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Articles

- 06** WAR Night
- 09** The Power of Empowerment
- 11** Via Negativa
- 14** Underdog on a Mission
- 20** Papa, I Don't Want You to Go
- 22** E-TEAM: It's Worth It
- 26** A Day in the Middle East
- 27** Whatever "It" Is
- 28** Vulnerability
- 30** Light Beyond the Shadows
- 34** You Can Go Home Again, Part One
- 37** Ready, Set, _____
- 39** Kentucky to Kandahar
- 44** Turning It Around
- 47** The Final Out?
- 48** The Impact of Impact



News

- 24** Around the World
- 42** Across the Nation
- 18** At Welch College
- 50** NAFWB 2017 Preview
- 52** Impact Louisville

Columns

- 04** First Glimpse: Looking Forward to Louisville
- 16** Intersect: The Marks of a Christian
- 33** Brown on Green: Doing Nothing
- 48** Leadership Whiteboard: Overcoming Obstacles
- 54** One to One: Camp

20



First Glimpse >>

Looking Forward to Louisville

Anaheim, California, 1980. Sweaty palms. Pint-size leisure suit. Racing heart. Three terrifying judges. It was the first of many competition performances, from Bible memorization and sword drill to drama, piano, vocal solo, art, and photography. In 12 years of competition, I won only once. But those years of practice shaped, molded, and prepared me for ministry. I wouldn't trade anything for the experience.

Charleston, West Virginia, 1991. Top row. Wednesday night missionary service. As the convention choir sang "Oh, What a Savior," the words sank deep into my soul. Shouts rang out across the arena, and one attendee, overcome completely by emotion, left his seat and ran the length of the arena, his booming shouts reaching all the way to the upper-deck seating. It was more than just an unforgettable service. It was the night I felt God nudge me toward ministry through music.

Birmingham, Alabama, 2006. Relentless sun. Triple-digit temps. Sweltering humidity. More than 400 volunteers spread across the city for the first Im-

pact event armed with Bibles, hammers, chainsaws, and determination. Teams of two and three walked the streets, taking the gospel to every door along the way. And before the hot sun faded to a molten copper sunset, six people met the Savior in central Alabama. I've rarely been so proud of Free Will Baptists.

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 2010. Sunday morning. Opening service. My friend and mentor Bert Tippet preached his final convention sermon powerfully. He expressed no bitterness, though the final stages of an aggressive form of bone cancer would soon claim his life. His faithful words of encouragement in the face of suffering still echo in my mind.

Charlotte, North Carolina, 2012. Quivering voice. Shaking hands. Last-second adjustments. After leading the opening songs of the convention on Sunday morning, as I turned to take my seat, I bumped and spilled the courtesy pitcher of ice water under the pulpit. Over the next 40 minutes, Sunday School teacher Rodney Holloman was gradually drenched with bone-chilling water from

the knees down as a puddle formed around his feet. He still hasn't let me forget it.

Tampa, Florida, 2013. My first board report. Although only two steps led to the stage, I somehow missed one. Papers flying, I pinwheeled across the platform, finally catching myself on the keyboard stand. Nobody remembers what I said that day, but every year, somebody reminds me of that not-so-graceful display. I don't blame them. I would have laughed, too.

Kansas City, Missouri, 2016. After a message calling generations to work together for a stronger church and denomination, my daughter and I walked down the long aisle to the altar where we knelt and prayed. It was a moment I will never forget.

Louisville, Kentucky, 2017? I could fill pages and pages with memories from the national convention. And maybe you could too. The only question is: what will happen *this* year in Louisville? **ONE**

For more information about the 2017 convention, read, "Equipping the Saints," on pages 50-53 of this issue, or visit www.nafwb.org.

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letters:

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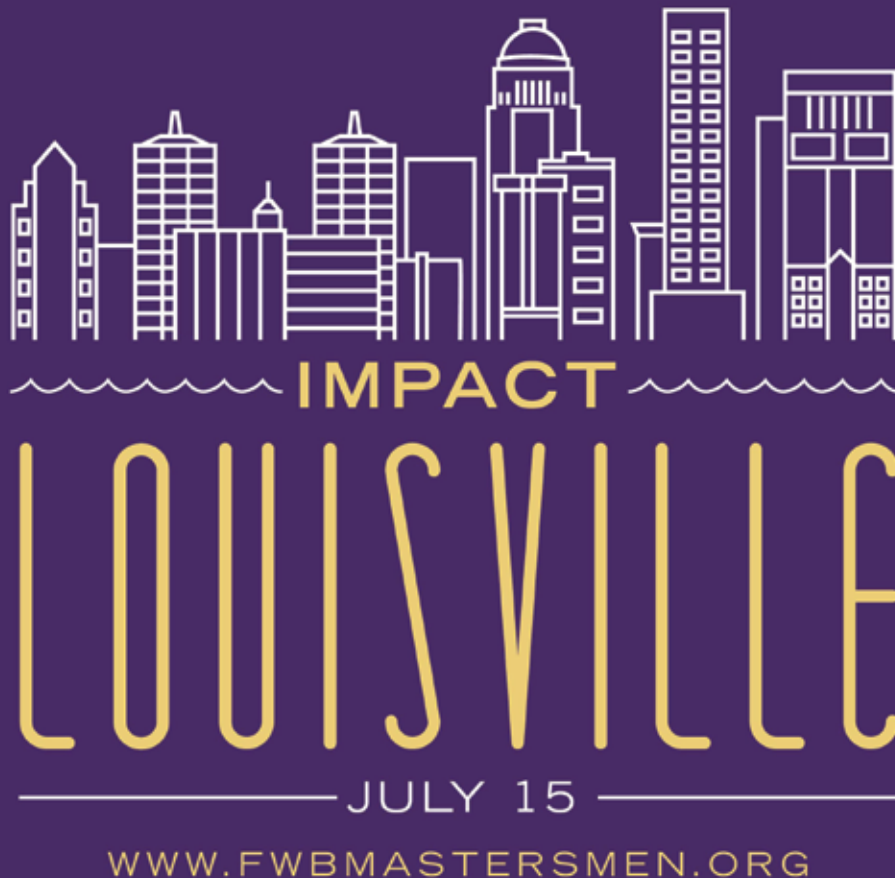
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WAR

NIGHT

BY EMILY FAISON

God is working in the rising generation, and he is using Free Will Baptist women to do it. Anna Forlines is one such young woman following God's calling. While churches provide the preaching, teaching, network of family, and voices of wisdom young adults need to grow spiritually, Anna realized small, intimate gatherings are also crucial to spiritual wellbeing. Young women need their own spaces to come together to share, worship, and pray.

In response to that need, Anna and a team of young women recently held their first WAR Night, an event for Christian women ages 18-25, in the Nashville, Tennessee, area. The evening lineup included worship, testimony, prayer, snacks, and, of course, coffee. “We aren’t trying to be hip and trendy,” Anna exclaimed. “But you have to reach people where they are. Trends can be used as a tool to reach people.”

Based on the theme, We Are Royal, from 1 Peter 2:9, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out,” the goal of WAR Night is to create a space for young women to build one another up by sharing their daily Christian walk.

“So many girls feel as though there is no one to talk to,” Anna said. “They feel like they have to put on a ‘Sunday face.’” By coming together in a smaller group of young Christian women, Anna hopes to offset the mentality that girls must figure the hard stuff out on their own. Gatherings like WAR Night may help mend the rift girls feel between Sunday mornings and the rest of their week.

God has positioned Anna in just the right place to recognize these needs among young women—they are actually Anna’s peers. A senior at Welch College, Anna recently completed a year-long International Missions internship, when she studied at the university in Nantes, France, while working alongside Matt and Christina Price in their outreach to students. “Before I went to France, I went through some struggles,” Anna admits. “But God orchestrated all of it. While I was in France, God used that time to break me and put me back together.”

Now back in the States, Anna understands she can continue to build on the relationship-building skills learned in France to minister to fellow young women in college. “So many girls are in the same place I was,” Anna explains. “Struggling with life.”

Encouraged by the success of programs like WNAC’s *Shine!*, which helps 12- to 18-year-old girls discover their self-worth in their heavenly Father, Anna knew it was possible to bring similar themes into a conversation with women in the next age bracket. Young women in college also struggle with identity, especially when comparing themselves to their peers.

Anna believes a starting point to addressing this struggle is “to be known and loved where we are.” Creating a space where young women can be vulnerable while speaking God’s truth to one another is the first step in Anna’s plan to be known and loved. “I want to help other young women realize the ‘significant insignificance’ of being a child of the King.”

YOU HAVE TO REACH PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE.

Geared towards Christian women, the goal of WAR Night is to encourage young women to share their walk with Christ—including the hard parts—without worrying about an end goal of evangelizing. “Before we can evangelize effectively,” Anna explains, “it’s important to be open and honest with each other.” In a space like this, girls can focus on helping each other heal and reenergize before stepping back into the important role of witness.

Anna is no stranger to these kinds of activities, having worked with Young Life, a Christian organization that ministers to adolescents and college students, as well as having helped the Prices in their Heart for the World student ministry in France. Still, Anna knew she couldn’t build this project on her own and consulted friends and mentors for guidance. “I want to reach out to women more mature in the faith to pray for this group of young women as we come together,” Anna said earnestly, recognizing the importance of both the preceding generation and the upcoming generation.

WNAC’s Executive Director Elizabeth Hodges has been instrumental in the early stages of WAR Night. When Anna and a friend first came up with the idea of ministering to young women from a conference-style approach, they didn’t realize how far out of their league they were. “We were dreaming big, big,” Anna laughs. “But we weren’t even laying a foundation.” Elizabeth’s mentorship, along with advice from other women, helped Anna transform her ideas into a feasible plan, leading to what is now WAR Night.

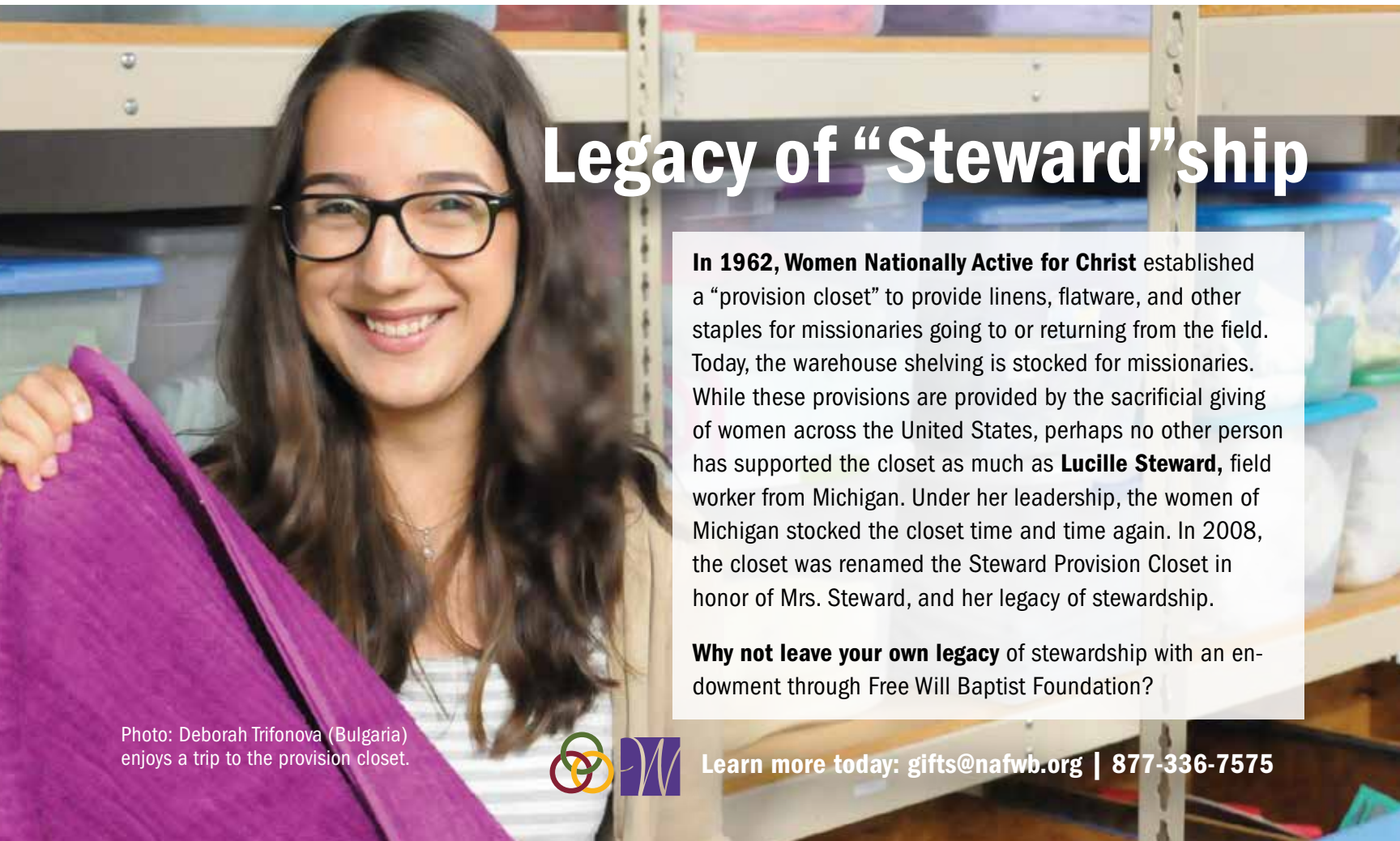
"I was thrilled when Anna approached me with the concept of WAR Night, after WNAC had hosted the *Shine!* Conferences for girls 12 to 18," Elizabeth explained. "Her burden was for similar events for her 18-24 age group." After Anna's initial call to Elizabeth, Anna sat down with Elizabeth and WNAC board chairman Diana Bryant to discuss practical steps to begin moving towards fulfilling her dream. "I was impressed with Anna's teachable spirit as she worked to develop an idea," Diana shared. Elizabeth agreed: "Due to my life experiences and education, I posed many questions for thought. My heart's desire was to encourage her passion and vision with realistic expectations."

Over the course of the next few months, Elizabeth and Diana coached Anna towards laying that foundation she needed. With their guidance, Anna made plans for every logistical detail of the event and put together a team of

peers to help her make her dream a reality.

While just one WAR Night event has taken place so far, Anna has put together a team to create more events and build a website, with hopes of planning a conference similar to WNAC's *Shine!* in the future. Deborah Trifonova, native to Bulgaria, where her parents are missionaries with International Missions; Keren Delgado, a Cuban pastor's daughter and recipient of a WNAC scholarship; and Kori Slempe; all students from Welch, have joined in Anna's dream. Each brings different skills and abilities to the table, and together they can maintain a website, market upcoming events, and plan and host future WAR nights. "It's exciting to see the places where others are so much better at different things than I am," Anna said. "God has gifted us uniquely to help each other." **ONE**

About the Writer: Florida native Emily Faison is the interactive editor for Brief Media, located in Tulsa, Oklahoma. A prolific writer and blogger, Emily earned a M.A. in Literature from Florida State University in 2015. Learn more about the ministry of WNAC: www.WNAC.org.



