

February 2004

Contact



TEST OF FORGIVENESS

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Charlie Switches Mules

He rode a red mule to keep an appointment with God.

Ten Commandments for Ministry Survival

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Keith Burden

What Are You Staring At?

It had been a long week at

graduate school. I was attending a modular course on the Free Will Baptist Bible College campus. The class had been practical and challenging, but 32 hours of instruction and interaction left me exhausted.

The session concluded Friday at noon. I decided to skip lunch and hit the road immediately. I slid under the steering wheel of my Dodge Colt stationwagon and began the 12-hour trip home. If everything went well, I would arrive by midnight.

Twilight hours were the worst. The sun sat on the horizon forever. Blinded by the glare, I found it difficult to relax. My neck ached and my shoulders burned from tension and fatigue. To make matters worse, I developed a throbbing headache as my glasses pressed against the bridge of my nose.

Ingenious Solution

In an attempt to ease the discomfort, I tore a piece from a paper napkin and placed it under the nose pads of my glasses to serve as a cushion. Before long the pain subsided and my headache eased. The next few hours passed in relative comfort.

As I neared the half-way point of my journey, I spotted a road sign signaling a rest stop one mile ahead. Needing to stretch my legs and get some fresh air, I decided to stop for a few minutes.

The parking lot was crowded with cars. As I made my way along the sidewalk, I greeted other travelers with a friendly, "Hi! How are you this evening?" To my surprise, most were unresponsive. In fact, some actually stopped and stared at me as I passed by. I was perplexed by their odd behavior.

Do I Know You?

Entering the men's room I noticed one man who seemed preoccupied with my appearance. I tried hard to ignore his steady gaze. He never took his eyes off me. *Perhaps I look familiar and he's trying to figure out if he knows who I am*, I reasoned. He finally left.

I walked over to the lavatory and washed my hands. As I rinsed the soap away, I glanced into the mirror. I couldn't believe what I saw. There, sticking out from under my glasses, was that piece of paper napkin. No wonder people were staring at me. I looked like a dork!

I removed the makeshift paper cushion, dried my hands and tried to return to my car as inconspicuously as possible. I had been questioning the strange behavior of others without realizing I was the one with the problem. Once I got over the initial embarrassment, I laughed at myself the rest of the way home.

Take Hard Look

That incident reminds me how we sometimes judge the actions and appearance of others without realizing we may look or act equally ridiculous to them. We can become like the man in James 1:23-24 who, "... beholding his natural face in a glass (mirror)... goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was."

To my shame I confess that I

have been guilty of jumping to conclusions about others based solely on their speech or how they dressed. I ignored Jesus' instruction in John 7:24—"Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment." Things are not always as they appear.

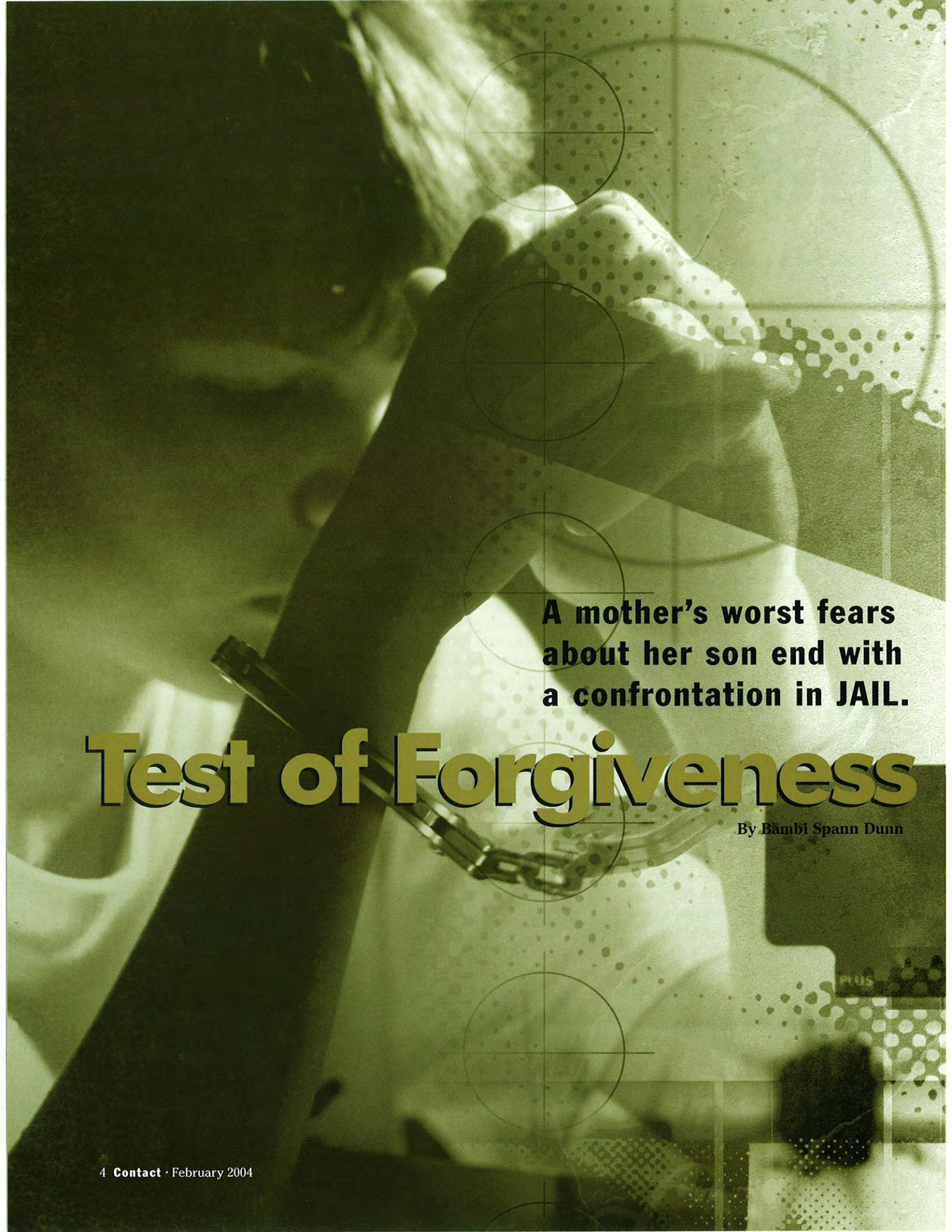
Jesus asked in Matthew 7:3, "... why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?" It's possible to become so focused on or preoccupied with the faults and imperfections of others that we fail to acknowledge our own shortcomings and inconsistencies.

Good Advice

That's why it's important to take an honest look at ourselves by spending time each day gazing into the mirror of God's Word. It's only as we see ourselves through the lenses of scripture that we can view others through eyes of love and compassion.

By the way—before you appear in public next time, take a moment to glance into the mirror. Who knows? It might save you the embarrassment of having others stare at you. ■



A person wearing a white shirt and handcuffs is shown from the chest up. The image is overlaid with a target graphic consisting of concentric circles and crosshairs. The person's hands are clasped in front of them. The background is dark and out of focus.

**A mother's worst fears
about her son end with
a confrontation in JAIL.**

Test of Forgiveness

By Bambi Spann Dunn

The hardest thing I ever had to do was tell someone I hated with all my heart that Jesus loved them.

My oldest son was 12 when he quit coming to see me. Because I moved to another city, he decided to go and live with his father. Recently remarried, his father offered my son what appeared at first to be a stable family environment.

The change wasn't sudden, but over the course of several months I noticed that he slowly stopped coming around.

I passed it off as being a pre-teen, wanting to spend more time with his friends, feeling that he would soon get past that stage of life.

The pain of rejection stung the very core of my heart. Weeks lapsed into months. Months grew to be a year at a time where I didn't see my son. I tried, but phone calls went unreturned and planned visits were repeatedly cancelled.

Great concern began to arise. What was going on in my boy's life that left no room for his mother? Could he not spare the small amount of time it takes to return a phone call?

Sting of Betrayal

The day came when my worst fears became reality. Hidden behind years of secrets, I discovered my son's father had

HIDDEN BEHIND YEARS OF SECRETS, I DISCOVERED MY SON'S FATHER HAD FORCED HIM OUT OF HIS OWN HOME BECAUSE OF A SUBSTANCE ABUSE PROBLEM.



forced him out of his own home because of a substance abuse problem. The trouble was, his father and step-mother had been the catalysts who introduced and encouraged the use of drugs, doing them together in their home.

They shaped my son into something I only sickened to think about. Pulling him away from his mother into a life of secrets, lies and drugs, all under the name of love.

I don't remember how long I was in shock, but healing was not soon to be my friend. I was angry. I was hurt. I wanted revenge.

My mind struggled with unending thoughts of *how could someone who was supposed to love and care for my*

to live the life he had been deprived of while in my care.

Gradually, he made the decision to live with his previous step-mother, and what was I to do? The law gave him full right to do whatever he pleased—to a limit.

Caught at Last

My secret prayer was for him to get caught—at something, anything—that would bring him to his knees. I took my prayers to the Lord faithfully and often. The day came when I received word that my son and his step-mother had been arrested.

Serves her right, I thought. *Now maybe she'll get what she deserves for ruining my son's life.* I vocalized my words with

Where were my words? I was crying and trembling. Before I assembled my thoughts, my mouth started to speak. I told her how much I wanted to hate her and how I wished she was dead for what she had done. But because God loved her as much as He did me, it was impossible for me to hate what He loved.

I was witnessing to her.

A release of anger, resentment and hatred was slowly rising off my shoulders. Through the conversation the flow of God's love poured down on my wounded heart dissolving the tapestry of pain that surrounded it.

I was broken and so was she.

To this day, my son is still in denial about his problem; the step-mother is in prison.

WHAT A PERFECT TIME TO TELL HER HOW I FELT. HOW I SUFFERED. HOW SHE SCARRED MY LIFE—SCARRED MY SON'S LIFE. GET EVEN. GET REVENGE.

child do this horrific thing to him? I wanted the culprits to pay and pay big.

Living with Consequences

By order of the juvenile court system, my son came to live with me at age 17. It was indeed an ongoing battle from day one. He was in denial about his substance abuse problem. Though we sought drug counseling, it benefited him none.

I ordered him not to see his now divorced step-mother again. Repeatedly, I found where they sneaked phone conversations planning pick-up and drop-off points near my home.

How I hated her more than hate itself. My fury continued to flame until it was ever and constant on my mind—a raging fire.

There were secrets I was certain never to find out but only imagine how grotesque they could be.

Time passed. My son turned 18 and graduated high school all within a few months of each other. He was now free

a "hurrah," but my heart strummed a different tune.

Before I could give consideration to circumstances, my fingers were thumbing the pages of the phone directory searching for the telephone number of the jail. With voice bold and strong I inquired about visiting hours for the women's area.

What was I doing? I had just scheduled a date and time to visit *her*—the woman I hated. But what a perfect time to tell her how I felt. How I suffered. How *she* scarred my life—scarred my son's life. Get even. Get revenge!

Of course, I could have cancelled, but somehow I knew in my mind that it wouldn't happen. Canceling was no option. A few days later I appeared in the seating chamber of the local jail waiting for her to approach.

Confrontation in Jail

She was just as stunned as I that I was sitting before her. I suddenly drew a blank.

