

GOD'S REVIVALIST

December 2015

and Bible Advocate





about this issue

MERRY CHRISTMAS

The few weeks before Christmas can be quite hectic, with all the decorating, gift buying, card signing, special choir practices, and memorizing parts for the church Christmas program. Busy. Often too busy.

Too often the busyness of our lives so binds us to the to-do lists that we don't see the people around us as people. They become part of the next item to be checked off of a list. We miss the opportunity to allow God to prompt us with the right thing to say to cheer their day and point them to the real reason for the season.

Besides being busy, we sometimes focus on cultural concerns that detract from our real mission—spreading the good news that Christ came into the world to save us from our sins. We allow ourselves to be insulted by a store clerk's "Happy Holidays," or disgusted when a coffee shop delivers our caramel macchiato in a purposefully plain red cup, devoid of any Christmas graphics. Rather than allowing ourselves to be sucked into this so-called "war on Christmas," we should be asking God to help us to slow down and look for opportunities to be a blessing to others.

Rather than trying to come up with a clever retort to that "Happy Holidays" greeting or letting your barista know that you object to the new coffee cups, why not ask God to help you to set all those distractions aside and stay tuned to the leadership of the Spirit as you interact with those around you? Even in the midst of the busy rush to Christmas, ask God to inspire you to redeem specific moments in ways that encourage others and help them to see the Christ of Christmas!

* * * * *

In addition to President Avery's Christmas article, we also have four articles and a poem seasonally themed for your enjoyment and edification. One, "The Miracle Tree," is from alumna Joy Barnett (p.14).

This issue also continues our year-end tradition—presenting the various improvements made to our facilities since last year. This "Campus Improvements" section (pp.6-9) gives our readers a glimpse of the work being accomplished by our facilities department at GBS.

Enjoy the issue and the Christmas season! —KF

CONTENTS

DECEMBER 2015
Volume 127 No. 9

FEATURES

Three Words Better Than Merry Christmas	5
by Jani Ortlund	
Campus Improvements	6
by Richard Miles and Michael Avery	
The Miracle Tree	14
by Joy Barnett	
Reconciler Of Worlds	16
by T.M. Moore	
Seven Quick Facts About Christmas	17
by Andrew Dragos	
The Christmas Conference	21
selected and adapted	

DEPARTMENTS

The President's Page	3
Letters To The Editor	4
News From The Hilltop	10
Revivalist Family	10
World Pulse	13
Student Focus	13
Dear Phil	18
Revivalist Pulpit	19
Alumni News	22
Thoughts For The Quiet Hour	23

STAFF

Ken Farmer, *managing editor*
Kevin Moser, *art director, assistant editor*
Shane Muir, *assistant graphic designer*

God's Revivalist and Bible Advocate (ISSN 0745-0788) is published monthly except for combined issues in January-February and June-July-August for **\$12.00 per year (\$28.00, Canada; \$45.00, other countries)** by the Revivalist Press of God's Bible School, College and Missionary Training Home, 1810 Young Street, Cincinnati, Ohio 45202. Periodical postage paid at Cincinnati, Ohio, and at additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER: send address changes to God's Revivalist and Bible Advocate, 1810 Young Street, Cincinnati, Ohio 45202.**

God's Revivalist and Bible Advocate, the official organ of God's Bible School, is a magazine founded by Martin Wells Knapp in July of 1888. We seek to proclaim the good news of salvation; to stir a revival spirit among Christians; to stimulate Christian growth and responsible Christian living; to present the happenings and interests of God's Bible School.

Please obtain permission before reprinting any articles from *God's Revivalist and Bible Advocate*. **Unsolicited manuscripts are welcomed, but not returned.**

God's Bible School and College seeks to glorify God and to serve His Church by providing higher education centered in Holy Scripture and shaped by Wesleyan conviction, thus preparing faithful servants to proclaim Jesus Christ and spread scriptural holiness throughout the world.

God's Bible School and College does not discriminate on the basis of age, race, color, national or ethnic origin, or against otherwise qualified handicapped persons in its admission of students or employment of its faculty and staff.

Contact us by telephone at (513) 721-7944 (Revivalist Press, ext. 1351); by fax at (513) 763-6649; by email at revivalist@pbs.edu. Visit us online at www.gbs.edu or www.godsrevivalist.com.

COVER PHOTO: GBS student Ashley Muir photographed by Kara Moore.

the president's page



GOD'S WONDERFUL GIFT OF LIFE

by Michael R. Avery, President

The *Greatest Gift*, written by Philip Van Doren Stern, is a story about a man who wants to accomplish something in his own life but is so busy helping others that life seems to pass him by. Despondent over what appears to be a very ordinary if not a wasted life, he wishes he had never been born. He gets his wish, and through the help of a guardian angel he sees the world as it would have been had he never lived. After viewing life from such a unique perspective, he concludes that life is indeed a wonderful gift. Though Stern never found anyone willing to publish the story, it finally found its way into the hands of filmmaker Frank Capra, who turned it into the all-time Christmas classic, *It's a Wonderful Life*.

I have not had a life-changing visit from a kind, guardian angel, but I have had my perspective on life altered in recent years. I have always thought that because of our fallen condition in this fallen world, life as we know it now is quite pitiful in comparison to the life that is yet to come. Hence, it has not been very tempting for me to sink my roots too deeply in this present world.

I do not at all mean that my life hasn't been enjoyable and blessed. To the contrary, I have had a good life, a happy marriage, wonderful children, and adorable grandchildren. I have been privileged to meet some of God's choicest saints in places all around the world. I have been able to work in a very rewarding ministry and develop some wonderful friendships. I feel that what I have done has had tremendous meaning and value. I feel I have had a truly full life! So any time God is ready for me to go, I am ready. I have no sad stories, no regrets about leaving, and no struggle to grasp a few more fleeting moments of time here on earth. It's been a great journey! (For those who are shocked by this, no, I am not depressed; and, yes, I would like to see my grandchildren grow and have children of their own.) But earnest Christians live with a very loose grip on this present world. Right? We are only pilgrims passing through this land of shadows headed for the real world—the eternal one. Right? This life is inferior at best, and the sooner we slip the bonds of mortal existence and are clothed with the eternal, the better. Right?

Some time ago God began to speak to me about the wonderful gift He has given us in our earthly physical life. It should not be minimized or demeaned. It shouldn't simply be endured until we are liberated by eternal life. Rather, it should be lived with deep gratitude and respect as a wonderful gift from God. It is good, not because I make it so, but because He has made it so.

God created life and declared it good. God gave Adam and Eve each other and the created world around them to enjoy richly. He considers this physical life sacred and reserves the severest penalties for those who destroy it. The first

promise attached to a commandment was the promise of a long life. God often promised length of days as a way of honoring His faithful servants in the Old Testament. All of this is still true, despite the fall of man and the curse of sin.

Obviously, God sees the life He gives us as very good! Don't confuse God's gift of life that is good with what the world calls the "good life." The two are polar opposites. The citizens of this present world chase after the "good life," grabbing all they can get and holding it as tightly as possible. They generally succeed in keeping it long enough to make themselves thoroughly miserable before losing it all. Christians, however, have given up the "good life" so that they may enjoy a life that is truly good. They do not grab for what they can get, but rather hold everything they possess in an open palm. They clutch nothing to themselves. Thereby they can enjoy all things without those things affecting their joy.

If God views our earthly life as good, then His perspective ought to become our perspective. We should see every moment of our life here as a blessed gift to be richly enjoyed—a glorious journey marked by His grace. I don't need health or wealth or popularity or beauty or anything else to make my life good. All I need is to walk with Him and remain in Him moment by moment. Such a view of life is neither a shallow optimism nor a refusal to acknowledge the deep darkness that life can bring. It isn't ignoring the curse of sin and its awful physical consequences. But it is refusing to let those things blind us to the ultimate goodness of this life. It is acknowledging that every day is a gift from God—a gift that when received gratefully can transform the most common and ordinary moment into joyful living. It is a statement of faith that says pain, sorrow, and trouble do not define my existence, determine my happiness, or have the final word!

