

June 2004

Contact

BACK FROM IRAQ TRILOGY

We Never Said Goodbye

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Our Screaming Eagle

A Tennessee church opened its heart to a teenager who gave them a platoon from the 101st Airborne.

PIERCE

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Contents

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ARTICLES

Back From Iraq Trilogy: A soldier's story as told from home, from church, from the battlefield.

4 Story One: We Never Said Goodbye

Lieutenant Pierce led his platoon in prayer and then led them into battle against Iraq's Republican Guard.

8 Story Two: Our Screaming Eagle

A Tennessee church opened its heart to a teenager who gave them a platoon from the 101st Airborne.

12 Story Three: I Adopted a Soldier

The mother with two daughters found her life intertwined with a tall boy who became a man . . . and her son.

14 Interruptions from God

What we do with the unexpected marks our lives as believers.

17 I Hated Rainy Days

Life's worst moment came in a cemetery on a rainy day.

COLUMNS

3 An Encouraging Word

The Master of Malapropisms A father who had a way of saying things so wrong they were right . . . and unforgettable.

21 Free Will Baptist Ministry Focus

25 Green Tree Bible Study

Old Testament Covenants: Kingdom Blueprints

26 The Pastor's Wife

Ministry—A Family Affair Eleven ways to make sure children are part of ministry outreach when Dad is the pastor.

27 The Preacher's Perspective

A Hundred Days of Prayer and Praise

28 Student and Children Ministries

NYET Team Members

30 Top Shelf

Learning Theology with the Church Fathers
by Christopher A. Hall

31 Briefcase

At Least You're Honest A preacher, a police officer and Loretta Lynn meet at a traffic light.

NEWS

18 Free Will Baptist Newsfront

South Carolina State Association | FWBBC Scholarships
Dotson Re-Elected President | Texas Church Turns 30
Canada District Association

20 Currently



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Keith Burden

The Master of Malapropisms

He had an eighth-grade education. His mother died when he was young, he came from a large family, and he grew up during the Great Depression. He felt fortunate to get as far in school as he did. He was what we might call a self-educated individual. In spite of his lack of formal instruction, he was intelligent—he had a sharp mind. His name was Bennie Burden. My dad.

In the Ballpark

He was, however, notorious when it came to his vocabulary. He was the master of malapropisms [malapropism—*n.* 1. a confused use of words in which an appropriate word is replaced by one with similar sound but ludicrously inappropriate meaning.] What made it all rather amusing to us was the fact that his choice of words was usually in the ballpark, though not quite on target.

Some examples include:

- The time he told me about a realtor who had his office closed because he was involved in some shady business deals. Dad said, “He kept pulling those shenanigans until they finally *provoked* (revoked) his real estate license.”
- Someone asked how he was doing after surgery and a series of radiation treatments. He replied, “Oh, I guess I’m doing pretty good for a man who has *phosphate* (prostate) cancer.”
- After Mom had heart by-pass surgery, Dad and I visited her in the intensive care unit. She was understandably agitated, confused and excitable. The nurses were struggling to keep her calm. She didn’t recognize either one of us. As we walked out into the hallway, Dad began to cry and said, “I’m worried about your mother—she’s on the verge of being downright *historical* (hysterical).”

- My parents bought a home in the community where I was pastoring. In an attempt keep them from becoming home-sick, my sister provided a subscription to the newspaper from their former hometown. Speaking of that newspaper, Bennie commented, “I really like to read the *arbitrates* (obituaries) so I can keep up with who died back home.”
- Mom and Dad wouldn’t run the air conditioner until it became unbearably hot. The reason? In his words, “That window unit uses entirely too much electricity; and besides, those *isolating* (oscillating) fans keep the house plenty cool.”

What’s the Point?

Please don’t misunderstand. I don’t say these things to make fun of my dad. I share these examples to make a point. And the point is this—Bennie Burden may not have always used the appropriate word when he was talking, but when it came to communicating with his life, the message was absolutely, unmistakably clear.

Even though Dad was a jack-of-all-trades, two occupations in particular left a lasting impression on my life. For a number of years he farmed the fertile soil in eastern Oklahoma. Later in life he traded farm implements for carpenter tools, remodeling old homes and building new ones. Through each vocation he communicated spiritual truth to his children.

Great Teacher

As a farmer Dad taught us two important lessons from the Bible. One is found in II Corinthians 9:6 where Paul says, “But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.”

Dad sowed many seeds of kindness and generosity in people’s lives. Although he may not have been rich by this world’s

standards, he was a wealthy man if you measure wealth by the number of friends he had.

The other lesson he taught us about farming is found in Galatians 6:7—“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” He taught his children to accept personal responsibility for their decisions and actions . . . to only expect a good harvest if they planted good seed.

As a carpenter Bennie Burden taught us an important spiritual lesson about building a life based on Jesus’ words in Luke 6:47-48—“Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock.”

Thanks, Dad!

Dad did more than teach us how to make a living. He taught us how to build a life—a life based on values and principles that have eternal significance. He modeled them by building a marriage that lasted 63 years, by being a man of character and integrity, by facing death with assurance and an eternal hope.

Bennie Burden went to heaven mid-December, 2001. He only left a few earthly possessions, but he handed down a priceless heritage to his family. It’s an honor to carry on his spiritual legacy. And just for the record, I’m also proud to be a direct descendant of the master of malapropisms.

■

A young lieutenant leads his platoon in prayer and then leads them into combat against Saddam Hussein's Republican Guard.

We Never Said GOODBYE

By Steven Pierce

March 6, 2003. I woke early and packed a few final items, kissed my two-year-old daughter and my newborn son goodbye, and left for the loneliest trip of my life. My wife, Corrie, and I drove to my unit without speaking, and amid tears and heartache, we kissed and said, "See you later." *We never said goodbye.* There is no good way

to tell someone goodbye when you know you may not come back. In a few short hours, I'd be on my way to Kuwait where my unit would stage in preparation to liberate Iraq.

Five years earlier, I worked at a local art business and knew it was time to take the next step in God's plan. I'd graduated from Columbia International University with a degree in Intercultural Studies and was wondering about what God had in mind about my future.

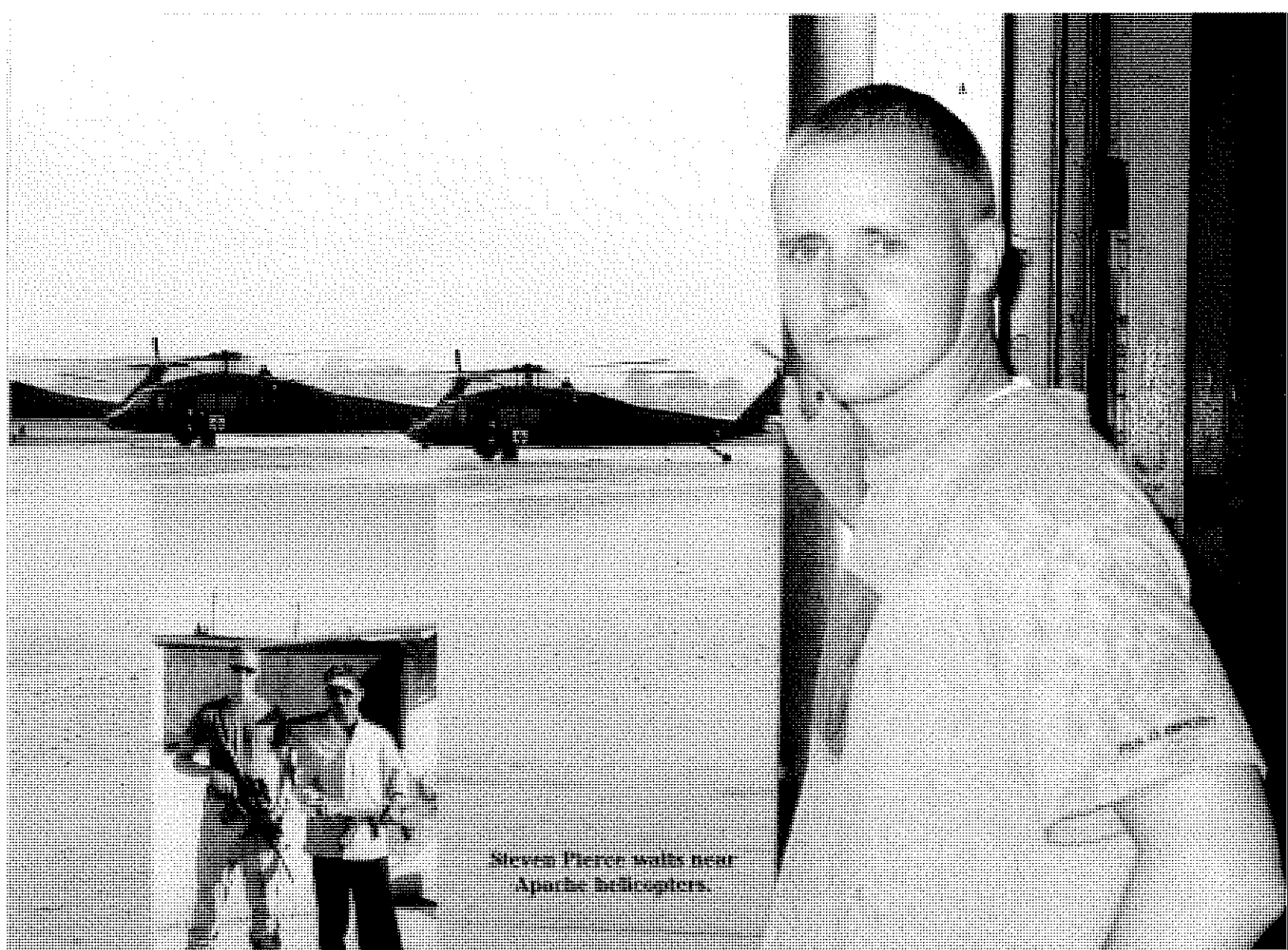
You're in the Army

Corrie and I talked about finding a church to work in, going to the mission field, getting a promotion where I was or launching out in a new direction. One night I had a funny thought. I said out loud, jokingly, "Maybe I should join the military?" We both burst into laughter and giggled as we drifted to sleep.

The next day, I couldn't get that joke out of my head. I thought to myself that I could never be in the military. I was not good

Steven—just after Brandon Rowe was killed.





Steven Pierce walks near
Apache helicopters.

Steven (L) with friend
John Miller.



I considered the army a continuation of my education. God, on the other hand, considered it my mission field.

at sports and didn't think marching in formations was very interesting. Yet I couldn't stop thinking about what it would be like in the military.

Later that day, I confessed to Corrie that I had been thinking about our conversation and she looked at me in shock, saying she had been doing the same. The next day I called an army recruiter. A month later I had a bald head and found myself doing more push-ups than I thought humanly possible. I was in the army.

Although my transition into the army was quick, it was calculated. The army agreed to pay off my existing college loans which would have been an obstacle for many years. My obligation would be for three years, and then I would become a debt-free and disciplined man for my service. I considered it a continuation of my education. God, on the other hand, considered it my mission field.

Military Mission Field

After two weeks in Kuwait, the word came that we would cross the border of Iraq in a few days. The anxiety and the adrenaline were flowing, but each soldier stayed focused. This was a time when men consider their own mortality. They ask the hard questions and wonder if they will see their families again, if they will do what they are trained to do and if there is something beyond life should they find themselves there.

Now, with a weapon in my hands and poised for war, I was a platoon leader responsible for 38 men, most of whom I helped train. A few of the men were Christians, but most were not. They all knew I was because I didn't curse, and I was vocal about my faith.

There's a thin line between sharing your faith and shoving your faith down someone's throat in the military. As an officer, it's wise to be cautious in approaching the subject. I've found the best advice for sharing my faith in the army comes from I Peter 3:15: "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every (soldier) that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you."

As I prepared myself to meet the challenges of war, I read several passages of scripture and found myself "floored" by Psalm 144: "Blessed be the Lord my Rock Who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle—My lovingkindness and my fortress, My high tower and my deliverer, My shield and the One in whom I take refuge, who subdues my people under me" (vv. 1-2).

As this passage continues, the warrior David humbles himself and pleads for the Lord's deliverance—not because he is afraid of battle, but because he craves a victory that will give

glory to the Lord: "Happy are the people whose God is the Lord!" (v. 15b).

On the eve of crossing into Iraq, I found so much peace in these words that I gathered my platoon around and read the passage aloud to my soldiers. Less than a week later, my platoon found itself deep in enemy territory just south of the ancient city of Babylon.

Battle of Babylon

My men and I were ordered to move north of our position, along with a platoon of tanks, into the southern portion of the city of Al Hillah. Our purpose was to create a diversion to trick the Iraqi army into believing the Americans were attacking from the south of the city. In reality, the 3rd Infantry Division would be attacking from the west and moving north to Baghdad several miles away through what we referred to as the Karbala Gap. The intent was to create such a convincing diversion the Iraqi Army would reposition their troops to the southeast to defend against our attack, allowing the 3rd Infantry Division to make their move north with little or no resistance.