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In 1962, Women Nationally Active for Christ established a "provision closet" to provide linens, flatware, and other staples for missionaries going to or returning from the field. Today, the warehouse shelving is stocked for missionaries. While these provisions are provided by the sacrificial giving of women across the United States, perhaps no other person has supported the closet as much as **Lucille Steward**, field worker from Michigan. Under her leadership, the women of Michigan stocked the closet time and time again. In 2008, the closet was renamed the Steward Provision Closet in honor of Mrs. Steward, and her legacy of stewardship.

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Photo: Deborah Trifonova (Bulgaria) enjoys a trip to the provision closet.



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The **POWER** *of* **EMPOWERMENT**

By Don Matchett

Sheila Valdés is not a household name among Free Will Baptists in the U.S., but for the last few years she has been invaluable to Free Will Baptists in Panama. Anyone who has attended a youth event in that country knows she is no amateur. She certainly doesn't do it alone, but every event is challenging, inspiring, educational, well organized, and non-stop. One minute you are out of breath, the next you laugh yourself to tears, and the next you are overcome by the Word of God. I'm sure it hasn't always been perfect, but watching Miss Valdés organize and execute a camp now is like watching a conductor lead a finely tuned orchestra. And her journey as the national youth director started with empowerment.

Empowerment, in most cases, sits on the shelf of forgotten capital, like a valuable stock waiting to be remembered and cashed in. The good news is empowerment costs nothing but time, training, communication, and courage. In contrast, the lack of empowerment creates a vacuum that sucks away creativity, wisdom, and fellowship, as well as spiritual and numerical growth.



This vacuum is propelled by the idea that the church should be run only by trained professionals. This is not to say we shouldn't expect professionalism. Everything should be done with excellence, but even professionals do not start as professionals. And being a "professional" is no guarantee of professionalism, either.

Yet, a professionally-led church leaves the rest of the church to operate as consumers—only taking and not giving any service in return. And consumers are extremely fickle. "If I don't like the show, I can and will change the channel."

However, the opposite is true when you empower the consumer to become a producer. They take ownership. Isn't this the theme of the Great Commission? Be a disciple and make disciples. Produce and teach others to produce.

In fact, if you look closely, this theme runs throughout the New Testament—the health of the Kingdom, both individually and collectively, depends on using as many people as possible. First Peter 4:10 reminds us that *all* of us should use the gifts we have been given, and Paul describes the Corinthians as a body that functions well when each member plays his or her part by applying those gifts.

Why can't some churches move from 75 to 100, or 100 to 125, or 150 to 200? While it could be any number of reasons, in many cases, it's because the church refuses to empower its members, or the laity refuses to become fully vested in leadership. A small group of leaders, or sometimes just the pastor, is left to do everything; consequently, important matters do not get completed, or worse, are done poorly. The larger a church grows, the more the pastor must rely on laity, and the more laity must be determined to duplicate and replace themselves.

I just returned from another action-packed youth camp in Panama, planned and orchestrated by Sheila. It was another great success, but she is now handing the reins to Onel Maldonado. So, the cycle continues. Sheila will now become an advisor to Onel, but it doesn't stop there. College-age students will be promoted to assistants and the training process will continue.

Admittedly, I did not experience the early days of Sheila's role as youth director. I'm sure some days were messier than others. But patience and training have certainly paid off. And it all started with a conversation that started with "Will you?" and ended with "I will." Who are you empowering?

About the Writer: Don Matchett is the director of missions for the Arkansas State Association.



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Via Negativa—

ADDITION

by

SUBTRACTION

By Joshua Eidson

MINIMALISM. ESSENTIALISM. SIMPLICITY. DECLUTTERING.

This is a principle or idea I have been exploring lately. It's a means to an end, a means to live with contentment; it's a re-setting of priorities. Western culture, and especially our American wealth, has made us too comfortable, too soft. We have lost our resiliency in tough times. It has distracted us from the important things in life. For me, minimalism has served as a prompt, a needed push to help me reevaluate what a "need" is.

Minimalism is primarily considered a way of thinking towards material belongings, but its core purpose goes much deeper than the material. The principle idea or definition of minimalism is addition by subtraction. *Minimalism* is discarding all that is unneeded or of lesser value to focus time and energy on those things most important to you. So, in this frame of reference, minimalism can apply to any area of life. And to be fully realized, it must be applied to all areas of one's life.

Family life is the most rewarding area in which minimalism can apply, but it can also be one of the most contentious or debated areas. First, minimalism is a scale, not a destination or definite point, so it can look different for everyone. Are you constantly running from one calendar engagement to another? From one practice, recital, game, or performance to the next? None of these things are bad, but are they producing the individual and familial results you want? Do they contribute to and reinforce your family's priorities? Or, are they keeping you from focusing on the family priorities and principles you want to attain? These questions about how we commit our time and family resources help us focus on the most important things in life.

Church life can strongly resemble family life when it comes to minimalism. We can and should use the questions listed earlier when it comes to church resources. The church leadership and congregation should ask these questions of everything in which the local congregation is involved. Each family in the local body of believers should ask these questions as they try to determine where they fit within their local church's priorities and ministries. If we don't have focused purpose and principles for our local church, then we have no measuring rod to see if we are effecting the changes we want to see in our church and community.

Personal finances may be the most recognizable application of this principle. It can be a most rewarding area to apply the habit of

simplicity. This does not necessarily mean you cut everything from your budget that is not absolutely necessary for existence. Instead, it provides a lens through which to make choices. It clarifies your personal goals, and it determines the means to meet those goals. A minimalistic mindset causes you to ask questions of your current spending habits: if I spend my money here, what goal does it help me reach? If I save money by not dining out, what priority does that give me freedom to pursue?

One of your goals may be to save for your children's college years. You realize you need to cut back on eating out or entertainment spending by a certain percentage, and reduce your clothing budget to set aside a certain amount for college tuition. Minimalism has helped shift focus from immediate gratification to the more fulfilling perspective of intentional spending.

Minimalism is summed up simply by Joshua Becker, author of *The More of Less*, "You can do anything you want, but you can't do everything." Minimalism is a means to focus on what's most important and eliminate distractions. It's not taught me anything new, but it has helped to reshape and reenergize my thinking regarding my priorities. What area(s) in your life could use simplification? Where do you feel you're missing something greater? Maybe you need to remove the excess so you can identify your true blessings and fulfill your unique purpose.

About the Writer: Joshua Eidson is accounting administrator for the Free Will Baptist Board of Retirement. A native of Middle Tennessee, Joshua graduated from Welch College in 2007, where he earned a B.S. in business administration. He and his wife Rachel have three children.



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70	5.1%	70/70	4.6%
75	5.8%	75/75	5.0%
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SEXUALITY, GENDER, *and the* CHURCH

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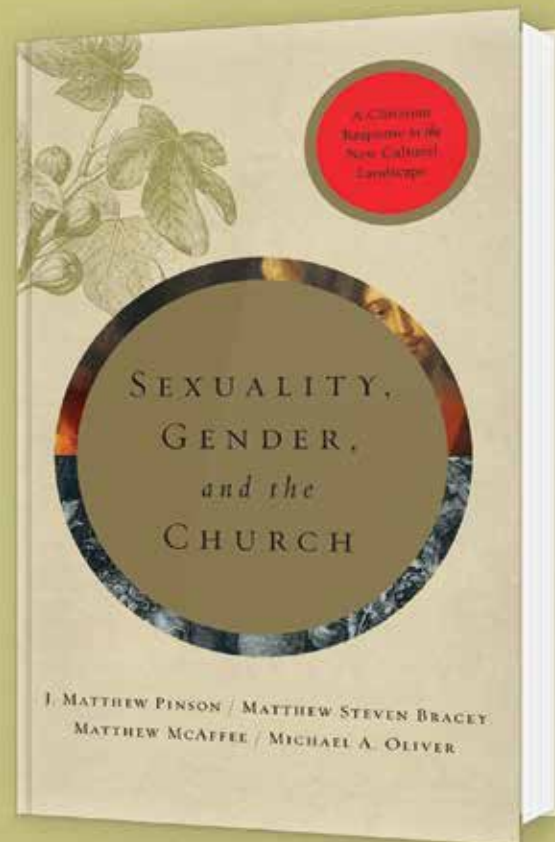
What do I need to know about the legal, political, and religious liberty implications of the Supreme Court decision legalizing same-sex marriage?

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UNDERDOG

ON A MISSION

BY DAVID JONES

PEOPLE LOVE A GOOD UNDERDOG STORY.

It's part of the reason children are so drawn to the real-life story of David and Goliath. It's why simply saying the name "Rocky" conjures up images of a boxer with the "eye of the tiger." It's why Frodo Baggins is one of the most relatable and beloved characters in all of fictional literature.



For many years, there has been a type of underdog deep in the heart of Nashville, often dwarfed in size by giants, yet standing out among the crowd because of its heart, conduct, and eternal impact. Since 1942, Welch College has made a profound influence on its community through the Christ-like service of its students. Although small in number, the student body has left a lasting impact that far surpasses its enrollment numbers.

As Welch College enters an exciting new era, I thought it important to share a couple of behind-the-scenes stories from my time at Welch. Although these stories are unknown to many, they truly convey the heart of the student body, both past and present, and the impact the college has made for 75 years.

Red Cross and Red Flags

During the 2006-07 school year, the student body conducted an annual blood drive for the Red Cross. As student body president, it was my job to communicate with the Red Cross and find out their hopes for the drive. I spoke to the representative who headed up the drive, and she wanted us to set a goal of 30 donors for the day. She told me that if we happened to have more than 30, I should call her, and they would send extra help. During our student council meeting, the society and class presidents took this very seriously and went out to the student body and encouraged sign-ups. We didn't have 30 people—we had 78 people sign up!

When I called the lady from the Red Cross, she freaked out. I expected jubilation, but what I heard was absolute shock. Trying to find her breath, she told me, “We don't have enough workers on staff to cover that many people!” Luckily, she was able to find additional help to cover the drive. Including the 78 initial signups, we had over 90 people donate blood that day—including many members of the faculty and staff—and even had to turn away

some students because there weren't enough workers or hours in the day to get all of the donations.

In the following days, the representative from the Red Cross called me in tears. She said her boss had called her because a red flag showed up on their donor page. That red flag indicated an unusually high amount of donors in an area, and all of those donors were from Welch College. She explained that our small college had donated more blood than other local colleges with nearly 50 times as many students!

With tears, she thanked us for going above and beyond and shattering expectations. She recognized something special about our school and students, and she was extremely grateful for what we did. She had no doubt we cared about others.

A Truckload of Food

During that same school year, the student body contacted Second Harvest Food Bank about volunteering at their facility. Unfortunately, Second Harvest was so low on food donations at the time they couldn't use our help. So, in typical Welch College fashion, the student body decided to remedy that situation with a food drive to replenish their inventory. Once again, the student council worked hard to promote this, and the student body responded in an amazing way. Day after day, students came into the student center with huge cardboard containers of canned goods and other items. As the donations continued to pour in, I watched as the cardboard cracked under the weight of the donated items. What started as a small idea turned into a colossal effort, as the massive piles of donations blocked the walkway in the student center.

When the drive ended, we totaled the number of items and called Second Harvest. I wondered how we were going to get that many items in our cars to deliver them. When Second Harvest heard, they laughed: “When there are that many items, we don't expect you to bring them

in. We'll send a truck to pick them up.” And so they did.

I vividly remember watching the Second Harvest workers wheel in dollies and take box after box to their trucks. In total, we ended up donating 1,000 pounds of food. In the following days, an email arrived from Second Harvest Food Bank. They expressed their amazement and admiration at what a small school could do and thanked us for seeing a need and finding a way to meet it.

Small College, Eternal Impact

Plenty of other stories could be told—students raising money for mosquito nets to fight malaria in Africa; students taking their Saturdays to cut grass, rake leaves, clean gutters, or provide babysitting for the community at no cost; the student body voting to donate \$5,000 to the World Missions Offering. These stories aren't anomalies. They are true representations of the students at Welch College, past and present. These stories won't make the evening news, get written about in a local paper, or even be tweeted about for all to see. They don't need to be. But these stories epitomize a college, a campus, and a student body that truly cares about serving God and serving people.

In a city with colleges enrolling thousands, people might see Welch as a great underdog story. But if you talk to any students, faculty, or staff, they'll tell you what this small school does is no surprise. In fact, the college has been doing it for the past 75 years. “Within these halls we love so well . . .” are students who will continue changing the world by loving God and loving people. It's a great story that will continue to be told for years to come.

About the Writer: David Jones is a senior editor at Randall House Publications. Learn more about Welch College: www.Welch.edu.

Intersect >>

*“From henceforth,
let no man trouble me:
for I bear in my body the marks of the
Lord Jesus” (Galatians 6:17).*

The Marks of a Christian

Maybe you have heard some Christians use the verse above loosely as a justification for “Christian” tattoos. However, it is clear, given the context, that Paul had something much deeper (and more painful) than a tattoo of a cross in mind. He referred to the extreme suffering he endured as a result of following Jesus, suffering that scarred him permanently.

The irony is evident in these closing words to the Galatians. The false teachers who opposed Paul in Galatia insisted on circumcision as physical evidence of a right relationship with God. In response, Paul simply pointed out his scars for Jesus. Obviously, we do not have pictures of Paul. But I’m sure his body was covered with the lasting signs of suffering. Perhaps you remember Paul’s own description of what he had endured in 2 Corinthians 11:23b-27:

In stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.

The Apostle’s simple statement to the Galatians reminds us of several important biblical principles regarding suffering. First, don’t be surprised by suffering but expect it as part of living in a fallen world and following the Savior. Scripture tells us not to be surprised at the fiery trials we face (1 Peter 4:12), yet we still tend to be stunned when we encounter dif-

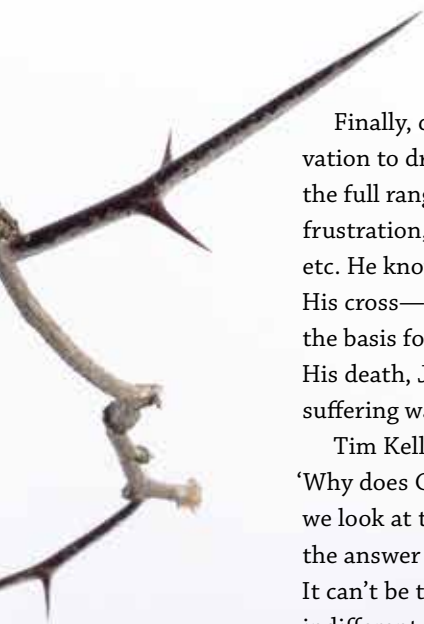
ficulty. Perhaps this is the result of the fairytale misconceptions of the Christian life in which we “live happily ever after.” Yes, Christians experience peace, joy, and grace, but the Bible never promises ease. Jesus not only told us about His cross; He also describes our cross we take up daily to follow Him. He told his disciples that all who strive for godly lives in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

Second, remember we shouldn’t go through suffering alone but take comfort in other believers. In his book *Future Grace*, John Piper encourages us to follow the example of Jesus during His agonizing hours in Gethsemane. He chose close friends to accompany him (Matthew 26:37). He openly shared his struggle with them: “My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death” (26:38). He asked for their intercession and partnership through the struggle: “Remain here and keep watch with me” (26:39). He did all of these things before giving Himself fully to the agony He experienced.¹

It might come as a surprise to many to learn that some of my greatest spiritual battles came during seminary. In spite of being surrounded by Scripture, sermons, and a constant stream of biblical wisdom, I experienced nearly overwhelming spiritual oppression. I found relief only when I left campus, and I dreaded each return more and more.

