

DECEMBER 1994

CONTACT

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
FREE WILL BAPTISTS

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**Christmas
Without Credit**
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End on a Grace Note
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Reverse Blessings
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Shopping Tips
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**Wise Men Still
Seek Him**



INSIDE

DECEMBER 1994

VOLUME 41, NO. 12

ARTICLES

- 4 Ending on a Grace Note**
Three positive ways to end 1994.
- 5 The Expression of God**
- 6 Christmas Without Credit**
If charge cards are wrecking your budget, this practical analysis will point you toward a healthy financial future.
- 8 Wise Men Still Seek Him**
The story of the magi has some amazing applications for today.
- 10 Reverse Blessings**
When bad things turn out good, God must be in it.
- 12 Spiritual Shopping Tips**
Thirteen ways to shop smarter and live smarter.
- 13 Orphan**
An allegory that will brighten the Christmas season.
- 14 Of Comics and Kids**
Kids still read comic books, but today's comic heroes need help.
- 26 Index**

COLUMNS

- 3 The Secretary Speaks**
Looking at the Lamb
- 20 The Department Pages**
- 24 Youth Update**
- 25 Top Shelf**
- 31 Briefcase**
Pixie Dust and Purple Dinosaurs

NEWS

- 17 Free Will Baptist Newsfront**
Leadership Conference
Tulsa Meeting
Georgia Church Turns 100
CCC Students
WNAC Retreat
- 19 Currently**

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THE SECRETARY SPEAKS

Looking at the Lamb

The Christmas season offers an opportunity for Christians to remember and reaffirm the wonderful story of God's great salvation. This is a special time when even the unsaved world pauses to acknowledge the historical event which Christmas embraces.

His Preexistence

Jesus' birth in Bethlehem was not the beginning of His existence. John 1:1-2 declares, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God." Philippians 2 and Colossians 1 also confirm the preexistence of Christ.

His Presentation

John the Baptist identified Jesus as God's Lamb when he said, "... Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me; for he was before me" (John 1:29-30).

Having been pictured in type in the Old Testament, Jesus is presented in the fullness of time in the New Testament. The Word became flesh and tabernacled with men. John declares, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us..." (John 1:14).

The four Gospel writers give a remarkable account of the words, works and wonders of the Lord Jesus Christ.

His Passion

Jesus Christ came into this world to die for the sins of the human race. Paul reminds us, "And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:9).

Ephesians 1 and Colossians 1 declare that we have redemption and

forgiveness of sins through His blood. The writer of Hebrews declares that Christ, through His death on the cross, with one sacrifice purchased eternal redemption. Christ appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

God made Him to be sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Christmas has not been celebrated properly if we are not reminded that Christ was born to die for the sins of the depraved human race.

His Power

Christ's resurrection and ascension indicate that He was God. His resurrection affirms and assures Christians that He lives.

Paul reminds us of the power of the resurrected Lord when he says, "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in the earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11).

The book of Revelation addresses the power of Christ when it pictures Him as the Lamb, the Lion, the Light and the Lord. Reading Revelation will give a different focus to the Christian's Christmas celebration. Rather than seeing Jesus as the sacrificial Lamb purchasing redemption for sinners, we see Him as sovereign Lord preparing to bring retribution on sinners.

His Promise

During the Christmas season, we

The Secretary's Schedule

December 5-6 FWB Leadership Conference

December 7-8 Executive Committee Meeting



Melvin Worthington

should remember that in spite of the turbulent times, we have His promise that one day He will return and receive us unto Himself. All wrongs will be made right. The promised return of Christ is a comforting and compelling hope for Christians.

His Presence

Jesus promised that He would be with us always, that He would come and take up His abode in our hearts. We rejoice in God's presence in us through the person of the Holy Spirit. He has promised that He will never leave us nor forsake us. God is always faithful to His promises. His Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.

His Program

Christ's agenda has never been altered nor amended. He is building His Church, and the gates of Hell will not prevail against that Church. The Church has been charged with the responsibility to evangelize all nations. Regardless of other things the Church might get involved in, Christ's agenda is still the same—Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

His Personnel

Christians are the instruments God uses to get the gospel to every creature. As ambassadors, servants, witnesses, salt and light, we proclaim the good news of the gospel.

Christmas is our opportunity to tell the truth about the Triune God who became a man in order to purchase redemption for all human beings. May we seize this significant season to share the story of a Savior who can save sinners and a Sovereign who can satisfy, sustain, supply and strengthen the saints. ■

Ending on a Grace Note

By Keith Burden

I am not a trained musician. It is, however, my understanding that a musical piece does not end on a "grace note." Actually, a grace note is an ornamentation or embellishment played or sung before the beat. For the musician, a grace note is used to aid in expression. It is a means of making a good musical piece better.

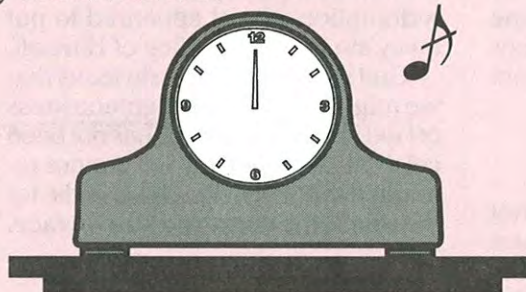
And so it is with our lives. We are not simply concerned about the final outcome. We need more than "the ends justify the means" mentality. For the conscientious Christian, the "means" is just as important as the "end." In some cases, it is even more important.

Far too many of us approach the end of the calendar year with a sense of exhaustion and frustration rather than a feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment. How do we end the year gracefully?

As with the musical grace note which is played before the beat, so we must get a jump on the new year by taking charge of our lives. I am not talking about making more hollow New Year's resolutions. Rather, by the grace of God, taking positive action instead of spending all our time reacting. What are some areas of our life that need embellishment?

Get Out of Debt

First, from a practical standpoint, many of us need to concentrate on getting out of debt financially and into shape physically. This is "no man's land" in the life of the average Christian. The attitude of most is, "It is none of your business what I do with my money or my body!"



Perhaps that is true, but if it is your business, I feel compelled to ask, "Are you taking care of business?"

I have never considered myself to be a financial counselor and I have no intention of becoming one. But I am convinced that most of our lives would be greatly simplified if we would just get out of debt. How? The same way we get into debt . . . one step at a time.

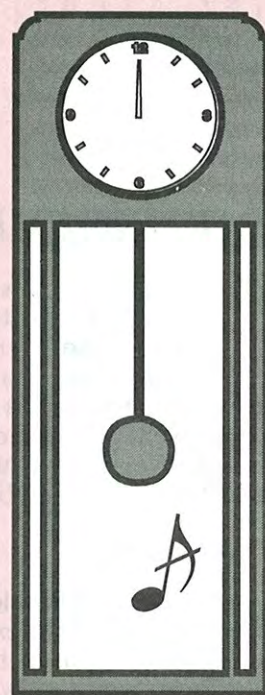
Map out a strategy whereby you can live within your means—and stick to it. Stop going into debt and start moving towards becoming debt free. It may be difficult but it is not impossible.

Get in Shape

Closely akin to the stewardship of our wealth is the stewardship of our health. As a 40-year-old pastor, I have a growing concern about keeping my body fit and functional. I am not saying you should run right out and join a health club. But most of us do need to take better care of our bodies.

In a recent article adapted from his new book, *Pain: The Gift Nobody Wants*, Dr. Paul Brand said,

We doctors sometimes shy away from interfering in our patients' lives. But if we were fully honest, we might say something like this: "Listen to your body. It is telling you that you



are violating your brain with tension, your ears with loudness, your eyes with constant television, your stomach with unhealthy food, your lungs with cancer-producing pollutants. Listen carefully to the message of pain before I give you something to relieve those symptoms. I can help with the symptoms, but you must address the cause."

It may be as simple as walking a mile each day, modifying your diet or altering some other area of your lifestyle. The point is, this is the only body you will ever have, so you had better take good care of it. Do not wait until your health begins to fail to become concerned about it.

Get Out of the Rut

There are a couple of other areas that need attention in our lives. We need to get out of a rut and get into the Word. What do these two things have to do with each other? More than you might think!

We are creatures of habit. We want things to be routine and predictable. Consequently, we get locked in to doing things a certain way. While that is not altogether bad, it does tend to cause us to become resistant or intolerant to change.

This can eventually have a negative effect upon us spiritually. Our unwillingness or inability to accept or

adapt to change can keep us from realizing our full potential for Christ. Our message should never change, but our methods must change. A noble objective for all of us in 1995 would be to become more open to change, making an honest, deliberate effort to see our lives and ministries from a totally different perspective.

Get Into the Word

Speaking of different perspectives, maybe this would be a good year to change our approach to the Bible! Song writer John Mohr raised a legitimate question when he asked, "I hear you're getting into the Word, but is the Word getting into you?"

Have we viewed the scriptures from such a limited perspective for so long that we have failed to see the big picture? Do we have such a narrow view of the Body of Christ that we have forgotten that we are not the only ones who comprise His Church?

We need to have a world view of the Bible. A view that transcends racial, cultural and, yes, even denominational boundaries. A view that focuses, not on the particulars that divide us, but a view that concentrates on the principles that unite us as believers. How can this happen? By breaking out of the mold of traditionalism . . . by forcing ourselves to confront and accept change where it is needed.

December 31 need not end on a dissonant chord. We can strike a positive note through sound financial management, sensible health practices, an objective attitude towards change and a practical approach to God's Word. Begin, and end, gracefully! ■



ABOUT THE WRITER: Reverend Keith Burden pastors First Free Will Baptist Church in Ada, Oklahoma. He also serves as assistant clerk of the National Association of Free Will Baptists.

The Expression of God

By Dr. R. F. Smith Jr.

It is almost Christmas. The church is appropriately decorated. A little girl is showing her pastor the miniature nativity scene set on a table in the hall.

Everything is there—the stable, angels, shepherds, kings—all grouped around the crib. On the smelling hay in a manger lies the child, tended by His mother. Understanding Joseph stands in the shadow of an angel's wing. Above the thatched roof a blue star gleams.

The little girl is pointing out the details to her pastor as her eyes dance with delight. "These are the Wise Men, you know, and that's one of their camels outside the door. Look at the sleepy donkey and sweet lamb. These are the shepherds," she points out.

"And there is the mother Mary," she says. "Isn't her blue cloak lovely? And Joseph—he looks like a carpenter, doesn't he? And that dear baby Jesus. Isn't He sweet and chubby?"

The pastor, not wishing to appear woefully ignorant, adds his word: "Yes, and there's the star, too, up there above the roof. Do you suppose the starlight shines into the stable?"

"Of course it does," says the little Christmas guide, and she points to holes in the roof. "That's why it's so lovely and bright inside. But you can't see how the light comes in unless you get down and look up."

Ah, from the mouths of babes! "You can't see how the light

comes in unless you get down and look up!"

Christmas is just that simple—kneel down, look up and look through.

Kneel down, look up and look through all the hustle and bustle that marks our traditional celebration of Christmas. Look through the things that insulate us from the true meaning of our Lord's birth. Look through the sentimentalized concepts of the Babe in the manger. Look through everything until the tremendous thought and fact dawns upon you that 2000 years ago at a definite spot in history, at a definite location, God made a visit to the planet as a man.

Think of that! "*The Word made flesh and dwelt among us*," cried John in his attempt to explain the mystery. Or as J. B. Phillips translates it: "The Expression of God became a human being and lived among us."

Ah, "The Expression of God . . ." God's door to Himself opened. What a Christmas! What a Gospel!

Somewhere upon a far-off hill,
At Christmas time,
At Christmas time,
A little door creaks open still—
It opens still. ■

ABOUT THE WRITER: Dr. R. F. Smith Jr. is senior minister at Fifth Avenue Baptist Church in Huntington, West Virginia.

Christmas

Without

Credit

By Dan Farmer



MasterCard reports holiday spending soared nearly 24% between Thanksgiving and Christmas. . . . VISA reports a 32% jump in retail spending on credit. Did you do it again last Christmas? Did you end up spending more and when you ran out of cash you simply put it on a credit card? We make careful plans about spending, then for some reason we overdo it and go into debt.

Many today seem to spend a larger amount than they can afford and place much of it on credit cards, hoping to pay off the balance soon. I want to address how we might have a "Christmas Without Credit" by first stating the problem, then the biblical plan for spending and, finally, recommend ways to get out of debt.