On March 31, just before sunrise, I gathered my platoon for roll call. After each soldier was accounted for and briefed, my platoon sergeant asked if I would say a prayer with the soldiers. We all knew what we were about to do would be dangerous. For most of us, this would be the first time we fired our weapons at another human being. This was a time for prayer.

As we stood there, heads bowed, I offered a prayer I had heard many times before in my home church. "Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to Him be the glory for ever and ever. Amen" (Heb. 13:20-21 NASB). My platoon mounted the tanks and we headed north.

Miracle Under Fire

We rolled along the abandoned highway toward the city while the sun began to rise. As we watched the horizon, a call came over the radio that one of my soldiers had been hit by enemy fire. Instantly, enemy bullets began to impact the side of the tank I was on. One round broke into several pieces and stopped in my arm. We were in an ambush.

After a quick inspection of my arm to determine if I could still fight, I gave the order to dismount the tanks. For the next five hours, we continued to fight while enemy fire kicked up



Lt. Steven Pierce with Mara and Madden.

Brandon became the first combat casualty of the 101st Airborne Division just 14 days before his 21st birthday. I gathered my men around to announce the loss. We wept together.

dirt around us and snapped past our ears. We were surrounded by what was later identified as over 120 members of Saddam Hussein's Republican Guard. The only cover from the barrage of bullets was small dirt mounds lining the sides of the road.

Every position my soldiers occupied was being fired at from enemy on both sides of the road. My platoon fought back with deadly accuracy and defeated the ambush leaving 60 enemy dead. The Iraqi army moved its forces in the area toward our position providing an opportunity for the 3rd Infantry Division to move effortlessly north into Baghdad. Mission accomplished—or should I say, miracle accomplished.

After the mission, news came that the soldier, Specialist Brandon J. Rowe, who was hit early during the fight did not survive his wound. Brandon became the first combat casualty of the 101st Airborne Division just 14 days before his 21st birthday. I gathered my men around to announce the loss. We wept together.

Coming Home

Over the course of the next 11 months, our platoon covered over 1,200 kilometers and helped in liberating Karbala, Baghdad, Haditha and finally the city of Mosul, the ancient city of Nineveh. After so many months away from home and in harm's way, we were informed that it was time to return to our families.

On February 4, 2004, we were greeted by a huge crowd as we stepped off the plane and back on American soil. In the crowd were several members of my church who were there not only to see me but the soldiers of my platoon whom they had written and prayed for faithfully over the past year.

When every soldier was off the plane and a brief ceremony completed, the moment we had all waited for came. We were given the command to "fall out," after which we turned and frantically searched for our loved ones. Through the crowd, her eyes swollen with tears of joy, Corrie made her way to me and we held each other tighter than I had ever held anyone in my life.

What seemed to be the most outrageous road for me to take for ministry turned out to be the place where I was needed most. As I suffered and survived the challenges of war alongside the men I led, I had countless opportunities to share my faith. I experienced more pain and joy in that year than any other time in my life. And through it all, God gave me a chance to not only serve my country but to serve Him. ■

About the Writer: First Lieutenant Steven Pierce serves with the 101st Airborne Division in the U.S. Army. He is a member of Donelson Free Will Baptist Church in Nashville, Tennessee.

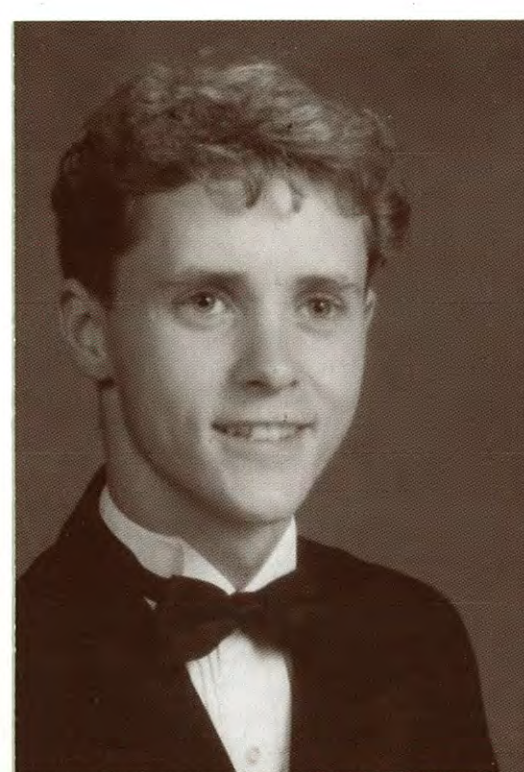
How a Tennessee church opened its heart to a teenager who later gave them a platoon from the 101st Airborne.

Our Screaming **EAGLE**

By Sherry Anderson



In an army full of heroes, there are many newsworthy stories. The Donelson Free Will Baptist Church family, in Nashville, Tennessee, thinks the story of our hero is one worth sharing.



Steven Pierce graduating from high school (top left). With wife, Corrie (left) and Dari Goodfellow (right). Steven as a teenager (lower left and right).

The Orphan

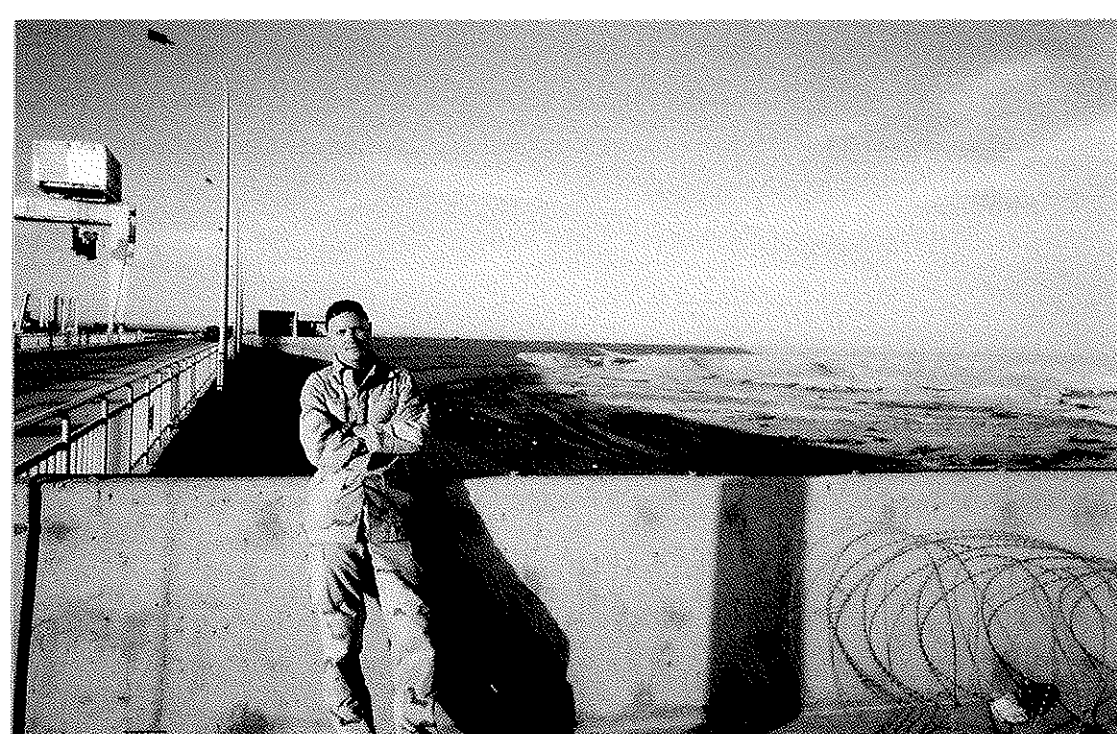
Steven Pierce was orphaned as a young teenager when both parents died within a month of each other. He was a student at McGavock High School in Nashville and had no place to call home. Most of his relatives lived in Louisiana, and the family had never been particularly close.

Steven lived briefly with his brother, Chris, in Nashville, but Chris was going through a divorce, and Steven's home life wasn't pleasant or stable. Because our church sits across the street from the high school, Steven started dropping by after school to have a place to hang out in a safe environment. He eventually developed

a relationship with our pastor, Robert Morgan, and the rest of the staff.

Because he was here so much of the time and because his brother spent the family's income drinking and going to strip clubs, which left Steven with no money for food, he started helping out with odd jobs around the church. He's a terrific artist and lent his talent to the youth department by painting the Solid Rock Café (our youth center) with graphics.

As word of Steven's plight filtered through the congregation, several families took an interest in him and opened their homes for him to live with them. Steven continued to develop ties within the church and to be involved in the life of the congregation.



His engaging smile and personality drew people to him, and he became an integral part of the youth group, eventually rising as a leader among our teens.

The Soldier

Steven graduated from high school and enrolled at Free Will Baptist Bible College. He later met and fell in love with Corrie Coker, who became his wife. Midway through his schooling, he transferred to Columbia International University. After graduation, he enlisted in the Army and quickly proved himself to be officer candidate material.

Following a tour of duty in Germany, Steven, Corrie and their daughter, Mara (who was born in Germany), returned to the States where he was assigned to Fort Campbell as an infantry platoon leader, and later became a 1st Lieutenant. He was put in charge of a platoon of 38 men from 2nd Platoon, C-Company, 1st Battalion, 2nd Brigade of the 101st Airborne (Air Assault)—the Screaming Eagles.

(Steven's brigade had the designation of "Black Hearts." This stems from a practice begun during WW II when soldiers in each regiment of the 101st placed symbols from a deck of cards—a heart, spade, diamond or club—on their helmets. This helped them recognize fellow soldiers during battle so they could regroup with their own men. When Steven's men learned their designation was the heart, they thought they looked like Care Bears with hearts on their helmets. But the men thought a black heart looked tougher than a red one.)

In 2002, the Pierces found out two bits of news: They were expecting their second child, and Steven would soon be deployed to Iraq where war appeared imminent.

Operation Walls and Bridges

With both anticipation and dread, the little family waited throughout the following nine months, uncertain if Steven would still be home when their son, Madden, was born or what

the future held for them. When it became apparent that his platoon would be deployed soon, Steven asked his church to "adopt" the 38 soldiers under his command and provide support to the soldiers and their families during their deployment in Iraq.

We called this plan "Operation Walls and Bridges," and our goal was to build walls of prayer around the soldiers and bridges of support to them and their families. So many of our TDF (*The Donelson Fellowship*—another name for our church) families wanted to engage in this project that each soldier had at least three

families praying for him, and many had four.

Meanwhile, Corrie's due date of March 8 approached and she went into early labor, which allowed Steven to be present for the birth of his son on February 22. Twelve days later, Steven and his men left for war.

What happened in the ensuing 11 months is almost beyond description. As we wrote letters to "our soldiers" and sent them care packages, we realized that bonds of deep affection were being forged. Although few of us had actually met our soldier, life-long friendships were developing with them and their families.

The Battle

Throughout those 11 long months, we anxiously listened to the news broadcasts, fearful of what we might hear. On March 31 we learned that a soldier from the 502nd infantry division, 1st battalion, had been killed—the first of the 101st to die. We knew that Steven and a group from his platoon had been inserted from Kuwait into Iraq, but we didn't know where they were.

On the morning of April 1, our local ABC station gave the soldier's name—SPC Brandon Rowe—and we knew he was one of ours. He was just a few weeks away from his 21st birthday. It was with heavy hearts that we called the three families who had adopted Brandon with the news.

On the day of that battle, Steven and some of his infantrymen were ordered atop six Abrams tanks with orders to perform a feint maneuver to allow a large contingency of troops to move through the Karbala Gap. The tank crews didn't have a problem with the assignment, but Steven and his men knew they would be extremely vulnerable on top of those tanks.

As the tanks rolled into a small town in southern Iraq, our soldiers found themselves surrounded by an enemy that outnumbered them 4 to 1. The fighting was fierce, Brandon was killed and Steven was wounded. After several hours of fighting, the men found shelter in a building and were eventually evacuated.

When it became apparent that his platoon would be deployed soon, Steven asked his church to "adopt" the 38 soldiers under his command and provide support to the soldiers and their families during their deployment in Iraq.

In a letter to the church, Steven wrote that as he and those involved reflected on the battle, it was apparent they all should have perished. They were surrounded and outnumbered. He and his men say it was only the grace of God that pulled them safely through and feel it was as if our prayers literally formed walls of protection lining the roads on either side of those tanks.

The Blessing

During the platoon's deployment, we continued praying for them and sending letters and care packages. Along with the usual baby wipes, toiletries and beef jerky, some of the guys got packages of Oreos, canned pastas and soups, games, books, film, calling cards so they could phone home, pictures of their adopted families, Bibles and study material, and other touches of home.