In desperation, I confessed this struggle to my seminary roommate, Matthew McAfee, now a fellow professor at Welch College. To my surprise, he admitted to a similar struggle. I can’t tell you how comforting it was to know I wasn’t alone in my suffering. Someone shared in what I was going through. As I recall that moment, I can’t help but think of the words of the Apostle Peter, who urged us to be steadfast in our faith because we understand that other Christians throughout the world have and will experience the same types of suffering (1 Peter 5:9).

1 John Piper. *Future Grace*. Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1995.



Finally, don't waste your suffering. Use it as a motivation to draw near to God. Remember, Jesus endured the full range of human experience—sorrow, desertion, frustration, temptation, disappointment, mistreatment, etc. He knows from experience about our suffering. And His cross—the culmination of His own suffering—became the basis for understanding God, the world, and self. In His death, Jesus tasted supreme suffering, yet by His death suffering was conquered.

Tim Keller observes: "If we again ask the question: 'Why does God allow evil and suffering to continue?' And we look at the cross of Jesus, we still do not know what the answer is. However, we know what the answer *isn't*. It can't be that He doesn't love us. It can't be that He is indifferent or detached from our condition. God takes our misery and suffering so seriously that He was willing to take it upon Himself."²

² Tim Keller. *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*. New York: Dutton, 2008, 31.

Consider the thought-provoking insight on suffering offered by Adelaide Proctor in the 1858 hymn "My God, I Thank Thee":

*I thank Thee too that all our joy is touched with pain,
That shadows fall on brightest hours,
That thorns remain;
So that earth's bliss may be my guide and not my chain.*

As you face the struggles of this life for the sake of Christ, consider the following questions to help you keep things in perspective:

- *Will you seek to understand your suffering from God's perspective?*
- *Will you allow others to help you in your suffering? Will you be used by God to help others in their suffering?*
- *Will you use this time of suffering to draw you near to God?*

About the Writer: Barry Raper is Pastoral Ministry chairman at Welch College. Learn more: www.WELCH.edu.

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Traditional Jeffersonian architecture creates a striking and timeless setting.



“Papa, I Don’t Want You to Go.”

BY STEVE LYTLE

It was late December 2008. We lived in Antioch, Tennessee, near Nashville. Judy and I both worked at International Missions, in the home office. It was my eighth year there, after 23 years as a career missionary in Panama (1977-2000). For months, Judy and I had sensed restlessness in our spirits and felt the Lord leading us in a different direction. Finally, we concluded we should go back overseas, at least part time. The Mission Board approved our return, and we planned to leave in January.

On that day in December, our son Michael, his wife Diane, and their two children Caia, age 6, and Elliot, age 3, came to visit. As they pulled into the neighborhood, Caia saw something in the yard she’d not seen before and asked her mom what it was. It was a “For Sale” sign. Her mom explained we were selling the house because we were going back overseas soon. Caia was very quiet. When she walked inside, she came over, climbed up into my lap, and spoke these words: “Papa, I don’t want you to go.”

I could easily have lost it at that moment, as that loving face with those beautiful eyes looked up at me. But God helped me give an appropriate response. I gently explained we loved God and felt He wanted us to go back to Panama and tell people about Him, as we’d done before. We loved Him. He loved us, and we really needed to do what He wanted us to do. I reassured her we would come home from time to time and see them, and we could talk on Skype. We would stay connected. She got up and went on to play. I think she was okay.

And you know what? God was good. Sure, it was hard to leave



those four grandchildren who came along while we served in the States. But Mike and Diane and the children came to Panama in 2011 to see us. (Phil and Amy and their boys came in 2010.) We talked to all of our kids via Skype on a regular basis. Due to a number of factors, we came home every year, sometimes for several months, which was wonderful for these aging grandparents.

But even if Judy and I had left and never seen them again, it was something we had to do. Obeying the Lord. Doing His will for our lives. Following His leading. This is not just for missionaries; it is for every follower of Christ. The saying based on 1 John 2:17, popular in my youth, is still true today: "Only one life, will soon be past. Only what's done for Christ will last."

Many have heard of Bill Borden, heir of the Borden dairy fortune. A young man in his early 20s, he was also a devoted Christian. As a college student, already wealthy, his burden for lost and hurting people grew. He felt God's call upon his life to be a missionary. But before that, he served the Lord faithfully during his college years at Yale. He shared the gospel with fellow students and led the students in morning prayer time. By the time he was a senior, Bill Borden saw a thousand of Yale's 1,300

students meet in prayer groups. He also reached out to widows, orphans, drunks, and the disabled near the college, and he founded the Yale Hope Mission.

Bill Borden completed graduate work at Princeton then sailed for China. He stopped in Egypt to study Arabic. While there, he contracted spinal meningitis and died within a month, at the age of 25, without ever reaching his field of service. Later, his family discovered the following words written in his Bible: "No reserves, no retreats, no regrets." Borden's life was not wasted; he did the will of God.

It is said the Moravian missionaries (among others) packed all their belongings in a casket when they prepared to cross the ocean to go to Africa, Asia, or the Americas, knowing they would never come home. When we think of all Jesus did for us, through His incarnation, His sacrificial death, and His resurrection, how could we do less than give Him our all, no matter what the cost or how great the sacrifice?

I hope our words, and even more, our examples, have shown our children and grandchildren the importance of complete surrender to do the will of God.

About the writer: Steve Lytle and his wife Judy, now retired, still passionately participate in taking the gospel where it is unknown. They have also welcomed five more grandchildren into the family.

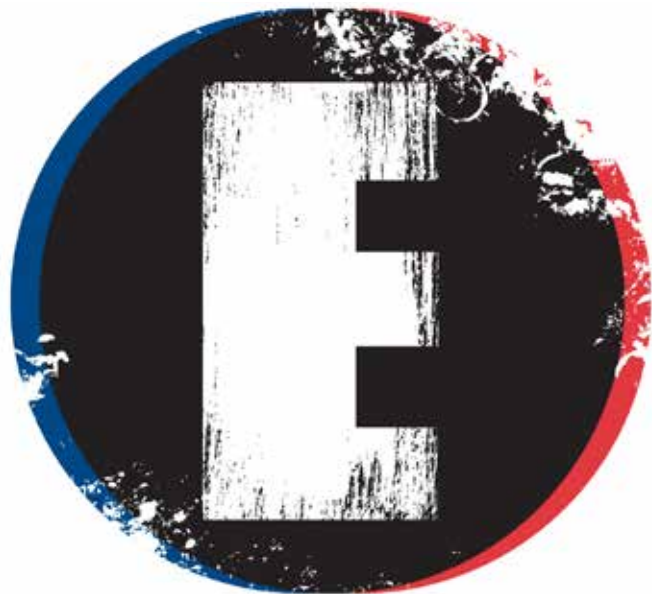
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E TEAM... IT'S WORTH IT

BY ARMON JORDEN

I was asked to write a short article about my E-TEAM experience. I started to write out a day-by-day account of what I had physically experienced. But I don't think that is what E-TEAM wanted from me. As I sat there reading it, I decided I didn't even want to read it... so why would anyone else? No, I want to share what I saw and felt God do in and through our team. So here is my witness of what God has done.

As soon as our team came together, tragedy struck one of our members. A close personal friend passed away and, even though it was expected, the hurt was still sharp and painful. But in it, God drew us together. As the team member shared what had happened, we were able to be there for her. We were able to cry with her. We became all she had and we were willing to be all she needed. I have never been part of a group of people who grew so close so quickly. Through that tragedy, love bloomed and family was born.

Over the next seven days, we studied God's Word together, prayed for one another, ate together, worshiped together, and spent all our time together. If that sounds like an awesome experience to you, let me remind you we were only following the example found in the Book of Acts. In Acts 2:42-47, Luke described how the church interacted with one another immediately after the Day of Pentecost. I won't quote it here, but I urge you to put this article down, pick up your Bible, and read it right now. Don't worry. I'll wait for you.

Done? Great! Did you see it? The Early Church studied the Apostles' doctrine together. They ate together, prayed together, worshiped together, and spent much time together. I believe the result of that dedication to one another was what we experienced at Welch College during our training. We became a family in much the same way the Early Church became a family. And it only took a week! We dedicated our time to one another and, in doing so, God gave us a taste of what He has for us. And it tasted good.

It was so good that despite being stuck in Florida for four days due to flight problems, we still loved one another and still looked for opportunities to serve God. We never got discouraged, because we knew God was not surprised we were still in Florida. If God had us in Florida, He had a reason and we wanted to know what it was.

Just as God planned, we ended up ministering to a Cuban church in Miami by performing and speaking. Even though it was Father's Day, Pastor José knew God wanted us there...because we were there. We sang, spoke about what E-TEAM was doing, and encouraged them to take part in future E-TEAMS. Only God knows who we may have touched and what seeds we planted.

I don't know what God was doing to hearts in Brazil while we were stuck in

the U.S., but I'm guessing He was doing the same things for them He was for us. I have to believe this, because as soon as we met Pastor "Z," it was like meeting family. He opened his life to us. He opened his family to us. He opened his heart to us. Personally, I felt as though I had met a brother for the first time. I know my wife and students felt the same way.

Again, we spent every second we could together. We ate together (can you tell I like eating), we prayed together, we studied together, and we worshiped together.

God brought us closer to one another. I look forward to returning and spending more time with Pastor "Z" and his beautiful family.

Above all else, E-TEAM gave us an opportunity to experience God's family like never before. If you are an adult, and you are wondering if the sacrifice to lead an E-TEAM is worth it...it is. You will experience more than you could ever imagine. If you are a teen, and you don't know if God wants you to go on E-TEAM...go. Even if you never step foot on an international

mission field again, God will do great things in your life and your heart.

Beyond that, imagine what God could do in your life and in your church if you simply placed fellowship with God and one another above everything else. I have no doubt you would experience a deeper level of fellowship, relationships that would even exceed what we enjoyed with E-TEAM.

About the Writer: Armon Jorden and his wife led E-TEAM Araras, Brazil, 2016. Learn more about E-TEAM: www.FWBGo.com/eteam



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Around the World >>

THP Worker Resigns

Antioch, TN—The Board of Free Will Baptist International Missions voted to accept the resignation of Jenny S* from her assignment with The Hanna Project (a subsidiary non-governmental organization of IM) through an email ballot March 2, 2017. Jenny submitted an official letter of resignation to IM on February 28, asking that her resignation be effective March 1. “I’m resigning for health reasons, especially because of issues relating to my back,” the 32-year-old wrote.

Appointed to work with the Malaga team in April 2010, the Missouri native arrived in Spain in 2012. From the beginning, she struggled with back and knee problems. Yet, she worked hard to solidify Spanish language skills, understand the culture, study Arabic, build connections with other students, and serve the immigrant population.

Jenny returned to the States July 11, 2016, and has spent much of her time seeking treatment for her health needs, undergoing and re-covering from knee surgery, and seeking God’s guidance for the future.

“I’m so thankful the Lord and the IM Board provided me the opportunity to serve under The Hanna Project these last five years,” Jenny wrote. “I’ve grown so much and am saddened to leave such a great organization.”

Jim Combs With the Lord

Antioch, TN—James Kemper Combs, former missionary to Brazil, entered his heavenly home, February 7, 2017. Diagnosed last November with pancreatic cancer, he achieved victory over pain and suffering on Tuesday afternoon.

Appointed as missionaries in April 1964, Jim and his wife Shirley (Roberts) departed for Brazil in December of the same year. The couple spent their first term in Araras, São Paulo. They served as church planters in Araras, Tubarão, and Jaboticabal during their missionary career, although the majority of their 40-year ministry was spent in Araras.

The crisis of children abandoned to the streets of Araras led to the founding of Lar Nova Vida (New Life Children’s Home). Jim and Shirley worked with the home, providing oversight of the ministry.

Jim and Shirley served in Brazil from 1964-1980. They returned to the States to teach missions at Hillsdale College (now Randall University). After five years, their hearts led them back to Brazil. In 2004, they retired but remained in Brazil until 2009.

A celebration of Jim’s 79 years of life and ministry was held at Randall University Saturday, February 11.



Cuba National Association Celebrates 75 Years

Pinar del Río, Cuba—Cuban Free Will Baptists celebrated 75 years of organized ministry during their national convention, February 23-26, 2017. The four-day event, held on Seminario Los Cedros del Líbano (The Cedars of Lebanon Seminary) property, celebrated the theme *El lo ha Hecho*, “He Did It.” More than 500 people attended the event-filled days.

Kenneth (regional director for Latin America and Africa) and Rejane Eagleton and General Director Clint Morgan represented the Mission, arriving in Cuba on Tuesday, February 21. The day before the convention was spent in meetings with the directiva (executive committee) and the international missions committee. Goals for International Missions’ partnership agreement for the coming year were set.

On Thursday, February 23, participants reviewed the 75 years of Free Will Baptists’ history in Cuba. Friday evening was dedicated to missions, both national and international. The service closed with the commissioning of a missionary family to Côte d’Ivoire.

Regional Director Kenneth Eagleton said, “God is calling those already engaged in ministry in Cuba to reach the nations. The Cuban Missions Board approved nine couples and two single ladies as cross-cultural missionary candidates. The goal is to send missionaries where no one else is willing to go.”

On Saturday, two ladies received degrees during the seminary’s graduation ceremony. Two young men were ordained as pastors. The convention concluded on Sunday with two morning services and the Lord’s Supper.

Kenneth and Rejane continued on the island for an additional week, visiting churches on the eastern side and meeting with association officials.



Snapshots

Around the World

Côte d'Ivoire—Pastor Alexis Hien from Ivory Coast (Côte d'Ivoire), Africa, announced five people are the first to become Christ-followers in the village of Guiwile. They built a structure for a place of worship. A new mission church is born!



Panama—Pastor Cirilo Mendoza of the Good News Church in Chitré, Panama, baptized four young people near the end of their family retreat during Carnival.

Bulgaria—On Saturday, February 25, many of Jonathan and Amy's new friends in Pleven participated in a "Bread House" event led by Vanya Trifonova. As Vanya taught the ladies how to make bread, she illustrated how elements of breadmaking teach about Jesus, the "Bread of Life." While the bread baked, Vanya led the group in an insightful discussion on what the Bible teaches about showing love to others. One lady said, "I've never thought before about how the sweetness of Kozunak (a sweet bread made at Easter) can be a reminder to me of God's love for us! I will think of that whenever I make it from now on."



Côte d'Ivoire—The Yopougon FWB Church in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), bought property in another area of Yopougon and began construction of their new church building, called Peniel FWB Church. Though the building is still under construction, they held a dedication and inaugural service on March 5. As part of the celebration, five people were baptized, and a meal was served. The church has decided to have two campuses and will continue to use the rented hall they have been meeting in for years. This densely populated area of Abidjan is home to nearly two million people.