The Problem

When cash is not readily available to us today, there are a variety of

ways available, one of which is what we call using a credit card. Officials estimate that 65,000 new credit cards are issued daily, and many people, despite their inability to repay, pile on the debt, especially at Christmas. The average balance on a credit card is around \$700 and the average person spends an estimated 26% more by having a credit card.

The average family spends about \$2,000 at Christmas, some much more, many much less. Now, before you panic, let me say that a large part of what some families spend, like mine, are for clothes and items counted as necessities, although we might not otherwise buy them.

We all have only a certain amount of income or limited resources that we can spend. When that is spent, there is no more. Some of us may need to send our kids to Bible College; we all have a need to feel secure, comfortable, etc., on our in-

come, but only about 5% save adequately for a good retirement.

Debt is not always the problem, but symptomatic of the real problem which may be self-indulgence, lack of discipline or having no plan for spending. Did you know that a majority of the 900,000 who file for bankruptcy each year do so because of unwise or unplanned spending?

Many homes have microwaves today. What is the number one use of a microwave? To pop popcorn. Large items purchased with credit cards last year included appliances and computers, and if a computer is used only to play games, that's quite an expensive toy. Many credit card companies will allow an individual to charge up to 250% more than he can readily repay without long-term indebtedness.

A \$10,000 balance on a credit card will take 33 years to pay off, if the minimum payment is made, and will

cost the credit card holder an additional \$16,000 in interest. If a person or family has no budget or plan for spending or does not operate according to biblical principles, the end can only be trouble.

An estimated 70% to 80% of marital problems result, in part, from misuse of credit. So many unnecessary things are bought, things that soon end up in the attic, garage or maybe even in a garage sale.

The Plan

The Bible has much to say about money and stewardship. Some 450 separate passages deal with it. Most of us agree that God owns everything. If we really believe that He is truly owner and we are responsible for what He gives us, then as His stewards, we have a great responsibility. We need to seek Him regarding how He wants the money spent and follow His plan carefully.

We have only to look inside our check register to receive a true revelation about our stewardship, our goals and our objectives. Many Christians, after they have paid their tithe and given an offering, seem to feel that the rest is theirs to do with whatever they please.

A healthy marriage may well depend on good money management. A budget is needed to organize spending, giving and savings. A budget is nothing more than a guide drawn up, based on your income, to show your actual expenses and discretionary spending. Too many spend or respond to emotion, advertisement or other people's persuasion rather than good planning.

"The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those that dwell therein" (Psalm 24). The world and its contents belong to God. There is a blessing in obedience to biblical principles (Psalm 50:10-11).

The Procedure

Let us re-focus on the real meaning of Christmas and determine to be debt free in our spending next Christmas. Debt-free living is what the Bible teaches and is still God's plan for us today. Our parents knew nothing of credit cards, car loans and if they attended college, they prob-

ably had to get a job and save for it.

Only humans, of all God's creation, can overstep the bounds God has given in His Word. If we were all good stewards of God's money, there would be plenty for every denominational program. We may need to simplify our spending and some may need help in adopting a simpler lifestyle. Here are a few suggestions that should make Christmas and the simpler lifestyle more fun and meaningful.

How about taking time to put tender love and care into making gifts? Gift ideas could include balloon bouquets, trivets, soup can pencil holders attractively decorated, hand-painted tee and sweat shirts, hand-made bookmarks, homemade candies, jellies, a jar of spiced tea.

I once painted little hand-made tree ornaments as gifts. To save money during the year, I buy books and other items I find on sale and save them for gifts at Christmas. When I was younger, banks offered a Christmas savings plan which would allow you to save a certain amount each month and withdraw it at Christmas.

Our family draws names, adults and children, and everyone gets something at our house. Our married children also have a family Christmas in their respective homes with their children.

Some good rules about credit cards are: 1) don't buy on credit unless you have budgeted for it, and 2) try to pay the entire amount in 30 days or as soon as possible. We should be teaching our children good money management instead of overspending and debt. Children learn by observing methods of spending, saving and giving. They like to be big spenders, at least teens seem to like to be, but are usually selective.

You may have less money for gifts in controlling your spending, but there are ways to show more love and appreciation without expensive gifts. We all make memories by creating traditions. One of our traditions is that before we open our gifts we read the Christmas story. This year we added singing of several carols.

Christmas is a time of giving, and we can do so much for so many—do something meaningful for a friend

or family member. Thoughtful, meaningful giving is something we need to instill in our children. Christmas means giving, Christmas means God gave His Son. He was our great example.

Two simple steps to aid in getting out of debt are to learn to live within your present income and develop a responsible lifestyle. We as believers are to be faithful to the trust committed to us. Develop a biblical financial plan.

Avoid financial problems by: 1) spending with a purpose, 2) use credit wisely when necessary, 3) plan spending carefully. If we are to "owe no man anything" (Romans 13:8), many need to take drastic steps to get out of debt.

Estimate expenses, and plan to pay as much monthly on bills as possible until they are paid off. Indebtedness may limit your service to God; credit abuse will hurt your testimony. It is wrong to charge above your ability to pay.

Remember David's first sin? He coveted. The lesson of the rich fool (Luke 12:16-20) is to warn of the consequences of using our wealth unwisely. A good steward refrains from excessive buying of things he doesn't need. Learn the difference between what is necessary and what is not and next year, enjoy a Christmas without credit. ■



ABOUT THE WRITER: Reverend Dan Farmer pastors First Free Will Baptist Church in Moore, Oklahoma.



Wise Men Still Seek Him

By Daryl Ellis



The story of the birth of Jesus oozes with mystery. The lack of housing, humble beginnings, visitors—angelic and earthly—cast an aura over the scene. Perhaps no incident highlights this more than the visit by the magi, those mysterious men from the east.

A lack of biblical information opens the door to speculation. Tradition includes three wise men, who were kings, riding camels and the group knelt down and worshipped Jesus in a stable. The fact is, they were magi from the east who brought three kinds of gifts within two years of Jesus' birth. That's about it, as far as we know.

Old Story / New Slant

There are at least three ways people may profit from this story (1) As followers of Jesus, we seize the devotion and deepen our love for the Lord; (2) unbelievers are challenged to come to the Savior because He came for them. Come and receive the benefits of a personal relationship with God; (3) as believers, we gain understanding of those who are without Christ and on their own journey of searching. Concerning this third option, we see a new slant on an old story.

The magi entered the scene during the 7th century B.C. as a religious people. Over the years they devel-

oped an eclectic set of beliefs—a little bit of this and a little bit of that: belief in one god, Zoroastrianism consisting of fire-worship, blood sacrifices and superstition.

The magi were influential people who often served as consultants to leaders. Jeremiah refers to the chief magi in 39:3 as does Daniel who mentions them several times in his book. Daniel beat them at their own game when he interpreted the dream of Nebuchadnezzar.

The saying, "it is not how you start, but how you finish," is nowhere more applicable than here. One cannot be sure how the magi found out about the birth of Jesus. Was it an

understanding of the Old Testament prophesies, a direct revelation from God, that star in the east or a combination? No one can be sure, except that they were looking for the one who would be the king of the Jews. Such a discovery held considerable motivation for them.

Magi Meet Messiah

The political climate was unstable. Herod was near the end of his reign. The magi were probably involved in some of the political posturing anticipating Herod's demise. Bordering on insult they asked Herod, who had just secured the title "king of the Jews," where was the one "born king of the Jews?" Directed to Bethlehem by Herod and the star, they found the boy Jesus in a house (Matthew 2:18).

Their first response was to worship the child. Some suggest that this was merely an act void of any personal understanding of who the child really was. However, it seems that their search resulted in an unexpected find. They found themselves face to face with God-man, the Christ child.

Although the trip began with political aspirations, God used their curiosity and ambition to bring them to Himself. Confused people are not hopeless. Intellectual and spiritual entanglements may be sorted out as basic needs of people are met. However distant from God, a person still has needs which can only be met effectively by God.

Out of their treasures were gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. In *The Christ of Christmas*, James Montgomery Boice gives insight concerning the three gifts, "When gold was presented to Jesus it acknowledged His right to rule. . . . Incense was used in the Temple worship . . . the wise men pointed to Christ as our great High Priest. . . . myrrh speaks of his death."

With this emphasis on royalty, purity and suffering, the gifts give the real meaning of Christmas. Did they know the significance of their gifts? Probably not. Yet, God was able to make use of worldly gifts to make a spiritual impact.

The Bible teaches that no one can come to God unless drawn by the Spirit. We also know that naturally

man hates God. However, when the spiritual vacuum goes unfilled, man has a way of seeking out solutions.

Motives of Men

Earlier in this century, the church was a socially acceptable place to do some seeking. This is no longer the case, especially for the under-thirty crowd. Our evangelistic efforts must keep this in mind as we strive for effectiveness. People may be attracted to religion for the wrong reasons. That seems deplorable for established Christians.

However, for many, a wrong reason is a good start toward a more excellent way. The motives of the magi, who can know? We do know that something happened when they found the Savior. God may use a wrong start to make a right finish. Their response to Jesus was worship.

God can make a difference. In this data-driven, technological age we are poised to commit a tragic mistake in evangelical circles. Is God necessary any more? With the self-help, support group and take-charge emphasis of our day, God is often an afterthought. He is icing on the cake of self-salvation.

No longer do we save ourselves, religiously, we have progressed to a more politically-correct, psychological salvation. Then maybe add a layer of Jesus after we have worked through our childhood-induced dilemmas. That is not a slam at the many useful tools of problem-solving. It is a caution that we do not substitute anything else for the saving power of Jesus.

People in our communities are so confused they are not sure what they are looking for, but that does not keep them from searching. As we pray, develop relationships and witness, remember the magi story and the lessons. Wrong reasons for the search didn't eliminate the possibility that the right reasons can be determined. God meets a person where he is and works to bring him to faith. He uses people, circumstances and even revelation.

Finally, God will make a difference for those who will bow down to Him and worship. These men returned home changed. God still does it today.

May the Lord use us as sensitive, possibility-oriented Christians to be one of the guides in the ultimate search for joy and peace. From unlikely sources come some of the most effective saints. Those who think they are wise may be seeking Him and not know it. Let's help them along the way. ■



ABOUT THE WRITER: Reverend Daryl Ellis pastors Butterfield Free Will Baptist Church in Aurora, Illinois. He also serves on the Commission for Theological Integrity.

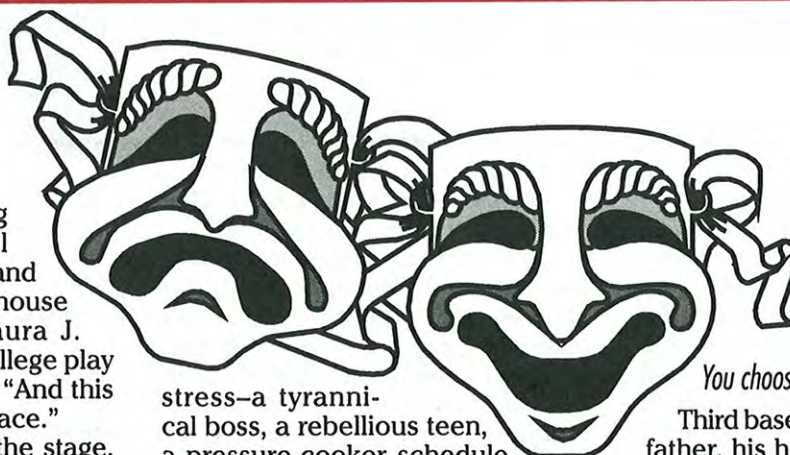
Capital Stewardship/Victory Campaign September 1994 Update

State	Goal	Gifts	Balance
Alabama	\$ 76,397.63	\$ 4,981.15	\$ 71,416.48
Arizona	1,228.93	2,883.71	(1,654.78)
Arkansas	76,860.94	38,107.13	38,753.81
Atlantic Canada	1,570.51	897.00	673.51
California	17,216.76	1,444.20	15,772.56
Colorado	789.18	1,165.00	(375.82)
Florida	20,703.30	5,481.62	15,221.68
Georgia	38,179.19	27,097.88	11,081.31
Hawaii	184.54	727.26	(542.72)
Idaho	353.37	25.00	328.37
Illinois	16,176.29	4,629.47	11,546.82
Indiana	7,868.27	1,846.75	6,021.52
Iowa	266.99	.00	266.99
Kansas	1,287.82	280.00	1,007.82
Kentucky	35,454.34	4,874.29	30,580.05
Louisiana	94.23	1,925.00	(1,830.77)
Maryland	6,812.10	1,355.00	5,457.10
Michigan	15,116.19	16,004.22	(888.03)
Mississippi	15,559.86	3,798.23	11,761.63
Missouri	60,484.40	33,789.91	26,694.49
Montana	27.48	100.00	(72.52)
Nebraska	102.08	119.00	(16.92)
New Mexico	596.80	630.55	(33.75)
North Carolina	59,118.06	7,025.40	52,092.66
Northeast Assoc.	883.41	265.00	618.41
Northwest Assoc.	1,087.58	135.00	952.58
Ohio	40,923.66	18,898.10	22,025.56
Oklahoma	92,271.60	9,832.15	82,439.45
South Carolina	18,335.75	2,102.00	16,233.75
South Dakota		175.00	(175.00)
Tennessee	78,557.09	51,197.94	27,359.15
Texas	11,547.20	6,648.52	4,898.68
Virginia	24,323.33	2,027.93	22,295.40
Virgin Islands		200.00	(200.00)
West Virginia	46,204.51	973.00	45,231.51
Wisconsin		61.00	(61.00)
Other		2,978.85	(2,978.85)
TOTALS	\$766,583.39	\$254,682.26	\$511,901.13

Reverse Blessings

(When Bad Things Turn Out Good)

By Kathy Tippet Henderson



It was a Sunday morning service at a Free Will Baptist church in Ashland City, Tennessee. The house was packed. Mrs. Laura J. Thigpen introduced the college play and me in particular with, "And this is George's lovely wife, Grace."