Our family thought we were really clever when we sent our soldier, PFC Jayson Hall, a Christmas-scented candle in his Christmas care box. That was until we learned that two of our ladies had sent *their* soldier a four-foot Christmas tree, complete with lights and ornaments!

Our church family also made sure every soldier got at least 10 Christmas cards from TDFers. Steven had been reassigned to a headquarters unit by Christmas, and he saw the mail as it was sorted before being routed on to the different groups of soldiers. He said he got mighty suspicious that something was afoot when he kept seeing stacks of green envelopes, all stamped with The Donelson Fellowship return address.

Unknown to any of us, these cards, packages and letters were the only contact some of the men ever had from the States. They later said it was the lifeline that kept them going when despair began to press in. But what we hadn't anticipated was the tide of blessings that began to roll back over the church family as we grew to love these guys. Each time someone got a letter from their soldier, we would hear an excited voice anxious to share the latest news from the platoon. We found ourselves caught up in the lives of these men and were a bit startled to find how much we truly cared for them.

Nearly a year passed, and when our platoon finally came home on February 4, it was to a crowd of TDFers cheering wildly. As those of us waiting at Fort Campbell finally met the young

men we had been so fervently praying for, it was like greeting long-lost family members—there was no sense of awkwardness, only joy and thankfulness.

There wasn't a dry eye as we watched Steven and Corrie embrace and saw the love in Steven's eyes as he winked at Mara, or the huge grin on his face as he held his 11-month-old son. The orphan-soldier came home to a thousand-member family, all eager to hug him and thank him for his service to his country on our behalf.

Best Yet to Come

But the story wasn't over. On April 4 at 10:00 a.m., we had a church-wide service to officially welcome home the entire platoon. It was the first time most of us had met the men we've grown to love so dearly. The service was especially poignant as our music and fine arts department led us in singing patriotic songs, and as greetings were shared by various political and military dignitaries.

Our church family presented Brandon Rowe's mother with a memorial gift in excess of \$6,000 through the Gideon's International, for placing Bibles in Brandon's memory throughout the military and around the world.

Pastor Morgan shared a clear message of salvation, and our prayer is that one day every one of the men will come to know Jesus Christ as Savior. After all, that was one of the primary goals of *Operation Walls and Bridges*—to reflect God's love and draw the men to Him.

Wherever the Lord leads Steven and Corrie, you can bet there will be a TDF-sized family of mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers following their lives with great love and pride, cheering them on as God uses them to touch the lives of soldiers all around the world. ■



About the Writer: Sherry Anderson is a member of Donelson Free Will Baptist Church in Nashville, Tennessee, where she serves as Pastor Robert Morgan's executive assistant.

The remarkable story of an orphaned teen and the Nashville family that refused to let him go.

I Adopted a SOLDIER

By Dari Goodfellow

I met 1LT Steven E. Pierce at church on Easter Sunday morning, 1991. (Of course, he wasn't a 1st lieutenant then). He scooted past me into the pew and sat beside his girlfriend—my daughter. Closer scrutiny

revealed a tall, skinny, soft-faced, 16-year-old wearing hair longer than I liked. After-service introductions confirmed what Kelly had hoped: I liked him immediately.

When their mom and dad died (within a month of each other), Steven and twin brother, Ethan, were uprooted from Shreveport, and transplanted to Nashville, Tennessee, where older brother Chris, wife Leslie and two small sons lived. Immersed in their own financial and marital problems, Chris and Leslie were struggling. Adding two teenagers to the mix proved disastrous.

Seeking Refuge

A hunger stirred within Steven for something positive in his life. Chris moved his family across town. Learning of the move, Dr. Fay Forlines (long-time Free Will Baptist and Steven's English teacher) encouraged him to visit the church located across the street from his new high school.

One Sunday everyone but Chris attended Donelson Free Will Baptist Church. (Leslie never attended again; Ethan participated for a short time.)

Days later, Donelson's youth pastor crossed the street to the school in search of Steven. The church family embraced this Louisiana orphan.

Steven spent long hours at the church—it was a happier place than home. His artistic gifts were discovered, providing him with much needed cash. Pastor Rob Morgan nurtured him.

My involvement resulted from the relationship developing between Steven and Kelly. I was drawn to him, my heart touched by his circumstances. Eventually they parted ways and Steven stepped out of my life.

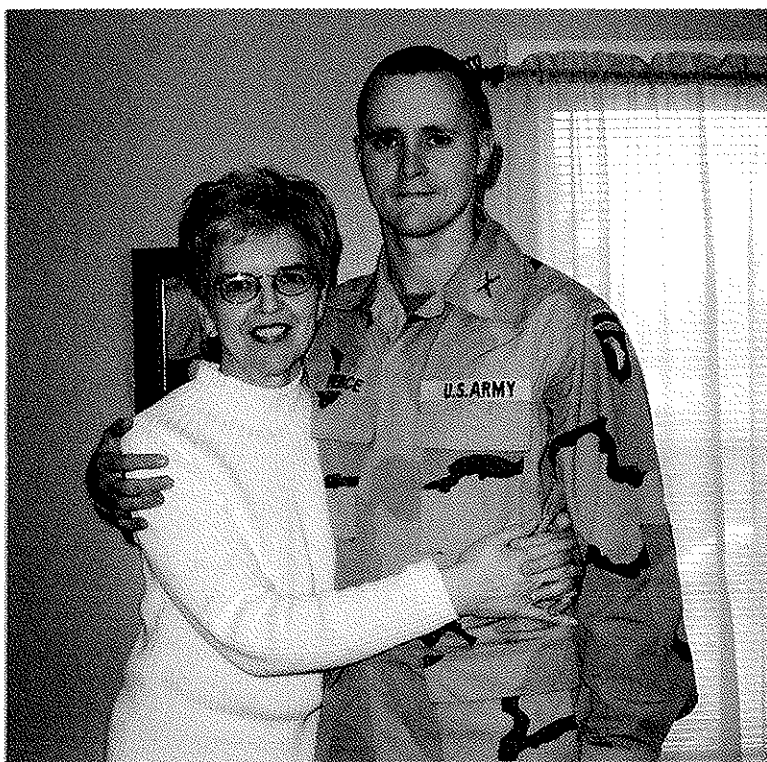
Kelly and I surprised him by attending his high school graduation and love bloomed again.

College Years

I urged Steven to attend Free Will Baptist Bible College. He said, "I can't afford it." God must have agreed with me, because He provided the money. In the fall of 1993, Steven enrolled at FWBCC as a freshman.

Love didn't last, however, and this time the break was final. Steven said the worst thing about the break-up was losing not only a girlfriend but a family as well. Not! We pulled him back into our family and this time the adoption was permanent.

Steven began dating a special girl from South Carolina—Corrie Coker. He found me at my national convention exhibit



booth and introduced us—standing before me was my future daughter-in-law.

With my blessing, Steven transferred to Columbia International University. A few months later he married Corrie. We hosted the rehearsal dinner and I lit the mother's candle at the wedding. Some months later his adopted family watched proudly as he graduated from CIU with a B.S. in Intercultural Studies.

Duty Calls

Then Steven surprised us all—he joined the army. Steven loved missions, but his huge college debt stood between him and that commitment. The army helped him repay his obligations.

Hunched against the cold wind, our entire family watched from the bleachers as Steven completed the first step—graduation from basic training. While stationed in Germany, the army turned Steven into a sergeant and Corrie turned him into a dad. My husband Sandy and I flew over to meet Mara, our tiny, month-old granddaughter.

Back in the U.S. he was selected to be an officer and commissioned. Sandy helped pin on his 2nd lieutenant bars.

Steven's next assignment was Fort Campbell, Kentucky, home of the 101st Airborne (Air Assault), an hour's drive from us and Donelson Church.

Deployed to Iraq

September 11. The War on Terror. Iraq—ILT Steven Pierce received his orders. Twelve days before deployment, I stood beside him in the delivery room watching through tears as Steven's son, Madden, was born.

Time to go. The night before he left, I listened outside the door as Steven videotaped himself reading two storybooks for Mara. Tenderness and love flowed from him as he handled and hugged his babies. Corrie proudly, yet reluctantly, let him go. *Gone*.

We sat glued to the TV night after worried night, watching the progress of the 101st Airborne into Iraq. Soldiers started dying.

I felt sadness with each loss and guilty relief when the dead soldier wasn't Steven.

Steven's letters brought the joy of knowing he was alive and well. His continued upbeat attitude about the war and the reasons he was there kept me encouraged and hopeful. He closed his letters with "your boy, Steven."

Wounded in Battle

Word reached us that Steven's platoon had been ambushed, one soldier killed and another wounded. In Steven's own words: "We should have all been killed that day." He was the wounded soldier.

The firefight lasted several hours. His platoon was surrounded fighting 4-1 odds. A fellow soldier witnessed bullets flying all around Steven. God's hand of protection covered them.

Because of his actions that day, Steven was awarded the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star with Valor. Always modest for himself and concerned about others, Steven pressed the army to award the Bronze Star to every member of his platoon. The request was denied.

Finally Home

After 11 months Steven was coming home. With a biting wind at our backs and wrapped in 6:30 a.m. darkness, we watched two big planes touch the tarmac. Over 200 identically-clad soldiers filed out of the first plane. My eyes hurt from searching unsuccessfully for that familiar face.

Heads riveted as the second plane's door opened, spilling its contents. I spotted him! We cheered—he smiled. *Welcome home, Steven*.

Past, Present, Future

The past—Steven's life has been a roller coaster of events. Connecting with Donelson Church and our family did not solve all his problems. We worked through car deals, car trouble, car repair, unemployment, tuition payments, a place to live, car loans, school loans, his "down" moments—a long list. Steven's heavenly Father met each need.

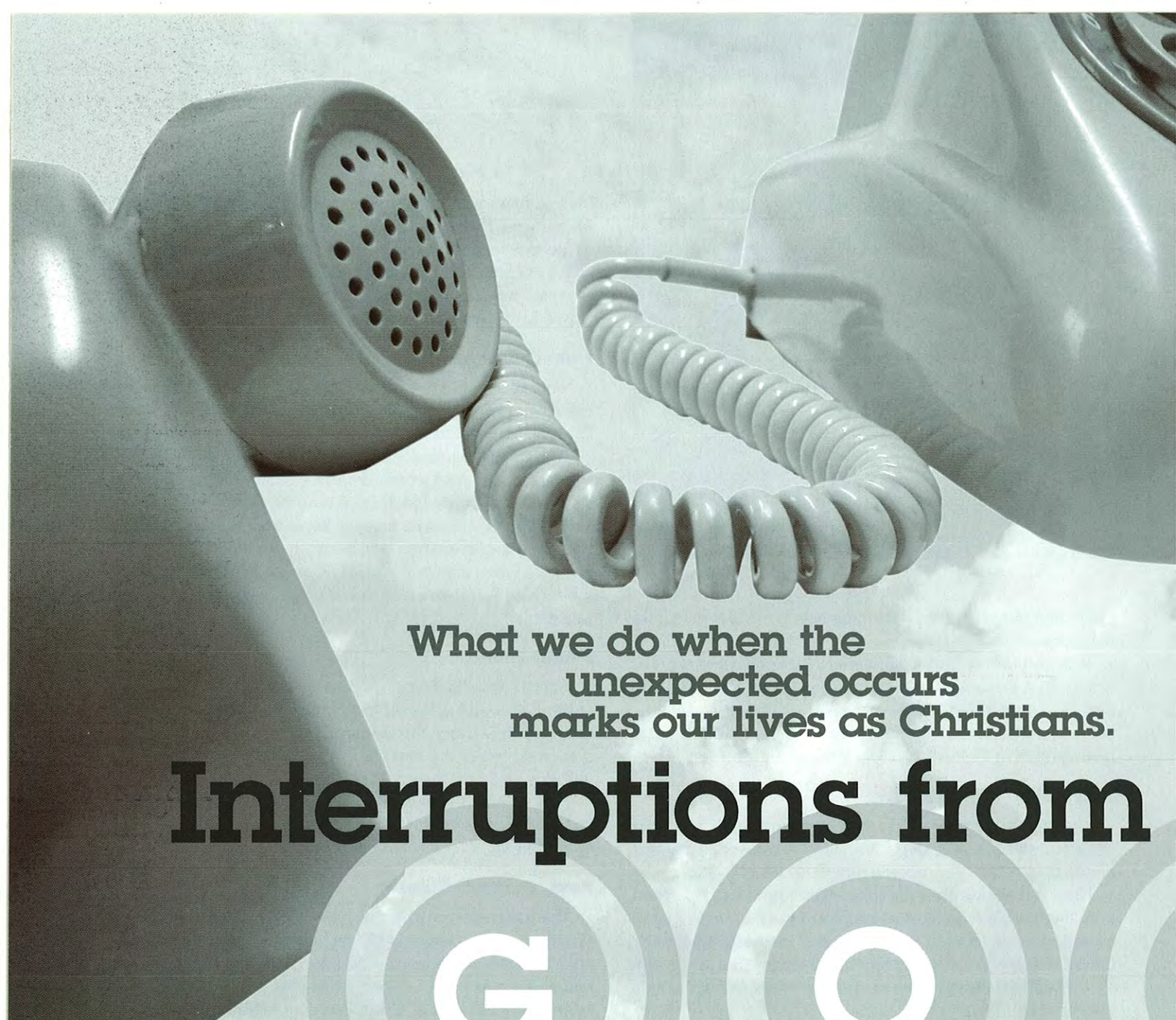
The present—Steven is now working toward his next promotion—soon we will call him *Captain*. (Army leadership roles provide a soldier-filled mission field.)