Photo: Pastor Paul Amiezi



Japan—Heath and Joni Hubbard led a Japanese exchange student to Christ via Facetime. Kim Zegelian, a teacher at Jacksonville Christian Academy in North Carolina, studied the Bible with a Japanese student, Chiaki. Chiaki wanted to verbalize questions in Japanese. Kim connected her with the Hubbards, and they answered many of Chiaki's questions. She asked, "So, can we pray together?" Heath exulted, "We had the pleasure of praying with her to receive Christ! Half the prayer was in English and half in Japanese. Chiaki lives in Tokyo and we hope to meet her in Japan when we both return in 2018."

A Day in the Middle East

BY BRITTANY SANCHEZ

The Father is working in the Middle East. He is faithful beyond measure.

My time in the Middle East was a huge learning experience for me. God taught me many lessons, and I was able to reciprocate as I taught my 92 students. The life of a refugee is extremely disheartening. The overwhelming Muslim presence leaves the door open to intense spiritual warfare, but also an entire harvest of searching souls. God is moving! Day after day, story after story, soul after soul, God is moving.

Each morning after I woke up, I looked out my window and saw the Syrian border just miles away. To the right, a militant mosque sounded the call to prayer five times a day. Once I got ready, I headed to the brand new camp school where I taught six classes of phonics-level English to children who had never been to school. In fact, most of them had never written anything, and I had to teach them to hold a pencil. Looking into their faces, you'd think I was teaching a bunch of adults. They have aged so quickly. They have witnessed their homes bombed and their families killed or taken to prison. Yet, each of my students was able to smile and laugh and be a child. They craved acceptance, encouragement, and approval. And they are so smart. By the end of the first week, we had begun stringing letters together to form words.

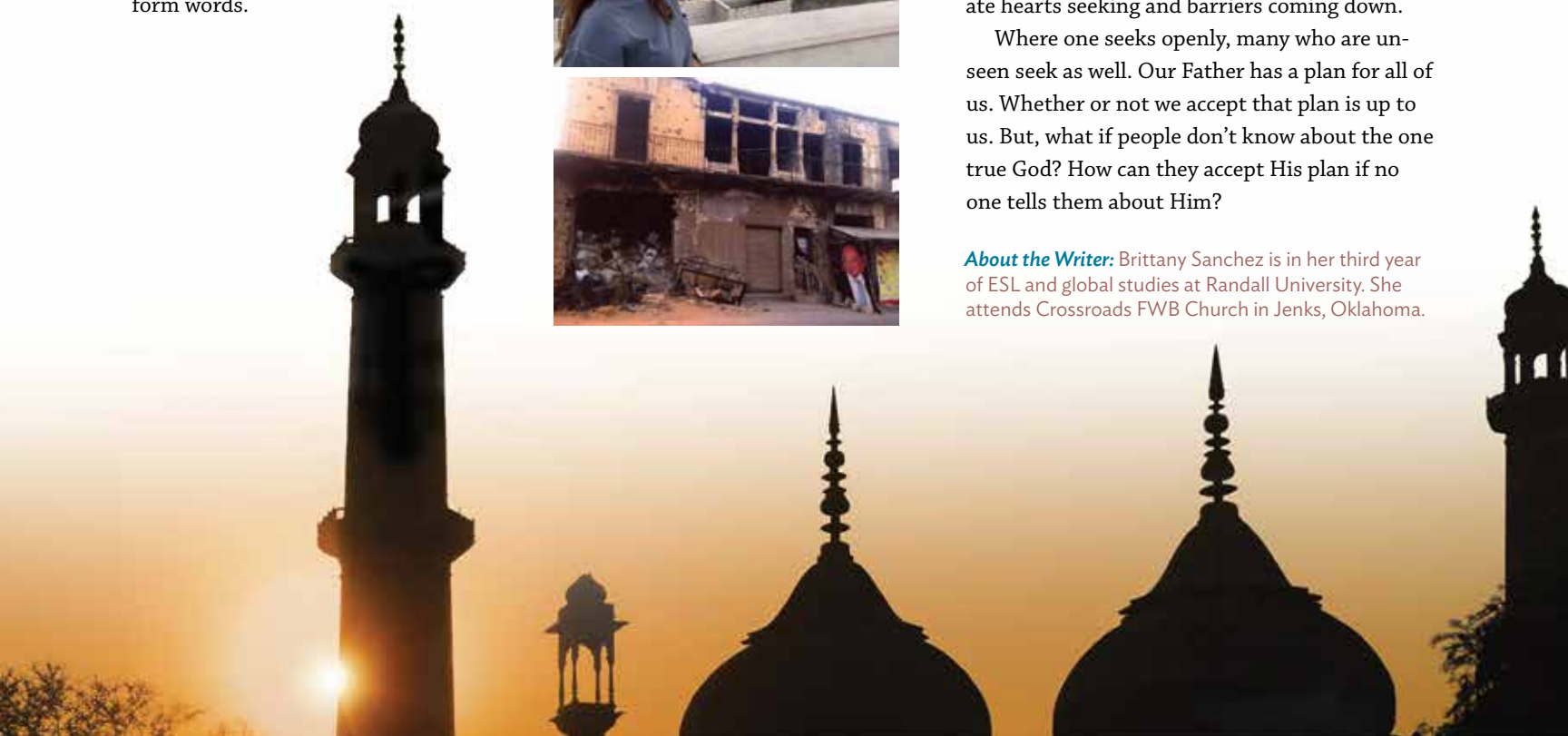


After six hours of teaching, I headed back to my apartment to plan lessons, eat, and prepare for my two-hour adult class that evening. My adult students craved knowledge and were perfectionists. But they learned so many things in such a short time. Some of my biggest breakthroughs happened in that class. Completely-covered, repressed women who wouldn't meet my eyes at first began smiling every time they saw me, and hugging me after every class. This is what the love and kindness of Jesus does.

This was a typical day for me. Some were very difficult. Some were full of laughter. Yet, in them all, God was moving. In the short time I was in the Middle East, God allowed me to see desperate hearts seeking and barriers coming down.

Where one seeks openly, many who are unseen seek as well. Our Father has a plan for all of us. Whether or not we accept that plan is up to us. But, what if people don't know about the one true God? How can they accept His plan if no one tells them about Him?

About the Writer: Brittany Sanchez is in her third year of ESL and global studies at Randall University. She attends Crossroads FWB Church in Jenks, Oklahoma.



Whatever “IT” Is

••• NEIL GILLILAND, PH.D. •••

I wish I could explain it. Words don’t seem to be enough, yet words are all I have.

Maybe the problem is I am not even sure I know what “it” is.

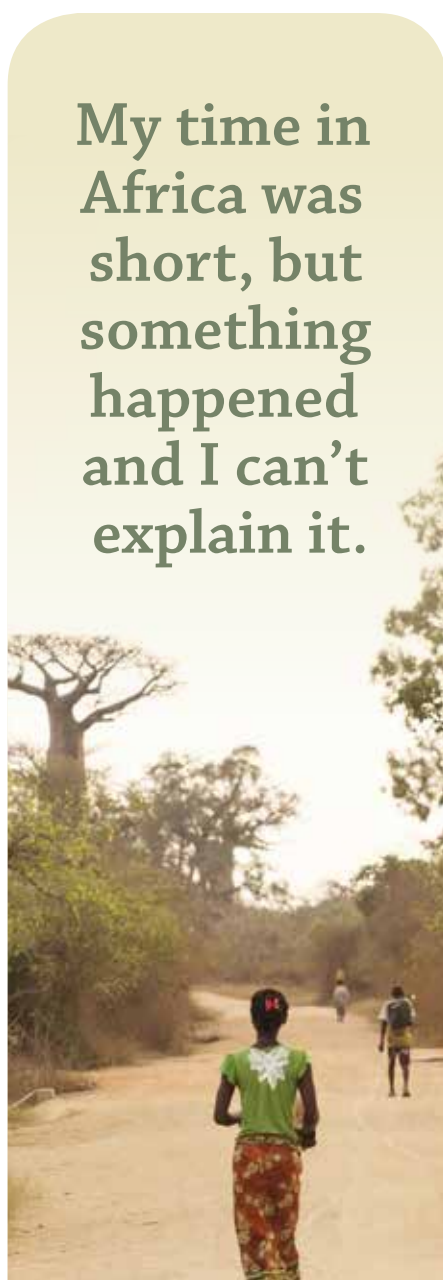
Sitting in my office in Nashville seems so very distant from “it.”

Maybe my friend said it best after returning from a trip to Vietnam, his childhood home. “My sister and I were having our picture taken with the pastor of the church. He was Jarai, the tribal people my parents worked with in the highlands of Central Vietnam. All of a sudden, I just lost it. I think it was the smell. I smelled burning bamboo, and the memories overwhelmed me.”

Maybe it is the memories that flood my senses. The smells of the African city. The dust of the villages. The fires. Even the smells of the people. Maybe it is the feel of the African sun or the leathered hands I shook each day. Perhaps it is the taste of the food or a cold African Coke. It could be the sounds of roads congested with traffic or the sweet “Bonjour, ça va(s)” that greet the morning. Maybe it was the sight of baobab trees dotting the Sahel landscape or the cacophony of rich colors everywhere I turned. It very well might be the demonstration I watched as people lived in true Christian community.

I am a bit guilty of chiding myself, because my sojourn on African soil was brief. How could a simple seven years sink so deeply into my soul? I often look askance at students who spend a week in a place and say, “I left my heart there.” Yet, I am just as guilty. My time in Africa

My time in Africa was short, but something happened and I can’t explain it.



was short, but something happened and I can’t explain it. But when I get off the plane it hits me.

Woven into “it” is friendships—friends whose lives are woven into the fabric of my memories with threads that stand the test of time. After years and miles of separation, I still sense their love. I wonder if that is it, the love that embraces me when we are together. We shared laughter and tears.

I don’t doubt for a moment that seeing the young men—whose lives flashed through ours for a brief moment—serving the King and Kingdom is a big part of it.

Suffice it to say that whatever “it” is, “it” is intoxicating. And while I cannot wrap enough words around it, I will allow my soul to envelope it. I will give thanks to the Holy One, who not only wonderfully and fearfully knit me together in my mother’s womb, but also knit me together with a place and people.

As much as I don’t have words to explain “it,” I equally lack enough words to thank the Father for bringing “it” into my life.

About the Writer: Neil Gilliland is director of care for Free Will Baptist International Missions. Learn more: www.FWBGo.com.



VULNERABILITY. What an interesting word! Open the dictionary and you will find it defined as “easily hurt or harmed; open to attack or damage.”

A thesaurus lists synonyms including susceptible, open, exposed, and sensitive. All of these lead us to view vulnerability as weakness when, in reality, vulnerability holds the potential key to unlock one's utmost strength.

Allow me to explain. Throughout my Christian life, I have heard again and again that Christians should “let go and let God lead.” We are told simply to release control and let Him move and direct our lives, trusting Him to make the next step clear. This has always bothered me, because I struggle to let go. Let me be “vulnerable” with you for a moment. I am a recovering perfectionist and an extremely goal-oriented individual. For the most part, I do well in accomplishing my goals. Yet, as hard as I have tried to hand over control to God, I have never accomplished that goal completely. Maybe for brief moments, but when fear sets in, I automatically reach for control of my life.

Learning to Let Go

It is my assumption that every Christian struggles with this to some extent. Letting go is not simple or easy, perhaps the hardest thing humans attempt. Yet, I wonder, do we ask God to help us do this incredibly difficult thing? I question, without His help, will we ever have the strength to give Him our lives entirely? And this need for His strength is exactly what keeps us reliant on Him. You may be thinking, “Everyone knows this. We are weak; God is strong, but where does vulnerability come into play?”

Recently, I did an informal survey of my friends, family, and students, asking them to describe vulnerability in their own words. One said, “Being vulnerable is a position where you feel helpless. You are stuck between a rock and a hard place with no way out, so you just do what is asked of you.” Another replied, “Vulnerability requires transparency, full honesty, and opening up in such a way that you acknowledge the other person could hurt you with the information you are freely giving them.”

Wow! These are accurate descriptions of how most of us view vulnerability. The first makes a great point. Vulnerability is indeed a place where one may feel he or she has no other option than to do what is asked or expected. (Hang on to that thought for a minute.) The second describes the need for transparency, honesty, and openness, knowing that people can hurt you as a result. (Also hang on to that thought, and keep reading.)

When we as believers are open, transparent, and sensitive (vulnerable) to the Holy Spirit, based on the definitions considered this far, we make ourselves susceptible to harm or pain. If this is true, then why would we give ourselves fully to God, opening up to Him completely, and placing our lives in His hands without reservation? It’s a matter of faith.

When Faith and Vulnerability Collide

A beautiful thing happens when faith and vulnerability collide. Faith requires vulnerability, and it is hard. It is helpful to remember God not only created love, but He is love. According to Psalm 136:26, “His steadfast love endures forever.” Let that soak in. Not only is God patient and kind, He also does not seek to hurt us, but rather to love us deeply and persistently. Most importantly, He is safe, He is security, and He is the best place to learn the art of vulnerability. You can be completely open with Him, knowing He will never harm you.

Vulnerability is the essence of openness, and when you allow yourself to be open with our loving Father then (and only then) He can speak to you and guide you. Just as free will is enacted in our decision to choose Christ, it is also active in our decision to be open with Him and vulnerable before Him, acknowledging weakness and choosing His strength.

First Samuel 2:4 says, “The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble bind on strength.” You may consider yourself a person of might physically, mentally, and emotionally. Perhaps you do good things for many people. Perhaps you are wealthy. Maybe you have started a humanitarian effort that reaches the nations (an incredible thing in itself). But this verse reminds us that if we rely on our might alone, our “bows and weapons,” are broken. Fascinating.

This doesn’t mean we don’t have these resources, it just

means we are limited in using them in our own power. There is a difference between might and strength. Might regards size, how massive something is. In contrast, strength is a gift, “a good or beneficial quality or attribute.” When this verse says the “feeble bind on strength” it refers to the weakest of all who latch onto strength that is not their own.

The Strength of Weakness

Self-reflection in this area usually isn’t pretty. I am weak, so incredibly weak as a human. I want badly to say I cling to God’s gift—His strength. Yet, the reality is that on a regular basis, I rely on my own might. I cling to what I know. This is frustrating but let me make one thing clear; it is absolutely a normal process of humanity, to cling to what we know. That is the fall of man, right? We play God, in a sense, even when we don’t realize that is what we are doing. It’s okay. If you get nothing else from this, know it is okay to feel scared and head back to wanting to control. However, also know that when we release our arrows and broken bow by handing them over to the One who can “bind on strength,” we receive strength in return. It’s an exchange that doesn’t work any other way.

My reality (and probably yours) is that every morning I wake up and *choose* to cling to Jesus, the source of strength I am describing. Yet throughout the day, I struggle to exchange my arrows for His strength. Too often, when difficulty arises, I find myself grabbing for my own arrows again. I forget the real battle is letting go of might and resting in His strength, perfected in my weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

This is such a daunting process. We trust; we control. We trust; we worry. We trust; we take back what we have given Him. And the cycle continues. “Why even try?” you ask. Because without this grace-filled relationship that allows you to change, you would be trapped in an endless cycle of control and guilt. You would never give up your weakness but continue to use a useless, broken bow with perfectly good arrows.

I challenge you to cling to the everlasting strength God offers. Remember, Jesus came to Earth just as human as we are and left as a flawless individual. He struggled in all of the same ways, but didn’t sin (Hebrews 4:15). Not once! And we can be certain that because the almighty King of the universe walked and lived among us, He understands the struggles we face. How incredible.