Hope is my healing ointment bringing comfort to each day knowing the seed of God's Word was planted a year ago. Now it is up to others chosen by God to water that Word. ■



About the Writer: Bambi Spann Dunn has been librarian at Mustang Mid-High School in Mustang, Oklahoma, for 10 years. She is the granddaughter of the late Free Will Baptist minister, Reverend Orville Carpenter.

**He rode a red mule with a new saddle
to keep an appointment with God.**



**Randy Burris and
his mule Ruben.**

Charlie Switches Mules

By Randy Burris

Every busy pastor knows the need to get away now and then. Some enjoy golf, others fish or relax in some other way. My getaway is mule riding. There is nothing so relaxing as getting together with other mule riders and taking off into the backwoods. Let me tell you about my two most rewarding rides.

Hank Sargent, a friend of mine who is a deacon, and I took our mules to the Buffalo River in Newton County, Arkansas, in September 2002. Eighty-four mules left the William Jeff Villine Farm

that morning. Riders came from Oklahoma, Missouri, Arkansas and who knows where else. We rode out about 9:00 a.m. and headed down the mountain to Buffalo River.

Saddleback Witness

The last three miles I felt God nudging me to ride alongside a man and his wife. He was astride a red mule with a new saddle. I struck up a conversation telling him he had a fine mule and a good-looking saddle.

He said he lived in Salem, Arkansas, and worked for the county. I told him I

Then he began to cry. He said he kept reading his Bible and had gotten saved.

Charlie wanted to know if I would baptize him in a river. I immediately agreed to do it. He was planning to ride at Devil's Den State Park in June which is near my home. We would meet at the Horse Camp on the south side of Devil's Den.

Baptism at Cedar Hole

On the morning of June 7, six of us rode to Lee's Creek and turned south until we reached a place known as The Cedar Hole. Charlie and I carried a

Ghost. That is the story of how Charlie switched mules. We rode back that day and I told Charlie the rest of the story of Philip and the eunuch. The Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away after he baptized the Ethiopian. Our mules were carrying us away to the next adventure the Lord had waiting for us.

Another Ride

A few nights later the Lord woke me in the middle of the night and showed me that everyone is riding on one of two mules. We either ride the Mule of Victory

The Ethiopian eunuch from Acts 8 rode a chariot in the desert. Charlie rode a red mule in Arkansas.

was a preacher and pastored Rogers Free Will Baptist Church. We talked about the Lord and about being a Christian. He said he was reading his Bible a lot lately.

I shared with him how God loved him and wanted to save him. I encouraged him to continue reading the Bible. If he seriously sought the truth, God would reveal it to him (Matthew 5:6).

We ended the ride, said our good-byes, and Hank and I loaded our mules and headed for home.

Charlie's Conversion

I didn't think much more about that ride until the last week of May 2003. A call came to my home one evening asking for Randy Burris the preacher. The voice on the other end of the line said, "This is Charlie LaFevers from Salem, Arkansas. You may not remember me."

He then told me we rode together on a big mule ride last September. It took me a few minutes to place him. I asked if he was the guy riding the red mule with the new saddle and he said, "Yes." He said he wanted to ask me a favor.

change of clothes and I had my little Bible in the saddlebags. We read Acts 8:26 which tells how the Lord spoke to Philip and told him to talk to a man who needed to be saved.

"That is the way it was for me on that mule ride last September," I explained to them. Philip preached Jesus to him as they rode along in the chariot. When they came to a water hole the man of Ethiopia asked what would keep him from being baptized. Philip told him he must believe with all his heart that Jesus is the Son of God.

I told Charlie that The Cedar Hole was a place of good water and the only thing that would hinder him from being baptized was unbelief. I asked Charlie if he believed Jesus died for his sins and if he was trusting Jesus as his Savior with all his heart. He began to cry and said he was trusting Jesus with his whole heart. Oh, it is good to see God make a big man cry.

We went down into the water, and Charlie was baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy

or the Mule of Vanity. Absalom rode the Mule of Vanity according to II Samuel 18:9. He rebelled against God and rode the Mule of Vanity.

That mule left him hanging by the hair of his head in a tree and went on without him. His mule left him to die when he needed him the most. Everyone who rebels against the Lord Jesus and His call to salvation is riding that same Mule of Vanity. In the end, it will leave a person alone and dying.

Charlie chose to ride the Mule of Victory. He sowed to the Spirit and not to the flesh as we are told in Galatians 6:8 and is reaping life everlasting. Which mule are you riding today? The good news is you can switch mules just like Charlie did. If you believe with all your heart that Jesus is the Son of God, that He died for your sins, and if you are willing to trust Him as your only means of salvation, you too can ride the Mule of Victory. ■

About the Writer: Reverend Randy Burris pastors Rogers Free Will Baptist Church in Rogers, Arkansas.

Myths About Christian Growth

By Joan Martin

Myth #1—As people grow older, they become more spiritual.

We often look at older men and women as godly people. Another birthday does not necessarily mean another year of spiritual growth.

Many young people far surpass older ones in spiritual maturity.

As a young, married woman, I looked up to an older person in church as my role model. One day I took a problem to her. She asked the date of my birth. Then she said, "Oh, of course. It's because you were born under the sign of Sagittarius that this is happening." I was left in shock, hardly believing the stars were her source of wisdom.

"And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able" (1 Cor. 3:1-2).

Myth #2—Spiritual growth happens the same for all of us.

Some people become "stuck" soon after they become Christians. The excitement has worn off and it seems most Christians they know feel the same way. Yet, each of us grows in a different way. The experiences God allows in our lives can cause us to grow closer to Him. The hurts we suffer, and willingness to be teachable, all have an effect on our growth.

I remember a rebellious son, a divorce and a very ill child as growing times. I also look to doors which were

opened when I thought it was impossible. Prayers were answered and my faith grew in these good times too.

"As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious" (1 Peter 2:2-3).

If we look for ways to grow, we will feel more of a closeness to the Lord.

Myth #3—Because we have accepted Christ as our Savior and Lord, He will make us grow.

"Churchy" isn't necessarily spiritual. There is no short cut in just waiting for maturity to come. God allows us to go through learning experiences, but it is up to us how we accept those lessons. Will we decide to learn and move closer to God, or become bitter and angry, blaming and questioning Him? God does not make us pray and study the Bible.

I recently felt that I was not growing much in my spiritual life. I began to pray for another way to open. I often read a passage of scripture without much thought. Then something occurred to me. I took a pad, pen and commentary, and each time I read scripture, I wrote about what it meant. It was only two or three verses sometimes, but the scripture means much, much more today.

"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matt. 24:35).

Myth #4—When we become Christians, we will never sin again.

Paul said these words: "Not as though I had already attained, either were already

perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended" (Phil. 3:12-13a). God's Word says if we say we do not sin, we are lying (1 John 1:8).

We all know when we have an unkind or wicked thought. If we are Christians, we also know when the Holy Spirit convicts us of doing wrong. The bright side is that when we ask forgiveness, Jesus is always ready to blot out our sin.

A woman once said she thought living the Christian life was easy. If we truly know the Christian life, it has never been easy.

Myth #5—When we become Christians, we are assured of great success, much money and happy lives from then on.

Sometimes our lives become harder. Peter tells us not to be surprised by suffering, but after a while Christ will make us strong (1 Peter 4:12, 5:10). We are promised joy. Happiness is usually a human trait, but joy is a gift from God.

Marion is a young woman in prison. She was placed in segregation for something she felt she had not done. As I visited her after her confinement, I noticed her shining face, and asked about it. She told me she used the time to pray, read the Bible and sing choruses in praise to the Lord. She had found joy.

There are many myths in our world, but God's Word is truth. ■

About the Writer: Joan Martin is a freelance writer who resides in Grayslake, Illinois.



A pastor who is still unpacking boxes
offers advice for members and ministries.

Commandments for Ministry Survival

By Kevin Riggs

Transition. It means to pass from one condition, place or thing to another condition, place or thing. Another word for transition is *change*, and change is never easy. Transition brings with it fear, excitement, insecurity and uncertainty.

I am in transition. I am passing from one place to another. I am changing, and I am afraid, excited and unsure. I am looking forward to the challenges ahead, but I am ready for the dust to settle. I am ready to not be in transition anymore. I am not as fond of change as I used to be.

After more than 14 years at the same church, God called me to a new ministry in a new state. In addition to saying goodbye, selling a house, packing boxes and crying, I have done a lot of introspection. What have I accomplished? What have I done right? What have I done wrong? What would I do differently? What mistakes do I hope to avoid next time?

The result of my self-evaluation was a list I call "The Ten Commandments for Ministry Survival." I plan on posting these commandments in a visible spot where I can review them regularly. My prayer is that these principles will guide me the rest of my life and ministry. The commandments come out of my experience—both the joys and struggles,

highs and lows—in pastoral ministry and are not written in any particular order.

Use them as you would like. Change them, adapt them, add to them, subtract from them, or toss them and come up with your own. Whatever you do, let me know. I am interested in your story. As a fellow ministry survivor, you can teach me a lot.

1. Thou shalt not let others steal thy joy.

Joy is a fruit of the Spirit and is determined by my relationship with Jesus Christ. Allowing others to steal my joy amounts to saying joy comes from people instead of God.

2. Thou shalt not gripe and complain when people act like people.

Jesus saw people as sheep scattered without a shepherd. What shepherd would scorn his sheep for acting like sheep? When people whine and grumble, they are acting like people—doing what comes naturally. The purpose of ministry is to enable people to do what comes supernaturally.

If people acted like Jesus wanted them to act, I would be out of a job. (Note: I am a “people” and hope others will forgive me when I act like one.)

3. Thou shalt keep a positive attitude in all things.

My attitude determines my altitude. I cannot control what happens to me, but I can control how I respond. Remaining positive does not mean I ignore reality. It does mean I know God is in control, the church is His church, nothing can separate me from His love, and He will make sure everything works to the good if I love Him. In Jesus Christ my future is brighter than my past.

4. Thou shalt work with the willing while praying for the obstinate.

Most people follow without complaining. Most people are willing to be led. Obstinate people are in the minority

but if permitted can take the majority of my time. The more time I spend with obstinate people, the more willing people will be to be obstinate. If a captain waits for everyone to get on board, the ship will never leave dock.

5. Thou shalt not take personal criticisms personally.

Honest criticism is not personal. Destructive criticism has a personal tone. Taking personal criticisms personally does nothing to help me nor the person giving the criticism. Not taking criticisms personally will enable me to see more objectively and will keep the seeds of bitterness from growing in my life.

6. Thou shalt place personal integrity above professional success.

My integrity is all I have and if I lose it, I have lost everything. At times it is tempting to do things or not do things based on how I think it will make me look to others. It is tempting to compare my ministry with other ministries. When I do, I feel either jealousy or pride based on perceived “success.”

God has uniquely gifted me to do what only I can do for Him. Integrity requires I do my absolute best and leave the results to Him.

7. Thou shalt stay focused on Christ.

This one thing will keep me from violating #6. It is Christ I am serving and it is to Him I will give an account. Nothing else matters but His opinion of me. Staying focused on Him will keep me from falling into the traps of comparisons and competition.