The future—Steven is quick to say that only God knows his future. Content to live one day at a time, he is allowing God to direct each step.

I am blessed to have such a son. ■

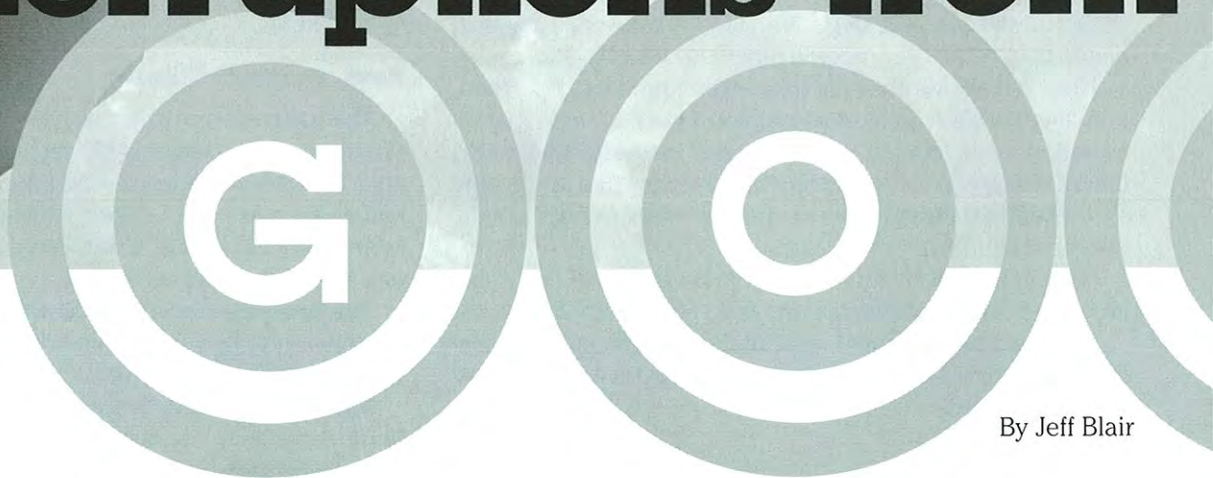


About the Writer: Dari Goodfellow works in the Executive Office. She is mother to Jill and Sean, Kelly and Barry, Steven and Corrie and Marmie to Sophia, Mara and Madden. Of all her jobs, she loves "Marmie-ing" the best. Husband Sandy Goodfellow serves as director of plant operations at Free Will Baptist Bible College.




What we do when the
unexpected occurs
marks our lives as Christians.

Interruptions from



By Jeff Blair

The phone rang about 7:30 Sunday evening. I was ready to sink into my recliner and relax after a full day of ministry. *This must be someone calling to congratulate their preacher for yet another soul-stirring sermon!* Not quite. Phil informed me that Kelly, one of his Sunday School students, had called with an emergency. Kelly's



How can we understand and handle interruptions in a way that will glorify Christ and lower our blood pressure?

and she had a Jehovah's Witness background. When we entered the house, we heard her sobbing.

I had been a pastor for three weeks, so I'm sure everyone had complete confidence in my ability to deal with this situation. All I knew to do was go to her and hold her hand. I sat next to her on the couch for an hour. I couldn't have spoken more than 25 words the whole time. I prayed and stayed. By God's grace she calmed down, so I prayed one last time and headed home. *Welcome to ministry.*

Rest of the Story

Fast forward a few months. I had a full day planned when the phone rang just after 8:00 that morning. It was Maria. In the past months I had visited with her and her husband several times. I shared the gospel with them, but they made no decision. She was at wit's end again. "Can you please help me? I'm so confused."

"Sure," I said, "I'll be right there."

In the next hours Maria found peace, hope and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. I knew she was sincere when she gave me her *New World Translation* (the corrupt Jehovah's Witness version) and told me to toss it in the garbage. I did with delight. Soon after, her husband Bill was saved and they were baptized. They have both been rays of light in our church ever since. *They were also interruptions.*

Back to Theology

Interruptions can be a frustrating part of life. The relentless deadlines of ministry

only magnify the problem. There's no postponing Sunday's sermon. It would be one thing if we knew every interruption would end like Maria's case, but they don't. Many of them seem pointless.

We often think, "If it weren't for these interruptions, I could do what the Lord called me to do. Can't people leave me alone for 10 minutes?" How can we understand and handle interruptions in a way that will glorify Christ and lower our blood pressure?


Everything in life eventually gets us back to theology. The key to dealing with interruptions is to understand God's nature.

Interruptions touch two areas of life: time and knowledge. They happen *when* (time) we don't *expect* (knowledge) them. Interruptions are problems for us precisely because we are limited by time—we only have so much of it, and our knowledge is imperfect—we don't know they're coming. Interruptions are obstacles to creatures whose knowledge is limited and who are bound by time.

But what are interruptions from God's perspective? Does "*interruption*" have any meaning to a God who is eternal and omniscient? For Him, neither time nor knowledge are limitations. For God, nothing is unexpected and He is beyond time.

What, then, are these things we call "interruptions" from His perspective? They are part of His sovereign plan. The fact that we didn't plan for them doesn't mean He didn't. They are only obstacles from our side of the curtain. *An interruption is not a coincidence, it is a matter of providence.*

So, the knowledge we have of our eternal and all-knowing God changes our per-



aunt, Maria, was hysterical and they didn't know what to do. Maria needed help immediately, so Phil and I rushed to her home.

Maria had just learned of the death of her 18-year-old grandson. I had not met Maria. She didn't attend church anywhere,



spective on interruptions. His nature frees us to face interruptions with confidence.

Four Principles

That's the big picture. Now, how should our actions reflect our faith? Here are some practical applications for handling interruptions.

Plan your schedule so that you can recover from interruptions.

For preachers, long-range sermon planning is an excellent way to ensure that the unexpected visitor or funeral you must conduct doesn't make preaching well impossible. Preaching a series or through books of the Bible allows you to know which text is next and helps avoid the frustration of searching for "something to preach" on

our best concentration and perseverance until the task is complete.

People are more important.

It's relatively easy to catch up on most of the work we must do, and sleep is easier to recover than broken relationships. If a knock comes in the middle of the night or the phone rings at an inopportune time, chances are that person is in great need. Interruptions are opportunities to demonstrate our love for people.

When Jesus withdrew to pray and rest, the crowds followed Him. The Bible says, "the people . . . followed him: and he received them . . ." (Luke 9:11). Jesus welcomed people whether He was tired or busy. So should we.

God is in control, and His "interruptions" are part of His plan.

Just months after Bill (Maria's husband) was saved, he died unexpectedly at age 58. His death occurred after I submitted this article. I didn't know until recently just how urgent God's interruption into Bill's life was.

The fact is, we desperately need interruptions. What would have become of Paul without his interruption on the road to Damascus? The burning bush was Moses' greatest interruption. Matthew's tax collecting and Peter's fishing—important career activities—were interrupted by Jesus' call. Your salvation was an interruption into your lostness and sin. Your call to ministry was an interruption. You may have a child that was an interruption.

How should we handle interruptions? *Thank God for interruptions. Where would we be without them?* ■

Interruptions are opportunities to demonstrate our love for people.

Saturday night. In general, ask yourself, "What can I do now that will help me handle interruptions later?"

Don't create interruptions to avoid hard work.

It's easy to think of something else we could be doing that might interrupt our labor. This hurts to admit, but much of what gets blamed on interruptions is nothing more than laziness. Ministry, and leadership in general, is hard work that demands

It should be added that being there isn't enough. Jesus went the extra mile when interruptions arose. In Luke 9, for instance, He not only welcomed them and taught them and healed them, but after hours of ministry He fed them. Clearly His love took over, and He didn't serve begrudgingly. We should never give people the impression that we are put out by their need.

People are more important. We are all busy. Jesus was busy. The Good Samaritan was going somewhere when he came across the wounded Jew. Interruptions test our love.



About the Writer:

Reverend Jeff Blair pastors First Free Will Baptist Church in Locust Grove, Oklahoma. He is a 1999 graduate of Hillsdale Free Will Baptist College. Jeff completed a Master of Divinity degree at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 2002.

I Hated Rainy Days

By Frank Gregory

The falling rain has always
brought me depression and despair.
Especially when it rains

in late November or early December. My dad died December 9, and it was raining that day.

Alone and Cold

I have come to realize, though, that Dad's death broke the heart of God. From now on, instead of despising rainy days, I will enjoy them. The day my earthly father died, my heavenly Father was urging me to run into His arms. He still loved me just as much and did not want me to feel abandoned.

The cold and rain have been reflective of my spirit. I will now acknowledge that just as abandonment causes this cold and wet feeling, it is contrasted with the warmth and acceptance of my heavenly Father's love. I will now learn to love rainy days.

Surrounded by Life

The first morning this week as I sat and looked out over the lake, it was tumultuous. The rain fell and the wind raged. The lake was restless and marked by waves. There were no signs of life.

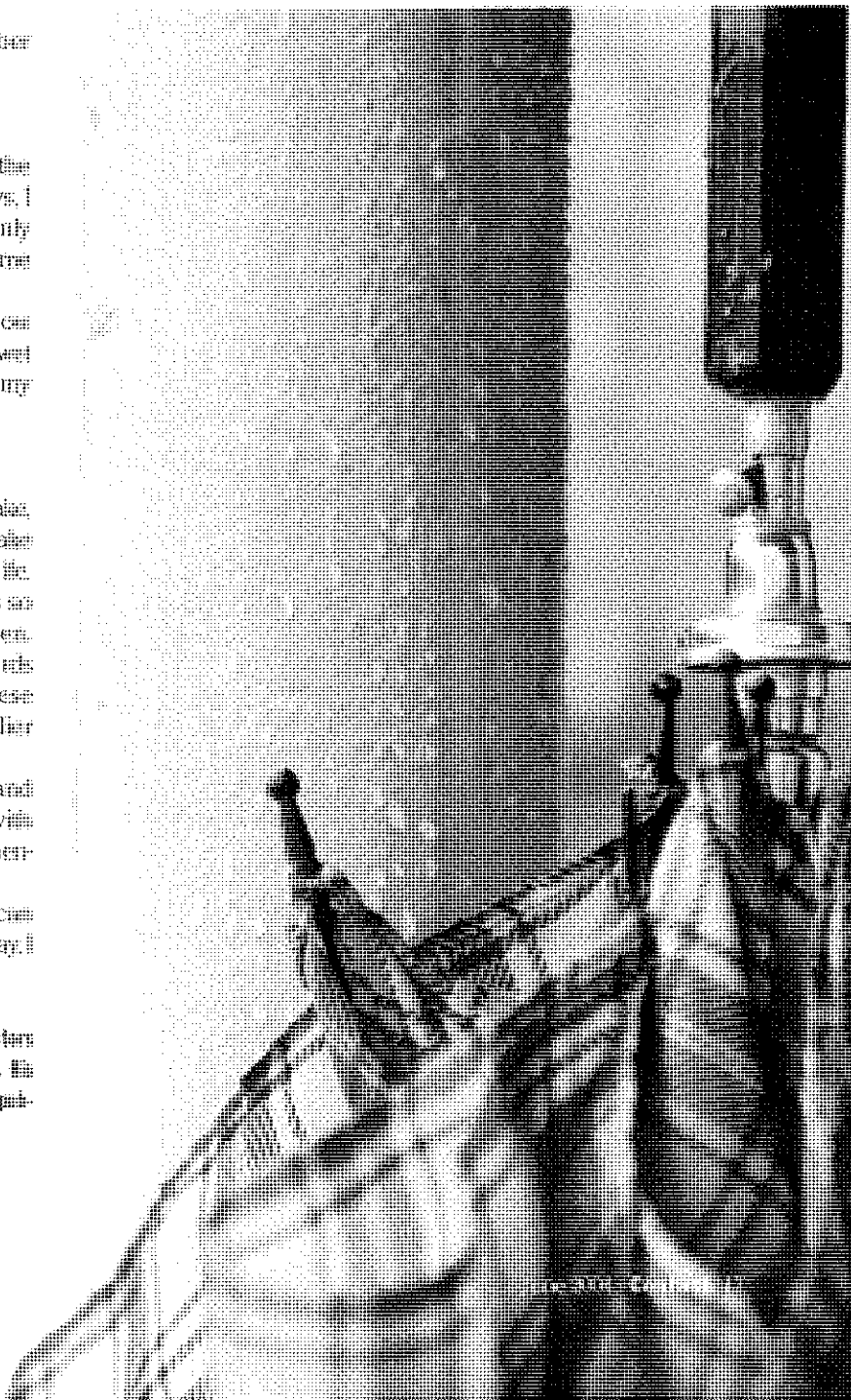
This morning, however, the lake is hardly moving. It is so peaceful, and there are more creatures than I have ever seen. Ducks are swimming next to the shore just in front of me. Birds are flying up on the plant ledges and looking in at me. Geese are flying over the water. Where were all these animals earlier in the week?