My cue! I floated onto the stage. The bright spotlight blinded me, but I could feel the enraptured eyes of my audience. I sailed just one step too far and fell off the stage onto all fours. Now I felt the horrified eyes of my audience, as Mrs. Thigpen helped me to my feet. Hot tears of embarrassment creased my make-up as my "wrinkles" ran.

From that day on my big brother, Bert, lovingly (I like to think) saddled me with the nickname, Graceful Grace.

As a freshman in college that was one of my toughest moments up to that time. Since then life has dealt much harder lessons and I've acquired permanent wrinkles. Bad things happen to good people. I asked some open-ended questions and listened as strong Christians shared their experiences at life's zingers. You learn a lot when you just listen. Tuck away their advice if you don't need it yet. You will one day.

Life screams ugly things at us—the death of a child or spouse, a divorce, disease and pain, mental or physical cruelty. Not only traumatic events but little foxes nibble at our bare toes and cause prolonged

stress—a tyrannical boss, a rebellious teen, a pressure-cooker schedule with constant deadlines, financial losses, or old haunts of fear or guilt. How do the survivors of such devastation advise us?

Time heals.

Cliché? Yes, but still succinct and so true. Folks repeatedly told me that emotional pain takes time to subside, and no substitute can rush it. There are steps to grieving, healing, forgiveness sometimes.

God allowed it to happen.

That's not to say He caused it, but just as with Job, even Satan had to get God's permission. All circumstances in our life are sifted through His hands and shaped into His permissive will. Yes, even the results of other people's sin. This seems to be first base for those victors of tragedies.

God provides.

This is second base. "Once I knew He allowed it, I knew He'd help me get through it," assured one godly survivor of incest. Joseph found

God's provision when he faced his treacherous brothers. He had grown better, not bitter.

You choose better or bitter.

Third base. One young man whose father, his hero, was jailed for rape, told me, "I didn't ask 'Why?' but rather 'What are you trying to teach me, Lord?' It made the difference for me. My brother kept asking why and grew bitter toward God and the family." It's like the anguish of chemotherapy. After the rigors and pain, you can get better.

Comfort one another.

The Bible is clear that this is one reason we go through battles and raw deals in life. Not until my father died did I fully understand how comforting it was for a friend to hug you and say, "I know how you feel. I've been there." Someone who has shared the same experience can say those words and help. Someone who has not felt the same pain cannot.

My godly Aunt Virginia has lost two husbands by death. One day she described to my mother, a recent widow, what it felt like. "It's like a big hole in the middle of you. A huge part is missing and nothing can fill it . . . not children or friends." Mama nodded.

"It's worse at night when you're

alone and quiet," she continued. Tears rolled down Mama's cheeks. I wondered why my aunt was torturing Mama like this. But she plunged on.

"It's like a part of you is gone . . . ripped away. You were one flesh, and your flesh has been torn open." Mama grabbed her dear sister-in-law and they wept together as Mama cried, "You know. You know. That's exactly how it feels." She was comforted, not tortured.

Run for the Psalms.

I'm not sure why, but many I spoke with said they found solace and strength in David's writings. He knew pain too. Christians with fresh wounds seem to flee to the scriptures for refuge. Christian music seems to be a common denominator for good things to come from bad.

These wounded soldiers who endured the trenches give us survivor's benefits, if we listen.

A mother and devout Christian taught her son biblical principles. Later in life he faced many failures and one day an accident. He clumsily spilled battery acid all over his clothes and shouted the now famous words, "Mr. Watson, come here! I want you!" Hence evolved the telephone and Bell Telephone Laboratories. God meant it for good in the life of Alexander Graham Bell.

Life is a stage, but like Graceful Grace sometimes we all plummet from it and need help to climb back up into the spotlight. Life must go on. Just ask Joni or Corrie. I imagine they'd agree with Clebe McClary's favorite phrase, "FIDO . . . forget it and drive on!" ■



ABOUT THE WRITER: Mrs. Kathy Tippet Henderson gracefully teaches piano in her Greenville, North Carolina home. She graduated from Free Will Baptist Bible College . . . a long time ago.

THE TOGETHER WAY

September 1994

RECEIPTS:

State	Design.	CO-OP	Total	Sept. '93	Yr. To Date
Alabama	\$ 8,050.73	\$.00	\$ 8,050.73	\$ 5,810.58	\$ 80,404.92
Arizona	369.36	80.00	449.36	449.71	2,999.77
Arkansas	20,568.25	9,944.86	30,513.11	27,292.63	262,685.85
California	4.00	770.88	774.88	.00	7,199.68
Colorado	.00	.00	.00	.00	160.00
Delaware	.00	.00	.00	.00	110.00
Florida	236.37	921.66	1,158.03	1,901.48	22,113.59
Georgia	8,882.00	1,685.11	10,567.11	7,654.73	104,288.41
Hawaii	.00	.00	.00	.00	227.26
Idaho	125.00	.00	125.00	.00	125.00
Illinois	8,181.16	2,011.88	10,193.04	6,607.89	98,081.93
Indiana	490.23	93.87	584.10	1,153.56	7,137.67
Iowa	90.00	.00	90.00	90.00	360.00
Kansas	.00	56.69	56.69	43.49	409.93
Kentucky	503.42	555.30	1,058.72	854.34	6,995.31
Louisiana	50.00	.00	50.00	.00	1,004.00
Maryland	.00	1,023.61	1,023.61	.00	5,519.03
Michigan	6,651.63	2,464.69	9,116.32	22,649.91	127,354.60
Mississippi	398.62	438.52	837.14	589.24	7,996.46
Missouri	10,782.78	.00	10,782.78	11,967.77	109,501.32
Montana	.00	.00	.00	.00	50.00
Nebraska	.00	.00	.00	.00	119.00
New Jersey	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
New Mexico	300.00	246.37	546.37	.00	2,991.59
North Carolina	292.00	670.00	962.00	619.02	22,466.39
Ohio	4,091.44	3,712.99	7,804.43	3,761.44	63,127.46
Oklahoma	50,075.14	.00	50,075.14	32,939.70	424,250.82
South Carolina	16,173.98	109.36	16,283.34	17,108.15	174,562.38
South Dakota	.00	.00	.00	.00	175.00
Tennessee	5,023.73	256.86	5,280.59	11,098.61	94,997.00
Texas	7,817.59	430.56	8,248.15	7,790.03	90,510.65
Virginia	1,828.99	.00	1,828.99	505.88	14,305.40
Virgin Islands	.00	.00	.00	.00	200.00
West Virginia	5,582.60	260.78	5,843.38	4,089.85	40,648.96
Wisconsin	.00	.00	.00	.00	61.00
Canada	.00	.00	.00	.00	897.00
Northwest Assoc.	.00	.00	.00	.00	135.00
Northeast Assoc.	30.00	.00	30.00	.00	255.00
Other	.00	.06	.06	149.00	.38
Totals	<u>\$156,599.02</u>	<u>\$25,734.05</u>	<u>\$182,333.07</u>	<u>\$165,127.01</u>	<u>\$1,774,427.76</u>

DISBURSEMENTS:

Executive Office	\$ 9,302.03	\$17,899.68	\$ 27,201.71	\$ 25,323.09	\$244,815.42
Foreign Missions	90,779.95	1,801.89	92,581.84	86,789.62	887,240.60
FWBBC	8,646.93	1,801.89	10,448.82	10,708.45	105,243.04
Home Missions	36,770.45	1,410.15	38,180.60	30,398.18	316,678.90
Retirement & Insurance	754.13	1,096.82	1,850.95	1,920.79	17,264.50
Master's Men	1,681.28	1,096.82	2,778.10	2,577.92	26,131.58
Commission for Theological Integrity	89.24	39.19	128.43	128.83	1,221.91
FWB Foundation	675.50	470.04	1,145.54	1,608.75	11,635.92
Historical Commission	83.73	39.19	122.92	125.71	1,095.19
Music Commission	73.80	39.19	112.99	104.74	1,033.71
Radio & TV Commission	78.81	39.19	118.00	104.69	1,132.76
Hillsdale FWB College	1,054.48	.00	1,054.48	2,346.03	20,807.41
Other	6,608.69	.00	6,608.69	2,990.21	140,126.82
Totals	<u>\$156,599.02</u>	<u>\$25,734.05</u>	<u>\$182,333.07</u>	<u>\$165,127.01</u>	<u>\$1,774,427.76</u>

Spiritual Shopping Tips

By Larry Russell

The other day at the bank I came across a list of "Safety Tips for Shopping Smart." That made me think that we believers need a list of "Safety Tips for Christian Life."

Shopping tip: "Always lock your car, even if you're leaving for only a short period of time, and make sure all windows are rolled up completely."

Spiritual tip: "Unlock your heart of selfishness, not only during the Christmas season but year around, and make sure all the windows of affection in our lives are rolled down completely."

Shopping tip: "Don't leave valuables visible inside your car. Radios, cameras, pocketbooks and packages attract attention and tempt thieves."

Spiritual tip: "Leave your fruits of the Spirit visible in your daily life. Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance will attract attention and convict the lost of this world."

Shopping tip: "Always choose parking spaces in well-lit areas, as close to busy entrances as possible."

Spiritual tip: "Always choose a prayer closet, one that's well-used is always closer to the kingdom of God."

Shopping tip: "Stay alert, pay attention to your surroundings, and be aware of anyone around you. Don't allow yourself to be distracted."

Spiritual tip: "Stay alert, pay attention in the house of God, and be aware of the unsaved around you, so you can pray that they will make a decision. Don't allow yourself to be distracted by things of this world."

Shopping tip: "Carry your purse close to your body and keep a firm grip on it."

Spiritual tip: "Carry your purse open and give generously for the cause of Christ, and keep a loose grip on things of this world."

Shopping tip: "Don't flaunt expensive items or jewelry."

Spiritual tip: "Don't flaunt your God-given beauty, talents and finances."

Shopping tip: "Walk facing traffic so you can see approaching cars."

Spiritual tip: "Walk facing the King of Kings, and the cares of this world will fade away."

Shopping tip: "Don't overburden yourself with packages—you need to be able to react to situations as they develop."

Spiritual tip: "Don't overburden yourself with Christmas cares—you may overreact to situations that could cost you the joy of the season."

Shopping tip: "Never lay packages or your purse on top of your vehicle."

Spiritual tip: "Never lay blame or criticism on others; carry the load God has given you and rejoice."

Shopping tip: "Always have your keys in your hand as you approach your vehicle."

Spiritual tip: "Always have the keys to the kingdom of God in your heart as His coming approaches."