8. Thou shalt not allow discouragement to distract thee from duty.

Discouragement is the job hazard of ministry. There will be days when I do not feel like getting out of bed. There will be times when I do not feel like continuing. It is important that during those times I work even harder, not allowing

my momentary weakness to dictate my pastoral duties.

9. Thou shalt not bring ministry problems home.

My wife and family are my most important ministry. The greatest church God has called me to pastor has four members, a dog and a cat. The home is to be a safe place, a place to relax and a place to rejuvenate for the next day. Home is not the place to discuss the difficulties and struggles of ministry. God called me into ministry, not my wife and kids.

10. Thou shalt remember thy self-worth is in thy walk with Christ not in thy work for Christ.

Jesus cared for me as a person before He cared for me as a pastor. If I were no longer a pastor, He would still love me. I am a success, not because of my achievements but because of His accomplishment. If my walk with Him is what it should be, I am a success even when I feel like a failure.

There you have it, “The Ten Commandments for Ministry Survival.” Am I on target or off base? Which ones apply to you? Looking back, if I had had these commandments years ago, I would have avoided a lot of heartache in ministry. I believe keeping these commandments will help me not just survive but also thrive in ministry. They will do the same for you. ■



About the Writer: Dr. Kevin Riggs pastors First Free Will Baptist Church in Russellville, Arkansas. You can reach him via e-mail at gkriggs@msn.com.



No serious Bible student can ignore eschatology.

THE FIRST WORD ON LAST THINGS

By Randy Corn

“Mr. Corn, I just don’t understand why we have to study this stuff.” That was the objection of a student at Free Will Baptist Bible College where I served as adjunct Bible instructor. The “stuff” was an introductory overview to

eschatology, the doctrine of the last things, before our class did a survey of First and Second Thessalonians.

Why indeed? My first thought was this was the typical college student objection to studying anything. I recalled the remark of one of the longest tenured teachers at my alma mater that a college student was “someone who paid for something and then hoped he didn’t get it!”

But this young man was not the class sloth; he would end up with a solid B at the end of the semester. Why did he object to spending a day discussing such things as the Second Coming of Christ, the differences between Amillennialism and Premillennialism, and the differences within Premillennialism about the Rapture?

Why Study Eschatology?

When the question was asked, my immediate response was because this was a biblical subject and we were in a Bible

class. I was convinced that if the students could put First and Second Thessalonians in an eschatological framework it would give them a deeper understanding of what the Apostle Paul was driving at in these epistles.

I’m afraid it came across to my questioner as, “I’m the teacher; you are the student, and I get to decide what we will study.”

The question and the inadequacy of my answer stuck with me until I was back in my church office that afternoon. I wondered if this was one of those subjects I found fascinating but the next generation could dismiss with a yawn? Was the problem in my presentation? Had I unnecessarily complicated it with a number of double-jointed theological terms?

Maybe the issue was application. Perhaps that questioning student was voicing the complaint many feel when preachers and Bible teachers fail to show how a biblical subject touches their lives. There was probably some truth in all my ponderings. I decided what I needed to do was convince my class that

Perhaps that questioning student was voicing the complaint many feel when preachers and Bible teachers fail to show how a biblical subject touches their lives.

eschatology really was an important Bible doctrine, one that should impact their daily lives. I would present them with an apologetic for eschatology.

Frequent Bible References

The next class period I met the students at the door with a single sheet of paper which gave my reasons for studying eschatology. The first was that the Bible gives a great deal of attention to the subject. Christians should be interested in anything God chooses to reveal in His Word.

Scholars have counted as many as 1,845 references to the Second Coming of Christ in the Old Testament and 318 in the New. In fact, 23 of the 27 New Testament books speak of the Second Coming in one way or another.

Basic Element of Faith

My second reason for studying eschatology is that the Bible speaks of it as one of the elementary things of the Christian faith. This is born out by such passages as Hebrews 6:1-2: "Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment."

Note that the last two items mentioned in verse 2, "resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment" are listed in what the writer of Hebrews calls "the principles of the doctrine of Christ." That word "principles" is literally "of the beginning." Some translations even render this "the elementary principles." Obviously then, eschatology is one of the foundational things Christians should learn.

The Apostle Paul certainly thought so. He speaks often of the Second Coming in First and Second Thessalonians and seems to do so building upon the knowledge that the Thessalonian church already had of those doctrines. When we go back to Acts 17, we find that the Apostle only spent three sabbaths there before being run out of town.

The only conclusion we can draw is that Paul had some basic teaching about eschatology in what we might refer to as his new convert course. If Paul the great church planter thought it was so foundationally important, eschatology certainly ought to be studied by Christians today.

Guidepost for Tomorrow

A third reason I gave the class for studying eschatology is that it gives us insight into what to expect. Now some obvious-

ly make too much of this, going to the extreme of setting dates for the return of Christ. Still, it can be a reassurance to us that the very things which will shock the world are prophesied in the Bible.

An analogy I shared with the class was my experience a few years ago while attending a Flames (FWBBC) basketball game. I ended up sitting next to my good friend Wayne Bess whose son Matthew was on the team. Now, I like to play basketball, but to be really honest a lot of the strategy is beyond me.

Wayne, on the other hand, has forgotten more about basketball than I will ever know. After a few questions, I got a running commentary from him on why the action on the floor was turning out the way it did. I really felt like I knew what was going on and why. Eschatology can be like that running commentary.

On the Test

I shared a few more reasons with the class, and then a hand went up. "Mr. Corn, is this going to be on the test?" I had only taught two semesters but I knew if I said no, the students with rare exception would toss my notes in the waste can almost as quickly as they would dismiss my lecture from their memories.

"Probably," was my reply. I know that kind of answer frustrates students, but my hope was that in putting my reasons for studying eschatology into their short-term memory, a few might seep into their long-term memory as well.

Eschatology is important. The same reasons I gave my class for studying it should compel preachers to make it part of their pulpit plan. As long as we avoid being either too technical or too abstract, the insights of eschatology can be of real benefit to every believer. After all, if we take seriously the admonition to preach the whole counsel of God, then what excuse can we give for failing to instruct those under our care?

As we have pointed out, eschatology is one of the "elementary principles" with which all Christians should be familiar. Our church members may not be facing an exam over the sermons we preach or the lessons we teach, but a healthy dose of eschatology can help them pass the test of day-to-day life. ■



About the Author: Reverend Randy Corn has pastored Bethlehem Free Will Baptist Church in Ashland City, Tennessee, since February 1995.

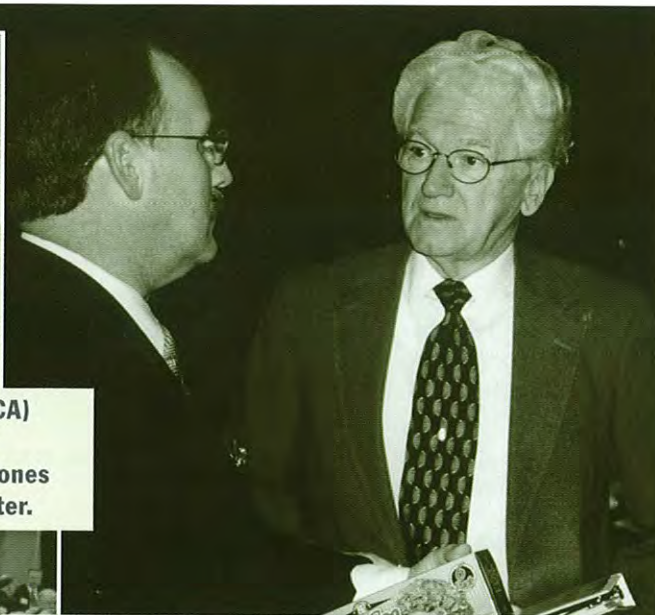
Leadership Conference Meets in Nashville



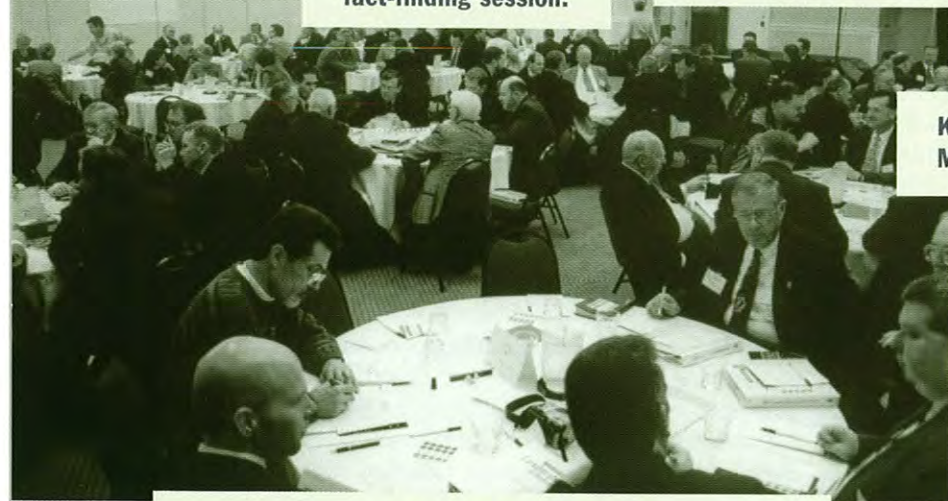
Robert Bryan leads Tuesday morning fact-finding session.



(L) Matt Upton (CA) entertains South Carolina's Mike Jones and Larry McAlister.



Keynote speaker Charles Shepson (R) and Master's Men chairman Cliff Donoho.



Attendees hard at work in Tuesday session.

NASHVILLE, TN—More than 140 Free Will Baptist state and national leaders met December 8–9 at Millennium Maxwell House Hotel for the annual Leadership Conference. The conference theme, “Leadership Is Listening,” sounded a note for global outreach, new vision, freshness and change.

Dr. Charles Shepson, founder of Fairhaven Ministries of Tennessee and Canada, spoke Monday and Tuesday evenings during plenary worship sessions. Dr. Shepson has written nine books and served 20 years as dean at St. Paul Bible College. Free Will Baptist Bible College provided drama presentations both nights preceding Shepson’s messages.

In a creative departure from previous leadership conferences, Free Will Baptist missionary to France, Robert Bryan, led two information-gathering sessions Tuesday morning after an

opening prayer meeting. Bryan, completing his Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Oklahoma, served as a facilitator moving from table to table helping attendees identify areas of interest for future leadership training.

Another innovative event bused attendees across town Tuesday at noon for a catered meal at Randall House Publications. The purpose for the unusual adjustment in the program was to allow Leadership Conference personnel to participate in a dedication

for the agency’s new Heidelberg Speed Master 74 press. Randall House CEO Ron Hunter said that acquisition of the high-speed press will allow the agency to bring print jobs in-house that had been out-sourced, thus providing a savings for the denomination.

The Publications Committee met with directors and editors Tuesday afternoon to hear recommendations concerning the feasibility of combining several national publications. The committee will prepare a report for delegates at the July national convention in Kansas City.

The National Association’s Nominating Committee also met Tuesday afternoon to consider nominees for board and commission vacancies at the 2004 national convention. Ernest Harrison, Jr., (OK) chairs the committee.

The 2004 Leadership Conference will meet December 6–7 at the Millennium Maxwell House.