It is doubtful that anyone was ever influenced toward the life to come by someone who despised the one he or she was living now. Life is good, and as Christians we should demonstrate that goodness to those with whom we interact.

As we celebrate God's unspeakable gift in Christ this Christmas season, it would be good also to celebrate another of His wonderful gifts—the gift of life. Important celebrations require planning and thought. One Christmas morning, before my family and I opened our gifts, we read the Christmas story, prayed together, and then I read some prepared remarks about how good God had been to our family and how grateful I was for each of them. I then mentioned some specific things about each one that I deeply appreciated. After I finished, each family member did the same. At times we were so overcome with emotion we couldn't speak. When it was over, we embraced each other and realized anew how wonderful life really is! If you're alone, read a prepared letter to God and thank Him for the life He has given you. You will not be alone for long! Whatever your circumstance, don't miss an opportunity this year to celebrate all of life. Because it really is wonderful! ■



Letters

TO THE EDITOR

Letters should be addressed to the Editorial Office, 1810 Young Street, Cincinnati, OH 45202, or emailed to revivalist@gbs.edu. Letters reprinted here do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the editor of God's Revivalist nor those of the administration of God's Bible School. Names and locations of writers will be withheld at their specific request or at the discretion of the editor. We reserve the right to edit and condense.

When I read the articles, I feel I've been under a good message. Keep up these good "messages!"

CONSTANCE HARPER
Marion, OH

We read the *Revivalist* from cover to cover. Thanks for a sharp-looking periodical with scripturally sound current topics.

ETTA FRANKLIN
Shoals, IN

I found the article in the October issue, "I'm the One Holding the String" by Shannon Popkin, very interesting. It is so hard to let go of our children, but when we do, it is so rewarding to watch them soar.

CHERYL WATTERS
Cincinnati, OH

Thanks for publishing Dad's article in the *Revivalist* ["A Church Plant That Should Have Failed," September 2015]. It meant a great deal to my siblings that you mentioned the fact that Dad was a ghostwriter for President Miller. Also, loved your mom's story ["My Sister and My Lost Penny," October 2015].... What a poignant memory of her lost penny!

DOROTHY BOWEN KLASS
Thomasville, NC

The *Revivalist* is a first-class publication. I really enjoy it and have recommended it to a number of people at Eastlake Community Church.

KENNETH J. WEBBER
Huddleston, VA





THREE WORDS BETTER THAN MERRY CHRISTMAS

by Jani Ortlund

My favorite Christmas word is “Immanuel.” That word tells us that Jesus is not only out there at God’s right hand interceding for us; out there preparing a future home for us—He is here now, living with us.

“All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel’ (which means God with us).” (Matt. 1:22–23)

This Christmas let three little, but powerful, words guide your thoughts, your words, your actions, your feelings: “God with us.”

GOD. God, the Son, who spoke the world into existence became a babbling baby. Christ, the King, laid aside His riches to live in poverty without even a place to lay His head. Jesus, our Lord, came as a servant to seek and to serve and to clear a way to His Father for any who will meet Him at His cross. Immanuel!

WITH. God had been with His people before that first Christmas. In the tabernacle or temple He would meet with them. But when Jesus came it changed from “Come meet with Me in a specific place” to “Now I’ve come to meet you. I’ve made the first move. I am ‘Immanuel.’”

Relish the “withness” of God this Christmas. He is very near, settled down among us. Hold this truth deep within your heart, “You cannot be where God is not.” Immanuel!

- When you get up in the morning, God is with you!
- When you go to work, God is with you!
- When you talk on the phone, or email, or take a walk, God is with you!
- When you are frightened and anxious, God is with you!
- When your needs exceed your income, God is with you!
- When you are alone, or tired, or teary, God is with you!
- When your health is failing, God is with you!
- In times of pain and in times of joy, God is with you!
- As you read this right now, God is with you!

...Immanuel!

US. If you know Immanuel, you are part of a multitude. It is not just “God with me.” It is “God with us!” You have taken your place with all who have loved and followed Him for two thousand years. Relish that truth. Hold your fellow believers tenderly in your heart. Let’s treat each other with “compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience” (Col. 3:12). Let’s be quick to apologize and slow to take offense. Learn to “let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body” (Col. 3:15).

The book of Matthew begins with this wonderful proclamation, “They shall call his name Immanuel (which means God with us)” (1:23). And Matthew ends with Jesus saying, “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (28:20).

You’re safe. God is with you. He has been with you. He is with you right now. And He will be with you—always! Remember Dad Ortlund’s words, “You cannot be where God is not.” You are never alone. Not only on Christmas, but forever.

Where is it hard for you to embrace the “withness” of God? How can you embrace Immanuel more this Christmas? ■

Jani Ortlund is a pastor’s wife, author, and speaker. This article is from her blog post “Three Words That Are Better Than ‘Merry Christmas.’” www.TrueWoman.com. Used with permission. All Scripture quotations are from ESV.

CAMPUS IMPROVEMENTS

ON! CONSTRUCTION! CONS



As soon as the school year ends, things start happening around campus. A lot of the work is not very exciting—and often not noticed. But it has to occur.

We had been repairing the main doors of the Student Center for years, but it was becoming more and more difficult to find replacement parts. So we had a company install brand new glass panels and doors with electronic access.

We sealed and striped Young Street. We also built steps at the rear of the Allan Clarence Strong Residence Hall to connect its parking lot with one of our other parking lots on Young Street. A handrail will complete this project.

Four residences with flat roofs were covered with a warranted product (Conklin) this summer. In the process, the existing box gutters were repaired and treated.

A 60-foot lift was rented to seal the Revivalist Memorial Building (women's residence). The lower rear wall of the building was sealed/painted for the first time since that building was erected!

We also utilized the lift for other tasks: tree cutting and trimming, various repair work on building exteriors, and transporting items such as wall and floor tile into and out of the residence halls.

Another improvement involved the external lighting around campus. We converted existing fixtures to LED lighting, which is much brighter, uses less energy, and lasts considerably longer than the older lighting.



When Aldersgate Christian Academy moved to its current location several years ago, all lighting for the entire floor was controlled by one switch—every time the lights were turned on, the whole floor lit up. We rewired that entire area so that the lights in each room can be separately turned on and off. Obviously this will save money.

There was also a fair amount of work done in both residence halls. The complete renovation of the restroom and showers on the second floor of the Men's Residence Hall finishes that project. Now all three of those areas on each of the three floors have been completely renovated with new bathroom fixtures and beautiful tile throughout.

New carpet was long overdue for some areas of the dormitories. We completed one floor in the Men's Residence Hall—both rooms and hallways—and also installed new carpet in two of the hallways in the Women's Residence Hall. At some point the carpet in the rooms will need to be replaced, but we have addressed the most critical areas first.

We also did quite a bit of painting this summer, including the gym, the kitchen, the dish room, stairwells in the student center, and walls of the rooms and hallways on the same floor we carpeted in the Men's Residence Hall. Additionally, all four of the stairwells in the Knapp Memorial Building were painted, as well as all of the doors on the lower classroom level in that building.



ON! CONSTRUCTION! CONST

ON! CONSTRUCTION! CONSTRUCTION!

ON! CONSTRUCTION! CONSTRUCTION!

NEW GRADUATE PROGRAM AREA

With plans to start a graduate program, we took one large office area, replaced the windows, and converted it into two new offices for the graduate program director and his assistant. In the process, we made several office moves in order to get the right people in the right locations.