Shopping tip: "Once you're in your vehicle, lock your doors immediately."

Spiritual tip: "Once you're in the kingdom of God, unlock the joy of being saved so the world can see Jesus in you."

Shopping tip: "Conceal your credit card numbers from spying eyes."

Spiritual tip: "Never conceal your love for Jesus and your fellow believers. Give the credit to the Lord so the eyes of the world can see our King."

Shopping tip: "Call your local police department if you have specific safety concerns."

Spiritual tip: "Call your friends, relatives and associates and tell them what this Christmas season is all about."



ABOUT THE WRITER: Reverend Larry Russell pastors First Free Will Baptist Church in Richmond, Virginia. He is a member of the national Home Missions Board.

An Allegory

Orphan

By Malcolm C. Fry

When I was old enough to understand, Mrs. Miller, a house mother at Bunker's Orphanage, explained to me that I was an orphan, and I began to long for a home of my own. I wanted a place to belong, a place where the people loved me, personally. I wanted a family that would be on my side, no matter what. "Somewhere there must be a family for me," I would sob into my pillow many a late night.

Whenever possible, I searched for any trace of my past. Mrs. Miller tried to discourage me. "It's no use trying. You need to get control of yourself. Straighten up, so you can be adopted by a good family."

I really tried to do and be right. But just when I would get close to being accepted by a visiting family, something always happened.

Strange as it may seem, one day I heard rumors that there was a letter for me at the office. I ran to Mrs. Miller who handed me a soiled and worn envelope. Looking closely at the envelope, I was shocked to see that the postmark was dated years earlier and was from a foreign country, one I had never heard of.

Why didn't someone show me this before? I wondered. Excitedly, but carefully, I opened the letter and read aloud.

"Dear Son, We have been searching for you for years. How excited we were to hear you are staying at the Bunker Orphanage . . ."

Son? I couldn't have read a more powerful word. Uncontrollably, I wept like a baby. This must be my true family, found at last!

Then a sick and sinking feeling hit me. Did they still want me after all this time? How could I reach them? I talked it over with Mrs. Miller, who became just as excited, and she suggested I call the number at the end



of the letter. She helped me get through to the operator and showed me what to do and say. She even offered to pay for the call herself if the orphanage wouldn't.

A strong, deep voice answered from the other end. I was definitely talking to someone in charge.

"Hello, sir. You see, I found your letter here at the orphanage . . . When? Just today, and, well, I guess it's been lost all this time. . ."

My stammering and faltering words were interrupted by sharp exclamations. I could hear the deep voice shouting to others, "We've found him! We've found him!"

Then, in a calm and comforting manner, he spoke to me of his love. He made me promise to call him back real soon, and said to call collect any and every time. There was much we needed to talk about.

Sleep did not come easy that night. I tried to get used to the thought of belonging to someone. I thought of hundreds of questions to ask my father. What was my family like? How did we get separated? Where did they live? What was I going to do when I got there? How did he ever find me? When was he go-

ing to pick me up?

In the morning, I got up before daybreak and rushed to the phone. He was right there to answer, just as he said he would be, and didn't mind the early call. I asked him all the questions I'd thought of the night before.

That's the way it went at first. I'd call my father and we'd talk a long time, sometimes several times a day. I'd ask some of the same questions over and over, so he finally wrote me all the details. I read the pages over every night. I could hardly wait for each day's mail.

The most persistent question I had was, why couldn't he come get me and take me home right now? He gave me two main reasons. First, my way of life in the orphanage was so radically different from their home routine that I needed to grow accustomed to their ways, standards, manners and attitudes. Although it wasn't impossible for me to go home immediately, I'd enjoy it much more if I adjusted somewhat first.

Second, he wanted me to stick around the orphanage just a bit

(continued on page 15)

Look, up in the sky! It's a bird! It's a plane! It's . . . It's a multi-million-dollar super-business that's spiraling out of control, and it's threatening a slice of our younger population with immorality, demonism, profanity and graphic violence deadlier than a speeding bullet.

And to me . . .

Well, to me it's very sad, for I used to devour comic books like jelly beans, sitting in the corner of the newsstand visiting with Superman, Batman and Richie Rich while my dad visited with his cronies at the soda fountain. I plowed through thousands of comics, practically all of them either funny—like Richie Rich—or based on an old-fashioned good-vs-evil perspective—like most of the superheroes.

I don't really remember why I stopped reading comics, or when—but it's been 30 years since I picked one up.

Until the other day.

I was asked to review the comics today's kids are reading, so I strolled down to a large comic book outlet and revisited some of my old buddies. What a difference a generation makes! I felt like Paul strolling through the streets of Athens, greatly distressed.

I couldn't locate Richie Rich or Scrooge McDuck, though I assume they're still around somewhere. The comic book store I visited was dominated by new, powerfully-drawn crusaders of dubious distinction.

Superman, who in a recent series of issues died and somehow regenerated himself, is now sultry, sexy, brooding and raw.

And my pal in the Batcave no longer calls himself the "Caped Crusader," but the "Dark Knight." He's a new Batman, sporting a savage new costume, who suffers from hallucinogenic demons and seems almost as psychopathic as the villains he fights.

But the biggest change I noticed with Batman was in the company he kept in the newsstand. The **B** rack was awash with new titles like *Black Axe*, *Black Orchid*, *Blackmask*, *Bloodfire*, *Bloodstrike*, *Blood Syndicate*, *Book of the Dead*, *Breed*, and worst of all, *Betty Bondage*, a sado-

Of Comics



and Kids

By
Robert J. Morgan



They're not what they used to be!



masochistic comic intended for adults, but stuck into the same racks as all the others.

Super Business

The new titles suggest that after sagging in the 70's, the comic industry has rebounded beyond belief in the 80's and 90's. More than 200 million of them are published each year by over 300 publishers, offering 10,000 titles to choose from. *Batman* and *Superman* have a circulation of over 3 million each, mostly made up of 7-to-11-year-old girls and 7-to-17-year-old boys.

It's the male market that's the bonanza for advertisers, for boys are a tough audience for merchandisers to reach. Most guys stop watching Sat-

urday morning cartoons at about age 11, and they don't reappear to advertisers until the late teen years. But comic books are proving an effective place—practically the only place—for advertisers to reach these kids. Comics are now packed with ads, and many of the superheroes spin off television shows, video games, trading cards, toys, T-shirts and scads of related merchandise.

Comic collecting is itself now a high-dollar hobby. Many collectors purchase issues in sealed bags, never opening them, hoping to later sell them on the collectors' market for a profit. It's called the "poor man's stock market."

But the publishers aren't poor, and their quest for profits has blinded them to principles. Jim Shooter,

former editor-in-chief for industry-leader Marvel Comics, said recently, "When I began doing comics 29 years ago, heroes never lied, were never beset by self-doubt; they could do no wrong and were uniformly brave. Today, it's sometimes hard to tell the villain from the good guy."

I was surprised to discover that one of the more popular Superheroes, Northstar, is openly homosexual. Others are foul-mouthed and violent.

I thumbed through one comic called *Bloodstrike* which opened with a scene in which the hero, Chapel, was naked in bed. He awakened to find a well-shaped, barely-clothed blonde hovering over him. She purred, "We're both adults. . . . Why should either of us deny our true feelings?" He pulled a gun from the covers and splattered her insides graphically across the next page.

After all why should he deny his true feelings?

Another comic book in the **B** section—*Breed*—began with this story line—the words set against a dismal, dark urban scene: Life stinks and

then you die. . . . The real world is a [expletive deleted]. . . . There's too many [expletive deleted] telling you what to do. . . . As if they'd know a good thing if it bit them on the [expletive deleted].

Times Have Changed

Those are the comic books America's kids are reading.

Maybe your kids.

Most baby boomers remember comic books as being relatively simple and sanitized, and so unless they carefully monitor their children's reading habits, they often don't realize how things have changed.

The Psalmist prayed, "Turn my eyes away from worthless things . . .," and that prayer can provide a starting point for talking to your kids about the content of their reading materials.

Including their comic books.

Am I saying that all comics are bad? Of course not. I still glance at the comic strips in the daily paper, and most publishers of Christian curriculum utilize colorful comic-like drawings and panels. Even some of

today's secular comic books are still simple, safe and nontoxic.

But when you see *Wham! Pop! Zowie! Zap!* don't automatically assume it's just like *Richie Rich*, *Scrooge McDuck*, *Peanuts* and the good-old-days of a generation ago. Your child could be absorbing massive doses of profanity, sexuality, violence and occultism—all within the colorful pages of less-than-super heroes.

And there's nothing funny about those comics. ■



ABOUT THE WRITER: Reverend Robert J. Morgan pastors Donelson Free Will Baptist Church in Nashville, Tennessee. He serves on the national Board of Retirement.

Orphan (from page 13)

longer because some of my brothers and sisters were also there. He wanted me to help locate them.

Life at the orphanage has taken on a new appearance and new meaning. I spend my days learning all I can about my family. I'm constantly trying to make up for lost time. My great joy is to know I can talk to my father anytime, day or night. I tell him everything. Sometimes he disagrees with my actions and attitudes, but he always reassures me of his love.

A lot of my time is spent studying his letters. I know I still have a lot of changing to do, but the strange thing is, every time I do make a change, I like the new way so much better. The letter I like the best tells me

what it's going to be like when all of us children return home. Dad drew a floor plan and color illustration of my room, too. It makes me homesick to look at it, even though I've never been there. I sure would like to go home.

Meanwhile, I'm checking around for my lost brothers and sisters. I've found two of them already. That was one of the greatest thrills, to see their faces when I told them the good news.

Sometimes I do get discouraged. It seems I'm not getting in shape for my new life fast enough. But my father is patient and gives me good advice about handling each situation. Anyway, deep down inside I know for a fact that I'm not an orphan anymore.

"... When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because

ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (Galatians 4:4-7). ■



ABOUT THE WRITER: Dr. Malcolm Fry pastors Goodlettsville Free Will Baptist Church in Goodlettsville, Tennessee, and continues as part-time adult editor for Randall House Publications.

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FREE WILL BAPTIST NEWSFRONT

WNAC Retreat Attracts 635 Women

ANTIOCH, TN—The eighth national WNAC retreat met in Spilman Auditorium at Ridgecrest Conference Center in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina. WNAC executive secretary Mary Wisehart said 635 women gathered September 15-17 to celebrate the conference theme, "Back to Basics—Prayer and Bible Study."

General session speakers Alice Wood (Okla.) and Pam Wood (Calif.) spoke on Bible study and prayer. Lois Miller, missionary with OMS, also challenged women to Bible study, prayer and worship.

Eleven group leaders led small group Bible studies and prayer time: Maurine Lee, Sandy Mounts, Annette Aycok, Diana Bryant, Marvis Eagleton, Diane Thomas,

Becky Gwartney, Odessa Ledlow, Wanda Powell, Anna Jean Walley and Janice Wallace.

Missionary women sat at special tables in the dining hall so that attendees could get acquainted and talk with them personally. Friday evening, the women gave \$4,161 in the missions offering. The following missionary accounts received \$416.10 each: Marvis Eagleton, Shirley Combs, Vicki Sturgill, Carol Pinkerton, Nelda Gwartney, Mirial Gainer, Pat Franks, Lynn Midgett, Rhoda Creech and Pam West.

The next Ridgecrest retreat is scheduled September 12-14, 1996.

A WNAC retreat is scheduled west of the Mississippi on October 20-22, 1995, at Glorieta Conference Center in Glorieta, New Mexico.

Tulsa Sponsors Church Growth Emphasis

TULSA, OK—The Christian Education Board of the new Tulsa Area Association sponsored a Church Growth and Renewal Service Friday evening, September 16, at Lewis Avenue FWB Church in Tulsa. The new association, formed this year, consists of six churches: Barnsdall, Lewis Avenue, Madison Avenue, Skiatook, Central and Christ FWB Churches. The commitment to growth by the churches was evidenced by the fact that every church was represented at the service, according to Victoria Hidde, clerk.

Over 75 people heard Pastor Leonard Pirtle (First FWB Church in Owasso) and Pastor Connie Cariker (West Tulsa FWB Church) share their experiences, burden and vision for Free Will Baptists. The service opened with Reverend Robert Luther Hidde, who celebrated the 61st anniversary of his ordination, leading the invocation. Following the two sermons, the service closed with the congregation singing, "Send A Great Revival."