Reverend W.C. Combs Dies at 91

SOPHIA, WV—Long-time West Virginia pastor and church planter William Cecil (W. C.) Combs died at home November 14, 2003, at age 91. Reverend Combs was converted at age 10, answered the call to preach in 1944 and was ordained to the ministry in 1945.

His 59-year ministerial career included six pastorates in West Virginia, two in Florida and one in Georgia. While in Florida, he organized and pastored Cocoa FWB Church. He retired as pastor emeritus at Sophia FWB Church (West Virginia) in 1992.

Brother Combs also served the broader Free Will Baptist outreach while pastoring. He moderated the Florida and Georgia State Associations, served as Florida's General Board member, was elected to numerous boards in local conferences, served on the National Layman's Board (now Master's Men), and provided direction for the FWB Home for Children in Greeneville, Tennessee.

One of his surviving seven sons is Free Will Baptist missionary to Brazil, Jim Combs. One of his five daughters (Judy) is married to Oklahoma missions director, James Puckett; another (Nancy) is married to North Carolina pastor Ed Cook.

In addition to his preaching and pastoral ministry, Reverend Combs was a certified public accountant, a master carpenter and a great outdoorsman.

Funeral services were conducted November 18 at Sophia FWB Church. Two of Brother Combs' sons-in-law officiated, Reverends Ed Cook and James Puckett.

Reverend Puckett said of Combs during the eulogy, "He would cross-reference scripture like a chain-reference Bible. While others compared what different commentaries said, he compared scripture with scripture."



Mississippi Continues Korean-Hispanic Support



WAYNESBORO, MS—Delegates to the 39th annual Mississippi State Association adopted a resolution to continue supporting Spanish and Korean ministries, according to clerk Dick Williams. Funds contributed through

the state's MAP program will be distributed equally between the two ministries. Dr. John Chang (Korea) and Rick Bowling, director of Hispanic Ministries, USA, will serve as contacts for the outreaches.

The October 31–November 1, 2003, session met at Corinth FWB Church in Waynesboro, with Moderator Charles Walden presiding. Walden was elected to his fifth term as moderator.

Sixty-nine people registered for the meeting, including 29 ministers, 17 lay delegates, 13 deacons and 10 visitors. The state meeting theme, "Missions," was developed in three sermons by Pastors Rick Powers (First FWB Church, Booneville), Robert Dykes (Corinth FWB Church, Waynesboro) and Rick Bowling.

Delegates adopted constitutional changes adjusting representation fees to the National Association of Free Will Baptists and authorizing the executive secretary to sign legal documents.

In other action, delegates set state meeting sites for 2004, 2006 and 2009. The 2004 session will meet November 5–6 at Burgess Creek FWB Church in Tishomingo.

Theological Symposium Broadens Impact

MOORE, OK—Forty-four people registered for the eighth annual theology symposium, according to Daryl Ellis, spokesman for the Commission for Theological Integrity, the sponsoring agency.

The symposium met October 27–28 on the Hillsdale FWB College campus. Participants included laity, clergy and college instructors.

Daryl Ellis said, “The program illustrated the faithfulness of God in raising up young minds to protect the integrity of God’s Word and continue the Free Will Baptist commitment to God’s truth in word and deed.”

Nine men read papers on a variety of subjects from a biblical theology of economics to Free Will Baptist growing pains. Presenters included: Keith Fletcher, Allan Crowson, Cody Freeman, David Outlaw, Kendall Ross, Denny Kuhn, William Davidson, Matthew McAfee and Thomas Marberry.

A bound volume of the papers is available from Daryl Ellis, pastorde@aol.com. Send \$20, payable to Commission for Theological Integrity, to 1405 Butterfield Road, Aurora, IL 60504.

The 2004 symposium will convene on the campus of Free Will Baptist Bible College in Nashville on October 25–26.

Chaplains Help Church Honor Veterans



ARLINGTON, VA—Two Free Will Baptist chaplains stepped away from their regular duty posts on November 9 to help Bloss Memorial FWB Church in Arlington honor America’s veterans.

Army Chaplain Richard Anderson taught the adult Sunday School class. Air Force Chaplain David Trogdon shared pictures from Iraq and preached during the morning worship service.

Chuck Fulton, USMC (L); Ralph Gonzales, U.S. Army; James Vanlandingham, U.S. Army Reserves; Chaplain David Trogdon, U.S. Army; Chaplain Richard Anderson, U.S. Air Force; Bobby Wilson, U.S. Army Reserves and National Guard; Elizabeth Copp, U.S. Women’s Army Corps; Rudy Payne, USMC; Jim Revis, U.S. Army.

During the worship hour, Pastor Steve Faison presented certificates of appreciation to nine veterans. Included among the nine recipients were a Marine veteran who

participated in the Okinawa invasion (WW II), Army veteran Jim Revis who retired after 21 years, and a member of the Women’s Army Corps.

BEYOND BELIEF



FWBBC Students in Who’s Who

NASHVILLE, TN—Eight graduating seniors at Free Will Baptist Bible College have been chosen by the faculty to be included in the 2004 edition of *Who’s Who Among Students in Colleges and Universities*.

They are: Paul Bryant, Vero Beach, FL; Christopher Harris, Joelton, TN; Kiley Hawkins, Greenville, NC; Nikki Jennings, Russellville, AR; Emilee Kettelman, Nashville, TN; Patrick Layton, Dickson, TN; Neil Morgan, Pamplico, SC; Hugh Reid, Nashville, TN.

316 Attend FWBBC Welcome Days



President Matthew Pinson tells visiting seniors and sponsors the advantages FWBBC offers.

NASHVILLE, TN—Forty-eight sponsors and 268 prospective students attended Free Will Baptist Bible College's fall Welcome Days, November 13–15, 2003, for a total of 316 guests. This marked the highest attendance in recent years, according to Matt Markins, director of enrollment management, perhaps, the all-time record for the event.

Visitors came from 17 states, with North Carolina leading the way with 65. Florida, Tennessee, Arkansas and South Carolina also had strong representations. The largest church group was 27 from First FWB Church in Seffner, Florida.



Tim Hackett and youth group from Fairview FWB Church, Spartanburg, SC, arrive to register.

After visiting classes and numerous special events planned for the occasion, a number of prospective students declared their intentions to enroll at FWBBC. Their comments included:

"I have never had another experience like Welcome Days; it is wonderful. I am looking forward to coming here as a student."

"Welcome Days is a great way to experience college and meet new people."

"Welcome Days was really fun this year! And it's one of the main reasons I am considering coming to FWBBC."

The next campus Welcome Days will be March 25–27. For information on how to attend, call 800-76-FWBBC or email recruit@fwbbc.edu.

Virginia Church Reports 75 Conversions

VIRGINIA BEACH, VA—Members of Virginia Beach FWB Church closed out a five-service, four-day evangelistic outreach with 500 people in the closing service. Pastor J.D. Norris, Jr., said the October 5–8 sessions resulted in 75 first-time decisions as well as many rededications.

Total attendance at the event topped 1,600. Pastor Norris introduced the "Operation

Go" outreach to his congregation in 1999. The program is a 13-week study originated by Georgia minister David Wood.

Church members began inviting friends and colleagues to the "Operation Go" meeting in September 2003. When Dr. David Wood spoke in the October 5 Sunday School hour, some 275 juniors and adults listened in the sanctuary. Five hundred

people came to morning worship which ended with 47 conversions.

The crusade continued through Wednesday with a dramatic presentation. More than 3,000 tickets to the drama were distributed. One hundred teens showed up for the event. During the invitation 26 people were converted, including 20 teens.

Pastor Norris said, "We give God all the glory."

STATE/DISTRICT

(Chronological Listing)

STATE	DATE/TIME			LOCATION
Atlantic Canada District	Starts:	Jan. 17	3:00 pm	Bristol FWB Church
	Closes:	Jan. 18	3:00 pm	20 Tapley Road
				Bristol, New Brunswick, Canada
South Carolina	Starts:	Feb. 26	9:00 am	First FWB Church
	Closes:	Feb. 27	4:00 pm	243 N. Old Grove Road
				Greenville, SC
Arizona District	Starts:	Mar. 13	10:00 am	North Valley FWB Church
	Closes:	Mar. 13	3:00 pm	18220 N. 20th Street
				Phoenix, AZ
Georgia	Starts:	Mar. 18	7:00 pm	First FWB Church
	Closes:	Mar. 20	11:00 am	420 N. Westover
				Albany, GA
Illinois	Starts:	Mar. 19	9:00 am	Heritage FWB Church
	Closes:	Mar. 20	12:00 pm	3436 S. Douglas
				Springfield, IL
New Jersey District	Starts:	Mar. 20	7:00 pm	Centerton FWB Church
	Closes:	Mar. 20	Noon	110 Dealtown Road
				Pittsgrove, NJ
New Mexico District	Starts:	Apr. 16	7:00 pm	First FWB Church
	Closes:	Apr. 17	4:00 pm	1202 Fairground Road
				Artesia, NM
Colorado District	Starts:	May 1	9:30 am	Westgate FWB Church
	Closes:	May 1	Noon	543 31 Road
				Grand Junction, CO
Florida	Starts:	May 5	7:00 pm	Jacksonville Marriott
	Closes:	May 8	Noon	4670 Salisbury Road
				Jacksonville, FL
California	Starts:	May 13	7:00 pm	First FWB Church
	Closes:	May 15	11:30 am	2236 E. California Avenue
				Bakersfield, CA
Michigan	Starts:	May 14	7:00 pm	Woodhaven FWB Church
	Closes:	May 15	4:00 pm	26191 Allen Road
				Woodhaven, MI
Idaho	Starts:	May 14	7:30 pm	TBA
	Closes:	May 15	Noon	
Northwest District	Starts:	May 14	7:30 pm	First FWB Church
	Closes:	May 15	Noon	1390 45th Avenue N.E.
				Salem, OR
North Carolina	Starts:	Jun. 7	10:00 am	Faith FWB Church
	Closes:	Jun. 8	12:00 pm	1200 W. Grantham Street
				Goldsboro, NC
Missouri	Starts:	Jun. 7	7:30 pm	Clarion Hotel
	Closes:	Jun. 9	9:00 pm	3333 S. Glenstone
				Springfield, MO