An old bathroom that had been inside the Revivalist Office was gutted and a new restroom area and a kitchenette were created with new access. This will service not only the graduate program area, but also the Revivalist Press and Aldersgate Distance Education Program offices.

RENOVATION OF THE MUSIC STUDIO

Phase One of the renovation of the Music Studio has been completed. The goal is to restore that building to its original look. The first task was tearing down the existing porch in order to replicate the original, ornate porch. In the process, the front steps and the sidewalk were also replaced. A number of the members of Steve Miller's construction crew who completed the carpentry work are GBS alumni.

COSTS

Campus Administrator Richard Miles estimates that the work discussed thus far has cost GBS approximately \$140,000. The estimate would be higher if we also calculated the labor costs when our own facilities crew completes the work.

538 CHANNING STREET

A major project for this cycle has been the renovation of the house at 538 Channing Street which we had previously purchased. The approximate cost of this complete remodeling project is \$80,000 in addition to the original purchase price of the property.

As you might expect, the interior was gutted and totally rebuilt, including wiring and plumbing. It is now complete except for a new roof on the garage. It has passed all of the inspections and has a temporary occupancy permit in anticipation of its completion.

The transformation has been astounding. This new residence was desperately needed as GBS is blessed with a number of young faculty and staff who need more space for their families. This two-story residence has three bedrooms, two full bathrooms, and a basement.

OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE

Your financial partnership enables us to make all of these campus improvements. The "Revivalist Family" is made up of faithful "GBS supporters" who have stood behind us and made it possible for us to move ahead for over a century. So many of you have been faithful in giving—and every gift directly or indirectly supports all students on this campus and impacts every future ministry to which God has called them.

A gift of \$25, \$50, \$100, or \$500 would mean a great deal to the school right now. A gift of any amount would be so much appreciated and go a long way in meeting the needs that are facing us at this time.

Maybe you would like to give a significant year-end gift that not only helps GBS, but could also benefit you at tax time.

If contributing by check, send it to Advancement Office, God's Bible School and College, 1810 Young St., Cincinnati, OH 45202. To donate by credit card or give online, visit www.gbs.edu/give-now; or you may call the school at 1-800-486-4637 and ask for the Advancement Office.

Thank you for standing with us!

Mike Avey

GOD'S BIBLE SCHOOL
& COLLEGE

DECEMBER 2015

ONSTRUC

RUCTION



PHONATHON: A SUCCESS!

Phonathon 2015 is in the books! A big “thank you” goes out to our



students and staff who volunteer many hours to make this yearly event a success, and to our friends and alumni who donate to make a difference in the lives of our students! A total of \$121,358 was raised, more than 1,500 individual pledges were made, and approximately 800 volunteer hours were logged. The photo shows volunteer student callers celebrating as the goal was surpassed on September 30.

OPEN AIR CAMPAIGN

On October 12-15, GBS hosted the Open Air Campaigners, who trained students to share the gospel through street evangelism, children’s programs, and sketch board outreach. Groups ministered on Fountain Square, at the University of Cincinnati, and various other places in the city to both adults and children. GBS senior Andrew



Blankenship, after leading a boy through a sinner’s prayer, said, “As we were talking about how being a Christian meant having a new life, reading your Bible, etc., tears slowly began to come down his face. He felt really different inside.” Students liked the creativity that this ministry brings to evangelism.

FRIEND AND SIBLING DAY

Friend and Sibling Day, held this year on October 28, is a time when students invite family and friends to experience firsthand a

REVIVALIST FAMILY

On these pages, we feature items about GBS alumni, significant events scheduled throughout the “Revivalist Family,” and brief news notes from across the Holiness Movement.

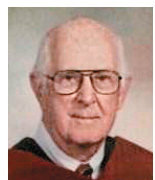
BIRTH



To **Diane (Wood) (BA '12) and Nathan Kennedy (BA '15)**, a son, **James Nathan**, born October 20, 2015, at Good Samaritan Hospital, Cincinnati, OH. Nathan directs the housekeeping department at GBS where Diane also serves on staff.

DEATHS

Edwin Williams Kilbourne, 97, passed away August 19, 2015. He was born in Tokyo, Japan, in 1917 and was raised the child and grandchild of missionaries to China,



Korea, and Japan. He attended schools in Tokyo, Beijing, Shanghai, and Los Angeles, and then attended Asbury College, Asbury Seminary, and the University of Kentucky. He received honorary doctorate degrees from Seoul Theological Seminary (South Korea) and from Asbury College.

In 1941 Edwin married his childhood sweetheart, Edna Martin, also a child of missionaries to China and Korea. Together they served under the Oriental Missionary Society (now One Mission Society headquartered in Greenwood, IN) in China, Korea, and then back in Greenwood in an administrative capacity until his retirement in 1988.

He served most of his life as a professor and missionary pastor in South Korea. He was given the presidency of Seoul Theological Seminary until a Korean leader could be trained and placed as the new president of this prestigious theological school.

typical day at GBS: staying in the dorm, eating in the cafeteria, attending classes, playing sports in the gym, and even taking a trip to



the Creation Museum. More than 30 prospective students attended.

ALDERSGATE FORUM

More than forty attended the forum which focused on Galatians and was held on the GBS campus October 27-29. Nathan Brown presented an overview of Galatians' background and message. Sermons and sermon outlines were provided

by Rodney Loper, Chris Cravens, and Pres. Avery. Thomas McCall, professor of biblical and systematic theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, presented the keynote address, "The Just Shall Live by Faith." His excellent survey of the doctrine's history was married to a powerful challenge to make personal application of our acceptance in Christ.

"Each year I look forward to Aldersgate Forum. I enjoy taking a deeper look into the Word and the fellowship with co-laborers in the great harvest." —Rodney Loper, *Hobe Sound Bible Church*



YOUTH CHALLENGE

GBS was once again involved in Youth Challenge, October 29-31. This annual convention, held at the Higher Ground Conference and Retreat Center in West Harrison, IN, was an opportunity for our recruitment team to mingle with nearly 1,000 young people, pastors, and youth leaders. Two GBS quartets sang and numerous GBS presentation videos were shown periodically during the event. (These and other GBS-related videos can be viewed online: www.youtube.com/GBSC1900.) Kent Stetler, GBS student recruiter and a member of the YC executive council, hosted the afterglows with HillTalk guys Jordan Potter and Joshua Cravens assisting. (See also the GBS Recruitment YouTube page: www.youtube.com/GBSCRecruitment.) GBS faculty members Mark Cravens and Philip Brown spoke in two of the sessions respectively. ■



He continued in the service of the mission in his retirement, writing three books, two volumes on the history of the Oriental Missionary Society, and one on the land of Tibet.

Edwin was preceded in death by his wife, Edna. He is survived by his wife Yoko; 2 sons, Edwin and Kent; daughter Kay; 9 grandchildren; 13 great-grandchildren, and 2 brothers, Elmer and Ernest. A memorial service was held at the Community Church in the Good Samaritan Village, Kissimmee, FL.



Jeanne Marie (Beggs) Pfiester, 75, of Hillsdale, MI, passed away September 13, 2015. She was born in 1939 in Franklin, PA, the daughter of Donald Sr. and Hazel (Wilcox) Beggs. She loved God's Bible School where she was a student worker for five years from 1959-1964 in the printing department. She also loved singing and was very active in the choir.

In 1964 she married fellow GBS student James Pfiester (CWC '61). For 51 years she was active in missions, pastoring, and children's work, and she was a prayer warrior and singer. Jeanne was a longtime member of Bird Lake Wesleyan Missionary Church and was loved by all for her sweet and thankful spirit. Jeanne is survived by her husband, James; 4 children, Deborah, Shirley, Mary Ellen, and David; 11 grandchildren; and 11 great-grandchildren. The funeral service was held in the Hampton-Kurtz Funeral Home, Rev. Max Masters and Rev. Troy Bolen officiating, with interment in the Leonardson Cemetery in Pittsford, MI.