Dr. Robert D. Hidde, pastor of Christ FWB Church and chairman of the Christian Education Board, presented gifts to all the association pastors present and honored the Lewis Avenue FWB Church for having the largest number present. The service concluded with Reverend Troy Staires, moderator of Tulsa Area Association and pastor of the host church, pronouncing the benediction.

CCC Students Earn *Who's Who* Honors

FRESNO, CA—The 1995 edition of *Who's Who Among Students in American Universities and Colleges* will include the names of four students from California Christian College who have been selected as national outstanding campus leaders, according to Greg McAllister, academic dean.

Campus nominating committees and editors of the annual directory included the names of the students based on academic achievement, service to the community, leadership in extracurricular activities and potential for continued success.

They join an elite group of stu-

dents from more than 1,800 institutions of higher learning in 50 states, the District of Columbia and several foreign nations. Outstanding students have been honored in the annual directory since it was first published in 1934.

Students named this year from California Christian College are:

Jennifer Marie Barron

—Fresno, CA

Crystal Olena McKinney

—Vancouver, British Columbia

Melissa Dawn Scroggins

—Chelsea, OK

Terry James Thomas

—Bakersfield, CA

Leadership Conference Set for December

ANTIOCH, TN—The annual Free Will Baptist Leadership Conference will meet December 5-6 at Nashville's Maxwell House Hotel, according to Executive Secretary Melvin Worthington. Some 125 state leaders are expected to participate in the two-day conclave.

The conference begins Monday, December 5, with 3:00 p.m. registration. After an opening dinner, state leaders will caucus for a two-hour session in the Grande Ballroom.

Eight speakers will address the conference theme, "Unity in Diversity." The speakers include Oklahoma executive secretary, Jack Richey; Ohio executive secretary, Edwin Hayes; Georgia pastor, Paul Smith; Illinois promotional secretary, David Shores; Michigan moderator, Gene Norris; Missouri executive secretary, Nathan Ruble; North Carolina promotional director, Tom Lilly and Alabama promotional secretary, John Edwards.

National Association moderator Ralph Hampton and assistant moderator Carl Cheshier will preside at all sessions. Tuesday afternoon will feature a one-hour open discussion.

The Leadership Conference will conclude Tuesday evening at 9:30 p.m. National boards and commissions will then meet separately to conduct the business of each agency.

Georgia Church Celebrates Centennial

NORMAN PARK, GA—The Cool Springs FWB Church in Norman Park turned 100 years old this year and celebrated their centennial birthday September 10-11. The two-day festivity got underway at 3:00 p.m. Saturday and concluded Sunday afternoon with dinner on the grounds.

Pastor Steve Hughes called on Reverend Walter "Monk" Daniels to preach the Centennial sermon. Former pastors, members, relatives and descendants of the church's founders gathered to remember what God had done.

Reverend C. M. Hall established the Cool Springs Church in 1894 on two acres deeded to the church by Martha Jane Dunn Allman. The first meetings were conducted under a brush arbor. Thirteen charter members joined the church roles.

The first church building was one room with two front doors and steps across the front. Inside, the pulpit was situated near

the back door. During worship services, the men sat on the left of the pulpit and the women on the right. Wooden pegs adorned the wall for the men to hang their hats. The women wore hats and long aprons with beautiful needle work that distinguished them as their "Sunday best." Church services were held on the second Saturday and Sunday of each month. In December of 1960 the church began having services on a full-time basis.

The church building that was built in 1894 was replaced in 1936 with the present building. As late as 1948, wood heaters were still being used. Sunday School rooms were added in 1954 and in 1973 the social hall was built. In 1989 the church was remodeled with brick and vinyl siding. A steeple was added later.

The name "Cool Springs" originated from the cool, clear water taken from four large springs on the property.

Directory Update

GEORGIA

Glenn Paston to First Church, Savannah from Grace Church, Memphis, TN

Rowan Sirmons to Ozias Church, Pearson from White Hall Church, Waycross

HAWAII

Fitu Tafaoa, Sr., to Waipahu Church, Waipahu

KANSAS

Robert Spencer to First Church, Wellington

MAINE

James A. Pittman III to Linneus Church, Houlton from Calvary Church, Crewe, VA

NORTH CAROLINA

Jim Turnbough to Trinity Church, Greenville from Garner Church, Garner

OHIO

Howard Kimball to Campbell Chapel Church, Ironton

Bob Bryant to Newark Church, Newark

Floyd Estep to Wakefield Church, Wakefield

Brian Phillips to Wyandotte Church, Mansfield

TENNESSEE

Tim Sizemore to Grace Church, Memphis from Cooper Church, Detroit, AL

Frank Owens to Sylvan Park Church, Nashville from Waldorf Church, Waldorf, MD

OTHER PERSONNEL

Scott Bullman to Bethany Church, Broken Arrow, OK, as associate pastor from Garner Church, Garner, NC, as associate pastor/minister of music and youth ■

CURRENTLY...

The **Trula Cronk Home for Children** in **Greeneville, TN**, needed a van. Nearby **Limestone FWB Church** came to the rescue, and Pastor **Alfred Cutshall** handed a set of van keys to houseparent **Matt Wilson**. The church also gave an oak dining room suite for the West Virginia cottage.

Pastor **Terron Stonecypher** baptized seven converts at **Zion Hill FWB Church** in **Millwood, GA**.

Pleasant View FWB Church in **Walnut Hill, IL**, kicked off their centennial celebration in July. Pastor **Clifford Buchanan** said the 100-year emphasis allowed members to remember their own history and reflect on "the work that Christ has sustained in our community."

Rescue FWB Church in **Whittington, IL**, honored **Mae Sneed**, a member for 50 years. In its 94-year history, the church has had 23 pastors. A July storm in 1915 destroyed the church building, but members rebuilt and never looked back. **Byford Campbell** pastors.

By proclamation of the mayor, June 12, 1994, was **Carl Cheshier Day** in **Fort Smith, AR**. Cheshier celebrated 25 years as pastor of **Cavanaugh FWB Church**. During his ministry, attendance has surged from 69 to 400. Members gave Pastor Cheshier a plaque of appreciation and an \$11,000 love offering.

The **Georgia State Mission Board** received a \$12,000 gift from the sale of the Decatur FWB Church property near Atlanta. The Decatur Church, which discontinued services five years ago, was a Georgia state missions project in the 1960s.

Members of **First FWB Church** in **Seminole, OK**, paid off their 15-year mortgage in less than seven years. Pastor **Allen Wood** led the mortgage-burning and anniversary service this summer. The church is debt free.

Fifteen years ago, a group of believers organized **Antioch FWB Church** in **Mt. Sterling, OH**. Pastor **James Blankenship** announced at homecoming that over the years the church has witnessed 600 conversions and sent six men into the ministry.

Pastor **Bert Miller** must be doing something right. **Lockbourne FWB Church** in **Lockbourne, OH**, reports nine baptisms, two conversions, two

new members and plans to purchase additional property on which to build. One family also made a generous gift toward the purchase of a new car for Pastor Miller.

The annual **Ohio Minister/Layman Retreat** meets January 19-21 at **Big Prairie**. The 1995 speakers are Pastor **Billy Hanna** (Albany, GA) and Pastor **Milton Worthington** (Royal Oak, MI). Ohio executive secretary **Edwin Hayes** will coordinate the three-day gathering.

When members of **Thayer FWB Church** in **Thayer, MO**, added a 10,000-square-foot sanctuary to their church, they also topped it off with a new steeple. Pastor **Cody Freeman** says the church is debt free.

Eight Free Will Baptist churches in northwest **Arkansas** sponsored a six-day tent revival this fall with Virginia pastor **Dale Burden** as evangelist. Six conversions and numerous rededications highlighted the week. Attendance averaged 375 nightly. The group also gave a \$675 offering to purchase Bibles for distribution in Romania.

After the warmth and smiles on Pastor Appreciation Sunday at **Fulton FWB Church** in **Fulton, MS**, Pastor **Bill Van Winkle** had \$170 in cash and matching rods and reels for him and his wife, **Hope**.

Former National Association moderator **Ralph Staten** celebrated 61 years in the ministry. He was ordained August 20, 1933. Brother Staten resides in **Knoxville, TN**, where he publishes a weekly newsletter, *Congregational Crusader*. He attended the organizational meeting of the National Association in 1935.

Pastor **Jerry Rogers** led centennial celebration activities at **Bethel FWB Church** in **Blakely, GA**. The church organized August 11, 1894, with 34 members. Former pastor **C. C. Rentz** preached the centennial sermon. Georgia Representative **Roger Byrd** provided special music.

A new church joined **Georgia's Union Association** this year. **Wrights Chapel FWB Church** organized August 14 with 27 charter members. The building is located on the Sumner/Moultrie Highway in the Wrights Chapel community. **Elsie Franks** pastors.

Members of **Corinth FWB Church** in **Alma, GA**, conducted a note-burning ceremony

to celebrate paying off their new fellowship hall. Pastor **Steve Hutchinson** said the structure will seat 150 people, and includes a baptistry and kitchen.

The new \$400,000 sanctuary at **New Sulphur FWB Church** in **Prairie Grove, AR**, was dedicated earlier this year. The 400-seat facility allows the congregation to double in size, according to Pastor **Glen Faulkner** who has served the church since 1987. Mayor **Charles Johnson** attended the dedication. Guest speaker was Arkansas promotional director **David Joslin**. The church began in 1958 with 15 charter members.

Dr. **Thomas Marberry** led a group of five **Hillsdale FWB College** students on a three-day mission trip to **Mexico**. This marked Hillsdale's fourth mission trip to Mexico. One major project included mixing concrete by hand and carrying it in buckets to build a parsonage for **Ebenezer FWB Church** in **Reynosa**.

Dr. and Mrs. **Charles Thigpen** both spoke during the second annual Family Life Conference, sponsored by **Heritage Temple FWB Church** in **Columbus, OH**. The group met at Scioto Hills Retreat Center near Wheelersburg. **Billy Sharpston** pastors.

Pastor **Terrell Holland** reports 11 conversions, four baptisms and 10 new members at **First FWB Church** in **Haskell, OK**. He has served the church seven years.

Way of the Cross FWB Church in **Sallisaw, OK**, baptized 15 converts, according to Pastor **Jerry Copeland**. The group also set a new attendance record with 210 present.

Members of **Stigler FWB Church**, **Stigler, OK**, celebrated 50 years of service in the community. **N. L. Craig** pastors.

Faith FWB Church in **Bartlesville, OK**, is one year old and searching for property on which to build. **Danny Hester** pastors.

Pastor **M. C. Powell** says the van ministry has revitalized **Berean FWB Church** in **Albany, GA**. The group reported a three-year high in attendance, including 16 active teens.

New Light FWB Church in **Morgan, GA**, reports 25 new members and 15 baptisms. **Terry Pierce** pastors. ■



FOREIGN MISSIONS

Motorcycle Evangelism

by Jose Resende de Castro Jr., M.D.



One sunny day I was riding my motorcycle when I met a man about 40 years old. He was also riding a motorcycle. We had become acquainted a few days earlier, and his righteous life attracted my attention.

That day we rode and talked until we arrived at my home. We were discussing the mechanics of the motorcycle and he showed me some details of his bike. Then, he pointed to the bumper sticker on his gas tank and said, "Now, I'm going to show you the most important part." The bumper sticker read, "Jesus Christ is Lord."

I Had an Interest in Jesus

I felt a shiver go through my body as I read the sticker. I had a profound interest in knowing this Jesus, so alive, that he told me about. Since he was always prepared to talk about his Savior, he explained to me the marvelous plan of salvation.

Our first conversation lasted a long time, and we met several times over the following weeks. I discovered the man attended a Free Will Baptist church. About one month after

our first meeting, I gave my life into the hands of my Lord Jesus Christ and accepted Him as my Savior.

This decision transformed my life. I began a new life with God! I was joyful to be freed from the slavery of sin and thankful to be certain of eternal life with Jesus Christ.

I was just 16 years old when I was converted, but I had already experienced suffering and emptiness as I lived far from God. Evil abode in me and sin dominated me. After my conversion I encountered problems of peer pressure and opposition because of my decision, but God provided grace in every situation.