Vulnerability requires complete openness, and when that is applied to your relationship with Christ, He becomes your greatest strength. Vulnerability acknowledges you are susceptible to the world’s wounding, but what can the world take from you, when you have already given yourself away to the One who has overcome the world?

LIGHT BEYOND *the* SHADOWS

**Until you've walked
in shadows, how do you
know the light is bright?**

This has been a theme in our family for several years. Shadows are dark and dreadful, but when the sunshine filters in, it's as though God smiles down to assure us He cares about what is happening. Let me start at the beginning.



Several years ago, our daughter Jennifer* was married. The honeymoon years were wonderful. We loved our son-in-law and welcomed him to the family. They were ecstatic to welcome their first child and our first grandchild. She was perfect—ten tiny fingers and toes, beautiful eyes, and pretty black hair. She began life in an apparently happy home and was adored. But, gradually, things began deteriorating within the family—things no one could see. Shadows were creeping in as shameful behaviors were shoved in a closet, covered up, and hidden.

At first, no one noticed the impact this made on Tiffany, but she internalized all the hurt and anguish her parents exhibited as they pulled apart. Though only a child who still played and acted as other children did, her thoughts were being established. Her parents eventually divorced, leaving her devastated. She loved them both and felt caught in the middle as everything fell apart. The shadows were thickening.

In time, the problems began to come to light. Our son-in-law was drinking heavily and abusing drugs. Our daughter reached such a sad mental state that she couldn't care for herself, let alone Tiffany. So, her dad took custody, declaring he would raise her without help from anyone. As Jennifer struggled to heal from the wounds resulting from years of mental abuse, we struggled with weekend visitations, and the devastation of sending Tiffany home with her father each time.

In time, Jennifer was ready to change things, and, after Tiffany's father was arrested, she had a chance. She went to court and was awarded custody, with visitation rights granted to the father. This worked well for a while. However, Tiffany's dad refused to honor the agreement. Tiffany would arrive at school late, and missed some days entirely. He did not bring her home on time or when expected. Court hearings urged her dad to cooperate, but things didn't change. The shadows grew so thick it felt as if we were walking in darkness.

As the years flew by, Tiffany began to go to counseling. She had the usual problems at school, and she had an especially hard time connecting with other children. They tended to bully her. To cope, she began to withdraw into fantasy worlds. We tried to interact as much as possible, going to church, taking trips, watching movies, and spending time with family. These times seemed to help, but emotions stretched thin, like rubber bands, every time Tiffany left with her dad. We learned to place our fear at the feet of Jesus, the only safe place to confront the shadows hovering over us.

After not seeing Tiffany for months, one weekend her dad decided he wanted some time with her. Tiffany loves her dad, and naturally she wanted to go. She assured us she would be gone only for the weekend, but it turned into a lot longer. After two days, her dad stopped all communication. He told Jennifer Tiffany no longer wanted to live with her or even talk to her, and she did not love her. He told her that Tiffany wanted to change schools. And, most shocking, he informed her that Tiffany didn't want to be a girl any longer!

What? The beautiful, little girl who loved pretty clothes, chick flicks, playing with makeup, and getting pedicures had suddenly become confused about her gender? This couldn't be happening. We were shocked. In our agony, we wondered where God was. Why was He allowing this to happen? The shadows covered us in darkness, and we desperately needed a light.

Perhaps you have heard the saying, "Pray as if everything depends on God, but act as if it depends on you." We went into action. Jennifer contacted a lawyer to find out what could be done. We prayed, our church prayed, our friends prayed. It didn't take long to receive an emergency court hearing. After talking with Tiffany, the judge quickly ordered her return home.

She arrived dressed like a boy, very confused and upset. After many long talks with her mom, Tiffany assured Jennifer she did not want to be a boy. Yet, the questions remained. Tiffany was more confused than ever.

Tiffany began using her phone to chat with people who were negative influences and to look at inappropriate things. She carefully hid these things from everyone—fine on the outside, turmoil on the inside. The pressure became so severe that she experienced a "meltdown" at school. She became a different person, hearing voices in her head telling her to hurt the boy and girl who had been bullying her. A hospital intervention helped Tiffany evaluate and understand why she had been living in the shadows, and she began to see the light herself. After returning home, things smoothed out, school resumed, and she settled into a routine. Life became almost normal, except for medication, counseling, and psychiatrist appointments. You may be saying to yourself: "Normal? I think not."

Just look around. Untold numbers of children are living this life. We are thankful for the interventions provided: a church family who loved Tiffany and prayed faithfully, and pastors who took time to counsel her. I'm most thankful for our daughter, who, after experiencing a dark time herself, has worked hard to provide a home filled with love and support rather than condemnation. She fought courageously for the right to protect her child.

Walking through the shadows has not been easy. We have cried enough tears to fill a river, experienced overwhelming sadness, depressing uncertainty, and enough financial instability to go under. Yet, through it all, we have experienced the assurance and peace that God is most definitely in control. He provided peace in the storms—joy in the laughter, happiness in the hugs and kisses we receive freely from Tiffany.

Free Will Baptists have given Tiffany opportunities to hear the Word of God, from conferences like *Shine!*, to the national convention, youth competition, and summer camps. She attends every church service unless she is sick and has since she was a baby. Yet all of this did not stop the shadows. Influences beyond our control made her life a tug-of-war between good and evil. Does she see the light now? It's hard to say. We hope she does, and she appears to be living in the light. She still needs restrictions on phone and

Internet usage, and her mother still monitors these closely. At a recent *Shine!* conference, a presentation about the dangers of the phone and Internet really helped to open Jennifer's eyes. I am so thankful for interventions like this, and I can't say it enough.

Parents, beware! You may never know what is happening with your child unless you monitor their technology closely. The shadows can creep in and take over, even in a Christian home. Tiffany, like many other children, has been inundated by technology. We must be aware that today's technology opens doors to allow this world to affect our children's morals, thinking, and attitudes in detrimental ways. Check your child's phone periodically, their texts, their "friends" on social media, and the videos they watch. It is so important to stay informed. They may get angry or even resent it, but you might prevent a tragedy. Most important, don't assume this can't happen in your family. It may already be happening and you aren't even aware.

Today, the shadows are lifting, and we see the light beyond the shadows. Tiffany is excited about continuing school, graduating,

attending college, and eventually marrying. Our job is to offer continued love, prayer, guidance, support, and encouragement. The lines of communication must stay open so she feels safe and protected.

Will our lives be completely worry-free? Certainly not! We can, however, rely on the fact that Jesus will take care of us. He proves it again and again when we let Him. Consider His promise in John 8:12: "Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

Tiffany's story isn't over. She may be your child, attend your youth group, sing in your junior choir, listen closely during your Sunday School class, or even be your child's best friend. Treat all of these children with dignity and compassion. You may never know what really lies behind their attitudes and actions. Commit yourself to pray they, too, will discover the true Light beyond the shadows.

Shine Conference sponsored by WNAC helps girls aged 12 to 18 confront the challenges of today's culture. ***Learn more:*** www.ShineFWB.com or www.WNAC.org.

**Names have been changed to protect identities.*



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Brown on **Green** >>

Doing Nothing

Many stock market pundits predicted a downturn in the market if Donald Trump were elected president. Instead, the market has grown more than 10% over his first three months in office. Some experts are predicting the market is due for a correction of 10% to 20%, while others believe the market will continue to rise.

On any given day, a scan of financial websites will reveal headlines that encourage investors to get out of stocks before a significant downturn while other headlines advise staying in stocks is best, that the bull market has many months to go. What should an investor do? Long-term investors have a ten-plus year time horizon and have time to ride the market ups and downs. Short-term investors with a two- to three-year time horizon should probably cut back on stock market investments since they might not be able to recover from a downturn.

Many studies have been done through the years that compare long-term investors who choose to sell off their stock positions when they perceive a downturn compared to those who “ride” the ups and downs of the market and stay fully invested in stocks. Most analysts agree the best strategy for the long-term investor is to stay fully invested.

Market-timers periodically jump out of the market just before a downturn in stocks occurs and jump back in when the next rally begins. The difficulty with timing the market is the difficulty of knowing exactly when a downturn or rally is coming, in order to make your move. A market-timer has to be right twice—when a high in the market has

been reached and when the exact bottom of a downturn occurs. Even the best of the professional investors rarely get both of these dates right.

The consequences of missing on either end—when a downturn starts or when the market begins to rally—are huge. Being off even just a few days (and sometimes a few hours) can greatly impact your overall return. We have all seen the panic that results in dramatic one-day losses in the market. It is difficult to remain calm and ride out a big downturn, but many studies have shown that the investor who stays fully invested has a better return over the long term than the market-timer. So, what is the best thing to do when the markets have a big run-up or a big downturn? Nothing. **ONE**

About the Writer: David Brown, CPA, became director of the Free Will Baptist Foundation in 2007.

Send your questions to David at david@nafwb.org. To learn how the Foundation can help you become a more effective giver, call 877-336-7575.





Home is where our cradle was, where we grew up, and, for most of us, where we eventually left and never went back again, except for brief visits. In some ways, Thomas Wolfe was right: you can't go home again. But, in fact, most of us never fully leave home in the first place. We go away with some of its dirt under our fingernails or between our toes, and we cling to the values and lessons, good or bad, we acquired there.

We recently sat down with [MELVIN](#) and [ANNE WORTHINGTON](#) in the kitchen of Melvin's homeplace in Ayden, North Carolina, to talk about that topic of going home again.

EVANS: *Melvin, this is the house you were raised in. What's it like to literally come home again?*

MELVIN: I wouldn't be anywhere else. Of course, Anne and I live next door in a house we built, but I'm in this house every day. My office is there in the next room.

EVANS: *Were you born here?*

ANNE: He was supposed to be, right over there on that little kitchen table, but Mama had trouble, so they went to the hospital.

MELVIN: I'm not sure that's how it was.

ANNE: Well, that's what Mama said.

MELVIN: Well, if Mama said it, then that's how it was. (Laughter)

ANNE: Milton [Melvin's twin brother] was born first but was slow to come, so the doctor reached in and out he came. Then he said, "There's another one," and out came Melvin.

MELVIN: You can tell I was an afterthought. Mama and Daddy just gave us one name apiece, but when we went to first grade, the school said they needed our middle names, too. So Milton took Wilber and I took Leroy because Daddy's name was Wilber Leroy. That's how we got middle names.

EVANS: *Melvin, you were in pastoral ministry in several states for 20 years and then in Nashville as executive secretary of the denomination for more than 23 years. You're just finishing up 12 years on the Free Will Baptist Foundation Board, and you and your brother Milton have co-pastored Liberty FWB Church here in Ayden since 2003. When you came home, were you keeping a promise to your parents, or did you feel called back to the farm?*

MELVIN: Neither one. It was about stewardship, doing what you can with what you are and what you have. That's what Daddy taught me. He was a farmer and told me one time that your legs go at

85. I'm 80 and haven't lost my farming legs yet, although I do rent out most of my land. But I also haven't lost the wonder of preaching.

EVANS: *We'll get back to that "stewardship thing" in a little while, but first tell me about your call to preach.*

MELVIN: I was saved during a tent revival in 1954, called to preach in 1956, and ordained in 1957 while at Columbia Bible College. Four of us—R. J. Kennedy, Jerry Ballard, Milton, and me—had a quartet. I. J. Blackwelder, who had been our pastor here in Ayden during my teen years, had moved to Horse Branch Church in South Carolina. So our quartet did our Christian service with him. Sang off the back of a pickup truck, set up microphones in churchyards, white churches, black churches, a cappella, no piano, and gave our testimonies.

Sunday nights, we would talk to Brother Blackwelder for hours. He was a brilliant man who'd also been to Columbia, a master at outlining and preaching. One night he told us, "The Lord has called you boys to preach; you just don't know it yet." I told him no, the Lord hadn't called me, and he said, "You enjoy testifying, don't you?" And I did. He replied, "One day you'll enjoy preaching."

ANNE: When Melvin told me, I just said, "I told you so."

MELVIN: They both were right. (Laughter)

EVANS: *So your preaching legs haven't gone yet.*

ANNE: Or his mind, either. He still has a keen mind.

MELVIN: And I don't know that my preaching legs will ever go. But back to Columbia Bible College. It showed me something else: *be* something before you *do* something.

EVANS: *How does being and doing connect to your father and that thing of stewardship that you brought up a while back?*

MELVIN: Daddy was my greatest influence, a man of quietness and integrity. He taught me to tithe, go to church, and keep my word. His philosophy about money was give ten percent, save ten percent, and live on 80%. He also believed you didn't have to have everything new.

My uncle came over one time and said he'd bought himself a \$100,000 bean picker. Daddy told him he'd bought a \$1,400 bean picker and picked \$100,000 worth of beans. He dismissed new things with "That ain't nothing." He'd been to mechanic school and knew how to take old equipment and make it run. He had nine tractors, and not a one of them was new.

ANNE: And he had that old trailer and his car, and here we'd go.

BE SOMETHING
BEFORE YOU
DO SOMETHING.

MELVIN: He was the most contented man I ever knew. A farmer and never owned a truck. Like Anne said, pulled the trailer with his car. We learned to make do. If we needed a little cash, he'd say, "Sell a cow."

ANNE: Or a pig.

MELVIN: He taught us to share. Milton and I had one bicycle. He rode it there. I rode it back. One gun, too. Another thing, Dad never let circumstances rule his life. I've watched his crops wash out of the field, and I've watched him have bumper crops. It didn't matter. His expression didn't change. He taught us the Lord was in control, and you just trusted Him.

EVANS: *Anne, you were born in Lexington, Kentucky, and brought up in Zurich Lake, Illinois, a small town where your father worked on a dairy farm, but you've adopted this place as home as well.*

ANNE: I have, and I love it. I get up early every morning, walk over here so we can feed and pet the animals together. We've got a llama, donkeys, cows, a horse that we board, a cat, and a neighborhood peacock. The horse doesn't like me. Has this big head that could knock me down, so I watch out for him.

MELVIN: They get a little rowdy sometimes, especially the llama. I had a young bull that would jump the fence, and I'd have to call in somebody to get him. Some things you let somebody else do. I've decided that next time he jumps, we'll eat him.

EVANS: *You give a lot of credit to your parents for the person you are.*

MELVIN: Well, Daddy was a southern gentleman. That made the difference.

ANNE: And he always said, "Think for yourself."

MELVIN: It didn't matter what anybody else said. He'd sit right there at the table and gently tell you what he thought. His gentleness prepared me emotionally and psychologically for more than 23 years at the Executive Office. I never got really bent out of shape or showed myself. And Mama, too. She thought we children could do no wrong, so she gave us confidence. But she also was our disciplinarian. When I was in high school, I came in too late one night, and she took the keys away from me.

ANNE: She was strict but very intelligent, too. She was voted Mother of the Year for the state of North Carolina.

MELVIN: One time I came home from college with a mustache and a feather



in my hat, and Daddy told me, "Your mother is on the 'warpath.' Cut that mustache." And I did. When Columbia professors told me I had to be something before I could do something, I knew what it meant. I had learned it right here.

(Read You Can Go Home Again, Part 2, in the August-September issue.)