Sharon Faye Brown Ashleman, 50, died October 7, 2015 at her home in Sophia, NC. Sharon was a 1983 graduate of Carolina Christian Academy of Thomasville, a 1987 BA graduate of God's Bible School, and a 1989 graduate of

Greensboro College. She formerly taught at Hobe Sound Christian Academy, Carolina Christian Academy, and Neighbors Grove Christian Academy. She also taught Vacation Bible School at Trinity Holiness Church where she was a member. She is survived by her husband, Dan; daughter, Allison; sons, Samuel, Nathaniel, and Daniel; mother, Betty Hodge; sister, Jenatte; and brother, David. Funeral services were held at Trinity Holiness Church, Rev. Tim Cole officiating, with interment in the church cemetery.



Raymond Leslie Crooks, 84, a country boy from Oklahoma, passed away peacefully October 17, 2015, after a brief bout with cancer. Ray was born in 1931, the seventh of 12 children of Pearl and Goldie Crooks of May, OK. Growing up, his favorite pastimes were rounding up cattle, running rims down the dirt roads with sticks, and listening to the melodic howling of coyotes in the night. He often slept in a woodshed as a child in order to make room in the house for his siblings. In 1950 Ray married Lavena Dockum, his pastor's daughter. In 1955 they answered the call to missions for the Church of God (Holiness) and relocated with their young family to Jamaica where they served for a total of seven years. In ensuing years, Ray held numerous positions in both ministry and academia throughout the United States, including El Dorado Springs and Mexico, MO; Gravette, AR; and Fairbanks, AK. He served as president of Kansas City College and Bible School (now Kansas Christian College). Ray served on several Church of God (Holiness) boards including World Missions, Home Missions, Publishing Board, and Foundation Board. In addition to Lavena, his wife of 65 years, Ray is survived by his two daughters, Pamela and Patricia; 9 grandchildren; 5 great-grandchildren; 2 brothers, Frank and Haskell; and 1 sister, Blossom. Services were held in the Gregory Hills Church of God with interment at the Floral Hills Memorial Gardens.

NOTICES

Darrell Stetler II (BA '03), pastor of the Oklahoma City Bible Methodist Church has founded a new service, SermonSubscribe (www.sermonsubscribe.com). This ministry provides quality biblical preaching by video to churches. For a small fee, the service does all the preparation on preaching, making it as turnkey as possible.

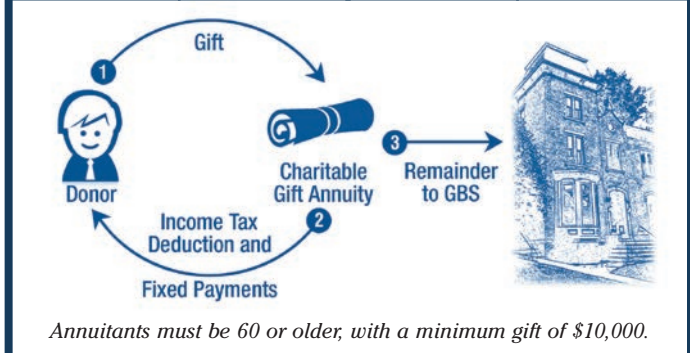
Each week they: (1) prayerfully prepare sermons; (2) preach them live at the OKC church; (3) record high definition video of the message; (4) edit and produce the video; (5) burn a DVD or upload the finished video to share; (6) print handouts, and ship it all to the subscriber church. ■

Help God's Bible School & College and receive a regular income for life



Charitable Gift Annuity Rates

Single-Life				Two-Life			
Age	Annuity	Age	Annuity	Age	Annuity	Age	Annuity
65	4.7%	80	6.8%	65-65	4.2%	80-80	5.7%
70	5.1%	85	7.8%	70-70	4.6%	85-85	6.7%
75	5.8%	90+	9.0%	75-75	5.0%	90+90+	8.2%



God's Bible School & College • Office of Advancement
 1810 Young Street, Cincinnati, OH 45202
 For more info, contact Faith Avery: favery@gbs.edu • 513.721.7944

GBS Presidential Search

- ★ Submit an Application
- ★ Submit a Recommendation

We value the opinions of our readers. You probably have thought of someone who you think would be a good fit for the position. Let us know. We appreciate your help!

Apply or recommend at:
www.gbs.edu/presidentialtransition





student focus

TOO MUCH TOLERANCE?

While addressing Catholic followers regarding the importance of exhibiting religious tolerance, Pope Francis was quoted as saying that the Koran, and the spiritual teachings contained therein, are just as valid as the Holy Bible. He also said, Jesus Christ, Mohammed, Jehovah, and Allah are “all names employed to describe an entity that is distinctly the same.”

RED & BLUE LETTER BIBLE

Editors Rick Lawrence and Ken Castor, working on the belief that Old and New Testaments are intricately linked, decided to highlight in blue letters all the passages in the Old Testament which refer to Christ. They determined that nearly 700 references in the Old Testament refer to Jesus in some way. Their hope is that their new “Jesus-Centered Bible” will help Christians see how interconnected the Old and New Testaments are.

CHINA CRACKDOWN ON CHRISTIANS INTENSIFIES

The *Christian Post* reports that under President Xi Jinping, Christians in China have experienced the worst persecution in 20 years. Particularly in the last couple years, Xi’s government has made it clear that religious activity will be closely monitored. Not only has China been taking down the large

red crosses that grace the tops of many Chinese churches, it also has demolished around 1,700 churches and imprisoned prominent Christians and their advocates. Despite the persecution, however, the Church in China is seeing rapid growth, with an estimated 10,000 people being converted daily.

NON-RELIGIOUS AMERICANS BELIEVE IN A CREATOR

A new study by LifeWay Research suggests that you do not have to believe in God or identify with any religion to see a creator’s hand in human life and morality. The survey of 1,000 U.S. adults found that most Americans—72% overall and 46% of “nones” (those who do not identify with a religion)—agree that “Since the universe has organization, I think there is a creator who designed it.” And most Americans—79% overall, and 43% of “nones”—say they agree that “The fact that we exist means someone created us.”

NONPROFITS WIN APPEAL ON CONTRACEPTIVE MANDATE

The 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals on Sept. 17 issued the first circuit court level victory for nonprofits challenging the contraceptive and abortifacient mandate. The ruling creates a split among the circuit courts, increasing the chances of the Supreme Court taking one of the nonprofit cases. ■

VALERIA MEDINA was raised in Mexico City. When she was ten, her parents were converted to Christ. The Lord led them to open a Christian school and Valeria attended there until her graduation. She began to learn English, which opened doors for her to study in the United States. She had every intention of going to a university, but through much prayer, God sowed a seed of passion in her heart for Christian education. Jean Eades, a missionary-educator and GBS alumna, talked to her about attending GBS, and Valeria felt that God directed her here. Since coming to college, Valeria says that she has come to know God very deeply. She appreciates the fact that the education she is receiving is from a Christian worldview rather than a secular one. Valeria has a passion for young people, missions work, and Christian education, and she hopes to go back to Latin America and share that passion with others for the glory of God. ■

Seventy-five percent of our students receive some form of financial aid which enables them to attend GBS. If you would like to support students with financial needs, you may send a gift to:

Student Fund
God’s Bible School and College
1810 Young Street
Cincinnati, OH 45202

or give online anytime at
www.gbs.edu/give-now



The Miracle Tree

by Joy Barnett

The intersection of the divine with the human is always miraculous. Sometimes it is mind-blowing and dramatic—angels singing, stars shining, and trumpets blasting—and everyone who sees it recognizes it for what it is. But sometimes it is almost ordinary—the still, small Voice; the quiet victory; the tiny gift; the need subtly met—easy for others to miss because they are not looking for it, but no less miraculous for its unobtrusiveness. It is always a miracle when God interacts with us!