I Want God to Use Me

Today, I have the great mission of taking the gospel of love to the hundreds of people around me. I know that if I am an instrument in the Lord's hands, He can have His way in my life. Because we are "co-laborers with Christ" (1 Corinthians 4:9), He can use us in marvelous ways to get the gospel to people. May He use me as He used a 40-year-old man on a motorcycle!

Epilogue

Dr. Jose Resende Jr. was in medical school when he wrote this testimony. He is now a cardiologist and is married to a Christian girl who was reared in the Free Will Baptist church where he found Christ. She, too, is a medical doctor. Jose had the joy of seeing his parents accept Christ recently (over 10 years after he was converted). They attend the Barbacena Free Will Baptist Church in Brazil. His mother teaches Sunday school and his father is church treasurer.■



Translated and adapted by Pat Franks, missionary to Belo Horizonte, Brazil.



MASTER'S MEN

Network of Support and Encouragement

By Wayne Spruill, LifeMember

Communication with the Lord's servants around the world has been a desire of many for years. During most of that time, we have probably been too lazy to sit down and write even a letter and post it to our closest friends.

In the early 70s, a radio tower was erected atop the National Offices Building in Nashville. There were conversations with only a few missionaries who had the necessary equipment, but now in the 90s we have a tool that many of us use on a daily basis. The computer, used by many, can be one of the foremost tools in ministry.

Many of us use this tool for word processing, including but not limited to, sermon preparation, bulletins, flyers and banners. With the addition of a modem to access phone lines, one can communicate with a network of people around the world. It is with this thought in mind that we begin a new network among our people who are serving the Lord in various cities and capacities around the world.

NOSE, Network of Support and Encouragement, as organizations go, will simply be a directory of persons who are "on-line" with communications software. These folks will be from within our denomination and others who have an interest in promoting the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As purpose is concerned, the intent is to give each of us a forum that will enable us to communicate, giving and receiving encouragement, advising and simply sharing needs and concerns with a "friendly ear."

Over the years we have all heard Christians pray, "Lord, bless the missionaries," or "Lord, be with all our sister churches around the world." Recently, I was able to hear a young Christian, who was 69 years old, pray, "Lord, be with Marc (Gibbs) as he begins his test tomorrow morning." I was also able to see a tremendous smile on Brother Toufala's face the following Sunday morning when I read E-Mail from Marc that began, "I got it, I got it, I got it." The old adage, "out of sight, out of mind," has no place in our need to pray for one another, but we must make every effort to keep the needs of our people before those who care.

Sometimes we need to put some feet on our prayers. Let's not simply look at this network

as another prayer chain. There are times when a little practical advice is necessary as well. There are many ways we can be of support to one another.

We cannot always help with our hands but if our NOSE is sticking to the Lord's business, our hearts will be there too.

If you would like to be included in a directory of E-Mail users, please send the following information to the Master's Men Department or transmit to Wayne Spruill on Compuserve 70253,3256:

E-Mail User Directory

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Occupation _____

Church _____

E-Mail Address _____ on

- ☐ Compuserve
- ☐ America on Line
- ☐ Prodigy
- ☐ Other

Mail to Master's Men Department
P. O. Box 5002
Antioch, TN 37011-5002

Transmit to or
Wayne Spruill
on Compuserve
70253,3256:



WOMAN'S AUXILIARY

Woman's Window on the World

By Mary R. Wisehart

From My Window

Lessons from a genealogy. The family tree seems to be the thing these days. I frequently get letters offering to help me locate all the Wiseharts or send me a book or a coat of arms—for a price, of course. Or I get a letter from someone related to the Wiseharts who wants to know what I know about their great, great grandfather on their mother's side.

What's to be gained from a genealogy anyway? One of my professors used to say, "Don't look up your family tree. There's bound to be a rope or a nut on some branch."

Genealogies do seem to be important in the Bible. The New Testament begins with a genealogy. Beginning at Abraham, the family tree is traced to end with the words, "Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ."

In this listing five women are mentioned: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba and Mary.

Which women would we pick from this list to be so honored? Perhaps we would pick Ruth and Mary to be honored. Loyal, faithful Ruth denied her own country and religion to choose her mother-in-law's God and her country. Mary must be special. Spoken to by the angel Gabriel, she found favor with God. "Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women."

What of Tamar, Rahab and Bathsheba? Would we choose a woman who betrayed her father-in-law, a harlot, an adulteress to be in the line of the Messiah, the Son of God? Even if these women professed belief in God, left off sinning and lived upright lives, we'd probably still be saying, "Unclean, unclean!"

But God. There is the difference. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." God says, "I will remember them against you no more."

How like our God to choose the foolish, the weak, the base, the despised. What examples of His amazing grace and redemptive power.

Lessons from a genealogy? Yes, God chose even you and me, redeemed us, made us children of Abraham and heirs with Jesus Christ, set us in the family. The wonder of it!

Why A Women's Group?

Should your church have a women's group?

An organized women's group, even with two members, can begin doing service in the church and in the community. They can join with other women across the country to aid our missionaries and help get the gospel to the whole world.

The purpose of Free Will Baptist women's groups is to help our women understand and fulfill their part in the Great Commission in their families, their churches, their communities and around the world.

As two women serve, they can enlist other women. The group will keep growing as they keep serving.

Does your church need a women's group? Yes, if it has two women in it.

January Is Enlistment Month

The beginning of the new year is a good time to enlist more women in the women's group at your church.

Start the new year on the right foot. Plan a special enlistment program for all the women. Let them know the purpose, plan and program of your group for the coming year.

Involve the new members in service and ministry.

Enlistment materials are available from:

WNAC
P. O. Box 5002
Antioch, TN 37011-5002.

If you need some fresh ideas, order *Bright Ideas*, a book of suggestions for enlistment from WNAC (\$1.50 plus postage and handling, 60¢).

You may also request back issues of *Co-Laborer* magazine to distribute to the women. Let the WNAC office know how many you need and where to send them. Encourage the women to subscribe and join other women in prayer, study and action. ■



BOARD OF RETIREMENT

Retirement: Misery or Ministry?

By William Evans

As retirement approaches, the Shangri La-like dreams of youth may fade into frightful uncertainty. Hard personal questions come into focus. Will you have enough income? Where will we live? What if our health fails?

Pastors and church leaders have been in the lime-light their entire careers. What will it be like to step down? What about personal value without "the ministry"?

Since I do not have the answer for each individual, let me share with you some people I know.

The retired fellow who works in our office building.

He was a successful businessman strong in personal relationships. He loves the Lord and the Lord's people, and we love him. He goes places and does things that most retirees enjoy, but he also gets up early three days a week, drives 40 miles to the office and volunteers his time. He doesn't do executive type work, but what he does is important.

He is a joy to be around. He cares about people, saved and unsaved. He brags on his children and they brag on him, but not all the time, and the office staff is glad to hear from both.

Let me tell you about a preacher's widow.

This lady was alone after almost 40 years of marriage. She had never worked outside the home or church. She could have sat down and wallowed in self pity, fear and frustration. She didn't.

Instead, she began looking for places to serve. With care she managed her meager assets, but offered her service to those in pain and need. She took counseling courses and improved those traits developed through years of "pastor's wife" experience.

Counseling has provided her with supplemental income and purpose. She directly impacts several lives. She is still a widow with major health problems, but she smiles and encourages others and moves forward.

Then there is "Pop."

A few months ago I went to McDonald's for a quick breakfast. My order was a sausage biscuit and orange juice, but I got a lot more. The

young people behind the counter rushed around, but not so fast as to miss a friendly give and take with a much older employee they called "Pop." There was no hint of tension or conflict. Their words had no sharp barbs or edges. Smiles were abundant and respect evident. Of course, they were courteous to the customers. But it was the action behind the counter between employees that held my attention.

I figured "Pop" was finding a way to supplement his income and I was feeling a little sorry for him. About 9:30 a.m. he came into the dining area having finished his work for the morning. A young lady met him at a table with a hot cup of coffee and a biscuit. She acted like it was a treat to serve him.

I was hooked. I had to know what was behind all this. My approach was a little uncertain, but I mentioned the things I had observed and asked what was the deal. "Pop" invited me to sit and proceeded to tell me his story.

First, he had wanted something to do—twiddling his thumbs wasn't his idea for retirement. He wanted to contribute. He did not need extra income. His pension and savings were adequate. He loves kids and wanted to be involved with them. He said his ministry was to help young people learn to enjoy work—be dependable and "see Christ in the joy of an old man."

"Pop" ministered to more than kids that day. Retirement may not fit into any of these snap-shots for you, but there are places you will fit. Look for one or more. The Lord will open the door for you to enjoy the ministry of retirement. Begin today, for what you are becoming is what you will be.

Hints for Handling Retirement:

1. Start a savings/investment plan today. Early and consistent is the key.
2. Develop several areas of interest, not just your job or family. Read, paint, garden, listen to good music, emphasize variety.
3. Check your attitude. If it isn't positive now, work on it.
4. Build relationships with many people. Keep expanding your circle.
5. Cultivate a spirit of adventure and discovery. Never stop looking and learning. ■

YOUTH UPDATE



ROCKIN' CHAIR RETREAT

January 20, 1995

WHAT IS THE ROCKIN' CHAIR RETREAT?

It is a fun-filled evening, with a two fold purpose! First, it is a planned retreat that is held in your church, someone's home, or any other warm place you choose. Second, it takes place in rocking chairs, so you can participate in a Rock-a-thon at the same time as your retreat takes place!

WHO PLANS THE RETREAT?

We have prepared a skeleton schedule for your group to follow. We have also compiled suggestions for videos, games, activities, discussions, etc. This will help you in planning your retreat.

WHY HAVE A ROCK-A-THON?

The Youth Ministries Division is sponsoring the Rock-a-thon to raise operating funds. As you may know, the YMD is underwritten by Randall House Publications. Our budget is limited and much of our future growth depends on raising funds. This is your chance to help with the future growth of your youth division.

WHEN SHOULD THE ROCKIN' CHAIR RETREAT TAKE PLACE?

Friday, January 20th is the day. Our annual Youth Day is February 5th, so we planned the retreat two weeks earlier. Imagine hundreds of youth groups participating in the retreat at the same time. All your pledges should be collected by February 5th. Plan to call our office on February 6th with your Youth Day attendance and your Rock-a-thon collections.

WHAT DO I NEED TO DO NOW?

Please call the number below to order your free **Rockin' Chair Retreat Kit**. The kit contains the suggested schedule, ideas for your retreat, Rock-a-thon pledge forms and posters, information about prizes, merchandise discounts, and a special T-shirt offer.

MAKE PLANS TO JOIN IN THIS EXCITING EVENT! CALL 1-615-361-1221 EXT. 344 OR 346 TODAY!





Thomas Marberry

Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels

Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall, eds.,

(Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1992, 934 PP., hardback, \$34.99).

This large volume which is subtitled "A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship" contains almost 200 articles written by 95 different authors. It is the most comprehensive summary of current scholarship relating to the Gospels and the life of Christ which is available today.

These articles discuss everything from archaeological discoveries which have influenced the interpretation of the Gospels to the feasts which were observed in first-century Palestine.

The list of authors contains a mixture of well-established scholars (such as I. Howard Marshall and the late F. F. Bruce) and younger scholars (such as Bruce Corley and Scot McKnight) who are just now beginning to publish significant contributions to New Testament scholarship.

The authors reflect a variety of different denominational backgrounds and they do not always agree in their interpretations. They all, however, reflect a deep reverence and respect for the Bible as the Word of God. They argue that the Gospels

present accurately the teachings of Jesus. They do not agree with liberal theologians who teach that the early church changed and altered the teachings of Jesus to suit its own purposes.

In a review like this, there is not sufficient space to comment on every article. We must be content to mention only three.

The article by M. O. Wise on "Languages of Palestine" is a gem. It analyzes the available evidence on the use of Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek in ancient Israel. It outlines the various dialects of these languages which were spoken, which social classes used each dialect and the circumstances in which each dialect was used.

The article "Trial of Jesus" by Bruce Corley is a comprehensive and well-written analysis of this most important aspect of the life of Christ. Corley examines the trials of Jesus in light of what is known of Jewish and Roman legal practices of the first century. He also gives a good summary of the opinions and conclusions of important scholars who have studied the

issues surrounding the trial and crucifixion of Christ.