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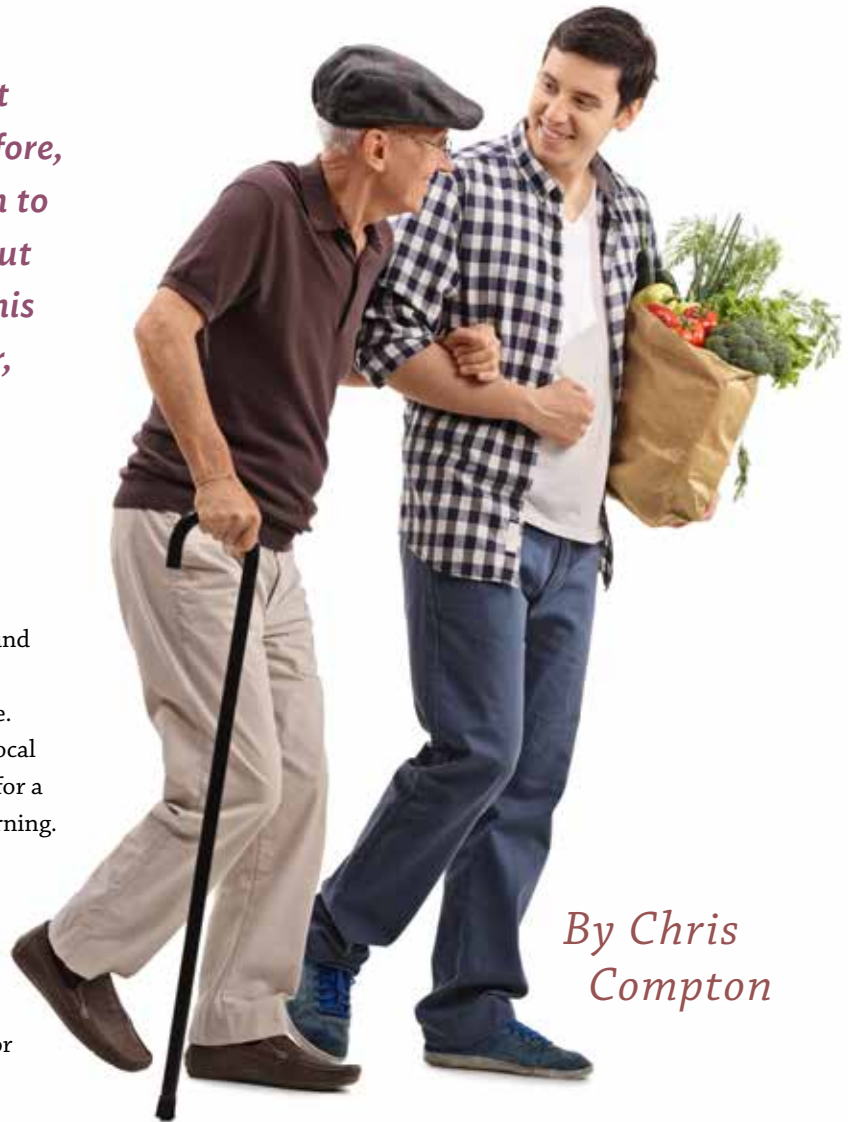
Ready, Set, _____

Martin Luther once said, “A true Christian lives and labors on earth not for himself but for his neighbor; therefore, the whole spirit of his life compels him to do even that which he needs not do, but which is profitable and necessary for his neighbor.” When we love our neighbor, we seek to serve him and find ways to help him whenever a need arises.

What encourages me is many Christians are ready to act and show kindness as opportunities of ministry present themselves. You see an elderly man struggling to hold the door and push his wheelchair bound wife, and you hurry over to help them. You stop in the parking lot to lend a hand to the teenager with a flat tire. You share an encouraging word with the cashier at the local grocery store for his or her hard work. You leave a note for a coworker on her computer monitor to find the next morning.

How wonderful these random acts of kindness are! They bless you, bless the recipient, and bring a sweet aroma of praise to God. Acts of kindness are good, and they are not difficult to perform. Many of them are free. What about those that are not? What about those acts that call for more than a generous act or a kind word? Are we prepared to be a neighbor when it requires us to dig into our pockets?

What about the young man in the line in front of you at McDonald’s who forgot his wallet? Or the young family working hard but struggling to pay the bills? How about the wife at the bedside of her husband who has already been in the hospital for a month?



*By Chris
Compton*

Are we prepared to be a neighbor when it requires us to dig into our pockets?

It is one thing to be ready with our heart and another with our wallet. At times, Christians need to reach into their pockets and put some money on the table. The problem comes when a Christian wants to be generous but does not have the means to be generous. We must get strong and stay strong financially so we have the means to act when the call for help comes in.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan is a good example. The story is found in Luke 10:30-37. While traveling to Jericho, a man was attacked by thieves and left half-dead. A Samaritan walked by, saw him, and had compassion on him. He cared for him and took him to the local inn. Luke 10:35 says, “And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.”

The Samaritan was not only ready with his heart, he was also ready with his wallet. He had money available to pay the

innkeeper and to take care of the final bill. In addition, he was generous. Providing care for the injured man was more important than what it cost this kind Samaritan. Yet, his generosity would not have been possible if the money was not available. The money would not have been available if he had not been intentional about it.

Would it not be amazing to be in the position to act like this? We can. We simply have to prepare. Start by looking over your budget. Find areas where you can trim down personal consumption—dining, groceries, entertainment, etc. Take the extra money and put it in a “giving fund.” Then, watch and wait. Your awareness to needs will rise, and you will be able to share the heart of a radically generous God.

You do not have to be wealthy to be a “Good Samaritan.” You just have to make a plan, be diligent, set aside the money, and take advantage of opportunities when they present themselves. You, and those around you, will be better for it.

About the Writer: Chris Compton is communications officer for the Free Will Baptist Board of Retirement. Learn more: www.BoardofRetirement.com.

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Kentucky to Kandahar

By Roy Swisher

Faith is essential to accomplishing what God has in store for us. Scripture is lined with one story after another illustrating God's blessings on the faithful. I have lived out this proposition since I was 22 years old. And today, as a soon-to-be-retired chaplain, I am convinced God has directed every step for my family and me. Many times, we wanted to give in, give up, and give out, but we kept our eyes on the Lord and His "perfect and acceptable will" for our lives.

I see God's hand at work in my life through the little things and the big things: growing up in the rural Appalachian Mountains of Kentucky; attending the funeral of my father, a disabled Korean veteran; being raised by a mother who experienced domestic violence on a regular basis but still loved her five children the best she knew how; joining the navy; meeting and marrying my loving and godly sweetheart Jan who has continued to be supportive throughout our 40-year marriage; attending Welch College; pastoring Northside FWB Church for 20 years; having God-given, supportive children (thanks, Ben and Rachel), experiencing one "miracle" after another to become a chaplain in the national guard at 53 years of age (50 was the cutoff); remaining on active duty for all but six months during the seven years I served; receiving not one but three mandatory removal date extensions after age 60. To sum it up: we serve a God who is faithful!



On a rotary (helicopter) in full battle rattle

Living by faith was truly the right answer when God called me to full-time, active duty service in the army. Many thought it would not last, and some said, “Join the militia; you are too old for this duty.” It was during times like these I could not give in to temptation. Abraham, David, and Paul each experienced their own challenges to God’s will for their lives and yet remained faithful. Even when the calling into the chaplaincy was dramatic for my family and me, I just kept trusting His leading.

In 2013, I was assigned to First Special Forces Group (Airborne) at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington state. During this transition, God kept confirming we were in His will. As the deputy group chaplain, I was called on to provide religious support and counseling to soldiers and their families. I had to “earn my seat at the table” before I was accepted as a viable unit ministry team member.

It didn’t take long for my dedication to be tested when a soldier was killed in action two days after I arrived. Then, within two months, a senior Special Forces retired commander passed away, and I was assigned to perform his memorial ceremony. After the service, our deputy group commander approached me and said, “Chaplain Swisher, I’d like to buy you a beer.”

I quickly replied, “Would you buy me a Pepsi instead?”

When he said yes, I knew I had earned my seat at the table.



Preaching at Front Operations Base Morehead

These instances were the first of many times Jan and I have been called on by God to love our battle buddies and their families. She has been my partner in ministry. She took pictures at baptisms, prepared soup and sandwiches for headquarters staff and soldiers, prepared dinner for the unit ministry team members, their families, and visiting chaplains or dignitaries. I could not have done this ministry without my best buddy.

We have proven God is faithful. He provides for and equips even the aged as evidenced by the biblical example of Caleb, who stayed in the battle at 80 years of age. He allowed me to excel in the annual physical fitness tests required to stay on active duty. Even after I reached age 60 and was encouraged to retire and leave the army by a senior chaplain, I

knew God was not finished with me.

He took me to Iraq and Kuwait in April and May 2015. During that time, I received a call from my group commander to meet him outside. He quietly and somberly informed me his father had passed away during the night. They had said their good-byes before he returned to Iraq to continue his command. While hugging my friend’s neck, I prayed God would give him and his sister grace to handle their father’s passing.

On that short deployment I had the opportunity to support and counsel soldiers contemplating suicide, to preach regularly, and to help keep morale high while these soldiers were deployed. Then, I returned to the States to assume the rear detachment chaplain’s role while the group chaplain was in Iraq. Caring

for soldiers' families during deployment is essential. Like their soldier loved ones, they are under a great deal of stress. I was honored to be their chaplain.

On March 6, 2017, I returned from my final four-month assignment in Afghanistan. I have lived by one guideline during all my years as chaplain: if you love soldiers, they will love you back. My soldiers loved me, and I loved them. I always made time to talk with and spend time with my soldiers. Talking comes naturally for this old, Kentucky hillbilly. But, a chaplain also has to be a good listener to catch hidden troubles that need to be addressed for a soldier and his family.

During my time in Afghanistan, I preached, observed, and listened to our soldiers. Young and old alike came to me for support; perhaps I just look like a grandpa to them.

After one service, seven soldiers who were about to go on a mission each made it a point to hug me. I asked them, "Do I look so much like a grandpa that each of you felt you needed to hug my neck?" The truth is, I knew why they hugged me; they were afraid.

I spent most of my time in Afghanistan traveling to a forward operation base to preach and provide religious support. Planes and helicopters of all types were my "taxis," and they made many stops before arriving at my destination.

If you love snow, go to Afghanistan. I awakened one morning to ten inches of



Baptism of husband and wife seargent

snow and had to shovel a path so soldiers could get to the church service. They came, and we worshiped God in spite of the snow.

On another occasion, I prayed with an injured soldier, first in the hospital, and later on the plane used to transport him to a major hospital in Europe. To honor him, we stayed on the flight line until his plane taxied down the runway and lifted off.

With doing God's will also came heartaches and difficult moments. Yet, God gives more grace when needed. It is His work; we just kept obeying Him even when it was uncomfortable; when some questioned our motives or disagreed with our decisions. The army has a saying: "bottom line up front" or BLUF. The BLUF for me as an U.S. Army chap-

I HAVE LIVED BY
ONE GUIDELINE
DURING ALL
MY YEARS AS
CHAPLAIN: IF YOU
LOVE SOLDIERS,
THEY WILL LOVE
YOU BACK.

lain was to stay faithful to God's calling and to finish the course. God was and continues to be faithful as we retire from the military in June 2017.

As I complete 43 years of military service in the navy and army, I not only want to thank the Lord for His love and mercy, but North American Ministries for the support they have provided. Dr. David Crowe, Chaplain (COL) Steedley, and many others at the office always met our needs and more.

Finally, I want to thank my lovely, faithful, and supportive wife of almost 40 years. I am a better person and Christian because of her glowing testimony of love and faithfulness to God, both to our children and grandchildren, and to the soldiers we served.

About the writer: Chaplain (MAJ) Roy Swisher is a Free Will Baptist army chaplain serving as an active-duty reservist at Fort Lewis, Washington.

Across the Nation >>



Church Planter Billy Bevan With the Lord

Dothan, Alabama—The North American Ministries family mourns the loss of dear friend and co-laborer Billy Bevan. He and his wife Gloria were leading a church revitalization joint project with the state of Alabama at Eastside FWB Church in Dothan.

Starting in 1970, Brother Bevan had enjoyed many years of fruitful ministry, pastoring churches in Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Alabama. He served as president of Southeastern FWB College in a full-time capacity for six years and part-time for seven years.

“He was a great man of God who truly lived what he preached,” said Jim McComas, director of church revitalization. “The Eastside Church, North American Ministries, the Free Will Baptist denomination, and the cause of Christ have suffered a great loss with his passing. Our thoughts and prayers are with Gloria, Billy Jr., Karla, and the entire family at this difficult time.” ■

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Church Revitalization Director Expresses Gratitude in the Midst of Loss

Antioch, Tennessee—Matt McComas, 23-year-old son of North American Ministries Director of Church Revitalization Jim McComas and his wife Beth, passed away suddenly and tragically, Saturday, February 25. Services were held at Canaan FWB Church in Creston, Ohio, where Jim and Beth ministered for 21 years before Jim accepted his current position at North American Ministries.

Jim, Beth, and their younger son Aaron have been overwhelmed by the love and support received from the denomination, including many who made memorial gifts to the “Hands Held High” Ministry in honor of Matt’s life.

To learn more about Matt’s story and the McComas family’s mission to “break the chains,” visit YouTube and watch the funeral service, which can be found by searching for “Matt McComas Celebration of Life.” ■

Brazils Appointed to Head Louisville Revitalization Project

Louisville, Kentucky—The Rodney Brazil Family has been commissioned to head an exciting missions venture in Louisville, Kentucky. In a joint revitalization project teaming North American Ministries with the Kentucky State Association, the Brazils will pastor the only Free Will Baptist church in the city of over a million people.

The Brazils leave a successful pastorate in Booneville, Mississippi, where they served for seven years. Rodney and Ashley have three children: Elayna, Dylan, and Bella. Please pray for this family as they move, build a team, and revitalize the church. Ask God to help them be effective in reaching people with the gospel and establishing a strong church in this growing city. ■



McComas Releases New CD

Antioch, Tennessee—North American Ministries announces the release of a new music CD from Jim McComas, director of church revitalization. The album, “Hands Held High: Songs of Help, Hope, and Healing for the Weary Pilgrim,” contains 14 songs designed to encourage and strengthen believers in their walk with the Lord.

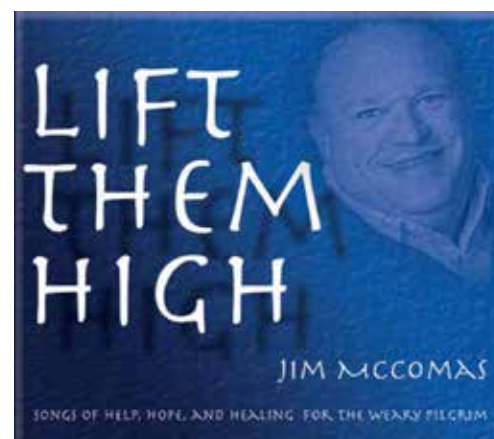
CDs are available for a \$15 donation and \$5 shipping and handling. (Shipping is a total of \$5 per order. Order multiple CDs with no additional shipping charges.)