ASSOCIATION MEETINGS

STATE	DATE/TIME			LOCATION
Texas	Starts:	Jun. 9	7:00 pm	Henderson FWB Church
	Closes:	Jun. 11	Noon	913 Richardson Drive Henderson, TX
Kansas	Starts:	Jun. 10	7:30 pm	Bethel FWB Church
	Closes:	Jun. 12	12:30 pm	2719 N. 67th Street Kansas City, KS
West Virginia	Starts:	Jun. 11	9:30 am	Parsley Bottom FWB Church
	Closes:	Jun. 12	2:00 pm	Lenore, WV
Northeast District	Starts:	Jun. 11	4:00 pm	First FWB Church
	Closes:	Jun. 12	Noon	20 Depot Road New Durham, NH
Virginia	Starts:	Jun. 17	11:00 am	Bethel FWB Church
	Closes:	Jun. 18	4:00 pm	3713 Pennington Lane Woodbridge, VA
Indiana	Starts:	Jun. 18	7:00 pm	Peace FWB Church
	Closes:	Jun. 19	4:00 pm	7030 E. Stop 11 Road Indianapolis, IN
Kentucky	Starts:	Jun. 19	7:30 pm	Bucyrus FWB Church
	Closes:	Jun. 19	Noon	1676 Hopley Avenue Bucyrus, OH
Ohio	Starts:	Jun. 25	9:30 am	Gahanna FWB Church
	Closes:	Jun. 26	Noon	3868 Stygler Road Gahanna, OH
Assn. of Mexico	Start:	Jul. 30	10:00 am	El Uro Camp
	Closes:	Aug. 1	Noon	Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico
Arkansas	Starts:	Aug. 3	7:30 pm	Conway Public School Aud.
	Closes:	Aug. 4	9:00 pm	2300 Prince Street Conway, AR
Oklahoma	Starts:	Oct. 12	7:00 pm	Hillsdale FWB College
	Closes:	Oct. 14	Noon	3701 S. I-35 Moore, OK
Mississippi	Starts:	Nov. 5	9:00 am	Burgess Creek FWB Church
	Closes:	Nov. 6	Noon	63 County Road 126 Tishomingo, MS
Mid-Atlantic District	Starts:	Nov. 6	9:30 am	Waldorf FWB Church
	Closes:	Nov. 6	12:00 pm	4028 Old Washington Road Waldorf, MD
Tennessee	Starts:	Nov. 8	7:30 pm	Grace FWB Church
	Closes:	Nov. 10	Noon	2110A Knob Creek Road Johnson City, TN
Alabama	Starts:	Nov. 10	7:00 pm	Madison FWB Church
	Closes:	Nov. 12	4:00 pm	5295 Wall Triana Highway Madison, AL
Mexico Association	Starts:	Dec. TBA		Altamira, Tamaulipas
	Closes:	Dec.		Mexico

Georgia: Members of **Piney Grove FWB Church** in **Bristol** celebrated the church's 96th homecoming, according to **James Ursrey**, interim pastor. The church began in a brush arbor in 1907, voted to go full-time in 1935 and has been served by 33 pastors.

Illinois: **Ina FWB Church** in **Ina** marked 75 years with a multi-media presentation. Deacon **Bruce Johnston**, great-grandson of first pastor **W. R. Burton**, gave a testimony of remembrance. The church began in 1928 with 28 members but did not have their own building until 1941. Building programs in 1964 and 1986 expanded the earlier facilities. **Ivan Ryan**, father of Pastor **Brad Ryan**, preached the homecoming message.

Bear Point FWB Church in **Sesser** reports seven baptisms and four new members. **Larry Cook** pastors.

Former pastor **David Shores** led 106th anniversary activities at **Blue Point FWB Church** in **Cisne**. **Ernie Lewis** pastors.

Indiana: **Peace FWB Church** in **Indianapolis** broke ground for an addition that will include a fellowship hall, kitchen, six classrooms and a new nursery. Pastor **Chris Clay** expects the project to be completed in time to host the state association.

Pastor **Tim Doss** reports six conversions and three rededications at **First FWB Church** in **North Judson**.

Two Indiana churches celebrated jubilee homecomings—**First FWB Church** in **Chesterfield**, Pastor **Ron Branham**; and **First FWB Church** in **Wabash**, Pastor **Lonnie Skiles**.

Maryland: Pastor **Mike Phillips** at **Waldorf FWB Church** in **Waldorf** gets to keep his hair. When 204 people packed a 100-seat sanctuary for worship and a follow-up dinner, they almost set a new attendance record. If they had, the agreement was for Pastor Phillips to get a military haircut. Close, but the pastor keeps his hair.

The church which averages a weekly attendance in the 70s was pleased with the strong attendance and the altar filled with folks praying.

Missouri: Some 250 people came together to help **Beacon FWB Church** in **Raytown** celebrate homecoming, according to Pastor **Kenny Simpson**. **Greta Carter** recalled the church's history, followed by a media presentation titled "The Way We Were." The church began with 16 charter members in 1957. The church honored **Janice Moore** for 40 years as choir director. Former pastor **Ernest Harrison** preached the homecoming message.

North Carolina: After members at **Corinth FWB Church** in **Dunn** discovered that termites had fatally damaged their 107-year-old church, they voted to build. The new structure is located 200 yards from the original building on a 10-acre site donated by a family with members in the church. **Joseph Wallis** pastors.

Christian Life FWB Church in **Thomasville** bought 4.5 acres with an unfinished building. They remodeled the structure, expanded it, then built a fellowship hall (3,200 square feet) that doubles for classrooms and children's church. Pastor **Gary Brown** and two other couples started the work nine years ago.

Ohio: Pastor **Leon Stevens** reports 12 conversions and three baptisms at **Lockbourne FWB Church** in **Groveport**.

Dogwood Ridge FWB Church in **Wheelerburg** underwent extensive renovations and began a choir, according to Pastor **Delbert Dixon**. Twenty people made professions of faith in a three-month period.

Canaan FWB Church in **Grove City** set an attendance record with 458 people present on Wednesday evening. Pastor **Mike Blanton** says the new 700-seat family life building is well on the way to being filled. Blanton baptized

four converts and reports an average attendance of 267.

Oklahoma: **Vicki Hidde**, wife of Tulsa Area Association moderator **Bob Hidde**, launched a new ministry designed to encourage family worship, strengthen children's programs and help blended families cope with life's challenges. Vicki and daughter **Leah Hidde-Gregory** have presented workshops in Free Will Baptist, Southern Baptist and Methodist churches. Call 800-650-2122 for additional information.

Spring Hill FWB Church in **Lexington** observed 102 years of service, according to Pastor **Rick Schultz**. Sermons by **Lynn Wood** and **Wade Jernigan** highlighted the celebration.

Pastor **Joe Grizzle** reports nine conversions at **First FWB Church** in **Norman**.

South Carolina: Pastor **Kenneth Cash** reports 19 baptisms at **Una FWB Church** in **Una**. Pastor Cash also serves as chaplain with the Spartanburg County Sheriff's Office.

Yes, bus ministry pays. A grandmother of one of the "bus kids" at **First FWB Church** in **Myrtle Beach** came into some money and wanted to share it with the only church that cared enough about her grandchildren to send a bus for them on Sunday. The \$50,000 cashier's check surprised Pastor **Jimmy Brown** and the congregation. Oh, the church gave Pastor Brown a \$2,000 love gift for pastor appreciation.

Tennessee: The mayor declared September 28, 2003, "Rev. **Elmer Carter** Day" in **Elizabethton** for 53 years of service to the community. Brother Carter serves as seniors pastor at **First FWB Church**. Pastor **Phil Poston** presented a plaque from Mayor Sam LaPorte to Carter.

Virginia: Forty-seven students attended "Open House" last fall at **Gateway Christian College** in **Virginia Beach**, according to President **Bruce Barnes**. Ten students applied for the fall 2004 semester. ■



Questions and Answers about Social Security

Although most financial experts agree that Americans need more than Social Security benefits to live a comfortable retirement, this program still plays a large part in many people's retirement. The following

are answers to some of the most commonly asked questions about Social Security.

When can I begin taking Social Security benefits for retirement?

The minimum age at which you can receive full Social Security benefits in 2003 was 65 years and two months. This full retirement age will rise by two months a year until 2007, when it will reach 67.

Can I still take early retirement benefits from Social Security?

You may take retirement benefits starting as early as age 62, but benefits will be reduced by an amount determined by the difference between the age at which you began taking benefits and your full retirement age.

Is it worth it to delay taking Social Security benefits to increase the amount I receive?

Working beyond full retirement age adds more earnings to your Social Security record. This may or may not result in higher lifetime benefits when you retire. Additionally, you can increase benefits by a certain percentage for each year you delay benefits from your normal retirement age until age 70. Whether delaying benefits in order to receive higher eventual benefits is the right thing to do, depends solely on your personal situation.

Can I receive Social Security if I continue to work?

Yes, you can. You will receive reduced benefits however, before you reach full retirement age. If

you're younger than full retirement age, your benefits are reduced \$1 for every \$2 you earn above the annual limit. In the year in which you reach full retirement age, your benefits are reduced \$1 for every \$3 you earn above the annual limit. After you reach full retirement age, your benefits are not reduced if you continue working.

What else is used to determine the amount of Social Security benefits that I receive?

The amount you pay in Social Security taxes has the biggest impact on the amount that you will receive. The more you contribute, the more you'll likely get back in return.

How can I check my Social Security account?

Workers over the age of 25 automatically receive an annual statement from Social Security showing how much they have contributed to Social Security plus a projection of how much in monthly benefits will be received. If you haven't received this statement, contact the Social Security Administration and ask for the form: "Request for Social Security Statement," Form SSA-7004. ■

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RETIREMENT
AND
INSURANCE

- You may take retirement benefits starting as early as age 62, but benefits will be reduced.
- You can increase benefits by a certain percentage for each year you delay benefits from your normal retirement age until age 70.
- Workers over age 25 automatically receive an annual statement from Social Security.

Free Will Baptist Ministry Focus



Why Have a World Missions Sunday?

By Doug Little, Director of Stateside Development

I want the April Foreign Missions emphasis to help pastors keep God's heart for the lost world as the priority concern. Rather than asking churches to take a World Missions Offering, I am asking pastors to plan a

World Missions Sunday with the World Missions Offering as one component.

What It Will Do for Your Church

Spiritual growth requires both processes and events. The daily processes are necessary to bring lasting change to our lives, but events provide inspiration and challenge to make and reaffirm decisions that determine our direction. A World Missions Sunday alone will not change your church, but it *will* expose members to the Great Commission and challenge them to find their place in global outreach.

A World Missions Sunday can lift our eyes from daily routines to the fields white unto harvest. It can inspire a church to evaluate its strategies for reaching the lost, across the street and around the world. A World Missions Sunday can also provide a climate for the Holy Spirit to call believers for personal involvement in redemptive work.

Inwardly-focused churches tend to be crippled by interpersonal tensions and conflict. Outwardly-focused churches are prone to pull together rather than split apart. Most pastors prefer the latter. Since serving pastors is a high priority for Free Will Baptist Foreign Missions, we want to provide tools for a World Missions Sunday that will help keep a church outwardly focused.

What It Will Do for Foreign Missions

It takes more than the five men on the court to play winning basketball. Coaches, trainers, scouts, managers and many others contribute to the players' abilities and performance. Likewise, it takes more than missionaries on the field to reach the world for Christ. The homefront team provides churches and missionaries leadership and support for advancing work on the field.

Approximately one-half of the financial support for the homefront team comes through The

Together Way giving (Co-op and designated), WNAC offerings, the Wednesday evening offering at the national convention, contributions from churches and individuals, and the World Missions Offering. Last year the World Missions Offering totaled approximately \$140,000. Most of this came from 165 churches. This year we are praying God will provide \$250,000.

It Is Simple to Do

A resource kit is available for churches to use in conducting a World Missions Sunday. We are looking for 250 churches to field-test and evaluate the kit and help us produce the best tool possible in the future. The resource kit includes alternative Sunday School lessons for all ages, a sermon and suggested order of service. A newly composed missions song in congregational format and choir arrangement will also be included, along with options for the Sunday evening service, prayer guides and other resources.

Sample materials are provided in the resource kit. The video series *Embracing the Vision IV* will also be available in March to use in this effort. Items needed in multiple quantities may be purchased through Foreign Missions. An overview of the kit may be seen at our website (www.nafwb.org/fm).

