and age, it either causes a major debate or people just do not want to have the discussion. However, that was not the case on January 30, 2024, as Pastor Dan Unruh hosted the 2024 FBFI Rocky Mountain Regional Fellowship at Westside Baptist Church located in picturesque Greeley, Colorado. Over fifty-five pastors, missionaries, evangelists, laymen, and their wives joyfully gathered for this half-day event.

The theme of this year’s meeting was “The Instruction and Implementation of Biblical Separation.” The keynote speaker, Dr. Bud Steadman, who is the Missions Mentor for Baptist World Missions and FBFI Chairman of the Board. In his three sessions Dr. Steadman spoke on personal separation, ecclesiastical separation, and social separation with an emphasis on “separation from questionable things.”

The preaching was not only timely but also very encouraging, challenging, and practical in its application to the local church. Cheryl Smith, wife of Ward Smith, pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Parker, Colorado, spoke on the topic of “God’s Presence with Us” during a breakout session for the ladies.

A special thanks goes to the congregation of Westside Baptist for their tremendous spirit of hospitality and sacrificial service in making this such a wonderful regional fellowship.



## 2024 WINTER BOARD MEETING

Bud Steadman

Various philosophies of board governance drive what an organization is and does. By God’s grace the FBFI is blessed with a “working board,” a group of men who not only give guidance to the fellowship but also serve on working committees. Policies, positions, and practical details are covered in both the annual Winter Board Meeting in February and the Annual Fellowship in June.

This year’s Winter Board Meeting was held at Northwest Valley Baptist Church in Glendale, Arizona, pastored by FBFI President Kevin Schaal. The church family did a wonderful job meeting the needs of the men and women who gathered to conduct board business.

Three informative presentations anchored the board meeting’s discussions, providing the catalyst for prayerful consideration on the topics. Steve Pittman (pastor of Heritage Hills Baptist Church, Winston-Salem, North Carolina) shared how God led him to plant an inner-city, multiethnic congregation in that traditional southern city. Following testimonies from men with international backgrounds, a very substantive discussion was held by the board concerning ways to facilitate churches reaching the world that has come to our doors.

Kyle Nankey of MinistryCPA, a financial service organization located in Wisconsin, spoke to the board concerning creative ways that local churches and pastors can practice biblical stewardship of their finances. Gordon Dickson followed with an informative and inspirational presentation on his new book, *12 Ways You Can Make a Difference in This Crazy, Mixed-Up World*.

The board meeting included reports by the president and various working committees and an invitation by Nathan Steadman to the Annual Fellowship to be held at Tri-City Baptist Church of Westminster, Colorado. The church will be hosting the western-flavored fellowship on June 10–12.

God has blessed the FBFI with a spiritually minded board that desires to be a blessing to pastors, churches, and chaplains. The sacrifice they made to come to the winter meeting is deeply appreciated.







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# A Day in Hospice Chaplaincy

Providing spiritual care to terminal patients is the most demanding and rewarding service for our Lord that I have ever experienced. The environment is extremely fluid. In one day you can visit the photographer who took the picture of young John F. Kennedy Jr. under the White House desk, and later that day be in a care center bedside with Olympic gold medalist Nancy Kerrigan's former coach as he takes his last breath. That same day is your fifth visit with an amazing woman who loves the Lord.

## AN AMAZING WOMAN

On our first visit, a beautiful, seemingly vibrant woman in her early fifties shared with us that she was born in Ukraine and had known Christ from an early age. She taught school in Athens and Morocco before coming to America. She had one daughter from her first husband, who passed away, and a brand-new granddaughter. She was relatively recently wed to a Brazilian gentleman who was dedicated to her every need.

One year after their marriage, she began experiencing headaches. Doctors found two golf-ball-sized tumors. Radiation, chemotherapy, and surgery eradicated them, but three months later they had returned and were the same size as before.

After three iterations of treatments, she knew she was losing a piece of herself with each one, so she chose hospice care. By our fifth visit she had lost her ability to speak and was now able to communicate only via facial expressions. By the ninth, communication was mostly one way, but she would follow and track with her eyes. I learned more from this patient than any other before or since. She went into the Lord's presence with confidence as we talked of

her heavenly transition regularly, reflecting 1 John 2:28: "And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming."

## YESTERDAY AND TODAY

New-patient admissions are a daily event. The law requires a complete initial spiritual assessment within five days of admission. We walk into the homes of people who realize their autonomy is fading, that they are in control of less in their life than ever before, and that their helplessness grows with each passing day. Yesterday this patient was a World War II fighter pilot, instructor, historic plane aviator, and successful aircraft restorer. Today, in a moment of lucidity, he realizes he is losing his cognitive abilities and grieves deeply. Five minutes from now he may be lost again to a world of confusion.

A chaplain assesses how this person is handling these realizations, ascertains his support group, and evaluates his spiritual life, his faith background, and other deep, personal questions. Chaplains support the needs of the family as they support their loved one through these challenges. This person is dying and needs an individual who can authentically connect with him, be compassionate, and feel real empathy. Chaplains must be willing to "get their hands dirty." Shedding tears together is a frequent event.