To order online using a credit card, simply go to www.fwbnam.com and follow the link on the homepage. To order by mail, send a check or money order for \$15 per CD plus \$5 shipping and handling to: North American Ministries, Attention: Teresa Womack.

All proceeds will fund the “Hands Held

High” outreach of North American Ministries, which seeks to help discouraged pastors and their families in very practical ways.

“I am excited to offer this new project from Jim,” said David Crowe, executive director. “This is one of the best collections of spiritual, inspirational, and encouraging songs I’ve ever heard. Jim sings with passion and heart that brings listeners into the very soul and ministry of every song. The beauty of the project is the character and personality of each song, including some fun songs for kids of all ages. Most of the songs were written either by Jim or other songwriters I know personally, and I have confidence in their walk with God and their testimonies. During my 40 years of ministry, God has used many people and things to encourage and inspire me. And many times it has been songs that touched my heart, flood-



ed my soul with hope, and lifted me higher. I promise you will find help, hope, healing, and encouragement as you allow God to minister to you through one of my favorite singers and dear personal friend, Jim McComas.” ■

Turning It Around

I like our future. I like our potential. I like our direction.

Today, our tweet would read: “We are trending up.” Sixteen months ago—not so much. What was thought to be a financial blip in 2014 continued as a trend in 2015, and we weren’t trending up.

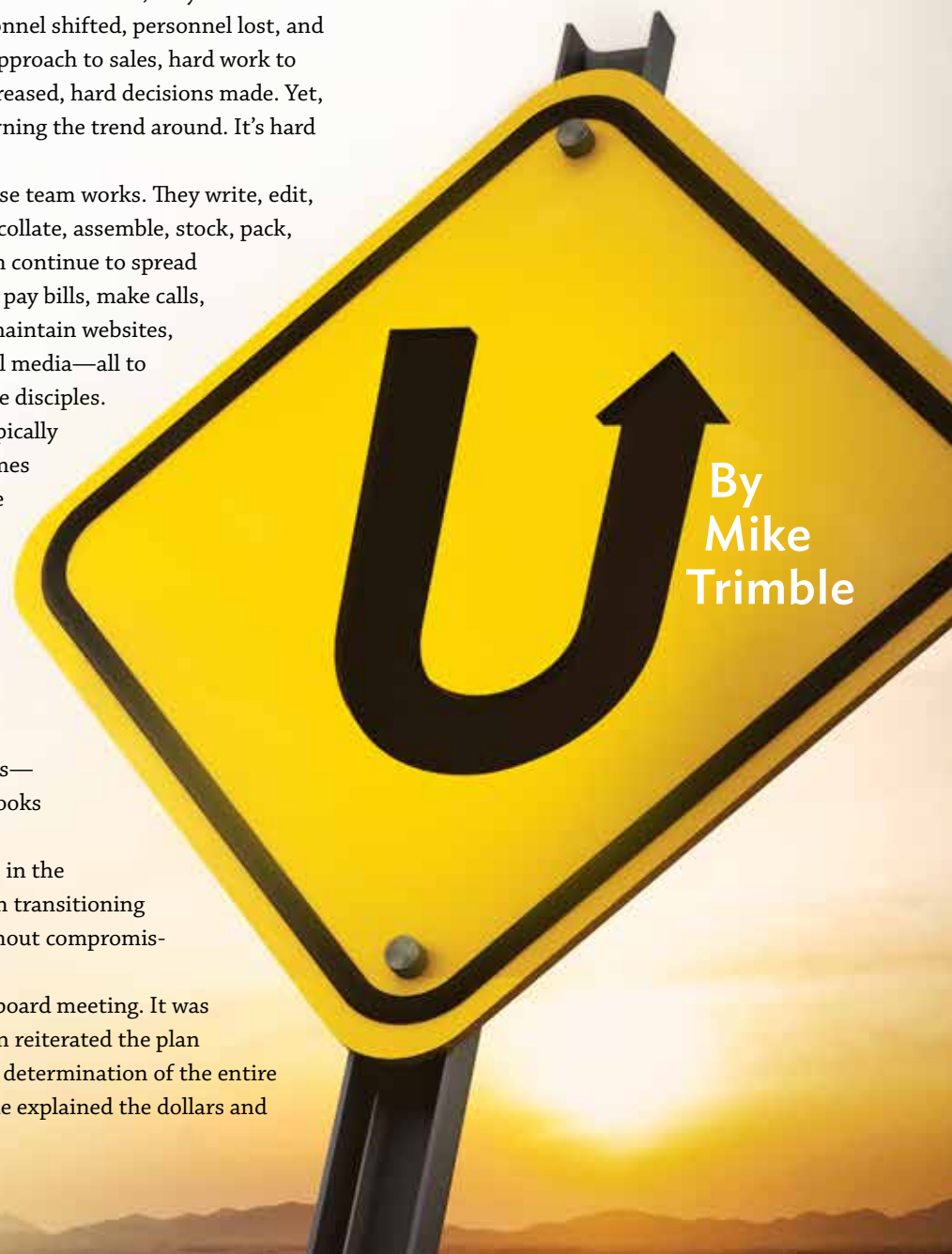
Ron Hunter gathered his leadership team, and they went to work; they *all* went to work. The vision of Randall House was restated, personnel shifted, personnel lost, and everyone picked up the slack. It wasn’t easy—a new approach to sales, hard work to catch up on production, spending cuts, workloads increased, hard decisions made. Yet, morale stayed solid. The entire team committed to turning the trend around. It’s hard work to trend up.

Maybe you don’t realize how hard the Randall House team works. They write, edit, proofread, spell check, create, design, produce, print, collate, assemble, stock, pack, ship, research, publish, execute D6 conferences (which continue to spread around the world), track inventory, manage accounts, pay bills, make calls, provide customer care, shoot video, create graphics, maintain websites, supply IT support, record podcasts, and manage social media—all to fulfill the vision of helping churches and families make disciples.

Let’s put it into some context. An average novel typically has between 80,000 and 100,000 words. The King James Bible contains 783,137 words. Leo Tolstoy penned the longest novel, *War and Peace*. It took him six years to scribble out the 587,287 words of his classic work. J.K. Rowling told Harry Potter’s story in seven best-selling tomes. If you add all the words she wrote in those seven volumes, the total would be 1,084,170. Randall House beats them all with more content. Randall House writes, proofreads, edits, prints, and ships D6 curriculum containing over 1.4 million words—per year—and that does not count the words in the books and other media they publish.

They continue to work hard, through seismic shifts in the publishing landscape, bookstore closings, and our own transitioning denomination. Randall House continues to adapt without compromising the content of what is published.

I wish you could have been at our December 2016 board meeting. It was certainly different from the spring board meeting. Ron reiterated the plan mapped out months earlier and praised the relentless determination of the entire Randall House family to make it happen. Michael Lytle explained the dollars and



cents, income and expenses, assets and depreciation, line items and the bottom line. When all was said, the numbers showed a \$650,000 turnaround in one fiscal year. Our board broke out in spontaneous applause sprinkled with exclamations of, "Praise God." Then, numbers gave way to the people who make Randall House, as Ron reminded us again of how the team stuck with the plan and made this flip happen because churches are depending on our future. Corrie Ten Boom once said, "Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God."

**I like our future.
I like our direction.
The direction is
trending up.**

About the Writer: Mike Trimble, lead pastor of Kirby FWB Church in Flat Rock, Michigan, chairs the Randall House Board of Directors.

To the leaders within our churches,

Our board chairman stated it well. Our future is headed the right direction. Publishing is still challenging, but so is pastoring and leading small groups or classes. The future of both churches and Randall House depends solely on the discipleship strategy each church adopts. If pastors believe discipleship is an event that occurs only at church, then we ignore how Christ intended to walk with us each day. Discipleship is not an event; it is a lifestyle.

Many of you have recognized the value of the church equipping the home. As a result, parents and grandparents serve as disciple-makers along with the teachers and pastors of the church. Your intentionality to change the trend has strengthened your church and reinforces why we exist at Randall House.

To all of you who take evangelism and discipleship as one command—reach and teach, the way Christ commissioned us—we say, "Thank you!" Without discipleship, there is no growth, and without growth, there is no future. You have said the future matters. We agree.

— Ron Hunter



Curriculum Discipleship Plan 2017 Scope and Sequence

Aug 2017 - Special Topic *Modern-Day Idols*

- Week 1 - The Problem of Idolatry
- Week 2 - Honoring God With Our Treasure
- Week 3 - Honoring God With Our Time
- Week 4 - Honoring God With Our Devotion

Sept 2017 - Old Testament *Women of Faith Influence Nations*

- Week 1 - A Choice of Faith
- Week 2 - Faithfulness Is Rewarded
- Week 3 - A Picture of Redemption
- Week 4 - Dedicated to Serve



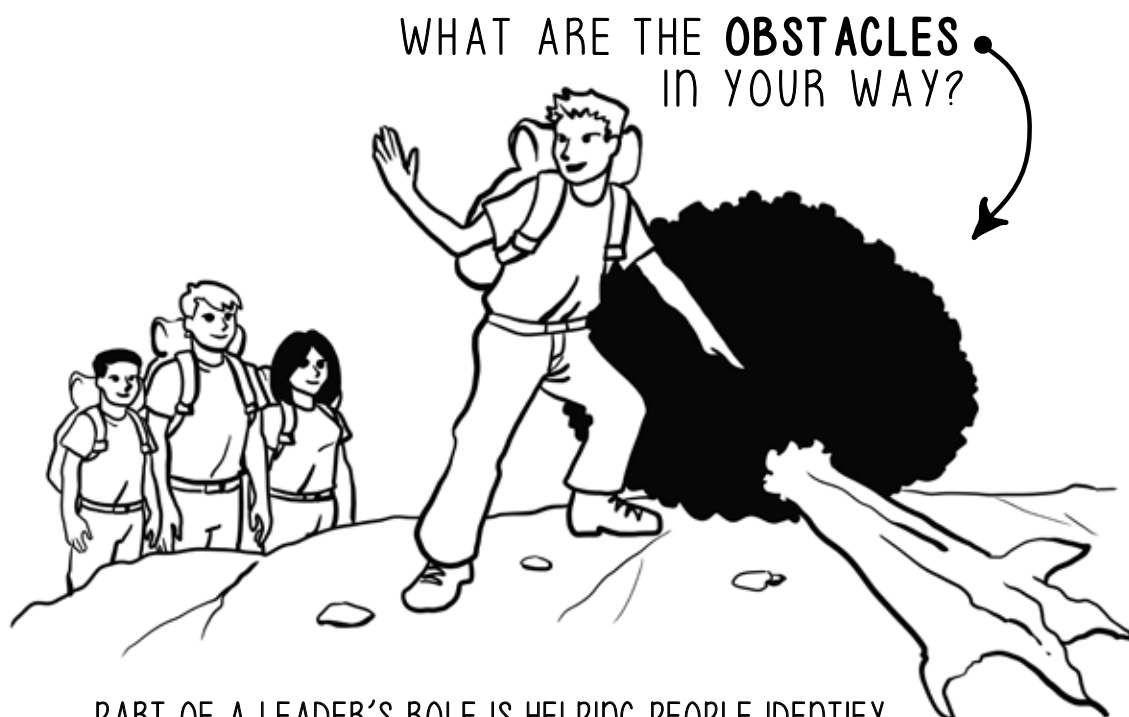
To order, call 1-800-877-7030 or visit www.d62gen.com



LEADERSHIP WHITEBOARD

Overcoming Obstacles || BY RON HUNTER JR., Ph.D.

WHAT ARE THE **OBSTACLES**
IN YOUR WAY?



PART OF A LEADER'S ROLE IS HELPING PEOPLE IDENTIFY OBSTACLES AND HOW TO GET AROUND, OVER, OR THROUGH THEM.

If you were leading a small group of people hiking toward a summit or benchmark further up the trail and came upon a fallen tree blocking the path, what would you do? If staying put and having all your mail forwarded to this dead-end location is not an attractive choice, then choose not to be held hostage by any barrier.

I am sure any leader reading this article would not let a tree keep him or her from reaching that benchmark, but I know many "leaders" who allow their team to take up permanent residence behind some major obstacle. Sitting at roadblocks should not be your destination. Many who reside at roadblocks appear to have given up on pursuing any solution. Leaders are not wired to be apathetic in a stagnant situation.

The leader who finds an obstacle in the path should do four evaluations: the **capabilities** of the followers, the **magnitude** of the obstacle, the **value** of reaching the intended goal, and **options** to get past the obstacle. Leaders cannot be the sole movers of any sizable obstacle. First, evaluate the capabilities, talents, and abilities of followers and then ask them to help you determine how to get over the hurdle. The key is inviting followers into the process rather than telling them the answer. The second evaluation helps followers see the dangers of allowing this obstacle to keep everyone from where God has called them to go. The third

reminds people why and where they were going before forward progress was impeded. The second and third evaluation is the story of the Hebrew children headed into the land of Canaan with many formidable obstacles standing in their way. However, God used Joshua and Caleb to help the people keep their eyes on the benefits of the Promised Land, and even worked through the removal of resistance until they were ready for God's destination.

The fourth evaluation takes on the shape of allowing people to help determine options or solutions to get past obstacles. Notice this step did not place the direction/vision casting (goal of where you are going) in the hands of the people, but does value their experiences and God-given gifts to help the group get to that destination. Leadership occurs in relationships, and together, problems are solved. **ONE**

RECOMMENDED BOOK:



LEADING
FOR A
LIFETIME

BY WARREN BENNIS

The FINAL Out?

BY KEN AKERS



In Ecclesiastes 3, the Bible says for everything there is a season. It's been 27 years since the National Softball Tournament started. Originally sponsored by Randall House Publications in 1980, it fell under the direction of Master's Men in 1990. Over the years, many players and teams have participated, with 40-plus teams participating at the tournament's highest point.

Many of the men who played during those early years are now close to retirement, and some have retired already. The tournament has become the most recognizable symbol of sports fellowship for the denomination. As many as 2,500 people gathered to watch the competition some years, and the tournament was easily the second largest gathering for Free Will Baptists each year.

In recent years, however, the number of teams participating in the tournament has declined sharply. Several factors have contributed. First, many of the faithful players of the 80s and 90s have passed their

playing years. Second, the year-long school calendar has become a challenge. Many families used the softball tournament as a time for family vacation, a time to "wrap up the summer" with a trip to Nashville. Today, no matter when the tournament is planned, it conflicts with someone's school calendar.

A third factor is the decline in the overall interest in church softball and softball in general. Conversations with local umpires indicate that in the Nashville, Tennessee, area, the number of teams participating has declined drastically.

Due to the decline in participation and

the amount of money and time required to organize the tournament, Master's Men has made the difficult decision to discontinue the tournament for now. It was a hard decision. Personally, I have played in the tournament for almost 30 years. Both of my sons played on teams with me...and against me. The softball tournament has been a big part of our family tradition for many years.

We deeply appreciate those who have been faithful to participate and support the tournament, and in the future, if we see interest return, we will happily restart. Is this the "final out" for Master's Men softball? I hope not, and I am choosing to think of it as an extended off-season.

About the Writer: Ken Akers is director of Free Will Baptist Master's Men. Learn more about this important ministry: www.fwbmastersmen.org.

The Impact of IMPACT By KEN AKERS

In 2005, Tennessee pastor Frank Owens shared the idea of having a one-day outreach event on the Saturday before the national convention. It was an opportunity to do something to give back to the city hosting the annual meeting. With that, Impact was born.