While kits are available without charge, Foreign Missions asks churches to receive a World Missions Offering as part of World Missions Sunday. April 25 is designated World Missions Sunday, but materials can be used on any date that suits the church.

Be one of 250 churches to field-test the materials this year. You will receive the immediate benefits of having a World Missions Sunday. Call Foreign Missions toll-free at 877-767-7736 and ask for April Bybee, assistant to the director of stateside development. Or email your request to april@nafwb.org. ■



FOREIGN
MISSIONS

Free Will Baptist Ministry Focus

- A World Missions Sunday can lift our eyes from daily routines to the fields white unto harvest.
- Your church can provide a climate for the Holy Spirit to call believers for personal involvement in redemptive work.
- To order a World Missions Sunday resource kit, call 877-767-7736, ask for April Bybee.



Men of Priority

By Ken Akers, General Director

Several years ago Master's Men set a number of objectives for our department. Those objectives were designed to make us men of priority, prayer, purpose, passion and purity. As 2004 begins, we want to focus this year on the theme of priority.

Men have many things vying for their attention. Between working at least one full-time job and sometimes extra jobs to make ends meet, time seems to be our most valuable commodity. Add hobbies and other interests such as sports and even church activities in the mix, and you can see there is little time for anything else.

But is this what God had in mind? The Bible warns us repeatedly not to be lured into the things of this world that would draw us away from Him. It is easy to get involved in too many things that leave no time for God. Even getting involved in church outreach can distract us from really serving God.

As we begin 2004 we want to focus on serving God and making Him our priority, keeping in

mind there is an order of priority in what we do. While there may be absolutely nothing wrong with having hobbies or other interests, we must maintain an order of importance. When Jesus was asked what is the most important commandment, He quickly told them it was to keep God first (Matt. 22:37).

Master's Men exists to encourage and equip men for service in their local churches, the denomination and ultimately to the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

If Master's Men can help you, please contact us. Call toll-free at 877-767-8039 or email us at masters@nafwb.org. ■



Master's Men
Free Will Baptist
Men's Ministry

- 2004 Theme: Priority
- When Jesus was asked what is the most important commandment, He quickly told them it was to keep God first.

Free Will Baptist Ministry Focus

www.nafwb.org/mm

Check it out! Find out all kinds of information about Master's Men and their upcoming events.



Also take time to **sign up** for our
Master's Men Monthly Online Email Newsletter

Just send us your email address. We will send you all of the latest Master's Men news.



Great Expectations

By Debbie Burden

Great Expectations—WNAC's theme for 2004. The word "expectation" stirs up ideas brimming with hope for the future. The psalmist wrote in Psalm 62:5, "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from

him." Though life brought unrealized expectations (friendships, marriage, children), David had learned this important lesson: God was the only one in whom he could place hope and faith.

"Expectation" as David used it can be interchanged with the word "salvation"—literally "a cord, or attachment." From the day Rahab let down the scarlet cord for the Israeli spies until the advent of Christ, God's people lived in expectation of a coming Redeemer. We can only imagine Simeon's anticipation as he waited "for the consolation of Israel."

Two thousand years later our expectation for a Savior is just as great. Like Simeon, we will not experience true peace until we have seen Christ. He is the fulfillment of all that was promised in the Messiah.

He is our salvation from past sins. His death is the only sacrifice sufficient to meet the demands of a holy God. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). When we repent and pray the prayer of faith, we can confidently expect God to remove the stain of sin.

Jesus is also our salvation in getting through this life. What a comfort to know that our high priest can be touched with our infirmities. When difficulties seem overwhelming He will *never* leave us or forsake us. He is our lifeline.

Best of all, in Him we have the expectation of a bright future. Paul wrote in Philippians 3:20 that "... our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ."

Vines says the word "look" in this verse implies "watching with outstretched hand, in strained expectancy, eager longing, the stretching forth of the head, indicating an expectation of something from a certain place."

WNAC has a great work to do in 2004. Focusing on Christ and His return will encourage us to be faithful. We must stay on task while we have time.

On a fog-shrouded July morning in 1952, a young woman named Florence Chadwick waded into the water off Catalina Island. She intended to swim the channel from Catalina Island to the California coast. Long-distance swimming was not new to her; she was the first woman to swim the English Channel in both directions.

The water was numbingly cold that day, the fog so thick she could hardly see the boats in her party. Several times sharks had to be driven away with rifle fire. She swam more than 15 hours before she asked to be taken out of the water. Her trainer encouraged her to swim on since they were so close to land, but when Florence looked, all she saw was fog. So she quit... one-half mile from her goal.

Later she said, "I'm not excusing myself, but if I could have seen the land, I might have made it." It wasn't the cold or fear or exhaustion that caused Florence Chadwick to fail. It was the fog.

We often fail because we lose sight of the goal. We understand why Paul said he was pressing on toward that mark for the prize. He had something greater in his view.

Oh, two months after her failure, Florence Chadwick walked off the same beach into the same channel and swam the distance, setting a new speed record. This time she could see the land.

Simeon patiently waited and looked and was given the privilege of laying his eyes on the eight-day-old Christ Child when Mary and Joseph brought him into the temple. One day we too will see the Savior. We will see Him face to face in all His glory. Our faith will become sight.

The women of WNAC have great expectations because we serve a great Savior. Join us as Free Will Baptist women on mission with Him. ■

About the Writer: Mrs. Debbie Burden served six years on the WNAC Executive Committee and now is a member of Tennessee's WAC Executive Committee.



**WOMEN
NATIONALLY
ACTIVE FOR
CHRIST**

Free Will Baptist Ministry Focus

- Jesus is our salvation from past sins.
- He is our lifeline for getting through this life.
- In Him we have the expectation of a bright future.



Garnett Reid

Let Me Put It Like This The Bible's Story-Line, Part I

There it is, in the front cover

of my first Bible. My Junior Boys Sunday School teacher, Mr. Jack Nicholson, taught us the "Romans Road" to salvation. He insisted that we memorize the references and write them on the flyleaf of our Bibles.

Since then I've used that clearly-marked avenue to share the gospel with many people, as many of you have. Whether it's the Romans Road, John 3, the Four Spiritual Laws or some other approach, we need to master basic scriptural facts of the gospel and seek opportunities to share the good news with people we meet.

However, *we also need to get a handle on the basic story-line of the whole Bible*, a narrative which climaxes in the gospel of Christ. This month I offer one such approach; it's my own take on this greatest of all messages. In coming issues we will examine this story-line in more detail along with biblical references explaining and supporting these tenets.

Let me challenge you to develop your own summary of the Bible's plot. Mine may not suit you or you may prefer to say it in a different way. Come up with one you can digest and use as you witness, teach and defend your beliefs. Make it practical. Illustrate it with your own experience.

But most of all, find ways to share it. Introduce relevant parts of it into conversations when it seems appropriate. Allow the power of its simple truths to shape your life and lodge in the hearts and minds of those who hear it.

Here's what the Bible is all about:

God is establishing His kingdom rule over all that He has created.

He purposes to bring all creation into complete submission under His sovereignty.

He will accomplish this through the work of His Son, Jesus Christ, as Mediator.

The final end of God's plan is to bring the highest possible glory to Himself.

In the Old Testament, God reveals the promise, the initial phases of His plan to reconcile fallen humans to Himself.

This plan unfolds in history through a series of covenant relationships He makes with His people Israel.

In the New Testament, God begins to fulfill His promise when his Son Jesus appears on earth, lives a sinless life, dies in the place of sinful people, rises from the dead, graciously calls all people by the Holy Spirit to a saving relationship with Himself through their faith in Him, unites them in His body, the church, sends those who believe into the world to tell and to model this good news before all people, and sits in exalted glory preparing to return to establish His kingdom on earth in which His church will glorify Him forever.

Before we look at this summary in more detail, note with me a few general matters it emphasizes. First, God is the subject. He and His Son Jesus are the sole actors. The verbs stress what *they* do. The first paragraph is an overview of God's purpose in creation and redemption.

Paragraphs two and three explain how the Old and New Testaments execute this great plan through a promise-fulfillment dynamic. The Old Testament section highlights the covenant theme, while the focus of the New Testament paragraph, more detailed than the Old because of its nature as fulfillment, is the gospel and the church.

The overarching bridge linking these two parts of God's plan is the building of His kingdom—a work begun at creation, renewed in redemption, and culminating with Christ's return and unending reign.

Yet the heart of God's great kingdom work touches all people, every individual, through His reconciling love in Christ. He acts through human beings and within real world history, not in make-believe sagas of myth and fantasy. Jesus Christ is the center, God as Mediator to carry out His purpose. Finally, meditate on and celebrate the truth that the ultimate end of all God does is for His own glory: "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Ephesians 3:21). ■

Next month: "*Thine is the Kingdom . . . and the Glory*"



Randy Sawyer

Exemplary Expositor

One of the most notable figures

in Jewish history is the Old Testament scribe Ezra. According to Rabbinic tradition, Ezra was responsible for the development of the Great Synagogue, the synod of Jewish scholars credited with compiling much of the Old Testament canon. These learned men, under Ezra's leadership, formulated patterns of worship utilized in local synagogues, patterns later followed to a great degree by the early church.

Among the positive examples bequeathed to the New Testament church by Ezra is an expository philosophy of preaching. Israel was not submissive to God's Word during the period between Moses and Ezra. Bright spots, such as Josiah's reform, were the exception. Many of God's priests failed in their assignment to read and teach His Word. The people often failed

what teaching they did receive. The culmination was the Babylonian exile.

After the exilic period, God initiated their restoration by leading them back to Zion. When 50,000 immigrants under Zerubbabel's leadership repopulated a portion of the land, God used Ezra to call His people to revival. The instrument through which God issued the call was the preaching of Ezra. Just as God prepared and commissioned Moses to be the *law-giver* of the first exodus, He prepared and commissioned Ezra to be the *law-restorer* for the second exodus.

Ezra's qualifications suited him for the task. He had an impressive ancestry (Ezra 7:1-5); he had advanced training (Ezra 7:6); he had position among both Israel's and Persia's aristocracy (Ezra 7:6); he had permission from the king of Persia sanctioning his mission (Ezra 7:6); he had leadership and organizational skills (Neh. 8:1-10). But these were not his most important qualifications. God selected Ezra because of his personal commitment to study, live and teach God's Word.

According to Ezra 7:10, Ezra *set his heart* toward the goal of Bible exposition. *Heart* is used by the Hebrews to denote the center of human life. That he *set his heart* implies a commitment that is both deep and long-term. Thus, Ezra directed the core of his being constantly toward the task of knowing, doing and explaining the Word.

Commitment to Studying the Word

Ezra's commitment was to *learn* God's Word (Ezra 7:10). The Bible does not preserve for us the record of Ezra spending long, arduous hours laboring in the Word. But that is obviously the case. He is called a *ready scribe*. Such a designation could not be achieved without persistent scholarship. Through the years he became a man with a resolve to study. The desire

no doubt grew as he learned more about God's will and Word.

This calls to mind Paul's instructions to another preacher, Timothy. The apostle encouraged his protégé to *give attention to reading* (I Tim. 4:12-16), to *study as a workman* (II Tim. 2:15), and to *reward generously those who labor faithfully in the Word* (I Tim. 5:17). The nature and character of God's Word demands that it be handled correctly, and rightly dividing the Word clearly requires diligent labor.