It was only a few weeks before Christmas. Excitement was in the air. The stores were full of hustle and bustle, and holiday music played overhead. Children repeated their “parts,” preparing for church programs. They breathlessly awaited the break from school and getting the presents they had picked out in the big Christmas wish book. Grandparents tucked wrapped gifts away, getting ready for the big day. A general air of festivity was everywhere. But one young pastor and his wife felt only dread. They knew they were unable to provide a traditional Christmas celebration for their little son and daughter.

They had moved into the church’s parsonage, knowing full well that it would be a difficult assignment. Past hurts had left the church with a very small congregation, largely dependent upon the district for financial support. The faithful few did their best, but despite that, resources were scarce.

They had done what they could to make the big, old, drafty parsonage homey, spreading out their furniture to fill the large rooms. And the kids had learned to love the broad stairway with its triangular stained glass window on the landing, the big front porch with the creaky swing and balustrade with lots of cubbyholes, and the upstairs bedroom they shared, filled with wide windows that looked out onto the busy highway alongside of which the church’s property was situated.

But as the holidays approached, the pastor’s heart ached and his wife worried because they knew they had no money for the fragrant Christmas tree they had purchased in past years. Their limited funds would be stretched thin, barely providing a few gifts, much less a tree.

So, as the days passed, fervent prayers were whispered. Tree lights glowed in the windows of the homes around them. And the desperate mother longed for a tree for her little ones.

One afternoon while his wife ran an errand, the pastor drove to the nearby second-hand store in a last-ditch attempt to see if he could find some kind of tree. Walking through the grungy aisles of other people’s cast-off junk, he spotted a large, beat up box. Inside, he found it stuffed almost to overflowing with artificial Christmas tree branches, but no metal trunk. No one else wanted a box filled

with the old branches of a couple abandoned Christmas trees. You could not have a tree without a trunk, so the box had remained, gathering dust in the corner of the store. With trepidation, he approached a store worker to inquire about the cost of the box, and found, to his joy, that he could afford the few dollars they were asking. Hurriedly, he purchased the box, an idea formulating, as he squeezed it into the rickety Renault he drove. Arriving home, he took a quick tour of the church property. Almost as if it grew just for his purposes, he found a small, straight sapling growing in the back, close to the railroad tracks behind the church. Working fast, he carefully cut down the tree, stripped it of its branches, and drilled holes in which to insert the artificial branches.

When the young mother arrived back at the parsonage, a full, beautiful tree sat majestically reflected in the large picture window of the old house. Tears filled her eyes as she took in the scene. The children would have a tree to decorate after all! They could put on the colorful lights that very night! With its real tree trunk and myriad of branches, it seemed like a miracle performed just for them. Their own Christmas miracle!

In the years following, every Christmas they used that tree, even after they could have chosen another—used it until it became quite bedraggled. They gratefully recounted the story of the “miracle tree” that brought them hope and reminded them of God’s providential care. No, it wasn’t a dramatic, life-changing event. Not many even knew about it. It was one of those quiet miracles—the meeting of their heart’s desire and God’s inexhaustible supply.

I’ll never forget that snowy Christmas season and the beautiful tree that came straight from heaven...because the pastor and his wife are my parents and I was the little girl.

We most often think of Christmas as being a significant miracle—God who created everything entered our world! We think in terms of angels, stars, and worshipping kings. But the truth is that very few who observed it even knew it was happening. To most, it was just another poor couple traveling to pay their taxes. Peasant babies were born every day. But into the common, mundane, and unremarkable of that day swept the Word—God enrobed in flesh. His birth was unpretentious—the Event of all events, disguised as “just another baby,” the ultimate junction of the divine with humanity. But then sometimes it’s the littlest miracles that are the greatest ones after all. ■

Joy Barnett (BA '00) teaches private voice and piano lessons and has a small residential cleaning business. She and her husband Matt lead the worship music at their church as well as sing for revivals and camp meetings. They live in Bethel, OH.

LET ALL MORTAL FLESH KEEP SILENCE

This ancient chant is based on Habakkuk 2:20, “Let all the earth keep silence before Him.” The original was composed in Greek as a Cherubic Hymn for the Offertory of the Divine Liturgy of St. James. It probably antedates the rest of the liturgy and goes back at least to 275 AD, with local churches adopting arrangements in Syriac. In modern times, the Ralph Vaughan Williams arrangement of a translation from the Greek by Gerard Moultrie to the tune of “Picardy,” a French medieval folk melody, popularized the hymn among other Christian congregations.

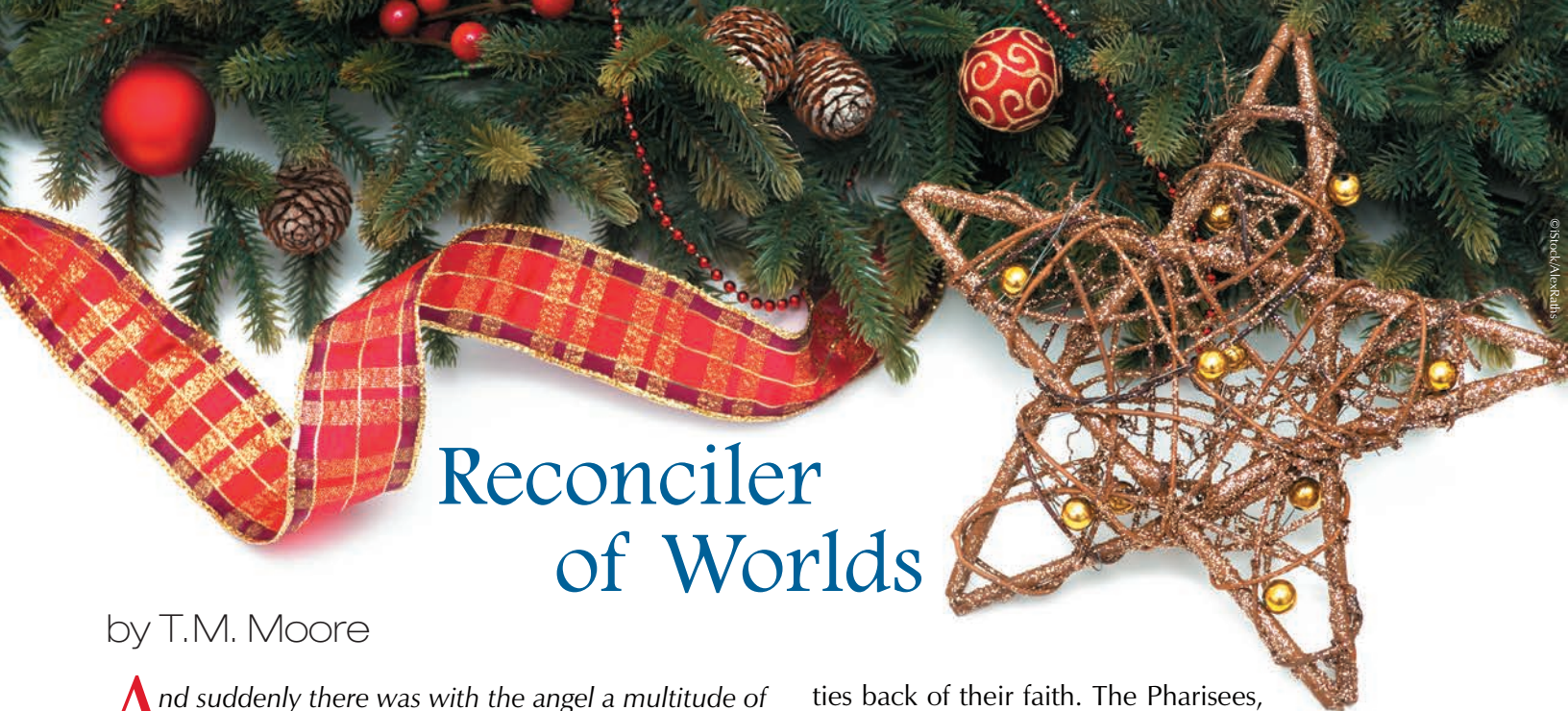
(adapted from Wikipedia.org)

Let all mortal flesh keep silence,
And with fear and trembling stand;
Ponder nothing earthly minded,
For with blessing in His hand,
Christ our God to earth descendeth
Our full homage to demand.