Hospice is a medical service that provides a painless and comfortable natural passing. Providing any medically assisted ending is prohibited by law in Florida (and in thirty-nine other states), so our services provide symptom management that minimizes the pain and agitation that result from the discomforts the body experiences

as it fights against the transition. Clinical Chaplains are trained to recognize some of these challenges and engage the services of medical staff as appropriate. We must develop trusted professional relationships, especially with nurses. This is a team effort that requires regular, clear communication. Although we are not medical professionals, we can share our experiences with families, and we can give emotional and spiritual guidance to nurses and doctors to help guide their care.

We meet patients in their current physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental state, just as Jesus meets us. A good habit to practice is to "let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves" (Phil. 2:3). Perhaps the patient is Lazarus at the gate, unable to fend off the dogs as they lick his sores. Perhaps the patient is King David, surrounded by an opulent life and servants. No matter the person, lost or saved, he needs love, compassion, understanding, gentleness, and, above all, the gospel of Christ as the Holy Spirit leads. We walk every day multiple times a day with the Holy Spirit in prayer asking for the opportunity to share Christ's great salvation and the hope of the resurrection (1 Pet. 1).

## VISITING "MR. JONES"—AND OTHERS

Today "Mr. Jones" is on the schedule. You drive up and see a structure that strikes you as something out of the jungles of Peru or the tin huts in the villages of Haiti, even though you are in the USA. You enter, and there is an almost overwhelming odor that is indescribable—but you're happy it is not decay. Mr. Jones loves the Lord and rejoices just to

see you. His Bible, with its worn edges, worn binding, and dog-eared pages, sits on the makeshift nightstand next to his bed (a cot). He is staying with his brother and sister-in-law. The odor is from his own incontinence, which he is unable to address, and which his sister-in-law may be unwilling to. The nature of the entire family relationships is unknown, yet this man is overjoyed to fellowship with Christ, singing hymns together and hearing you read Scripture to him. He shares his abiding faith, resting in God's provision, appreciative that God moved him to this location out of his old home, where his bed was falling through the floor. You cannot let the pain in your heart show now—stay present with him. When you leave after an hour, your clothes still hold the stench. You sit in the car for fifteen minutes getting yourself together. Now your shirt is stained with tears. Such experiences stay with you.

Hospice care can be long-term care. One patient with Parkinson's floated on and off hospice for over three years. Our visits would include some faith discussions,

although the patient never committed to any faith, let alone to Christ. But he did share how he had written the operations manuals for the M1A1 Abrams tank. Chaplains meet all kinds of people, and our hearts must have room to love them regardless of their choices.

Earlier in the week I met with a nurse who was just beginning her hospice career. She had just lost her first patient, and I wanted to make sure she was processing it well. Transitioning from a healer to a comfort provider can be difficult. We talked of the joy of serving her patient and ensuring that her end came peacefully. This conscientious and dedicated professional made deep connections with her patient over many months together. They had shared discussions over tea as well as life stories that harmonized. The nurse's heart was tender, and we shed tears together. She said she was surprised at how close she and her patient had been. Chaplains walk down these paths with hospice staff, affirming their pain while bolstering their deep dedication to the care they provide.

This is a ministry of life for the dying, helping to provide the most vibrant existence in this temporal life while sharing the freedom of eternal life. It is sharing Christ with an individual who knows that cancer is devouring her body or who knows his heart disease may take him in the next moment. It is the blessed moments when, during a particularly lucid moment in a dementia or Alzheimer's patient, God sits right with you, and you know He is using you to bring another into His kingdom.

This is the peace beyond all understanding that Philippians 4:7 speaks about, for both the chaplain and the patient. You get to do all this again next week, and more.

Tim Senter is a USN retiree and has served as a pastor in rural Wyoming and as a chaplain for fire, police, EMS, and veterans for over twenty years. Chaplain Senter serves the communities in the Florida panhandle as an FBFI Hospice Chaplain and veterans' coordinator with Vitas Health Systems.



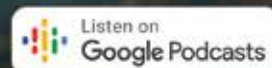
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## Salt and Light in Your City and State

Continued from page 5

is morally rotten. (You can see the reality of this moral corruption all around you today. Have you noticed that many recent news articles and opinion pieces are like a stench in God's nostrils?) Christ's use of the phrase "salt of the earth" identifies the problem, but He also identified the solution: His transformed followers.

Christ also told His followers that they were the light to a world in darkness. This wicked world cannot end its own darkness; it cannot keep itself from stumbling from bad to worse. But Jesus reverses the curse for His followers. And we are making a difference in this world.

Unfortunately, new generations often look upon Christians as shallow, hypocritical, and irrelevant, but Christ gave us the blessed answer for that problem. What if we were to show these new generations the true Christianity that Christ taught? By God's grace, what if we could become what we want *them* to be? Jesus laid out His blessed path in the Beatitudes to cause us to be what we want others to become. In the Beatitudes, Jesus portrayed God-honoring repentance and an appropriate response to the Redeemer. The gospel points to the fullness of Christ's grace as the only way to transform people. Lost sin-

ners who become living saints and loving soul winners are like salt and light in every society.