During the early years, the Executive Office coordinated the event, but in 2010, Master's Men assumed leadership. Over the years Impact has accomplished many projects, and more importantly, touched many lives.

Last year, Impact Kansas City experienced renewed vigor and participation. Kevin Williford, pastor of Victory Free Will Baptist Church in Kansas City, shares that while their outreach event did not add a large number of people to their attendance, it has had a profound affect on their membership. The church has increased its budget to make room

for outreach. Last fall, over 250 people came to their fall carnival, and they added 13 people to their membership in the fourth quarter of 2016.

While Central Church in Grandview, Missouri, did not see immediate results in attendance from Impact Kansas City, Pastor Alan Kinder indicates they too have received positive exposure from the event. The celebration at Central Church honored first responders, and was a joint project with other leaders and organizations in the community. Plans are being made now for Celebrate Grandview 2017, hosted once again by Central Church. The congregation hopes to see many more visitors on the church campus.

Only God knows the final results of the time and investments volunteers have made, not just in Kansas City, but in the intervening years since the program started in 2005.

You, too, can make an impact through Impact! Make plans now to attend Impact Louisville, July 15, 2017. Visit www.fwbmastersmen.org for more details about the event.



About the Writer: Ken Akers is director of Masters' Men. Learn more: www.fwbmastersmen.org



JULY 16-19, 2017
Louisville, Ky

VIII conference



\$25
 PREREGISTRATION
 PER STUDENT /
 \$35 ONSITE*

*Does not include
 CTS Ministry Expo
 participation fee or
 Skit Guys tickets.

Don't miss all VIII has to offer.

SAMPLE SCHEDULE:

	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY
9 AM		Team Time	Team Time	CTS Bible Finals
10 AM	Sunday School	Learning Lab 1	Learning Lab 3	GPS Experience
11 AM	Main Session 1	Learning Lab 2	Learning Lab 4	GPS Experience
NOON	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
1 PM	Registration/ Free Time	CTS Ministry Expo/ Serve the City	CTS Ministry Expo/ Serve the City	Fun Time
2 PM	Registration/ Free Time	CTS Ministry Expo/ Serve the City	CTS Ministry Expo/ Serve the City	Fun Time
3 PM	Registration/ Free Time	CTS Ministry Expo/ Serve the City	CTS Ministry Expo/ Serve the City	Fun Time
4 PM	Registration/ Free Time	KidMin Panel Discussion	StuMin Panel Discussion	Fun Time
5 PM	Registration/ Free Time	Dinner Break	Dinner Break	Dinner Break
	5:30 Leader/Sponsor Meeting			
6 PM	Registration/ Free Time	Dinner Break	Dinner Break	Dinner Break
7 PM	Main Session 2	Main Session 3	Main Session 4	Multi-Generational Worship
9 PM	Team Time	ENGAGE Leadership Panel	The Skit Guys *\$12 presale and \$14 onsite	Closing Sessions/ Awards

SEE FULL SCHEDULE AT
WWW.VERTICALTHREE.COM

a ministry of  randall house

SUNDAY AM



MICHAEL SMITH

SUNDAY PM



BRANDON ROYSDEN

MONDAY PM



SAM MCVAY

TUESDAY PM



ZANE BLACK

TUESDAY PM



SKIT GUYS

EQUIPPING THE SAINTS

81st NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FREE WILL BAPTISTS
Louisville, Kentucky | July 16-19, 2017

Saturday, July 15

Impact Louisville
9:00 am
Church Revitalization Project
fwbmastersmen.org for details

Registration Open
3:00 pm – 6:00 pm
Galt House Hotel, Suite Tower
2nd Floor

Sunday, July 16

Registration (Open Daily)
8:00 am – 7:00 pm
Galt House Hotel, Suite Tower
2nd Floor

Sunday School*
10:00 am
KFC Yum! Center

Morning Worship*
11:00 am
KFC Yum! Center

Vertical Three Sponsor Meeting
4:00 pm
Galt House Hotel

Evening Worship*
7:00 pm
KFC Yum! Center

Monday, July 17

General Board Meeting
8:00 am
The Kentucky Center
Bomhard Theater

Serve the City Opportunities (V3)
8:00 am
Various Locations

CTS Ministry Expo
8:30 am – 4:30 pm
Galt House Hotel

Convention Seminars
9:00 am – 4:00 pm
Galt House Hotel

Theological Integrity Seminar
2:00 pm
The Kentucky Center
Bomhard Theater

Exhibit Hall Open
3:00 pm – 10:00 pm
Galt House Hotel
Grand Ballroom

North American Ministries
Appreciation Dinner
5:15 pm
Galt House Hotel

Evening Worship
7:00 pm – 8:30 pm
KFC Yum! Center

WNAC Laughter & Latte
(Ticketed Event)
8:30 pm
Galt House Hotel

YET Program
9:00 pm
The Kentucky Center
Whitney Hall

ENGAGE Leadership Panel
“The Church’s Response to Refugees”
9:00 pm
Galt House Hotel

Tuesday, July 18

Serve the City Opportunities (V3)
8:00 am
Various Locations

CTS Ministry Expo
8:30 am – 4:30 pm
Galt House Hotel

Convention Seminars
9:00 am – 4:00 pm
Galt House Hotel

Prayer Rally
9:00 am
Galt House Hotel
Speaker: Barry Raper

WNAC Celebration Service
10:00 am
The Kentucky Center
Bomhard Theater
Speaker: Tammy Lancaster (Uruguay)

Exhibit Hall Open
10:00 am – 10:00 pm
Galt House Hotel
Grand Ballroom

Convention Business Session
1:30 pm – 4:00 pm
KFC Yum! Center

Student Ministry Panel
4:00 pm
Galt House Hotel

Evening Worship
7:00 pm
KFC Yum! Center

The Skit Guys (Ticketed Event)
9:00 pm
The Kentucky Center
Whitney Hall

Wednesday, July 19

Serve the City Opportunities (V3)
8:00 am
Various Locations

CTS Bible Finals
8:00 am
Galt House Hotel

GPS Experience: A Missions
Experience for Every Age
9:00 am – 11:30 am
Galt House Hotel

Convention Business Session
9:00 am – 4:00 pm
KFC Yum! Center

Serve the City Blood Drive
10:00 am – 3:00 pm
Galt House Hotel

Exhibit Hall Open
10:00 am – 9:30 pm
Galt House Hotel
Grand Ballroom

Luncheon
12:00 noon
Galt House Hotel

Evening Worship
6:45 pm – 8:30 pm
KFC Yum! Center

Vertical Three Awards Ceremony
9:00 pm
KFC Yum! Center

*Teen services will be held in The
Kentucky Center, Whitney Hall.
Preschool, Children, and 456
worship services will be in the Galt
House Hotel.



Tim Eaton (OK)
Sunday School



Rick Dement (MO)
Sunday Morning



Marshall Bonéy (VA)
Sunday Evening



Joel Franks (KY)
Monday Evening



Matt Pinson (TN)
Tuesday Evening



Clint Morgan (TN)
Wednesday Evening

Home of the “High Five”

Free Will Baptists will return to Louisville, Kentucky, for the third time July 16-19. Settled along the banks of the Ohio River where Interstates 64, 65, and 71 meet, this “Gateway to the South” is an easy day’s drive from most Free Will Baptist churches. And who wouldn’t want to attend a convention in the city where the celebratory “high five” was created?

In early 2015, the location of the 2017 convention was moved due to the upcoming renovation at the Kentucky International Convention Center. This year’s events will be held in the **Galt House Hotel, KFC Yum! Center, and The Kentucky Center for the Performing Arts**. The three venues are in close proximity to one another, and the Galt House and KFC Yum! Center are connected via skywalk. With its high room capacity, the Galt House will provide housing—all attendees in a single hotel for the first time in decades. Onsite registration will be located on the second floor of the Galt House. **Because the KFC Yum! Center is closed to the public, attendees must register in the Galt House Hotel before being allowed to enter.**



Barry Raper (TN)
Prayer Rally

Equipping the Saints

Speakers **Tim Eaton (OK), Rick Dement (MO), Marshall Bonéy (VA), Joel Franks (KY), Matt Pinson (TN), and Clint Morgan (TN)** will address the theme, “Equipping the Saints” from Ephesians 4:11-12. Online streaming of convention services will be provided at www.nafwb.org for those who cannot attend, courtesy of the Free Will Baptist Media Commission. The theme will also be emphasized by a prayer rally on Tuesday morning, guided by **Barry Raper (TN)**.

Attendees are also encouraged to take part in **Impact Louisville**, a one-day evangelistic campaign of service and outreach. This year, On Saturday July 15, participants will partner with First FWB Church of Louisville to provide a day of fun, fellowship, and outreach into the community surrounding the church,



along with a number of work projects.

Volunteers are encouraged to meet at the church (4618 Poplar Level Road, Louisville, KY 40213) at 10:00 a.m., with the community event scheduled to start at 11:00 a.m. Once the community outreach event is underway, additional volunteers will complete a number of work projects inside the facility. Details will be made available at www.fwbmastersmen.org as plans are finalized.

Delegates are expected to approve denominational budgets totaling more than \$25 million as Moderator Tim York guides delegates through annual business sessions Tuesday and Wednesday. This year's slate of business includes election of board members, general officers, and commission appointees. In addition, all national agencies and commissions will submit annual reports.

Vertical Three Conference

Meeting simultaneously with the National Association is the 50th annual Vertical Three Conference (previously the National Youth Conference) to address the theme "Be Bold." Planners expect more than 3,000 registrants to participate in national competitive finals in Bible and fine arts, seminars, and services designed especially for youth. In addition, students from across the nation will participate in "Serve the

City" projects, meeting the needs of the Louisville community with time, volunteer labor, and kindness.

This year, on Tuesday evening, the youth event will feature special guests Tommy Woodward and Eddie James, better known as **The Skit Guys** (pictured below), with their unique combination of side-splitting comedy and thought-provoking sketches. Tickets are available when pre-registering or onsite.



Convention Music

The 2017 Convention Choir and Orchestra, sponsored by the Free Will Baptist Music Commission, needs vocalists and instrumentalists (age 15 and above, with at least third-year skill level) to participate in convention music. The ensemble will accompany congregational and choir selections each service. To be involved or if you have questions, contact the commission: music@nafwb.org or visit [fwbmusiccommission](#) on Facebook.


Making the Most of Louisville

Getting around Louisville is a breeze, with restaurants, shopping, and tourist attractions within an easy walking distance of the Galt House. For those with limited mobility, the city offers **Zero Bus**, a free shuttle that loops through the downtown area, with stops at all major attractions.

With three home games scheduled during the convention, sports fans can take in a **Louisville Bats** game (Triple-A affiliate of the Cincinnati Reds) at Louisville Slugger Stadium.

For those with free time, **Museum Row on Main** is only steps away from meeting facilities. With ten museums in four blocks, visitors will find something for everyone, from the **Louisville Slugger Factory and Museum**, home to the largest baseball bat in the world, to the **Frazier History Museum** and **Flame Run Glass Studio and Gallery**, a truly unusual working art museum.

Known for its rich, southern fare, “foodies” will want to sample a variety of Louisville favorites. The **Hot Brown** is an open-faced turkey and bacon sandwich smothered in Mornay sauce created by Fred Schmidt in 1926 for the Brown Hotel in Louisville. Those with a sweet tooth will enjoy the rich, dark chocolate flavors of **Derby Pie** (pictured above), while barbecue fans have dozens of restaurants to choose from, each boasting their own unique version of Louisville’s sweet, brown sugar-based sauce.

Be sure to take home a bag of **Modjeska candy**—a marshmallow covered with rich, buttery caramel and named after Polish actress Helena Modjeska, who performed frequently in Louisville in the late 1800s. A local candy maker named Anton Busath created the gooey confection and received permission from Helena to name it after her. After his candy shop burned in 1947, a family friend named Rudy Muth agreed to produce the candy in his own candy shop in exchange for the recipe. The Muth Candy Store continues to produce the candy today. 



Louisville's famous
Derby Pie

Join the convention prayer team!

Help us pray for the national
convention in Louisville, Kentucky.

To receive prayer requests via computer, go to:
www.remind.com/join/2017pray.

To join from a mobile phone, text @2017pray
to the number 81010.

If you're having trouble with 81010, text
@2017pray to 270-872-0478.

Receive messages by email or text. Messages will contain
prayer suggestions for the National Association.

For more information about the convention: www.nafwb.org



Photo: Mark Cowart



KEITH BURDEN, CMP
Executive Secretary
National Association
of Free Will Baptists

ONE to ONE >> CAMP

The following note was written in 1993 by a nine-year-girl, just before she attended a Free Will Baptist youth camp:

I will sleep with Bonnie on a bunk. Me and Bonnie will sleep with my Mickey Mouse bed spread. We both hope we will get best bunk plus be on the sam color of team.

I will need to bring shaving cream and a water gun because the shaving cream fight and water gun fight. Merrie and Jenna will sleep below us that will be so cool!!! I just hope Bonnie a Merrie don't get in a serious fight bummer dude. Camp is so fun because you never get board good excuse huh. OH Yeah I just hope Jenna won't get home sick and my mom take her home. And plus Jenna will get to play with me that will be fun I just hope she just won't embarrs me to much.



In the next few months, young people from local Free Will Baptist churches across the country will assemble in summer youth camps. Countless young lives will be eternally and positively impacted as they enjoy a brief respite from their normal routines and spend time in a safe, spiritual environment. Lifelong friendships will be forged. Some will trust Christ as their Savior. Others will respond to God's call to Christian service or ministry.

As a denomination, we owe a great debt to the men and women who give of their time, efforts,

and financial resources in order to make church camp a reality. We applaud those who serve as camp directors and take care of administrative duties. We salute the sponsors who supervise and look after the campers. We appreciate the teachers and camp evangelists who faithfully teach and preach the Word of God. We tip our hat to the musicians who capably lead in worship. We admire the commitment and hard work of those who prepare the meals. We offer kudos to those who serve as camp nurses, activity directors, security personnel, and in other roles too numerous to mention.

Needless to say, youth camp is near and dear to my heart. It is where, in the summer of 1970, I answered the call to preach. Was there anything sacred about that campground? No. Could God have called me in a different setting? Of course! But He didn't. And for that reason, that experience at that location will forever be special to me, permanently etched into my memory.

That nine-year-old girl I mentioned earlier is now a 33-year-old woman. She's just as excited and passionate about youth camp today as she was back then. She serves as the children's director at a Free Will Baptist church and will be responsible for taking a large group of children to church camp this summer. Her parents are very proud of her. I should know—I'm her dad. **ONE**



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Play an instrument? We need you!

The Music Commission invites musicians (age 15+) to participate in the convention choir and orchestra in Louisville, Kentucky, this July. Those with at least third-year skill level will enjoy playing with musicians from all over the nation. If you'd like to be involved, or if you have questions, contact the Music Commission: music@nafwb.org.

**We look forward to worshipping with you
this summer...**

For more information about the National Association of
Free Will Baptists, visit: www.nafwb.org



Flood relief



Building an orphanage in Haiti



Impact Service Projects



Impact Evangelism



Water filtration



Church and ministry construction

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Ridge Church renovation



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