The storms of life have a way of reducing our lives to us and God. The earlier storm was reflective of my spirit as I dealt with past demons. The quiet, peaceful lake now mirrors the tremendous release God has given to me.

I can truly see His hand on my life and the healing He can bring. It is with great satisfaction and thanksgiving that I say, I used to hate rainy days! ■



About the Writer: Reverend Frank Gregory pastored First Free Will Baptist Church in Duncanville, Texas. His first book, *Aren't You Glad Jesus Asked?*, was published by Randall House Publications.



Snow Shortens South Carolina Meeting



GREENVILLE, SC—A snow-producing weather front creating hazardous driving conditions convinced leaders and delegates to condense the two-day South Carolina State Association into a one-day session.

Abbreviated reports by state and national agencies allowed delegates to handle essential business in record time.

Executive Secretary Mike Jones said the state's General Board met on Wednesday as scheduled and was prepared to present the condensed business format Thursday after the weather front moved in curtailing attendance.

The 62nd annual session met at First FWB Church in Greenville on February 26. Moderator Sherwood Lee was elected to his ninth

term behind the gavel. Some 125 people registered for the event, including 69 ministers, 24 lay delegates and 32 visitors.

Dr. David Gibbs with the Christian Law Association addressed the meeting twice, and fielded questions for 90 minutes.

Delegates adopted four resolutions. One resolution cited opposition to gay marriage and instructed the clerk to inform the president and congressmen.

A second resolution requested that Executive Secretary Mike Jones check into the possibility of arranging a state minister's retreat.

A vote changed the name of State Youth Camp Board to South Carolina Free Will Baptist Youth Ministries Board. This vote amended the state constitution.

The 2005 state association will meet February 24–25 and will be hosted by the Central Association.

BEYOND BELIEF



Scholarships Assist FWBBC Students

NASHVILLE, TN—Free Will Baptist Bible College lists nearly 90 scholarships, ranging from \$100 to \$6,000, in its 2004 catalog. Coupled with state and federal aid, they can bring the cost of a Christian education within the reach of nearly anyone.

Three premier scholarships are especially noteworthy:

Presidential Honors Scholarship: This is a \$6,000 per year award, given to up to four students per year. Students must have an ACT of 32 or higher and a high school grade point average of at least 3.75.

Dean's Honors Scholarship: As many as four students per year may receive this \$3,000 award. Candidates must have an ACT of 29 or higher and a high school grade point average of at least 3.50.

Legacy Scholarship: Children of all full-time senior pastors of Free Will Baptist churches are candidates for this annual award of \$2,500.

Other requirements may apply. For full information, contact:

Financial Aid Office
Free Will Baptist Bible College
3606 West End Avenue
Nashville, Tennessee 37205
Phone: 1-800-76-FWBBC
Email: fao@fwbbc.edu

Dotson Re-Elected VACH President

DUFFIELD, VA—Newl Dotson, executive director of Harvest Child Care Ministries, was re-elected for a second term as president of the Virginia Association of Children's Homes (VACH). The VACH is an organization of private non-profit agencies dedicated to serving children and families. The mission of the VACH is to promote a high quality of care to children, adolescents and families in need across Virginia through its member agencies.

This association provides a vehicle for interagency communication regarding chang-

ing needs, service gaps, funding and educational resources, new state and federal regulations and staff training information.

Under the direction of Mr. Dotson, the VACH has become proactive in legislative issues affecting residential child care agencies. He spearheaded the development of a child care worker certification program and worked diligently to improve the quality of training sessions offered by the association.

For more information, contact Newl Dotson at 276-523-2315 or by email at newl@harvestccm.org.



Texas Church Logs 30 Years

HOUSTON, TX—Members of Eastside FWB Church in Houston came together on a blustery, rainy Sunday in March to celebrate 30 years of service to the community. The March 14 anniversary event included guest musicians, guest speaker, dinner on the grounds and a look back at their beginnings.

Pastor Brian Hurst led the festive occasion, welcoming members and former members to the all-day activities.

"Legacy of Praise," a men's quartet that began 14 years ago in Arkansas and now works out of Nashville, Tennessee, provided music in the morning service. The quartet presented a rousing concert Sunday afternoon after attendees had been served lunch at the church.

Contact editor Jack Williams preached the anniversary message.

Eastside FWB Church grew out of a February 7, 1974, meeting when 14 people met at the home of Bill Ferguson with the

goal of starting a Free Will Baptist church in east Houston. The group called Reverend Tom Hunt as first pastor. The church organized September 21, 1975.

Church historian Ruth Jennische has kept meticulous records of each service for 30 years. Ten volumes of her pictorial and written history were on display in the church's conference room on anniversary day. They provide one of the most complete histories of any Free Will Baptist church.

Eleven men have served as pastor/interim pastor since the 1974 beginning. Current pastor Brian Hurst began his duties in December 2002.

The church occupies an 11-acre site in one of Houston's fastest growing suburbs. The missions-minded congregation shares their building with a Spanish-speaking group.

The church's Master's Men is one of Texas' leading chapters.

Canada Establishes Promotional Office

NEW BRUNSWICK, CANADA—The Atlantic-Canada Association voted to establish a promotional office with the goal of pushing local and national Free Will Baptist causes among the churches. Clerk Jeff Crabtree said the created position will begin as a volunteer effort.

Moderator Fred Hanson, who also pastors Plaster Rock FWB Church, was named promotional director. Some funds will be allocated to help cover expenses incurred in the promotional outreach.

The annual meeting gathered at Bristol FWB Church on January 17. National Associa-

tion executive secretary Keith Burden served as guest speaker.

Delegates adopted a \$108,000 budget for the year. Clerk Jeff Crabtree confirmed that 14 lay delegates and seven ministers registered for the meeting.

The 2005 meeting is set for January 22-23 at a site to be determined. ■

Alabama: Members of **Red Bay FWB Church** in **Red Bay** began construction of a new sanctuary in February. Pastor **Barry Raper** said the project would take several months to complete.

Arkansas: Pastor **Will Harmon** welcomed eight new members at **Cavanaugh FWB Church** in **Fort Smith**. The church projects a \$1.3 million budget this year.

The 10th annual "College Day" at **First FWB Church** in **Walnut Ridge** resulted in a \$3,500 gift for Free Will Baptist Bible College. **Steve Trail** pastors.

The 24 churches in Arkansas' **Social Band Association** sent 560 Bibles to Mexico with Seminary of the Cross president **Thomas Marberry**. The idea to send the Bibles came after a group of short-term missionaries from Walnut Ridge (First FWB Church) went to Mexico and noticed several people reading from one Bible.

California: The state **Men's Retreat** broke attendance records in February when 188 men attended the session at Silver Spur Christian Camp. Keynote speaker was Tennessee pastor **Cliff Donoho**.

Attendance at **Wasco FWB Church** in **Wasco** surged this past year with the congregation averaging 188 per service. Pastor **Danny Scott** says the church operates a 45-passenger bus with plans to expand that outreach. The church also operates a Christian school with 57 students, a Spanish ministry, food and clothing ministries, several prison ministries and various youth programs. Between 50 and 80 people participate in weekly visitation to knock doors.

Georgia: **Bethlehem FWB Church** in **Cordele** dedicated a new sanctuary last fall. Pastor **Emory Howell** said the church purchased two acres adjacent to the old sanctuary in early 2003. The congregation did most of the work themselves.

Michigan: Pastor **John Vick** led dedication services for the remodeled facilities at **First FWB Church** in **Comstock**. Reverend Vick started the church in 1966, pastored it 26 years, then returned to pastor again in 1995.

Need directions to a Free Will Baptist church in Michigan? **Rudy Taylor** has a book of maps to every church. The cost is \$13 (postage included). Order from 5643 Rowley Drive, Waterford, MI 48329-3246.

North Carolina: The fellowship/educational building at **First FWB Church** in **Hamlet** was dedicated in honor of former pastor **Reddin (Buddy) Hill** who led the congregation 26 years. A plaque citing Hill's pastoral years hangs in the new building. **Tom Hill** pastors.

Ohio: Pastor **Brian Phillips** reports 24 new members this quarter at **Wyandotte FWB Church** in **Mansfield**.

Marysville FWB Church in **Marysville** began a 30-minute Sunday morning radio broadcast. Pastor **Jon Mountjoy** reports attendance on the rise and 15 new members.

Pastor **Mike Blanton** baptized converts five Sundays in a row at **Canaan Land FWB Church** in **Grove City**. The church added 19 new members.

Members of **Forest Valley FWB Church** in **Springfield** honored **Sam Spradlin** with a dinner for his 50 years as a Sunday School teacher. Another dinner honored Pastor **Herb Davis** who celebrated 50 years in the ministry.

A record 330 men attended the state **Men's Retreat**. **Gordon Sebastian** (North Carolina) and **Rick Cash** (Alabama) preached to attendees. Thirty-one men from **Canaan FWB Church** in **Creston** helped Pastor **Jim McComas** carry the attendance trophy home.

Oklahoma: Reverend **Lonnie Hall** died December 2, 2003, at age 91 after 55 years as a Free Will Baptist minister. Brother Hall pastored in Texas and Oklahoma for five decades until his health failed. He was a member at



Reverend Lonnie Hall

Blue Bell FWB Church in **Sapulpa**. Hall retired from Gulf Oil Company. He is survived by five children, 13 grandchildren, 21 great-grandchildren and two great-great-grandchildren.

South Carolina: Members of **Temple FWB Church** in **Darlington** broke ground February 22 for a new sanctuary. Pastor **Todd Parrish** said the church purchased 30 acres a year ago on which to build.

Northgate FWB Church in **Greer** dedicated their new church March 6. **Earl Hendrix**, (Inman) preached the dedication message. Pastor **Chad West** has led the congregation four years.

Took some doing, but members of **Sand Hill FWB Church** in **Coward** finally surprised Pastor **Sherwood Lee**. The pastor appreciation celebration featured testimonies, presentations and a focus on the key role the pastor's wife (**Vada Lee**) plays in the church outreach.

Texas: Pastor **Nick Stewart** reports 14 conversions, 10 baptisms and an attendance increase from 30 to 60 at **Lighthouse FWB Church** in **Victoria**. Their next project is to start a junior church.

Fellowship FWB Church in **Bryan** authorized \$10,000 for a new sign. **Bill Van Winkle** pastors. The church also gave the pastor a \$1,047 pastor appreciation gift.

Virginia: **Gateway Christian College** in **Virginia Beach** completed their first year of operations. Forty prospective students attended spring "Open House" activities. Three ministers preached during Bible Conference—**Paul McKissick**, **Glen Johnson** and **Joel Nason**. The school's first commencement was set for April 28. ■

Men of Priority

By Ken Akers, General Director

Why are we different? Why are some people light-skinned and others dark? Why do some have brown eyes and some blue? Why are some people athletic and others more studious? Why am I asking these questions? I have wondered why there is such a variety of people and opinions. There are many reasons why people are how they are.

But what would the world be like if we were all the same? I'm glad everyone doesn't look like me, and others are glad of that also. I'm also glad everyone doesn't think like me. During Sunday School class, we have discussions. Issues are brought up that I never would have considered. It helps me get a better understanding of God's Word when someone has a different thought that makes me see things from a different perspective.

By this time, you may be wondering where I am going with this. We spend too much effort trying to make people see things the same way we do. We get so involved in telling people what is right that we don't spend enough time trying to get people right with God. Of the five purposes that Master's Men covers, the most important is soul-winning. As important as it is to have fellowship, discipleship, stewardship and edification, we need to be soul-winning.

While there is no question we need to have standards, personal convictions are not always biblical standards. Paul says in I Corinthians 9: 19, "For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more." He continues and gives examples of different people groups. And then in the latter part of verse 22, he says, "... I am

made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some."

When we spend time fussing over things that are not drawing men to Christ, we may be sinning. Proverbs 20:3 says, "It is an honour for a man to cease from strife: but every fool will be meddling." Sometimes we don't have to say anything. I have discovered that if people want my opinion, they will ask for it.