After pointedly applying His Beatitude blessings in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus carefully explained how His followers could persevere in prayer. Without persistent, prevailing prayer, believers cannot maintain their salty, light-bearing influence. Prayerlessness yields no answer to the godlessness in our society.

To accomplish His purposes, Christ pointed to three God-ordained institutions to help His people be salt and light. He designed an institution to make their salt more pungent and their light more vibrant: His church. The Lord also designed two more institutions where the sheer power of His followers' influence would be felt throughout the world: families and governments. Christ desires that His followers maintain their powerful influence through churches, families, and governments throughout the world. In this edition of *FrontLine* magazine, we will explore the power of these three God-ordained institutions.

Lost sinners who become living saints and loving soul winners are like salt and light in their cities and states.

After thirty-nine years of pastoral ministry, Gordon A. Dickson continues to minister as a freelance writer and conference speaker. His newest book is *12 Ways You Can Make a Difference in This Crazy, Mixed-up World*.



<sup>1</sup> George F. Will, "The End of Our Holiday from History," *The Washington Post*, Sept. 12, 2001, (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/2001/09/12/the-end-of-our-holiday-from-history/9da607fd-8fdc-4f33-b7c9-e6cda00453bb/>.)

<sup>2</sup> Jason DeRose, "Religious 'Nones' are now the largest single group in the U.S.," National Public Radio, Jan. 24, 2024, (<https://www.npr.org/2024/01/24/1226371734/religious-nones-are-now-the-largest-single-group-in-the-u-s>).

<sup>3</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, "Key Substance Use and Mental Health Indicators in the United States: Results from the 2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health," Health and Human Services Publication No. PEP22-07-01-005, NSDUH Series H-57, Dec. 2022, p. 6, (<https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/reports/rpt39443/2021NSDUHFFR-Rev010323.pdf>).

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Belcher, *George Whitefield, A Biography, with Special Reference to His Labors in America* (New York: American Tract Society, 1857), 187; (<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/44140/44140-h/44140-h.htm>).

<sup>5</sup> J. Edwin Orr, "Prayer and Revival," Revival Library, (<https://study.christianleaders.org/mod/page/view.php?id=56141>).

<sup>6</sup> Belcher, 188.

<sup>7</sup> John B. Boles, *The Great Revival: Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 30, Kindle edition.

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## Evangelist's Perspective

Jerry Sivnksty

# Joy and Rejoicing

**M**artin Luther, the great leader of the Reformation, said, "The Christian ought to be a living doxology." Charles Haddon Spurgeon declared, "You cannot glorify God better than by a calm, joyous life. Let the world know that you serve a good Master! If you are in trouble, do not let anyone see that the trouble touches your spirit. Nay, more, do not let it trouble your spirit! Rest in God and keep on praising Him!" This statement ties in with what the Scriptures declare in Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, rejoice."

Matthew Henry wrote in his commentary on this verse, "Joy in God is a duty of great consequence in the Christian life; and Christians need to be again and again called to it. If good men have not a continual feast, it is their fault." (p. 744)

I once read in the magazine *Prophecy Monthly* the following story: "During an earthquake, an elderly lady was serene and unafraid. Someone asked her afterward, 'Were you not afraid?' 'No,' she replied, 'I rejoiced to know that I have a God that can shake the world.'" What a powerful statement and something that all of the Lord's people should rejoice about!

This can actually be tied in with what happened in Acts 16, when the Lord sent a great earthquake while the apostles Paul and Silas were in prison. Verse 26 says,

"And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bands were loosed." Then we read of what the keeper of the prison said to Paul and Silas in verse 30, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" In the next verse they answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." The jailor believed on Christ and was gloriously saved, as well as his entire family. We read in verse 34, "And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house." I want to appeal to any of you reading this article who may never have repented of your sins and put your faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation. If you are going through a great "earthquake" in your life, I urge you to place your trust in Jesus to save you from your sins and the crisis you are going through. Romans 10:9-10 says, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ to save you from your sin, you will also rejoice, just like the jailor and his family in Acts 16. The Lord will grant for-

givenness to anyone who calls upon Christ to save him Romans 10:13 says, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

For those who are saved and are endeavoring to live for the Lord, remember that whatever we may go through, our disposition and attitude should be one of rejoicing in the Lord. Even when Peter and the apostles were beaten and thrown into prison for the cause of Christ and later released, the Scriptures record the following in Acts 5:41: "And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name." What a wonderful testimony and example for God's children! In 1 Peter 4:12-13 we are given this exhortation: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." Remember the encouragement of Nehemiah 8:10b: "For the joy of the Lord is your strength."

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Evangelist Jerry Sivnksty may be contacted at PO Box 141, Starr, SC 29684 or via e-mail at [evangjsivn@aol.com](mailto:evangjsivn@aol.com).



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