D. M. Scholer's article on "Women" makes a brief but insightful contribution to the volume. He summarizes how women were viewed in Jewish and pagan cultures of the first century and the roles which they played in the ministry of Jesus and in the life and work of the early church. He concludes by outlining the specific contributions of several women who are named in the Gospels and by describing each Gospel writer's unique perspective on women.

This book can be of great value both to Christians who preach and teach in local churches and to students in colleges and seminaries. I do not know of any other single source which provides so much information in a form which is so easy to use. It is not, however, a book for the beginner. It is designed for the serious student of the New Testament who has some understanding of the terminology which is used and the issues which are being debated today. ■

Beyond Belief



Index

Volume 41

January - December 1994

KEY TO INDEX: Articles, authors, columns and Newsfront items are arranged in three separate divisions.

In part one, articles are listed in order of title, author, issue and number of the page on which they appear. The author's division is alphabetized according to last names. Columns are listed in chronological order. The Newsfront

index is alphabetized in six main sections: churches, ministers, laymen, state ministries, national ministries and other.

—Compiled by *Contact Staff*

Articles

A		
Aliens Among Us; Larry D. Hampton	February, 13	
America's First Free Will Baptists; Matt Pinson	October, 18	
American Macedonian, The; Eleanor Grindstaff	November, 7	
Angels Unaware; Kim Phelps	January, 10	
Anonymous Sinner Decides to Confess; Eddie Fitzgerald	January, 11	
B		
Be Strong and Courageous; Dean Jones	September, 20	
Beauty and the Least; Jim Mullen	November, 9	
Believer's Focus, The; Tom McCullough	July, 16	
Built to Last; Don Guthrie	January, 4	
C		
Change: a Fact of Life; Kevin Justice	November, 18	
Christmas Without Credit; Dan Farmer	December, 6	
Church that Fed a County, The; Joseph Wallis	October, 4	
Combat Readiness; Brad Utley	January, 14	
Come on in and Stay Awhile! Sherry Anderson	January, 17	
Comforting the Uncomfortable; Tom McCullough	May, 16	
Common Ground; Keith Melton	August, 15	
D		
Deacons Can Make a Difference; Ken Dodson	October, 16	
Dirty-Faced Boy, The; Jon Forrest	October, 19	
Don't Leave! David M. Sutton	July, 10	
E		
Ending on a Grace Note; Keith Burden	December, 4	
Evils of Gambling, The; Robert B. Crawford	February, 6	
Expression of God, The; R. F. Smith, Jr.	December, 5	
F		
Faith-Confirming Discord; Jason Arlin Balthazor	May, 18	
Financially Reformed and Paid for It! Dan Steigman	January, 6	
Fruit of Laboring Together, The; Roger Lucas	March, 13	
G		
Gaucha and the Resurrection, The; Marcia Ellison	April, 4	
Get on the Team! Sam McVay	October, 14	
Give me a Child's Heart; Geneva Poole	November, 13	
Goin' Home; Anne Worthington	November, 12	
Guided By the Light; Melissa Riddle	September, 16	
H		
Hammer, The; James Munsey	November, 6	
Helping Hurting People; Paul V. Harrison	November, 15	
How to Help Your Pastor Help You; Vernon E. Gunnells, Jr.	August, 10	
I		
In the Trenches With Dad; Mark McPeak	June, 4	
L		
Learning from Big Blue; Jerry Norris	June, 7	
Lessons I Learned from the Hold-Up Man; Guy Owens	July, 18	
Let's Go Camping! James Evans	April, 14	
Let's Go to Little Rock; Marilyn Pritchard	May, 4	
Looking Ahead to Ministry; Robert Bryan	April, 6	
M		
Macedonian Call for Public Schools; Ken Hancock	February, 10	
Make the Iron Swim; Wade Jernigan	November, 11	
Man with a Happy Heart, The; Angie Deel	October, 8	
Mary's World; James Pittman	November, 14	
Meat and Potatoes Offering, The; Keith Fletcher	May, 12	
Miriam; Carolyn Johnson	November, 16	
Money-Saving Tips for the Pastor; Dennis Wiggs	August, 6	
Mother Went to Work; Diana Bryant	May, 10	
Mother's Laughter; Ken Riggs	May, 14	
Move Your Antenna; William Evans	October, 12	
My Pea-Pickin' Family; Connie Croxton	April, 12	

N			
National Convention Program	June, 13		
New Macedonian Call, The; Terry Austin	May, 18		
Notes to Novices; Wade Jernigan	February, 14		
Now We Have "Politically Correct" Education; Richard Tippet	August, 19		
NYC Program	June, 17		
O			
Of Comics and Kids; Robert J. Morgan	December, 14		
Orphan; Malcolm C. Fry	December, 13		
Other Indian's Moccasins, The; Wade Jernigan	April, 7		
P			
Parenting Tips; Robert J. Morgan	March, 6		
Parsonage Family, The; Ben Scott	August, 4		
Preparing for Winter; Billy Sharpston	November, 4		
Prescription for Revival; Bobby Jackson	July, 8		
Preserving our Tradition; Matt Pinson	July, 4		
Preventing Spiritual Anorexia Nervosa; Dennis L. Peterson	March, 16		
Protecting our Children; Eddie Moody	July, 14		
Purpose and Source of Pain; Tom McCullough	April, 10		
R			
Reverse Blessings; Kathy Tippet Henderson	December, 10		
S			
Satan's Limits; Tom McCullough	June, 6		
She's His Wife; Deborah Taylor	August, 8		
Small Giant, The; Carol Pinkerton	April, 8		
Spiritual Shopping Tips; Larry Russell	December, 12		
		Sweet Harmony; Terry Skiles	June, 8
		T	
		Team, The; Glenna Price	August, 14
		Thanksgiving in Tough Times; Clifford Donoho	November, 10
		Trash Can Celebration, The; Dana Thompson	July, 20
		Truth About Being Single, The; Melissa Riddle	February, 4
		Truth About Fund Raising, The; Nathan Ruble	October, 6
		W	
		We Preach Christ; Thomas Marberry	September, 4
		Wedding Music that Makes a Difference; Fay Forlines	February, 8
		What Can Your Church Do for the Homeless? Don Worrell	March, 10
		When <i>NOT</i> to Build; Ray Bowman with Eddy Hall	August, 16
		When Divorce Comes to Church; Jim McAllister	July, 12
		Where Are the Replacements? Raymond Riggs	October, 20
		Why Brethren Disagree; Jeff Crabtree	January, 8
		Why Do We Attend Church? Dann Patrick	March, 4
		Why Do We Wash Feet Anyway? Randy Wilson	March, 14
		Wise Men Still Seek Him; Daryl Ellis	December, 8
		WNAC Program	June, 20
		Would Anyone <i>Want</i> to Live in a Fishbowl? Dan Steigman	August, 12
		Y	
		You Can Defend the Faith; Clarence Hearron	October, 10
		You Can't Force God's Hand; Thomas R. McCullough	March, 8
		You Can Help Master's Men; Waymon Ray	February, 12
		Youth in a Dangerous World; Eddie Moody	January, 12

Author's Index

Anderson, Sherry	January, 17	Hancock, Ken	February, 10	Pinson, Matt	July, 4; October, 18
Austin, Terry	May, 18	Harrison, Paul V.	November, 15	Pittman, James	November, 14
Balthazor, Jason Arlin	May, 18	Hearron, Clarence	October, 10	Poole, Geneva	November, 13
Bowman, Ray with Eddy Hall	August, 16	Henderson, Kathy Tippet	December, 10	Price, Glenna	August, 14
Bryan, Robert	April, 6	Jackson, Bobby	July, 8	Pritchard, Marilyn	May, 4
Bryant, Diana	May, 10	Jernigan, Wade	February, 14; April, 7; November, 11	Ray, Waymon	February, 12
Burden, Keith	December, 4	Johnson, Carolyn	November, 16	Riddle, Melissa	February, 4; September, 16
Crabtree, Jeff	January, 8	Jones, Dean	September, 20	Riggs, Ken	May, 14
Crawford, Robert B.	February, 6	Justice, Kevin	November, 18	Riggs, Raymond	October, 20
Croxton, Connie	April, 12	Lucas, Roger	March, 13	Ruble, Nathan	October, 6
Deel, Angie	October, 8	Marberry, Thomas	September, 4	Russell, Larry	December, 12
Dodson, Ken	October, 16	McAllister, Jim	July, 12	Scott, Ben	August, 4
Donoho, Clifford	November, 10	McCullough, Thomas R.	March, 8; April, 10; May, 16; June, 6; July, 16	Sharpston, Billy	November, 4
Ellis, Daryl	December, 8	McPeak, Mark	June, 4	Skiles, Terry	June, 8
Ellison, Marcia	April, 4	McVay, Sam	October, 14	Smith, Jr., R. F.	December, 5
Evans, James	April, 14	Melton, Keith	August, 15	Steigman, Dan	January, 6; August, 12
Evans, William	October, 12	Moody, Eddie	January, 12; July, 14	Sutton, David M.	July, 10
Farmer, Dan	December, 6	Morgan, Robert J.	March, 6; December, 14	Taylor, Deborah	August, 8
Fitzgerald, Eddie	January, 11	Mullen, Jim	November, 9	Thompson, Dana	July, 20
Fletcher, Keith	May, 12	Munsey, James	November, 6	Tippet, Richard	August, 19
Forlines, Fay	February, 8	Norris, Jerry	June, 7	Utey, Brad	January, 14
Forrest, Jon	October, 19	Owens, Guy	July, 18	Wallis, Joseph	October, 4
Fry, Malcolm C.	December, 13	Patrick, Dann	March, 4	Wiggs, Dennis	August, 6
Grindstaff, Eleanor	November, 7	Peterson, Dennis L.	March, 16	Wilson, Randy	March, 14
Gunnells, Jr., Vernon E.	August, 10	Phelps, Kim	January, 10	Worrell, Don	March, 10
Guthrie, Don	January, 4	Pinkerton, Carol	April, 8	Worthington, Anne	November, 12
Hampton, Larry D.	February, 13				

Editorials

Briefcase

Ready for Tomorrow?	January, 31
Two Who Left	February, 31
Whose Move is It?	March, 31
The Bottom Line . . . People	April, 31
Oh, Mother!	May, 31
Now, That's Different!	June, 31
The Shoutin' Business	July, 31
Too Busy to Duck	August, 31
Monday Morning Attitude	September, 31
Preaching On the Wing	October, 31
The Bridge that Buddy Built	November, 31
Pixie Dust and Purple Dinosaurs	December, 31

The Secretary Speaks

Push the Plan	January, 3
Comfortable With Change	February, 3
Come Celebrate!	March, 3
Held Hostage	April, 3
Holy Hatred	May, 3
Why We Preach Christ	June, 3
Doing Denominational Business	July, 3
Bishop, Beware!	August, 3
Action in Arkansas	September, 3
Confusing Virtues with Vices	October, 3
Individual Integrity	November, 3
Looking at the Lamb	December, 3

Columns

Green Tree Bible Study

Husbands and Wives (Part 4); 1 Corinthians 7:32-40	January, 29
The Water and the Wine; John 2:1-11	April, 29

Top Shelf

Your Commonsense Guide to Personal Financial Planning; Charles Ross	January, 30
Making the Right Choices; Ted W. Engstrom and Norman B. Rohrer	February, 29
Prophecy: 14 Essential Keys to Understanding the Final Drama; John W. Walvoord	March, 29
Christian Theology: An Introduction; Alister E. McGrath	April, 30
Stones of Remembrance; Eleanor Grindstaff	May, 29
A Summary of Christian History; Robert A. Baker, revised by John M. Landers	June, 29
Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community; John Christopher Thomas	July, 22
Called Together; Steve and Mary Prokopchak	August, 30
When Heaven is Silent; Ronald Dunn	September, 30
The Book of Isaiah: An Introductory Commentary (second edition); Ronald F. Youngblood	October, 29
The De-Valuing of America; William J. Bennett	November, 29
Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels; Joel B Green and I. Howard Marshall, eds.	December, 25

Department Pages

Foreign Missions

Embedded In Me	February, 25
Triumph and Crisis	April, 25
Encouraged!	June, 28
A Converted Hindu's Prayer	August, 29
The Widow Who Praised God	October, 27
Motorcycle Evangelism	December, 20

Free Will Baptist Bible College

Missions Alive, Well on Campus	January, 23
Preaching Is Still Top Priority	March, 26
Financial Aid Can Make a Difference!	May, 27
June Volunteers, Second Year	September, 27
Moving FWBBC: The First Step	November, 27