King of kings, yet born of Mary,
As of old on earth He stood,
Lord of lords, in human vesture,
In the body and the blood;
He will give to all the faithful
His own self for heavenly food.

Rank on rank the host of heaven
Spreads its vanguard on the way,
As the Light of light descendeth
From the realms of endless day,
That the powers of hell may vanish
As the darkness clears away.

At His feet the six winged seraph,
Cherubim with sleepless eye,
Veil their faces to the presence,
As with ceaseless voice they cry:
Alleluia, Alleluia
Alleluia, Lord Most High!



Reconciler of Worlds

by T.M. Moore

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” (Luke 2:13-14 ESV)

Seeing The Unseen

The writer of Hebrews explains that true, saving faith is rooted in things hoped for, but unseen. He writes, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1, my translation). We are so familiar with this idea that it’s easy to miss the great significance of what our sovereign God has accomplished through Jesus Christ in reconciling the whole of creation and restoring all who believe to our proper place in the grand scheme of things.

For as the first Christmas makes clear, the coming of the Baby born in Bethlehem signaled the beginning of the restoration of all things, including the reconciling of the material and spiritual worlds. Jesus came down from the heavens in order to make a way for heaven and earth to be united as one, in our souls, in the presence of God, and in a new world coming, and to come.

Christians perhaps take this for granted. And in doing so we miss a good deal of the significance of Jesus’ birth, and neglect to make good use of the benefits afforded us as citizens of the heavenly Kingdom. Let me explain a little more.

Religious, But Not Spiritual

People in Jesus’ day were confused about religion. They had their traditions, of course, and most of them believed in God. The “secular Jew” so common in our own day would have been almost unknown in the first century in Palestine.

At the same time, it had become difficult for most people to engage meaningfully with the spiritual reali-

ties back of their faith. The Pharisees, one of three religious parties in Israel, had reduced religion to traditions, formulas, and rigid norms of behavior. They invoked the name of God primarily to justify and preserve their roles as the keepers of Israel’s religion during a time of political constraint. The Sadducees, the second religious party in Israel, believed in God but didn’t believe in a spiritual world. They were the religious liberals of their day, for whom the name of God was a convenient way of identifying with the people while, at the same time, occupying a kind of intellectual plateau, as they saw it, somewhere above the masses. The Herodians were the third party of Jewish leaders, the smallest of the three, and were distinguished by their close allegiance with the Roman puppet king. They were the pragmatic political wing of Jewish religion and, as such, had little say in the day-to-day religious affairs of the people.

Most people believed in a spiritual realm, but the only experience any of them had with that realm was demonic, rather than angelic, in nature. God had not spoken, whether through prophet or angel, for 400 years, and so, for most people, while they believed in God, any sense of a spiritual life would have been completely foreign to their experience.

Heaven Came Down

When the angel appeared to those shepherds, therefore, that must have been a truly amazing thing—so amazing, we can imagine, that most folks they told simply would have refused to believe (they were, after all, only *shepherds*).

But the angel’s appearing, followed by the multitude of the heavenly host, announced that the event they reported signified a new day, a day in which the “veil” separating heaven and earth was being drawn aside, and those who looked to Jesus could now begin



7 Quick Facts about Christmas

by Andrew Dragos

to share in the life of glory and spiritual power which the hosts of heaven knew, and which their appearing on that Judean plain foreshadowed and foretold.

Jesus came from heaven to earth, but He also brought heaven to earth when He came. His message was that the Kingdom of God was near, had come, and was within us. Now we would begin to know the Lord, to be indwelt by His Spirit, to experience and express His glory, and to seek and advance His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus came to make the blessings of God flow far as the curse of sin is found, and to begin the work of reconciling the seen world of time and materiality with the unseen world of departed saints, angels, and God on His glorious throne.

In the birth of Jesus, God began the work of reconciling the whole of creation to Himself, and us right along with it. It is thus no wonder that at Christmas the saints of God, seeing through to that unseen realm of glory, give evidence of their faith by singing, "Joy to the world! The Lord is come!"

* * * * *

Read and meditate on Isaac Watts' hymn "Joy to the World!" How many different ways does this hymn celebrate the work of God in reconciling the worlds unto Himself? Talk with some Christian friends about this. ■

©2015 by The Colson Center for Christian Worldview, www.colsoncenter.org. Reprinted with permission.

T.M. Moore is the author or editor of 20 books, and has contributed chapters to four others. His essays, reviews, articles, papers, and poetry have appeared in dozens of national and international journals, and on a wide range of websites.

★ The first Christmas included a visit from the shepherds at what was most likely a back room reserved for animals in an Israelite home, or even a cave. The wise men, who were ancient astrologers, not kings, visited the family up to two years later.

★ December 25th may have been chosen as the date to mark the birth of Christ in the 3rd or 4th century because of its proximity to the winter solstice and its relation to the pagan sun god. Christ, the true light of the nations, was polemically set against these celebrations to suggest His lordship over them.

★ Rather than being an attempt to "remove Christ from Christmas," the abbreviation "Xmas" is a Christian short-form dating back hundreds of years. The X stands for the Greek letter *Chi*, which is the first letter of the Greek word *Χριστος* (Christ).

★ The tradition of Santa Claus, though likely a convergence of several figures, harkens back to Saint Nicholas, the patron saint of children and bishop of Myra (celebrated on December 6th). In some medieval images, Saint Nicholas is depicted distributing gifts to children.

★ The Christmas tree also has its origins in pagan practices that used the symbolism of evergreens to ward off evil spirits and secure life during the dark days of December and January. Like other festive elements, it was Christianized as Jesus was recognized to be the true source of life.

★ In 1659, the colony of Massachusetts, led by Puritan religious leaders, fined anyone caught celebrating Christmas. The observance was considered to be an exercise in frivolity since celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ was not commanded by the Bible.

★ Until the 20th century, gift-giving was characterized by handmade items such as baked goods, wooden toys, or needlework, while manufactured gifts began to take over in modern Christmas celebrations after the Industrial Revolution. ■

Andrew Dragos is managing editor of Seedbed.com. He leads the charge in creating and curating digital spiritual-theological resources. When not editing he enjoys design work and photography.

DECEMBER 2015

Dear Phil



Isaiah 53:4, “He Himself took our infirmities and bore our diseases” (Matt. 8:17). Jesus rode a donkey into Jerusalem to fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, “Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey” (Matt. 21:3-5). Sometimes, Jesus fulfilled His own prophecies. For example, in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus said, “let [my disciples] go their way,” to fulfill the word which He spoke, “Of those whom You have given Me I lost not one” (John 18:8-9).

The second sense of “fulfilled” is obeying the commands of Scripture. Jesus told John the Baptist to baptize Him because it was necessary for Him to “fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15). Paul says that “the one who loves another has fulfilled the law” (Rom. 13:8), and “the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Gal. 5:14).