As Master's Men, we want our focus and main priority to be reaching the lost for Jesus. We, as a department, have many areas to include in what we do, but let's never forget the most important thing is to reach the lost. Let us never forget what Jesus said in Acts 1:8, "... and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." He never said *ye might be* or that *ye should be*, but that *ye shall be*.

Let's be men of priority so that we can say like Paul, "... that I might by all means save some." ■



Father's Day Offering

June 20, 2004



Master's Men
Free Will Baptist
Men's Ministry

5 Purposes of Master's Men

- Soul-winning
- Fellowship
- Discipleship
- Stewardship
- Edification

Free Will Baptist Ministry Focus

It's Worth Your Time

By Marjorie Workman, Executive Secretary-Treasurer

Soaring gas prices, increasing hotel rates and escalating food costs—all make for a costly convention. So why attend the Women Nationally Active for Christ Convention in Kansas City, Missouri, this July? Here are seven good reasons.

Worship

We gather from across the United States and around the world to join in worship. Our style of worship is as varied as the food we eat. But worship we do. At my first convention 39 years ago in Raleigh, NC, I had never seen so many Free Will Baptists in one place (3000 according to the records). I stood in awe as we sang together. I listened intently to powerful messages preached in a variety of styles.

Over time, some things have changed—words on a screen rather than a song sheet for one—but the crowd still gathers and lifts voice and heart in praise, adoration and worship. A good reason to trek to Kansas City.

Fellowship

When Free Will Baptists get together, it's like a family reunion. Everybody is hugging one another or shaking hands, depending on the personality mix. It's catch-up time on the family and what's been going on since you last saw each other. If you're a first-timer, you may find yourself talking to strangers while standing in lines or in restaurants, but these strangers quickly become friends that you will look forward to seeing at next year's convention.

You run into people you haven't seen in years—a former pastor, a missionary or a family who moved from your church. Yes, there's a bond that runs deep in Free Will Baptist blood that binds us together—we're a family. It's family reunion time in Kansas City.

Vacation

Location, location, location is a term used often by real estate advertisers. Let the Free Will Baptist convention planners take the stress off your family vacation planning by picking your spot. Put extra dollars in your pocket by combining business and vacation into one. Gasoline savings alone could pay for an extra night's lodging. Check out why Kansas City has "a flavor all its own!"

Shopping

Blending business and shopping is a winning combination for any convention.

Opportunities abound for collecting information and goods. Gather the total WNAC picture from seminars and reports. Browse the exhibit hall to purchase books, supplies, clothing, jewelry, souvenirs and WNAC's cookbook, *The Fruit of Our Hands*. Pick up a set of missionary prayer cards or college application form. Shop 'til you drop in Kansas City.

Business

Business meetings may not be your forte, but they are important. They are the source for accountability, the means for choosing leaders, the platform for charting the future. Let your voice be heard. Go online and register as a delegate. Counting on you in Kansas City.

Missions

Do you want a world vision? Our personal contacts with those who are involved in cross-cultural, worldwide ministries will impact our own vision. Learn what God is doing globally to build His church.

Attend the WNAC missions service and luncheon Tuesday to hear Ruth and Don McDonald and Lynette Miley. Take in the missions rally Monday afternoon following WNAC's seminar "HGTV—WNAC Style." Mix and mingle with missionaries throughout the conference in the exhibit hall, before and after services, and in the restaurants. Meet your missionaries in Kansas City.

Service

The convention offers an opportunity to fulfill one facet of WNAC's purpose—service. For the second time, Women Nationally Active for Christ is partnering with NYC in *Reach That Guy* activities. Two specific time slots are available for women. *Women Active in Kansas City* will take you into the inner city to serve in a community project. Also, you will be able to give life by donating blood through NYC's blood drive. Leave your heart and blood in Kansas City. ■



WOMEN
NATIONALLY
ACTIVE FOR
CHRIST

Free Will Baptist Ministry Focus

Things to do at the WNAC Convention

- Worship with thousands of brothers and sisters in Christ
- Look up old friends
- Stay informed at business meetings
- Browse the exhibit hall
- Volunteer at Women Active in Kansas City
- Donate Blood through NYC's blood drive



Getting Started

By D. Ray Lewis, Associate Director



RETIREMENT
AND
INSURANCE

Free Will Baptist Ministry Focus

Keys to preparing for retirement

- Start early
- Don't treat your retirement plan as a regular savings account
- If you are employed by a FWB church, school or agency, participate in the Board of Retirement's 403(b) retirement program

Retirement may seem a long way off, but it is never too early to start saving for what could well be the best time of your life. One of the keys to preparing financially for your retirement years is to start early. The earlier in your working life you begin to think, plan and prepare for retirement, the more likely you will be to meet your retirement goals. Put time on your side.

Many experts recommend that planning begin as early as age 25 or 30, while you're still young enough to reap big benefits from years of compound interest. Make retirement saving a high priority. Devise a plan, stick to it and set goals for yourself.

Planning for retirement always involves uncertainty, because we can't predict the future. We can, however, take steps toward financial security and remove some uncertainty if we have a solid retirement plan in place.

Expensive to Wait

Retirement can be expensive. Experts estimate that you'll need about 70% of your pre-retirement income to maintain your standard of living when you stop working. Even though you may receive Social Security benefits when you retire, those alone may not allow the level of living you would like in retirement.

Social Security pays the average retiree about 40% of pre-retirement earnings. Where will you get the other 30%?

You can't retire with financial security unless you really prepare for it. That means facing up to reality and beginning to take action for tomorrow as well as today. Putting away money for retirement is like giving yourself a raise. It's money that gives you freedom when you want it—and deserve it.

Establish the Habit

Employees of our Free Will Baptist churches, schools and agencies have the opportunity to participate in our own denominational 403(b) retirement program. For many this is one of the most effective methods of saving for a financially healthy retirement. A person can get started in this plan for as little as \$10 per month.

To get started on your retirement nest egg, develop the habit of setting aside money in your retirement

account every payday. The habit itself can be as important as the amount of money you put into the account at one time. The earlier in life you start saving, the easier it is to build a retirement nest egg—even if you can't afford big amounts at first.

Another key is, don't look at your retirement savings as a regular savings account. Remember these are funds you are setting aside for your financial independence during retirement. You should avoid dipping into these savings unless it is an emergency. Tax deferred funds withdrawn before age 59.5 are subject to a 10% penalty tax by the IRS. This may be waived under a few specific circumstances clearly spelled out by the IRS.

Four Sources

The Board of Retirement can receive deposits into your account from four different sources:

After-tax deposits. You are allowed to make unlimited after-tax contributions by personal check or money order.

Before-tax or **Salary Reduction** funds. You instruct your employer, by completing a *Salary Reduction Agreement*, to withhold these tax-deferred funds from your salary.

Employer funds. Your employer budgets a certain amount to contribute to your account as an employee benefit.

Rollover funds. This is the newest type of contributions that can be made to your account. We can now accept funds from IRA and 401k retirement plans.

As you change employers within the Free Will Baptist network, encourage your new church/employer to contribute to your existing account with the Board of Retirement.

Also, remember that it is never too late to start. Start saving now, whatever your age. Whatever you accumulate is more than you will have if you never get started. ■



A Catalyst for Change

By Neil Gilliland, Director of Member Care,
and James Forlines, General Director

"Events, even those such as the World Prayer Summit, do not bring about change in our lives. Events can only serve as a catalyst," Foreign Missions General Director James Forlines wrote in a summary of the Summit, **"but change comes when we alter our daily processes to conform more fully to His will."**

Free Will Baptist Foreign Missions hosted our first Prayer Summit. It was a time few present will forget, an event designed to be a catalyst for change.

The weekend provided an opportunity for concentrated prayer and challenge. "I basked in the time—an entire weekend—to devote to prayer without distractions or outside expectations," observed one attendee. Another exulted, "This was an unbelievable opportunity to learn so much about prayer and experience prayer in new ways! I was challenged to be a woman who not only *talks to God*, but *listens to Him*."

Yes, the focus was prayer. Mike and Deleen Cousineau, Doug Little, Eddie Payne and Glen Johnson provided informative and stimulating workshops on prayer. Mrs. Lorene Miley furnished a perspective of Paul's phrase "in the heavenlies" as used in Ephesians. Dr. LaVerne Miley presented thought-provoking messages on the Lord's Prayer and cited *10 Conditions for Effective Prayer*. Yet, each of these, though fresh and practical, would not have been as meaningful without the actual *pursuit of prayer*.

Prayer was practiced in various ways. A concert of prayer was held Friday evening. The powerful mix of prayer, song and introspection prepared the way for the rest of the weekend. On Saturday we were given opportunity to fast through lunch and spend time in personal prayer.

During Saturday evening's prayer time, small groups gathered around individual missionaries who were present. The missionary was interviewed by a Foreign Missions staff member and participants prayed for specific needs. The missionary then received requests from those around him and lifted those up.

A virtual prayer journey summoned viewers to study video footage from four neighborhoods where missionaries labor. As observers absorbed the sights and sounds of Tokyo, Japan; Uberlândia, Brazil; and Alpedrete and Villalba, Spain, they were encouraged to look for individuals for whom to pray and to be sensitive to God's direction concerning specific needs.

Many wept as God moved their hearts for lost people around the world.

When my wife Sheila and I were in Albertville, France, for language school, we developed a friendship with two single guys, Lynn and Tim, who loved Christ deeply. Several months after Sheila and I began our ministry at International Christian Academy in Bouaké, Côte d'Ivoire, we received a prayer letter from Tim. He had just returned from visiting a critically ill missionary colleague. From a sterile hospital bed Tim's ailing friend whispered, "Tim, the warriors have stopped praying."

As I read those words my heart seemed to stop. Many times in the 20 years since we received Tim's note my mind has repeated the phrase. "The warriors have stopped praying," has jolted my prayer life out of lethargy, apathy and numbness more than once.

Throughout the prayer summit weekend I often smiled softly and whispered to myself, "The warriors *are* praying." I listened to testimonies of participants and knew they had experienced meaningful prayer. A pastor indicated, "I desire for my congregation to be a people of prayer. For that to happen I must model it. This weekend gave me a chance to renew my personal commitment to prayer—free of distractions."

"I've been well reminded that I've taught my people to pray, but I haven't led my people to pray," another pastor stated. "Quite frankly, I came very discouraged, but I've been refreshed, re-focused and redirected."

Since the conclusion of the summit, we have received letters from several participants testifying to God's continuing work in them and their churches due to revitalized prayer lives. Suddenly, my soft words have become a near shout, "The warriors are *continuing* to pray!"

What about you? Have you stopped praying? Are there daily processes you need to alter? Why not begin now!

If you would like information about sponsoring a regional prayer summit in your area, contact Judy Lytle (877-767-7736 or judy@nafwb.org). ■



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Free Will Baptist Ministry Focus



Garnett Reid

Old Testament Covenants: Kingdom Blueprints

The Bible's Story-Line, Part V

Emarine Rawls and Robert

Bell—you don't know them, but I think of them with great fondness. Mrs. Rawls was my teacher in first and second grade. She patiently taught me my "ABCs" and how to use them in those beginning, mega-letter, kind of wobbly attempts to write—"See her run" and "Spot is my dog."

Now Dr. Bell—well, he's another story. Tenacious as Mrs. Rawls, he was my grad school professor who *also* helped me write. His assignments, though, weren't three-letter sentences written with fat pencils. Instead I had to write research papers, timed essay answers and eventually a 300+ page dissertation (which he promptly spangled with red ink and annoying comments).

Each of them, however, took a common thread—the English language—and wove it into what I needed at the time of my life I needed it. They nurtured me step-by-step in the process of learning. A dissertation was out of the question when I was six. And as for graduate research, well, "See Spot run" won't cut it at any universities I know. I grew from "Spot" to seminars, from fat pencils to faster word processors.

Contractor's Blueprint

The Lord follows just such a design in history through biblical revelation to reconcile us to Himself. Redemption's story unfolds in an orderly sequence beginning with Genesis leading to the Gospels and ending in Glory. God builds His kingdom according to an architect's blueprint of a great palace, not like an amateur carpenter's napkin sketch of rooms he plans to add here and there to his house.

Last month we noted that God's plan unfolds in history through a series of covenant

relationships He makes in the Old Testament with His people Israel. These covenants form the framework for the kingdom God is building.

Since the word "covenant" is not that common in our times, we need to get a handle on its significance in the biblical world. A covenant was a formal relationship between two parties. These partners promised certain things to each other in return for mutual loyalty.

Covenants between individuals and groups were common in the ancient world and often took the form of treaties. In our day, "contracts" assume the modern role of ancient "covenants." Marriage offers the best picture today of what a biblical covenant was like. Two people pledge their loyalty to one another in return for the benefits of sharing life as husband and wife.

Major Covenants of Redemption

Four similar "contracts" God makes with people in the Old Testament form the heart of His revealed plan to deliver them from sin and restore them to Himself.