Commitment to Living Out the Word

Ezra's commitment also included *living out the Word* (Ezra 7:10). He was not satisfied to be well informed. In the difficult situations that lay ahead, Ezra proved to be a man committed to living out the ethical and theological principles he learned from his study.

Furthermore, he expected those to whom he expounded the Word to do the same. *Living out the Word* proved to be painful for many, requiring them to sever pagan relationships (Ezra 9-10). Both in actions and attitudes, words and deeds, Ezra demanded holiness of himself, as well as the people of God.

Commitment to Teaching the Word

Ezra's commitment also involved *teaching the Word* (Ezra 7:10). A quick glance at Nehemiah 8:8 shows Ezra and his associates some years later, publicly reading and explaining the Word. The KJV says they *read distinctly* and *gave the sense thereof*. By reading *distinctly* we understand that they took great pains to achieve exact pronunciation, intonation and phrasing. They placed a high priority on the public reading of the Word.

The practice of reading scripture publicly continued in the New Testament, first in synagogue worship and later in the churches. The epistles were sent as cir-

Directory Update

Florida

Sonny D. Thomas, Sr., to Faith Church, Orlando from First Church, Titusville

Michigan

Donald Viers to Community Church, Ypsilanti

North Carolina

Tony Dean to Beacon Church, Farmville

Scottie Stewart to East Belmont Church, Belmont

Jerry Hall to Faith Church, Rockingham

Doug Snipes to Fellowship Church, Dunn

Willie Coleman to Peach Church, Henderson

Ohio

Dale Chanel to Divine Church, Cleveland

Chad Cornell to Antioch Church, Wheelersburg ■

cular letters to be read for all the churches. Of course, with the printing press not yet invented, public reading was extremely important. However, reading scripture has remained an essential element of worship throughout the centuries.

After the public reading of God's Word, Ezra and his associates *gave the sense thereof*. In other words, they expounded the recited text. This seems to be the preaching pattern throughout scripture. Luke records how Jesus *expounded* the Word (Luke 4:16-21; 24:27). The Greek word translated, *expound*, is *diemeneuo*, which means to *unfold the meaning of what is said or to explain*.

In Acts 17:2-3 we read that Paul's ministry of the Word also included *explanation*. In Thessalonica he *opened . . . the scriptures*, meaning, he thoroughly explained their meaning. In listing the requirements of a pastor, Paul includes an ability to teach (1 Tim. 3:2). There have been many attempts made to draw distinctions between preaching and teaching, but in scripture they overlap. Preachers are teachers.

Balancing the Commitments

Ezra's ministry clearly serves as an example for preachers of each successive generation. A life committed to the *study of the Word* demands focus, concentration and discipline. A life committed to *living out the Word* requires integrity, sincerity and consistency. A life committed to *teaching the Word* involves understanding, creativity and passion. In maintaining a balance in each of these commitment areas, many shortcomings are prevented. When there is a healthy balance, study is saved from unreality, conduct from uncertainty, and teaching from hypocrisy and shallowness.

Receipts:

State	Designated	CO-OP	Total	Year To Date Designated	Year To Date CO-OP	Year To Date Total
Alabama	\$ 494	\$ 152	\$ 645	\$ 5,330	\$ 1,742	\$ 7,072
Arizona	0	0	0	330	298	628
Arkansas	12,407	19,908	32,315	122,116	195,006	317,121
California	0	1,117	1,117	231	13,252	13,483
Colorado	0	0	0	0	0	0
Delaware	0	0	0	114	0	114
Florida	0	0	0	379	9,072	9,451
Georgia	30,380	1,197	31,577	373,842	18,749	392,591
Hawaii	0	0	0	0	0	0
Idaho	0	0	0	0	0	0
Illinois	13,068	2,015	15,084	135,905	29,394	165,298
Indiana	1,553	145	1,698	21,003	2,140	23,143
Iowa	0	0	0	0	65	65
Kansas	0	150	150	0	690	690
Kentucky	2,149	1,131	3,280	5,435	13,837	19,272
Louisiana	0	0	0	0	0	0
Maryland	0	0	0	0	0	0
Michigan	28,776	4,505	33,281	244,366	28,114	272,480
Mississippi	11,648	524	12,172	117,915	6,537	124,452
Missouri	34,276	13,258	47,534	464,766	179,168	643,934
Montana	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nebraska	0	0	0	0	0	0
New Jersey	0	0	0	0	0	0
New Mexico	0	0	0	5,289	268	5,557
North Carolina	4,527	5,706	10,233	19,831	31,986	51,817
Ohio	16,845	3,456	20,301	183,344	40,014	223,358
Oklahoma	64,510	13,833	78,343	650,643	120,526	771,169
South Carolina	30,181	20	30,201	493,336	681	494,017
South Dakota	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tennessee	14,110	2,272	16,382	136,180	16,342	152,521
Texas	16,253	573	16,825	121,269	3,551	124,820
Virginia	47	131	178	1,995	612	2,607
Virgin Islands	0	0	0	25	0	25
West Virginia	594	70	664	9,853	1,523	11,377
Wisconsin	0	0	0	0	0	0
Canada	941	20	961	8,721	161	8,882
Northwest Assoc.	0	0	0	1,029	0	1,029
Northeast Assoc.	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	10	0	10	10	0	10
Totals	\$282,768	\$70,183	\$352,951	\$ 3,123,255	\$713,729	\$3,836,984

Disbursements:

Executive Office	\$ 1,084	\$31,582	\$ 32,667	\$ 16,079	\$321,178	\$ 337,257
Foreign Missions	159,136	8,878	168,014	1,863,612	90,287	1,953,898
FWBBC	20,446	8,878	29,324	252,214	90,287	342,500
Home Missions	92,529	6,948	99,477	879,180	70,659	949,839
Retirement & Insurance	349	5,404	5,753	4,047	54,957	59,005
Master's Men	249	5,404	5,653	6,936	54,957	61,893
Commission for Theo. Integrity	47	193	240	600	1,963	2,563
FWB Foundation	178	2,316	2,494	2,437	23,553	25,990
Historical Commission	47	193	240	600	1,963	2,563
Music Commission	24	193	217	394	1,963	2,357
Media Commission	134	193	327	1,384	1,963	3,347
Hillsdale FWB College	1,676	0	1,676	22,857	0	22,857
Other	6,871	0	6,871	72,914	0	72,914
Totals	\$282,768	\$70,183	\$352,951	\$ 3,123,255	\$713,729	\$3,836,984



Rebecca Pugh

"I Did Not Tell Anyone"

"...Neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do..." (Neh. 2:12). The *best* in my life has come because God's Spirit stirred my heart... I didn't tell anyone... and God brought it to pass.

I first remember God stirring my heart specifically when I was 12. I was on the second row, organ side at Cofer's Chapel FWB Church with Dr. Joe Ange preaching. I didn't go forward, I didn't tell anyone.

But I did serious business with God, determining *not to be* a stereotypical rebellious teenager with a list of regrets at age 20 and *to start* reading my Bible daily. The incredible adventure God has given me (because of that night when God put that idea into my mind) is beyond measure!

Another time I was on the west side of the Music Building at Free Will Baptist Bible College following chapel. There was a brief exchange of words with a brilliant, handsome young man... enough that God stirred my heart. I didn't tell anyone, but the word is out now—30 years and six children later.

The next time was in the kitchen of Dr. and Mrs. Tom Malone in Florence, Alabama, in January 1974. Gwyn asked me to marry him. Wow! My heart was stirred. I said "Yes," but didn't tell anyone (until later). We married three weeks after we graduated from Free Will Baptist Bible College in 1976.

Christmas 1981, five and one-half years into marriage and ministry and wonder and joy and tests and *content without* children. Gwyn and I, along with my brother Raymond (Coffey) and his wife Frances who was *very* pregnant with their second child (Joshua) and delightfully adorable 18-month-old Julia, packed ourselves with

luggage and presents in our green Granada and traveled 16 hours from Russellville, Alabama, to Norfolk, Virginia.

We planned to spend Christmas with our parents. God put into my heart a desire for a baby. I didn't tell anyone. God gave Gwyn and me our precious angel, Carmen, in October 1982. She was the first of the six treasures with whom God blessed our home (Carmen is 21, Khristi—19, Karyn—15, Daniel—12, Michael—8 and John—5.)

When Carmen was five, God stirred my heart in a direction that was somewhat unconventional at the time. I felt perhaps we should experiment with home-schooling Carmen. After all, if it didn't work out well, "kindergarten level" curriculum might not damage her education process too much. We didn't make a proclamation that this was the one and only way for education for us or others. Yet, God was in it, and she learned to read.

This has been the amazing and thrilling educational path in which God has led our family for 15 years. One year at a time, one child at a time and one day at a time—we are following through with the initial prompting of God in my heart. (I am in the process of teaching our last child to read. What a blessing, what a relief. Only 11 years to go.)

January 1997 Gwyn preached on Abraham. God asked Abraham to do that which was impossible mentally, physically and emotionally. Impossible requests from God, yet Abraham exercised faith which made the impossible possible. God broke into my heart with stirrings that I dared not speak... to have a sixth baby.

Did God not know how old I was? (42 at the time.) Did He not know we had a quiver full? However, He definite-

ly stirred my heart. It was a couple of months before I shared with Gwyn what was in my heart.

(It is unpopular even for "Christian" families to have more than two or three children. God has said clearly that children are His *reward* not a *curse*. Yet, the birth control issue is a *struggle*. We feel we can't afford another child. We see from a limited frame of reference. Elizabeth Elliott says God's will is usually simple, but *not easy*. This was not any easy leading in my life. This I will affirm.)

God did have another blessing in store for us. God gave us John! What a beautiful confirmation he is to us of God bringing to pass what He stirred months earlier in my heart.

Daily as we walk with God, He stirs our hearts for various opportunities of obedience. We need not tell anyone. Simple obedience will allow God to bring to pass that good thing which He purposes to do through us. ■

About the Writer: Mrs. Rebecca Pugh is a member of Liberty Free Will Baptist Church in Millington, Tennessee, where her husband Gwyn Pugh pastors. Rebecca teaches piano part-time and teaches a women's Sunday School class.



Thomas Marberry

Exposition on Hebrews

By David Reece (Privately published, 2003, paperback, 177 pp., \$9)

David Reece is a veteran Free

Will Baptist pastor who has served 24 years at Heritage FWB Church in Fredericksburg, Virginia. He is a member of the Sunday School and Church Training Board.

The author begins by noting the unique place which Hebrews occupies in the New Testament. Reece writes, "It is obviously the most descriptive of all the New Testament books concerning the religious rituals and performances required by the Mosaic Covenant."

Hebrews has several interesting characteristics. First, it mentions no author. Second, the book is preventative in nature. Its goal is to encourage believers of Jewish background to remain faithful to Christ and not return to the rituals and ceremonies of first-century Judaism.

Reece discusses briefly the recipients, purpose and date of writing. He argues that Hebrews was written to Christians of Jewish background, probably living in the land of Palestine. He suggests that the book was written between 61–63 A.D., shortly before the Jewish War of 66–70 and prior to the persecution of Nero which began about 64.

The author devotes most of the commentary to explaining the meaning of the text and helping readers follow the progress of thought. Reece recognizes that the modern reader is far removed from the language, thought patterns and writing style of the first century.