Jesus fulfilled the law in both of these senses. All it predicted about Him happened, and all it required of Him he did. Scripture does not expect us to fulfill the law’s predictions, but it does expect us to fulfill the law’s commands by loving our neighbor as ourselves. In fact, this is the “law of Christ” we fulfill when we bear one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2). According to Romans 8:4 the righteousness of the law is “fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” The beautiful truth is that Christ’s fulfillment of the commands of the law means that in Him we are enabled by the Spirit to love God and love others, thus fulfilling the law’s righteous requirements.

Blessings,
Philip

A. Philip Brown II is a member of the faculty in the Division of Ministerial Education at God’s Bible School and College.

FULFILLING THE LAW

What did Jesus mean when he said, “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill”? If Jesus has fulfilled the law, why do some Christians think they should still follow some of its teachings? —Nathaniel

Dear Nathaniel,

You’ve asked a great question! Its answer certainly counts as “meat” and not “milk” (Heb. 5:12). Let’s start by looking at the context of Matthew 5:17. This verse is Jesus’ introduction to His discussion of key misunderstandings of the Law (Matt. 5:20-48). Apparently Jesus expected His audience to think that He was dismissing or getting rid of the law and the prophets. But that wasn’t what He came to do. In fact, to drive His point home, He says that the smallest part of the law will not pass away until all of it is accomplished (Matt. 5:18). Then He pronounces a blessing on those who obey and teach others to obey the least of the commandments: they shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:19). From the context, we can conclude that when Jesus said He came to “fulfill” the law, He didn’t mean that He was abolishing it, causing it to pass away, or giving a reason to ignore its commands. In fact, the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to say that “all Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for doc-

trine, for correction, for reproof, and for instruction in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16). Whatever Jesus meant by “fulfill,” the law is still profitable for all these purposes.

So, then, what did Jesus mean by “fulfill?” If you study the word “fulfilled” in the NT, you’ll find at least two main ways this word is used in reference to Scripture: (1) what was prophesied about the future happened as predicted and (2) a command or requirement of Scripture was obeyed.

The first sense of “fulfilled”—a prediction coming true—is what we normally think of, and there are plenty of examples. Jesus settled in Capernaum of Galilee to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah 9:1-2, “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned” (Matt. 4:15-16). Jesus healed the sick and cast out demons to fulfill the prophecy of



MANKIND'S BASIC PROBLEM

(Part 2)

by Allan P. Brown, Chair
GBS Division of Ministerial Education

Scripture: *"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6).*

Introduction

In our first sermon, we discussed self-centeredness as mankind's basic problem and noted that the process of renewing the image of God begins at the new birth. This sermon seeks to answer: "Can a Christian be set free from self-centeredness?" But first let's make sure we understand the difference between "self-centeredness" in the life of a sinner versus "self-centeredness" in the life of a Christian.

Self-centeredness in the life of a sinner

Self-centeredness is not a sin we commit like other sins. It is a condition of our heart and will that resulted from The Fall. Rather than coming from the womb of our mothers with a God-centered focus, we emerge into this world warped and twisted on the inside with a self-centered focus. David described it like this: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psa. 51:5). The term "iniquity" speaks of an inner crookedness and warped mind and will, and "sin" speaks of our inability to function as God designed humans to function. The Psalmist tells us that humans are "estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies" (Psa. 58:3). It is self-centeredness that motivates a person to commit acts of willful sin.

The primary terms the New Testament uses when speaking of "self-centeredness," or as theologians pre-

fer, "inherited depravity," "inbred sin," the "carnal nature" or the like, are: "sin" (Rom. 7:8); "sin that dwells in me" (Rom. 7:17); the "law of sin" (Rom. 7:23); the "flesh" (Rom. 7:18; 8:1); and "fleshly minded" (Rom. 8:6). However, as previously noted in our last sermon, when we become Christians, God forgives our sins and begins the renewal of God's image in us through union with Jesus. According to Apostle Paul, the power and control of inherited "self-centeredness" (that is, the flesh) is *broken* at the moment of the new birth (Rom. 6:1-23). This means that the Christian is freed from the controlling power of self-centeredness. However, there remains in Christians a predisposition to self-centeredness. This predisposition is not a "sin" to be forgiven; it is a condition of the heart that God must cleanse.

Unconscious habituated self-centeredness in the life of a Christian

Self-centered choices that are repeated over and over become habituated self-centered patterns of behavior that bypass the conscious thought processes of the mind. For example, something triggers an habituated pattern, and we react without thinking. Many times these habituated responses are self-centered and as such are not in harmony with God's Word.

A Christian purposes, by the grace of God, to stop doing everything he knows is wrong and to start doing all that he knows God requires (1 John 1:7). This rules out deliberate willful disobedience (1 John 3:9). However, habituated self-centered patterns of behavior will continue until God's Holy Spirit gives the Christian light on the specific issue and shows him he must change. In obedient response to the Spirit, the Christian begins the difficult task of reprogramming his mind for change. The biblical exhortations in Scripture to Christians to stop criticizing each other (Gal. 5:15), to stop quarreling with each other, and to stop causing division among the body of Christ (1 Cor. 1:10-11), are examples of unbiblical self-centered attitudes and behaviors. This shows that habituated self-centered ways of thinking and behaving show up in the lives of Christians.

Additionally, in Galatians Paul exhorts that Christians are to live a life of love one for another and that a major key in the change process is to learn to walk by the Spirit! He writes, "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16). In other words, the Holy Spirit can empower Christians to love one another. Further, if they are willing to obey the guidance of the Spirit and continually yield to His desires, they will never fulfill the desires of the flesh—that is, react to each other in self-centered ways (Gal. 5:16). Why? Because the Spirit and the flesh oppose each other and work against each other. If Christians would

live out in practice (follow the imperatives of God's Word) what was true of them in Christ (the indicative statements of fact; see Rom. 6:1-18), the Holy Spirit would keep them from the self-centered practices of conceit, provocation, and envy (Gal. 5:26).

God's cure for habituated self-centeredness in the life of a Christian

Dr. Dennis Kinlaw, describing his discovery of self-centeredness in his life, wrote, "I was a believer; I knew Christ. But I kept a finger on a corner of my life and I wanted to do a little bargaining with God about what He did with me." It was through a growing awareness of not being totally surrendered to God in every respect that Dr. Kinlaw came to see his need for a thorough cleansing from this predisposition. He was motivated to make a full surrender to God and consequently experienced the fullness of the Spirit whereby his heart was thoroughly cleansed from self-centeredness, and he received power to be the Christian example God wanted him to be (Acts. 1:8).

Whether or not a Christian fully recognizes the tendency toward self-centeredness remaining in his life, God gives all believers various commands such as, "Be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18), and urges all believers to present themselves to God as a living, holy, sacrifice to God. In other words, God wants each Christian to yield fully every aspect of his or her life to God's control (Rom. 12:1).

Earnest Christians want their hearts to be cleansed from self-centeredness so that it can be a pure and spotless throne for God. Listen to David as he cries out to God. After asking God to have mercy on him and to forgive him, he recognizes that he needs something more in addition to forgiveness, as wonderful as that is. He prays, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be *whiter than snow*" (Psa. 51:7). Did David understand the chemistry of snow? We do know that under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he did ask to be made "whiter than snow."

Why whiter than snow? Isaiah wrote, "Come now, and let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa. 1:18). Yet David asks to be made *whiter than snow*. Did he know that at the heart of every snowflake is a speck of dirt? Could it be that David was asking God to deal with the very heart of his problem: a self-centered heart?

Growth in grace after a Christian's heart is purified from self-centeredness

It is important to distinguish between the cleansing of unconscious habituated self-centeredness that

occurs at the moment a Christian offers himself to God in full surrender and becomes filled with the Spirit, and the on-going healing of the mental and emotional *consequences* of habituated self-centeredness that takes place as we continue to walk in the light. Let me illustrate.