Covenant with Abraham

In this first redemptive covenant, the Lord promises to bless Abraham with land and children. From those children will come blessing for the whole world (see Gen. 12:1–3; 15:1–21). The following three major covenants flow from this one.

Covenant with Israel through Moses

This covenant (often called "the Mosaic law") made at Sinai comes to a people who are already God's, and so does not involve a new way of beginning a relationship with Him. The law never saved

anyone (remember Gen. 15:6!). Instead, the Mosaic covenant reveals God's holy character, as summarized in the Ten Commandments. If the human parties of the covenant demonstrate heart loyalty to Him (Deut. 4:29; 6:5), then their lives will reflect His holiness (Lev. 19:2).

Since no one can live up to a standard of absolute holiness, this covenant provides object lessons of forgiveness through atonement (Lev. 17:11; on the entire covenant, see Ex. 19:5; 20:1–17; Lev. 26; and Deut.).

Covenant with David

The Davidic covenant helps define the kingdom God is building. Through David's descendants will come a King reigning forever in a rule of absolute peace and righteousness (see II Sam. 7:8–17; Ps. 72; 89:3–4; Isa. 9:6–7).

New Covenant

The pinnacle of God's covenant promises, the new covenant, includes: (1) a change in the nature of people so they will live righteously; (2) an immediate, direct knowledge of God; and (3) forgiveness of sin based on a perfect sacrifice. The blessing promised to Abraham for the whole world thus becomes reality. God reconciles sinful people to Himself and changes their will toward righteousness through the Son of David who suffers then reigns (see Jer. 31:31–34; 32:37–41; Ezek. 16:60–62; 34:23–31; 36:22–28; 37:24–28). ■

Next month: How the kingdom and covenant themes shape the Old Testament.



Sharon Rabon

Ministry—A Family Affair

The life I enjoy today started

when I was quite young. I was reared in a Christian home and chose to marry a preacher when I was 17 years old. On many occasions I have had the privilege to teach teen girls. I always tell them, "You make the biggest decisions of your life when you are too young to make them."

The decision I made to marry a preacher has led me to be the wife of a godly

man and a mother of three children. I am thankful for the decision that I made to follow the Lord's will many years ago.

In this article I would like to share with you a decision that my husband and I made over 20 years ago. We chose to make ministry a family affair. It is my desire to teach and train our children to love the ministry so that they are prepared to serve wherever the Lord may call them. Our children understand the ministry because they are actively involved, not sideline observers. I would like to offer to you suggestions for making ministry a family affair.

1. Entertain a Sunday School class in your home once a month. Include your whole family in cooking and cleaning responsibilities. Assign your children duties such as lighting the candles, entertaining the guests that are their ages, and overseeing small children. Many hands make for light work.
2. Include your children when entertaining evangelists and missionaries that are guests at your church. Allow them to feel a part of the conversation around the meal table.
3. Listen to suggestions that your children may offer concerning an event at the church. Their insight comes from a different angle and can be quite valuable.
4. Allow your children to be as normal as possible without breaking your high standards. Never tell your child that they cannot do something because of who their daddy is.
5. Have a close relationship with your spouse as well as your children. Communication is the key to a close rela-

tionship. Remember that rules without relationship equals rebellion, whether in the marital relationship or with your children.

6. Take your whole family on teen or church-wide activities when it is appropriate.
7. Pray for your children to do God's perfect will for their lives. Pray this in private as well as when your children hear you pray. Let them know that nothing would please you more than for them to serve the Lord in whatever field He may call.
8. Teach your children to hear the still small voice of God. They cannot hear God's voice if they are never still and never quiet.
9. Have family devotions on a daily basis. Remember that you are training even when you do not feel like it or plan to train. Your children and spouse know you best. Be the same at home as you are at church.
10. Be faithful in your own personal devotions.
11. Serve the Lord happily and with no restraints. The Bible says, in Psalm 100, "Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing."

I love the ministry and I have great peace and joy in knowing that our 20-year-old son and our 17-year-old son are called to preach, and our 14-year-old daughter believes the Lord would have her to be a missionary. I am thankful that my children were saved at a young age and have been active in the ministry throughout their lives. I challenge you to make ministry a family affair. You'll be glad you did! ■

Directory Update

Florida

Odus Whitehead to Blackwelder Church, Worthington Springs

Jeff Pettis to Marvin Chapel Church, Marianna

Douglas Whittle to Pleasant Ridge Church, Marianna

Byron Register to St. John's Church, Bonifay

Ohio

Rick Baker to Friendly Church, Columbus

Wayne Mays to Westside Church, Columbus from Friendly Church, Columbus

Don Kincaid to Faith Church, Logan from Fellowship Church, Jackson as assistant pastor

Jim Boring to Petrea Church, McArthur

Ron Henthorn to Pine Creek Church, Franklin Furnace

Brad Harris to Tick Ridge Church, Wheelersburg

Oklahoma

Larry Montgomery to First Church, Ada from Glennville Church, Glennville, GA

South Carolina

Ron Ogle to Happy Home Church, Andrews

Russell McCoy to North Spartanburg Church, Spartanburg



Randy Sawyer

A Hundred Days of Prayer and Praise

The solution came from one

of our staff members as we were in a heavy discussion about the next step in the development of our ministry. Darin Gibbs said, matter-of-factly, "I think we should pray." To that point each suggestion had dealt with initiating some new program, construction of an additional facility or creation of another staff position.

Then suddenly, unexpectedly and with little warning, we were confronted with a spiritual remedy. Prayer? Why does that always seem to be our last resort? We set to work organizing a prayer revival for our church. Eventually, the discussion evolved into *A Hundred Days of Prayer and Praise*.

The goal of the *prayer revival* was to call the entire church into a season of prayer. The program outlined included a Saturday evening prayer vigil during which we would introduce the need for the prayer emphasis, the transformation of our Wednesday evening service (for eight weeks) into an old-fashioned prayer meeting, and the preparation of a devotional guide to challenge the congregation to engage daily in the spiritual disciplines of prayer and praise.

Seeking Him

We didn't know what to expect as we arrived for the Saturday evening prayer vigil. I preached a message the previous Sunday on Christ's Gethsemane experience and challenged members to *watch with us one hour* the next Saturday night. To our amazement nearly 200 people came to pray, and from the beginning there seemed to be an overwhelming desire to connect with Heaven.

Using an acrostic for the word *ACTS*, I led the congregation in a time of *adoration, confession, thanksgiving* and *supplication*. As we worked our way through

each letter, I challenged them to share openly and honestly their inmost thoughts and deepest needs. The testimonies were powerfully expressed and the confessions moving.

A collective groan filled the sanctuary as we knelt to pour out our hearts to the Lord. I did my best to keep to the promise of *watching one hour*, but folks lingered at the altar long afterward. I quietly slipped out believing something significant had occurred during prayer meeting.

Finding Him

The next morning I met briefly with the *Pastor's Prayer Partners*, then grabbed my Bible and shook a few hands before going into the service. The worship choruses and hymns rang with vibrancy and passion, and an air of expectancy filled the sanctuary.

Then it happened. While the choir sang the first of two scheduled anthems, a young father made his way to the altar. Some men surrounded him and their praying and sobbing mingled with the voices of the choir as an offering of worship to the Lord. Before that season of prayer ended, a lady nearly ran forward and fell across the altar, followed by another and another and then another.

Instead of following the pre-set agenda, I lingered, sensing that this day would not be like others. When everyone was in their places, and before I could offer words of explanation, a man in the back asked if he could say a word. He expressed one of the most heart-felt confessions I ever witnessed. He turned to his daughter and confessed he had failed as a father, as a Christian leader and as a man. With great sobs he begged her forgiveness and then moved from his pew to embrace her.

While they held each other, a lady stood for confession, followed by another who

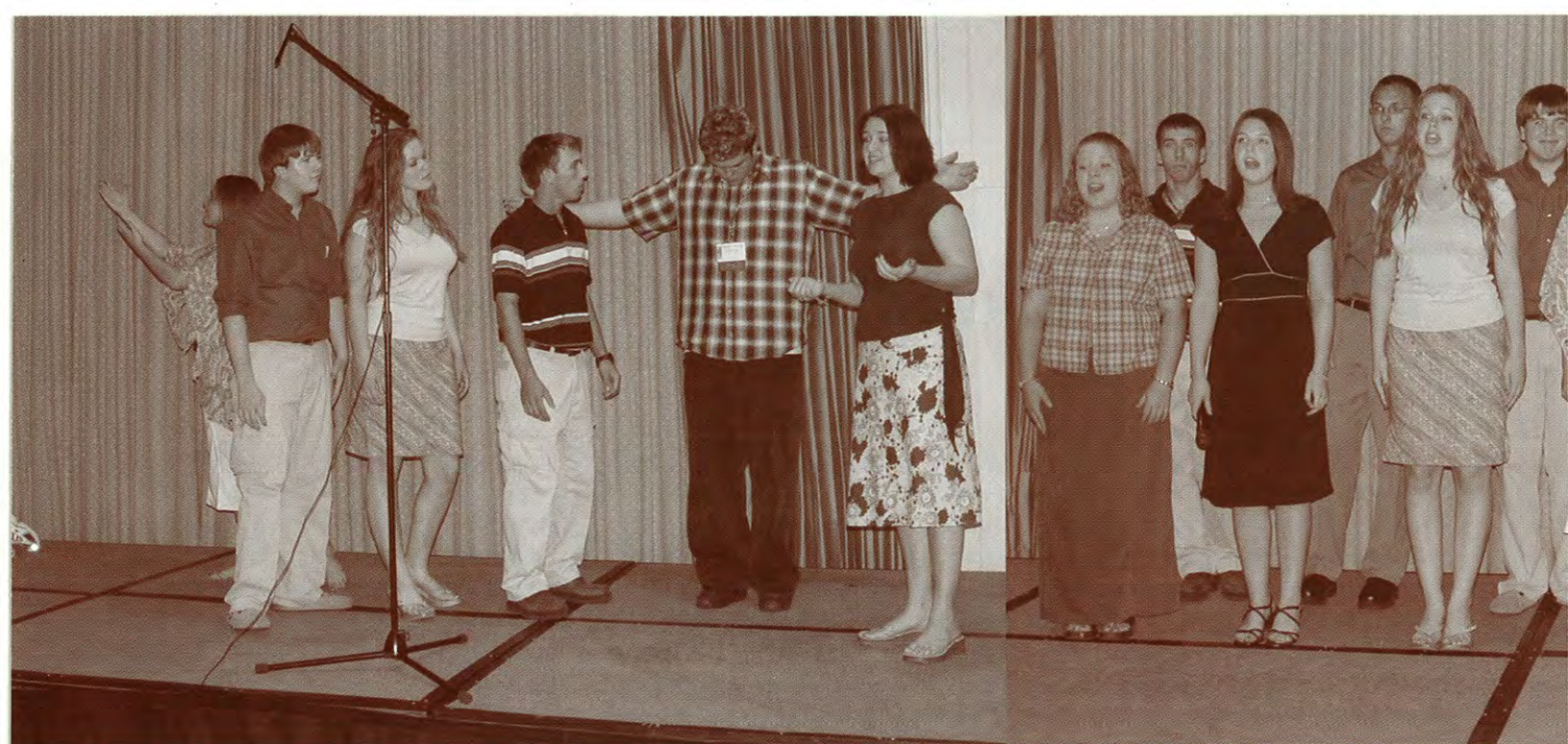
offered a prayer request, then others. Time seemed to stand still. We wept and waited and worshipped. When it was time for the congregation to be dismissed to Bible study classes, I didn't feel we should hinder what God was doing. I sent ushers throughout the building inviting those arriving for Sunday School and the second service to join us in the sanctuary.

Everyone scooted closer and the room was filled to overflowing. Those just joining for the service sensed that something powerful was happening. And so it continued through the Sunday School hour into the second worship time, and long past 12:00 p.m. The service that began at 9:00 that morning didn't conclude until early afternoon. At one point the presence of the Spirit seemed so real and so daunting that I felt compelled to encourage the folks not to fear.

Continuing to Seek

Clearly, the *Hundred Days* began with an explosion. The next three months would be filled with similar moments during which we celebrated the answer to many prayers, the salvation of souls and the movement of God in almost every life. We are left now wondering why, in His marvelous sovereignty, the Lord chooses to bless His people with such a visitation?

An equally relevant question would be, why He doesn't choose to do so more frequently? The answer to that one seems clearer. He withholds Himself at times to keep us hungering for more and to make sure that when He does make Himself known, we are able to evaluate such a moment as extraordinary. Believe me, it was, and I am left praying, please Lord, do it again! ■



NYET

By Dean Jones, NYC Director

In Russian, it's *no*, but in FWBeese, it's the National Youth Evangelistic Team (NYET). What began as an idea in the mind of Jim Lauthern, founder and former director of Student and Children Ministries, has been a reality for 20 years. With humble beginnings as a local

concept that placed Nashville students on a team to hone and utilize their talents for ministry, NYET continues today as a national ministry and as a local ministry.