Reece notes that the phrase "in these last days" (1:2) does not indicate "the length or span of these days, but rather the era (dispensation) of time in which these days appear." The goal is to emphasize the importance of the communication we

have received through Christ. In earlier times God communicated with His people through various prophets.

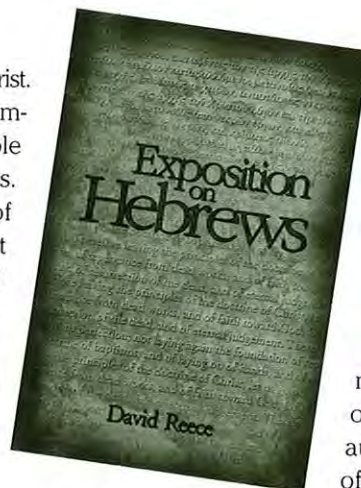
Chapters 6 and 10 of Hebrews are important to Free Will Baptists and others of the Arminian persuasion. Reece does a good job explaining their meaning and significance.

Why is it impossible for a believer who has committed apostasy to return to the faith? Reece answers this question with the words of scripture, "They crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."

Reece explains, "The act of crucifying Jesus afresh is seen as worse and more intense in its cruelty. He is struck by the hand of a believer. This act of apostasy is greater than that of the Jews because they 'knew not what they were doing.' The apostate knows exactly what he is doing and does so with the intent of trampling under foot the blood of the Savior."

He correctly interprets the words "if we sin willfully" (Heb. 10:26) as a reference to the sin of apostasy. The author explains, "There is the possibility of apostasy from the life of the believer. The author of Hebrews was in fact attempting to prevent the loss of true Christians who were on the verge of leaving the faith due to the pressure and persecution placed upon them because of their conversion to Christ."

Not many commentaries on Hebrews reflect an Arminian position. This useful



volume helps fill the void. It is easy to read and understand and should be of value to pastors, Sunday School teachers and others who want to know more about Hebrews.

I do have one recommendation. A more developed treatment of the date, authorship and recipients of the book would have been helpful. Reece argues

for Pauline authorship and presents evidence to support his position. The authorship of Hebrews has been much debated. Most authorities today, including conservative ones, feel that arguments against Pauline authorship are stronger than those in favor of it.

Reece suggests a date in the 60s for Hebrews, and that is certainly a possibility. Hebrews 10:32–34 speaks of a severe persecution that occurred in earlier times. This suggests the book may have been written after the persecution of Nero rather than before. If this interpretation is correct, the book would have been written in the 70s or early 80s of the first century. ■

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By Dean Jones, SCM Director

Most things in our society today seem extreme. In order to gain the attention of our students and children, we often resort to extreme measures. That's why we've chosen "Xtreme Cause... Xtreme Cost" as our theme this year. If our students are expecting extremes, I want to offer them the most extreme cause I know... following Christ.

While the world's extremes are often based on shock value, ours is based on a true cost, an extreme cost. Christ's words in Matthew 10:38 remind us of the importance of sacrifice and commitment. Those characteristics are typically not on the mind of many junior high students.

Make sure your students are a part of this year's Springboard program. Our focus is on creating leaders. Junior high is a crucial time in the lives of students. They can be influenced and shaped in a variety of ways.

Springboard creates opportunities for leadership development, team-building exercises, decision making, Christ-centered leadership studies and old-fashioned fun. Our teaching sessions, written especially for Springboard, will focus on "Significance over Success."

If you're interested in young people and the direction of their lives, steer them toward Springboard '04. Students will return to your church with new skills and direction. ■





Jack Williams

Jump-Start Better Writing

All right, I admit it. My writing

always starts out biblically—that is, "...without form and void" (Gen. 1:2). The difference, of course, is after six days the Lord's creation was pronounced "very good" (1:31), while mine requires another revision.

What a relief to get that out of the way so you can avoid my mistakes and move forward in your writing career. Want to be the editor's best friend? Try these eight writing tips to jump-start your next article.

First, say something worthwhile.

This is your chance to deliver a compelling message, build a strong news item or discuss a controversial issue. Give it your best shot. Who wants to read fluffy drivel that sputters and goes nowhere? **Editor's Law #1:** If you have nothing to say, please don't.

On the other hand, people are eager to read articles or news items that connect with their lives. Any subject that stirs you will likely grab others also.

Say it well. Research *before* you write. Don't guess about statistics; look them up. When retired *Tennessean* executive editor Lloyd Armour died last November, a colleague wrote about the feisty journalist, "One might argue with his opinions but never his facts."

Editor's Law #2: Know your English. Start fast and use good grammar. Write with authority. Use effective transition. Don't be bashful about sub-heads; they guide readers (including editors) through your article.

Write with a smile. Anger colors word choice and darkens paragraph tones. Good writers never yell at, berate or ridicule others in print. Exclamation points? Hunt them down and kill them. They scream "amateur at work." The same goes for words in all caps. Make your point with strong verbs, not a blizzard of punctuation marks.

Say it short. Editor's Law #3: Less is more. Too-short articles may exist, but I haven't seen one in years. Editors live in a tidy less-is-more word world. Writing short does not require short sentences, although that works too, but says it with fewer words. Try it.

Just because you have a 1,200-word limit does not mean you *must* use all 1,200. A tightly-written 1,000-word piece will impress the editor. Readers prefer shorter articles. They turn the page rather than slog through adverb-infested paragraphs.

Edit, edit, edit. Writing is hard work, but the editing and rewriting process is party time for journalists. This is where we get a second chance to put a shine on a mediocre piece. In spite of what you may have heard, nobody gets it right the first draft. Hold your writing up to the harsh light. Turn it over, stand it on edge, shake out unnecessary words. **Editor's Law #4:** If it's not worth your time to edit, it's not worth my time to publish.

Want a reputation as a complete writer whose manuscripts sparkle? Examine every word. Road test each for reliability. If a word hangs around taking up space and does not clarify, modify or simplify—feed it to the dog. The professional writer weeds his own garden.

Read it aloud. The litmus test for writing is the "read it aloud" principle. **Editor's Law #5:** If it sounds bad, it is. If you stumble while reading aloud, the paragraphs need to be tweaked, rearranged or deleted. The ear and the eye often disagree on what's good writing. When that happens, something is broken. Fix it.

Weak transitions aren't the only slackers that limp off the page when read aloud. Fuzzy thinking flops belly-up on the dusty road to rejection. Clichés and jargon whine like spoiled brats when read aloud. Don't skip this step.

Respect the reader. The same magic that tells little kids when you don't like them plays out on the printed page. Readers know if you write *down* to them. They sense if you think they're too dumb to understand. And they resent it. So don't do it.

Editor's Law #6: Readers pay the bills; be nice. Treat them as equals. Write to them as friends. Just as high-pitched, squeaky-voiced speakers irritate us, so do writers who come across like a committee of cats sliding down a tin roof—all claws and yowls.

Remember your purpose. Editor's Law #7: Focus, focus, focus. Beware of mixing the message. News releases inform. Period. They do not lecture, scold or debate. They get to the point in one bounce and stick with the facts of who, what, when, where and why.

Editorials, however, offer a platform for personal opinion, slashing review or outright challenge. Articles can be crafted to explain, exhort, indict, disclose and more. Decide in advance which horse you plan to ride.

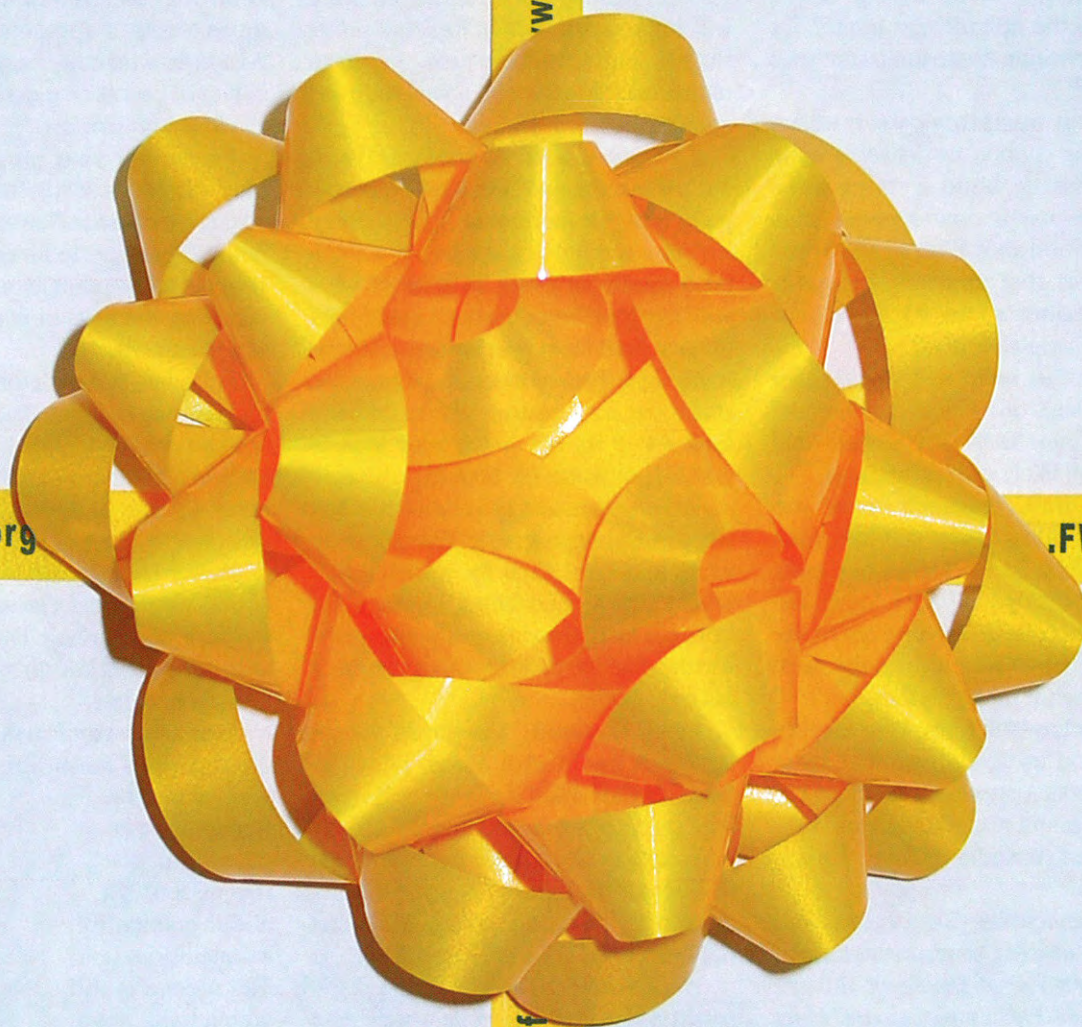
Henry Luce, founder of *The Weekly Newsmagazine*, told a prospective reporter during a job interview, "Our writers entertain, our editors inform, our researchers keep us accurate."

Stop when you finish. Two elements create a good finish. The first is to stop when you're done.

It shouldn't take all day to dismount. Don't *talk* about coming to a conclusion. *Do it.* The second is end with a bang, not a whimper. **Editor's Law #8:** Quit. With a bang! ■

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