Free Will Baptist Foundation

What is the Free Will Baptist Foundation?	January, 24
Can Your Church Benefit From A Revocable Trust?	March, 24
Flowers That Fade Not!	May, 28
Wills, Who Needs One?	July, 28
Dual Purpose Gift Annuities	September, 28
Family Budgets	November, 25

Home Missions

Help Wanted!	January, 25
The Blessings of Roll Call Sunday	March, 25
Benjamin Randall Day and the FWB Heritage Tour	May, 26
New Mexico Needs Help!	July, 29
Learning From the Mistakes of Others!	September, 29
David Marks: What a Preacher!	November, 26

Master's Men

When They Just Won't Hear	February, 26
Imagine 1,999 More of These . . .	April, 26
Ministry in the Marketplace!	June, 25
Network of Support and Encouragement	December, 21

Randall House

The First Chapter	January, 26
-------------------	-------------

Retirement and Insurance

What Is The Free Will Baptist Retirement Plan And Why Do I Need It?	February, 24
When is a Loan Better Than a Withdrawal?	April, 28
Retired and Happy!	June, 27
Planning for Retirement	August, 28
Lessons I've Learned as a Caregiver	October, 26
Retirement: Misery or Ministry?	December, 23

Women Nationally Active for Christ

Woman's Window on the World	February, 27
Woman's Window on the World	April, 27
Woman's Window on the World	June, 26
Woman's Window on the World	August, 27
Woman's Window on the World	October, 28
Woman's Window on the World	December, 22

Newsfront

Churches

Alabama	
First FWB Church, Mobile	March, 21
Arkansas	
Cavanaugh FWB Church, Fort Smith	February, 18
Georgia	
Cool Springs FWB Church, Norman Park	December, 18
Michigan	
Good Shepherd FWB Church, Dowagiac	June, 21
North Carolina	
Highland Drive FWB Church, Lincolnton	August, 21
Ohio	
Urbana FWB Church, Urbana	July, 24
Tennessee	
First FWB Church, Newport	August, 23
Donelson FWB Church, Nashville	April, 22

Ministers

Ashby, Hobert	October, 22
Beatty, Harry	July, 25
Cave, Larson	April, 23
Gallant, Richard	May, 23
Lee, George	September, 24
Joslin, J. A.	February, 19
Melvin, Billy	July, 24
Pembroke, Roy	March, 20
Powell, James C.	September, 23
Reeds, Roger	January, 19
Reynolds, R. J.	July, 23
Scott, Ben	October, 21
Worthington, Melvin	April, 23

Lay People

Burris, Dolan	April, 24
Manning, Scott	April, 22
Smith, Bruce	March, 21

States

Alabama	February, 18
---------	--------------

Arkansas	January, 20; October, 22
Atlantic Canada	October, 23
California	February, 19; August, 22; November, 21; December, 17
Florida	July, 23
Georgia	February, 15
Idaho	March 22; August, 22
Illinois	June, 22
Indiana	September, 23
Kentucky	September, 23
Louisiana	April, 24
Michigan	August, 22
Mississippi	January, 18
Missouri	September, 24
New Mexico	July, 25
Ohio	January, 19, 20; September, 22
Oklahoma	January, 21; April, 24; October, 21; November, 21
South Carolina	May, 23
Tennessee	February, 15
Texas	September, 22
West Virginia	September, 22

National Ministries

1994 Yearbook Mailed	May, 24
1994 State Association Meetings	February, 21
290 Attend Bible College Welcome Days	March, 20
42 Graduates in Bible College Commencement	August, 24
Bible College Adds Four New Workers	August, 23
Bible College Names Conference Speakers	March, 22
Bible College Purchases 122 Acres	November, 22
Bible College "Welcome Days" One of School's Best	June, 21
Discount Air Fares to National Convention Available	April, 24; May, 24; June, 22
Flames Win FWB Intercollegiate Tournament	February, 20
"F.R.A.N.tastic Days!" Winners Announced	February, 20
Free Will Baptist Bible College Surges to 354 Students	November, 20

FWBCC Looks for Teachers	April, 21
FWBCC Enrollment Grows for Third Year	April, 21
Georgia Pastor Joins FWBCC Staff	July, 25
Leadership Conference Addresses Change	February, 16
Leadership Conference Set for December	December, 18
Loveless to Direct Publishing House	January, 18
Master's Men Set Golf Tournament	June, 21
North Carolina Steering Committee Meets	October, 23
Sunday School and Church Training Board Statement	April, 21
WNAC Executive Committee Statement	February, 15
WNAC Retreat Attracts 635 Women	December, 17
Youth Workers "Build Kids Together"	May, 24

Other

Arkansas Teens Go to Washington	November, 21
Free Will Baptist Christian Schools Meet	May, 24
Harvest Child Care Ministries Full	June, 22
Mexican Convention Meets	November, 20
SE Announces Graduation	April, 23
SE Enrollment Up	November, 21
SE Sets Missions Conference	July, 24
SE Sets Spring Conference	January, 21
Tulsa Sponsors Church Growth Emphasis	December, 17

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1994
Leadership Conference
December 5-6
Maxwell House Hotel
Nashville, Tennessee

May the
 Lord's
 blessings
 be yours
 as you
 celebrate
 His birth
 this
 Christmas
 and
 serve Him
 in the
 coming
 year.



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Jack Williams

Pixie Dust and Purple Dinosaurs

Two kids with a cardboard box can squeeze more laughter and sheer joy from Christmas than a parking lot full of adults. That's because kids innately know more about what makes Christmas *Christmas* than adults do. Unlike adults, kids don't feel compelled to explain the theology or discuss the shining wonder of December 25. They don't worry that it'll end and they'll again face life without the sparkle.

Nope, kids bounce up Christmas morn and dive neck deep into the squeals, the colors, the giving, the sounds, the smells of the day. And when the day is done, they've made enough memories for a lifetime while their preoccupied parents only made turkey sandwiches.

Charles Dickens said, "It is good to be children sometimes, and never better than at Christmas, when its mighty Founder was a child Himself."

Kids can't resist a mystery. If there's one thing that Christmas has plenty of, it's a generous helping of mystery. From veiled Old Testament prophecies to a midnight escape to Egypt, the story of Jesus' birth fascinates the sneaker generation. And why not? It's the greatest story ever told.

The same Christmas mystery that draws children like moths to the light also attracts their parents. Children crowd around the manger to touch the new-born King while their parents gaze over their shoulders asking themselves how God could be reduced to seven pounds, 14 ounces.

Kids take it at face value.

Kids are natural believers. They live in a world of pixie dust and purple dinosaurs. They have absolutely no problems with the idea that an angel choir conducted a one-night concert for the benefit of a few scared shepherds on a Judean hillside. Wise men and wicked kings can occupy the

same paragraph in their minds. The Virgin Birth may put a strain on their parents, but to kids, the Virgin Birth gets no more attention than Mary riding a donkey a hundred miles to pay taxes. Maybe less.

Kids grow up trusting. They believe their parents. They believe their teachers. They believe their pastors. It's a great way to live.

Kids are smarter than you think. They know they're protected from some harshness in life. That's one reason they have no trouble believing that Someone they've never seen did something they can't explain, something so wonderful that once a year the whole world stops to remember it.

Charles Wells said, "Men always have hope of a better world when they see the miracle of Christmas. All the selfishness, bitterness and hatreds pause, and for a day surrender to the sweet charm of a little Divine Prince.... Thus we can always know that men could live with goodwill and understanding for each other, because one day in each year the little Divine Prince of Peace still compels them to do it."

Kids give the best gifts. I don't know why, but kids make the best gift-givers in the world. Their parents plot and shop and fret for months about getting just the right toy. Not the kids.

It doesn't take \$500 for a kid to get right to the heart of Christmas giving. Ask those empty-nest parents to show you their prized memories of Christmases past. It'll probably be some wrinkled sheet of lined paper where a five-year-old hand scribbled, "I luv you, Mommy," with a blunt red crayon. Or a faded card addressed to Dad that contains an IOU from a 14-year-old who promised to mow the yard next spring.

The reason kids give the best gifts is because they give themselves. That's all they've got to give—bright eyes, big smiles, sticky-fingered hugs. And no parent in the world would swap one such sentimental trophy for a truck load of over-priced tinsel and glitter.

Kids are innocent. There's a natural humility about how they view life, especially the Christmas season. Every kid in America seems to live from the day after Thanksgiving to the night before Christmas with his nose pressed against a store window in awe of... everything.

They simply stare open-mouthed at something that's alive and wonderful and they can't explain. That's why adults like to watch kids at Christmas, hoping to recapture some of their own dreams that got misplaced.

Children always flocked around Jesus when He entered a city to preach in His public ministry. He loved them and welcomed them and made room for them in His busy schedule. He also warned adults that except they be converted and became as little children they could not enter the kingdom of God. Now, that's a sobering Christmas thought!

Kids are Christmas. There is no Christmas story without children. The original Christmas began with a Child, a Child who would change history. A Child who was a new beginning. A Child who disrupted an empire and caused soldiers to beat their swords into plowshares.

Kids are still doing it. They still disrupt quiet domestic empires with cries of new beginnings. We adults still stand at the manger every Christmas puzzling at how easy it would be to love a God with brown eyes, chubby hands and an open-faced smile. Kids stop at the manger, touch the Child and walk away with the miracle in their trusting hearts. ■

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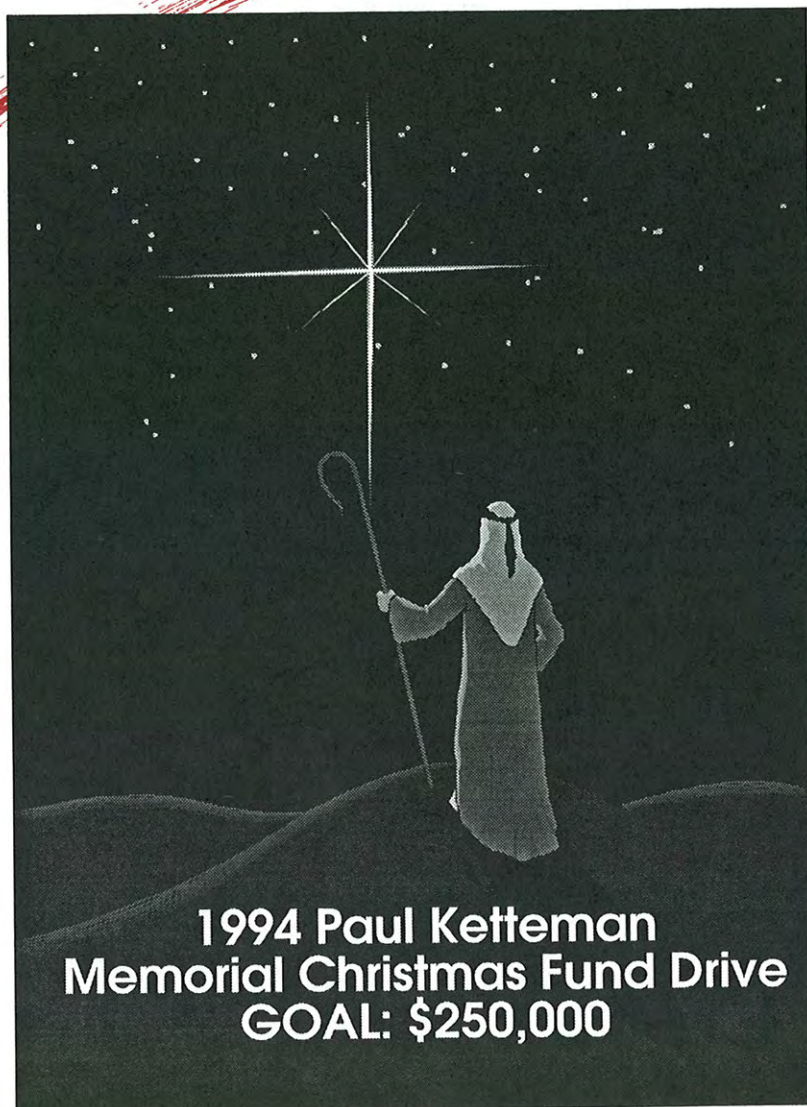
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Merry Christmas

from everyone at

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Nashville, Tennessee



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