Each summer 12 high-school students are selected from the pool of eligible competitors. The selections are based on scores and categories. The students meet the following summer to prepare a 60-minute musical drama program. The concept allows the students to steer their talents which they have used for competition toward ministry. The team then embarks on a 10-day tour to present their program in local churches and camps across the country.

Over the years, former NYET members have been challenged to pursue full-time ministry and to use their talents for the Lord. Today, NYET alumni include pastors, missionaries, moms and dads, business men and women and other faithful Christian workers.

This year's team members are:

Rebecca Brown	Georgia
Teddie Collier	Missouri
Casey Deel	Tennessee
Lauren Helms	Michigan
Derek Lewis	Illinois
Jared McNeal	Florida
Timothy McNeal	Florida

Ashley Ridgway	Oklahoma
Nick Skaggs	Kentucky
Matthew Slomp	Tennessee
Lyndsey Stripling	Arkansas
Byron Trimble	Michigan

Please pray for these students as they develop their program, blend their lives together and travel through the Midwest on their tour this month. If they're near you, make plans to bring your students to one of their presentations—you won't be disappointed. For more information, visit www.randallhouse.com or call 1-800-877-7030.

Photos: 2003 NYET



idea

Since the NYET developed as a local concept, it's an idea that may work for you. Many churches have developed traveling evangelistic teams. Scout the talent in your own youth group or association. Select students who may have an interest in developing a program that could be presented locally. The program could consist of music, drama, puppetry, art or any combination of these.

Consider presenting your program at:

- Youth Camps**
- Youth Retreats**
- Youth Rallies**
- Nursing Homes**
- Shopping Malls**
- Hospitals**
- Vacation Bible Schools**
- Your own local church**

This concept will allow your students to utilize their talents for ministry and have an impact in helping to evangelize their world. ■

the Together Way

March 2004

Receipts:			Year To Date	Year To Date	Year To Date
State	Designated	CO-OP	Designated	CO-OP	Total
Alabama	\$ 543	\$ 321	\$ 1,362	\$ 620	\$ 1,982
Arizona	0	96	0	139	139
Arkansas	11,276	15,722	33,071	52,392	85,462
California	66	1,051	2,301	3,422	5,723
Colorado	0	0	0	0	0
Delaware	0	0	0	0	0
Florida	122	0	245	2,768	3,013
Georgia	30,970	1,416	102,208	4,890	107,098
Hawaii	0	0	0	0	0
Idaho	0	0	0	0	0
Illinois	13,551	1,982	35,975	6,257	42,232
Indiana	1,876	150	5,297	1,145	6,442
Iowa	0	0	0	0	0
Kansas	0	279	0	380	380
Kentucky	775	455	940	1,883	2,823
Louisiana	0	0	0	0	0
Maryland	0	0	0	0	0
Michigan	21,417	2,315	62,125	8,270	70,396
Mississippi	24,425	1,299	33,394	2,098	35,493
Missouri	37,748	21,060	166,676	53,287	219,963
Montana	0	0	0	0	0
Nebraska	0	0	0	0	0
New Jersey	0	0	0	0	0
New Mexico	1,219	74	1,293	97	1,781
North Carolina	283	3,433	3,716	17,117	20,561
Ohio	16,244	4,514	44,114	10,955	55,069
Oklahoma	51,719	10,839	176,390	34,463	210,854
South Carolina	50,005	334	118,621	421	119,042
South Dakota	0	0	0	0	0
Tennessee	24,141	1,533	48,822	5,525	54,347
Texas	19,904	377	20,281	1,163	37,999
Virginia	66	196	238	196	434
Virgin Islands	0	0	0	0	0
West Virginia	670	107	1,542	336	1,877
Wisconsin	0	0	0	0	0
Canada	1,114	20	1,135	50	3,107
Northwest Assoc.	0	0	0	0	0
Northeast Assoc.	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	\$ 308,131	\$ 67,574	\$375,705	\$207,873	\$ 1,086,216

Disbursements:					
Executive Office	\$ 2,198	30,408	\$ 32,607	\$ 4,786	\$ 93,543
Foreign Missions	188,650	8,548	197,198	543,709	26,296
FWBBC	25,782	8,548	34,330	75,282	26,296
Home Missions	82,218	6,690	88,908	225,576	20,579
Retirement & Insurance	349	5,203	5,552	1,125	16,006
Master's Men	1,541	5,203	6,744	2,346	16,006
Commission for Theo. Integrity	53	186	238	149	572
FWB Foundation	204	2,230	2,434	621	6,860
Historical Commission	53	186	238	149	572
Music Commission	73	186	259	223	572
Media Commission	108	186	294	328	572
Hillsdale FWB College	2,699	0	2,699	6,783	0
Other	4,203	0	4,203	17,267	0
Totals	\$ 308,131	\$ 67,574	\$375,705	\$878,343	\$207,873



Thomas Marberry

Learning Theology with the Church Fathers

By Christopher A. Hall (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002, 308 pp., paperback, \$17.95)

Christopher Hall is associate

professor of biblical and theological studies at Eastern University. He is a specialist in the beliefs and practices of early Christian communities.

This is the second of a three-volume work examining different facets of the beliefs and practices of the early church. The first volume dealt with how the early Christian fathers interpreted the scriptures. This volume is an introduction to important early Christian beliefs concerning the authority of scripture, the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Holy Spirit, the Providence of God and other important topics.

The early church holds a special fascination for believers. Many basic beliefs of the Christian faith were clarified in discussions, debates and church councils during the first five centuries. During this period the church confronted and rejected many heretical beliefs that are surprisingly similar to teachings of contemporary sects and cults. The faithfulness of these early believers in the face of external persecution and internal conflict inspires us today.

There are several reasons why contemporary Christians should study this period. What we are today is often the result of what happened centuries ago. An understanding of the early period in Christian history gives us a sense of depth and perspective. The sad fact is few modern believers have an understanding of this important period in the history of our faith.

The divinity of Jesus Christ was an often-debated and controversial issue in the early church. Arius, a popular and important Christian pastor in Alexandria in the fourth century, argued that God the Father could not share His divine nature with anyone. On the surface, such

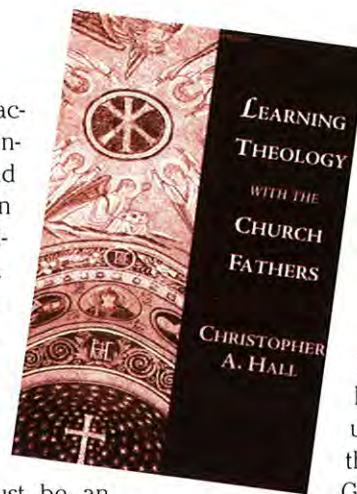
a teaching seemed attractive and correct. It maintained the oneness and uniqueness of God in opposition to the multiple gods of the pagans.

It was, however, a false and dangerous teaching. If God could not share His divine nature, then Jesus Christ could not be fully divine. Christ must be an inferior deity created by the Father. Arius wrote that the Son was "neither eternal nor co-eternal nor co-unbegotten with the Father, nor does he have his being together with the Father." Arius was an eloquent defender of this teaching, and thousands of Christians adopted his viewpoint. In spite of its widespread popularity, the early church rightly recognized the heretical nature of Arius' teaching and condemned it at church councils in 325 and 381.

Irenaeus, Augustine and other early Christian writers debated the issue of salvation in several different contexts. The most famous, and probably the most important of these debates, took place between a North African theologian named Augustine and a British layman named Pelagius in the fifth century.

Pelagius visited Rome and was not impressed by the form of Christianity he found there. Many Roman believers did not take seriously their commitment to Jesus Christ; they lived in moral laxity with little concern for the poor in society. Pelagius had just cause for questioning the sincerity of such believers.

Pelagius argued that Christians could not excuse their conduct by blaming it on some defect in human nature itself. Christians must accept responsibility for



their actions and make necessary changes in their lives. Pelagius argued that God had given man freedom, and would help man obey his commandments. He argued that God had given certain innate abilities to mankind, and that each individual could choose to use these innate abilities in God's service or not to use

them in God's service. Pelagius' optimistic analysis of human nature was impressive and attracted a wide following.

Augustine was quick to point out, however, that man is not morally neutral as Pelagius maintained. Our author writes, "Augustine argues that Adam and Eve had originally possessed a will free from sin's infection, but since the entrance of sin into the world through humanity's original disobedience, all descendants of Adam and Eve have inherited a crippled, distorted, bent will. We know the right, affirm the right, but desire or will to do the very thing we know to be wrong." This is the fatal flaw in the teaching of Pelagius that caused it to be rejected by the early church.

The information that Hall presents in this volume is not new. The writings of early Christian theologians and preachers have been known for centuries. The advantage of this volume is that it brings together important information from a variety of sources and presents it in an attractive and readable format. Hall helps us understand theological terms and concepts that are complex and difficult. ■



Jack Williams

At Least You're Honest

Blame it on Loretta Lynn. She

was belting out "You Ain't Woman Enough to Take My Man" when the light turned yellow. I admit to concentrating more on Loretta than the traffic signal and got caught in one of those betwixt and between moments.

But a nice officer waiting at the intersection had his eye on me. While he didn't know how good Loretta sounded at 4:20 a.m. Wednesday morning, he did have a front row seat when the light turned extremely yellow. I was on my way to Vanderbilt Holiday Inn to pick up a friend catching an early flight to Atlanta.

Two hundred yards later, one of Nashville's finest cruised alongside me with blue lights flashing. We stopped. He rolled down his window. Me too.

The officer leaned toward me and said in a disgusted voice, "You know and I know that you ran that red light."

Feeling guilty and offering no excuse, since there was none other than Loretta Lynn, I replied with the only three words that seemed to fit the crime: "I did it!"

The officer said, "Well, at least you're honest." I wish he had left it at that.

He continued, "Do you think you can be more careful next time?"

"Count on it," says I.

Then the officer asked the one question I hoped he would not. "What do you do for a living?"

For a brief moment, I wanted to say *I'm a meeting planner* (which I am). Or *I'm an editor* (which I am). But neither seemed quite honest enough in light of the conversation.

Taking a deep breath, I grinned bravely and said, "You're not gonna believe it. I'm a preacher."

He shook his head, then asked, "Reverend, will you *please* preach safety?"

"Yes, Sir!" I replied. He waved and drove on down West End Avenue.

When I walked into the Holiday Inn lobby, a lady at the front desk pointed me toward a hot cup of coffee as I contemplated the evils of running red lights and waited for Joe McKnight to come down from room 1118.

I confessed to Joe on the way out of the parking lot. To his credit, after hearing that he was riding with a fugitive from traffic court, he didn't make me stop the car and call him a cab. He did, however, indicate that he too had encountered an occasional pink light, and knew how it felt to get caught between can't-stop and you-ran-a-red-light.

The part that hurt most is I pride myself on being a careful driver—never cutting people off, no road rage, no unseemly hand gestures, never tailgating, never (well, almost never) crowding traffic lights. That hurt . . . plus the look in that policeman's eye when he pulled alongside me.

The last thing I wanted to do was disappoint a police officer. I'm the kind that wants to salute whenever a patrol car passes and cheer when the men in blue nab a bad guy. I think we ought to double their salaries and call them heroes.

It's downright embarrassing to think that one of those young men standing between my family and criminals has reason to be disappointed in me. Besides, my brother has been a police officer 40 years. He usually gets a copy of *Contact* in the mail each month. I hope he's too busy to read this issue.

To all my friends on police forces across America, "I'm sorry, men. I apologize. I was wrong to get distracted, even with Loretta Lynn. One of your fellow officers let me slide just before shift change. I promise to do better." There, now why don't I feel exonerated?

Please understand, I've been driving 45 years and only been issued two citations. In the early 1970s, I was caught in a speed

trap coming down a long hill on I-40 outside Williams, Arizona. That one left a bad taste, but I paid the fine without complaint.

Back in 1967 when I moved to New Orleans to attend seminary, my Tennessee car tags expired and I had no money to get new ones. Until an officer invited me to the Plaquemines Parish court house to discuss it with a hard-eyed judge, that is.

Ask my children. They'll tell you. Ask my wife. She knows. I'm a law-abiding, careful-driving citizen with an American flag hanging on the front door on my house. But in spite of all those years without transgressing the law, I was led astray before dawn last Wednesday because Loretta Lynn was having marriage problems.

Paul's warning about the law echoes in my mind, "... if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain" (Romans 13:4).

I'm leaving in 10 minutes to catch a plane to Texas. So help me, if Loretta Lynn has man trouble again on the way to the airport, I'm staying out of it, because I'm an honest man. Guilty, but honest. ■



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