My oldest brother was born during World War II. My father was in the Navy, and my mother was a homemaker. Having very little income, my mother bought powered milk for David. She did not know that the powered milk was not fortified with vitamins and minerals like it is today, and as a result, David developed "rickets"—a condition that results from a vitamin D deficiency. In David's case, rickets caused the bones in his legs to bow. Mother, deeply concerned, took David to the doctor, and he diagnosed his bowed legs as weak bone structure due to a lack of vitamin D and insufficient calcium absorption. He gave baby David a vitamin D shot to jump-start calcium absorption. He also told our mother to give David whole milk every day.

An immediate cure for vitamin D deficiency that caused the rickets was effected at a point in time by the injection of vitamin D. However, the physical consequences caused by the prolonged deficiency of the vitamin were not healed immediately. The appropriate diet and a long, painful, process of therapy and metal braces were necessary to straighten David's legs and "heal" the results of a deficient diet. The application of this illustration is this: the predisposition to self-centeredness in the life of a Christian can be cleansed in a moment, but the habituated mental and emotional consequences of self-centeredness may take a long time to reprogram.

Conclusion

When the Psalmist prayed, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (Psa. 51:10), he chose a Hebrew verb ("create") that is limited to God's activity. No one, apart from God, can create a clean heart in fallen creatures. A clean heart is a heart that is cleansed not only from the guilt of sinful behavior, but also cleansed from the pollution of self-centeredness. Once God has created in us a clean heart, it remains clean only as we continue to walk in all the light that God's Word and Spirit shed on our pathway. A clean heart begins with getting saved, and is furthered by fully surrendering to God (Rom. 12:1) and being filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). It is maintained by walking in the Spirit and making the on-going changes He prompts us to make.

Have you, my Christian reader, asked God to cleanse your heart of all self-centeredness and yielded full control to Him? If not, why not do it now? ■

The Christmas Conference

The Christmas Conference was a historic founding conference of the newly independent Methodists within the United States held at Lovely Lane Chapel in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1784, just after the American Revolution.

Prior to the revolution, American Methodism had consisted of itinerant preachers commissioned by John Wesley, founder of the Methodist societies in England. Wesley had been sending itinerant preachers to America since the 1760s to form Methodist societies. They were expected to work within the Anglican Church because they were not ordained and were not allowed to administer the sacraments. This caused some difficulty as Anglican churches were limited to the coastal cities, while the itinerant preachers were moving westward and inland.

With the outbreak of war, most Anglican priests left for England, as did most itinerant preachers as well, with Francis Asbury and James Dempster being two exceptions. Asbury began to be looked upon as the leader of the remaining groups. Dempster, meanwhile, moved to upstate New York where his activities were greatly restricted because as an Englishman he was suspected of not being sympathetic to the patriot cause. During the war, the Methodist societies continued to grow, albeit more slowly. Following the war, there was a move to locally ordain the preachers, but Asbury counseled patience until Wesley gave direction.

During the Methodist Conference at Leeds, England, in July 1784, Wesley ordained Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey as elders, appointing them to go to America. Wesley then ordained Thomas Coke (who was already an ordained Anglican priest) to superintend the American Church and instructed him to ordain Francis Asbury as his co-superintendent.

Meeting with Asbury on November 14, 1784, Coke explained Wesley's intentions and proposed to ordain him. Asbury, catching the spirit of democracy in the new country, refrained from accepting the

ordination until approved by the American connection. Messengers were sent, calling the American itinerants to Baltimore on December 24. Nearly sixty of them were able to attend the conference.



With the Christmas Conference's unanimous approval, Asbury was ordained and appointed as co-superintendent. Asbury's friend Philip William Otterbein, pastor of the German Reformed Church of Baltimore, assisted in the ordination.

The conference abridged the 39 Articles of Religion of the Anglican Church into 24, added an additional one about civic duties as U.S. citizens, and adopted the whole as its governing principles. John Dickins, a New York pastor, proposed the fledgling church's new name: the Methodist Episcopal Church. The conference also ordained 12 preachers to elder's orders, setting a precedent that ordinations were to be approved by the conference.

Immediately after the ten-day conference, Asbury went circuit riding as he had before the war. His first destination was Charleston, South Carolina, which he deemed the city most in need of spiritual enlightenment. American Methodism was on the move!

Coke later said, "In the presence of Mr. Asbury, I feel myself a child. He is in my estimation the most apostolic man I ever saw, except Mr. Wesley." ■

Adapted from the article "Christmas Conference" on Wikipedia. The illustration "The Ordination of Bishop Asbury" was painted by Thomas Coke Ruckle and engraved by A. Gilchrist Campbell (Drew University Methodist Collection, Madison, New Jersey).



CLARENCE HAMM

The birthday announcements had all been delivered. Family and friends were meeting in Edmond, Oklahoma, for the October 15th celebration of Clarence “Hambone” Hamm’s 90th birthday. It was an exciting time. But just five days shy of that birthday, Clarence passed away. The family and friends gathered at the appointed time and place, but instead of a birthday party, it was a memorial service celebrating the life of Clarence Elwood Hamm.



Clarence was the oldest of six children born to Edith and Marvin Hamm on October 8, 1925, in Covington, Kentucky. At the age of 16, he felt God’s call to move only a few miles from home to the campus of God’s Bible School in Cincinnati, Ohio. It was there that he met and



GBS High School Quartet (Clarence Hamm second from left)

fell in love with Ruth Strouder, who later became his devoted wife of nearly 67 years. First, however, World War II intervened.

In 1943, at the age of 18, he was drafted into the U.S. Navy. Following basic training, he was stationed at Coco Solo Naval Station in Panama, where he attended radio school and learned to install radar equipment on Navy fighter planes. From Panama, he was sent to radar jamming school in Hawaii and was stationed in Pearl Harbor for 13 months. He was then assigned to Seattle’s Naval Air Station. While he was on a one-week break, Ruth made the 3-4 day journey to Seattle by train, and they were married on Christmas Eve of 1945. He was discharged with honors from the Navy in 1946.

After his discharge, he returned to GBS and completed his education on the G.I. Bill. While there he enjoyed the privilege of singing in several groups. Immediately after obtaining his ministerial license, he worked for General Electric, where he helped make jet engines for the F-84 Thunderjet.

His first pastoral assignment was in North Bend, Ohio. Throughout the years, he ministered to small congre-



Honolulu, Hawaii

gations in various parts of the U.S. while also working other jobs in order to meet family financial obligations.

In 1963, while in Louisiana, Clarence began working for the U.S. Postal Service as a letter carrier. His



Wedding Day 1945



65th Anniversary

last relocation was to Bethany, Oklahoma. In 1992 Clarence retired from the Postal Service and from full-time ministry but stayed very involved in church work, speaking, singing, and playing guitar in a gospel trio which, incidentally, consisted of former classmates who attended GBS in the late 1940s.

The things Clarence loved most were: his Lord, his wife and family, his church, music, telling corny jokes, laughter, and spreading joy to others. He was a “glass half full” person and always looked at the positive. He will be dearly missed by a host of friends and family. ■

* * * * *

Clarence Elwood Hamm, 89, journeyed to his eternal home to be reunited with his beloved wife, Ruth, and to sing with the heavenly choir on Saturday, October 3, 2015. He is survived by his four children: Bonnie, Brenda, Sheryl, and David; seven grandchildren; four great-grandchildren; two brothers, Howard “Bud” and Roy; and two sisters, Betty and Joanne. Services were held at New Hope Worship Center in Oklahoma City, OK, with interment following at Bethany Cemetery.

Alumni are encouraged to email updates and pictures of their lives and ministries to Keith Waggoner I at w.ministries@comcast.net.



©2015 Jupiter Images

THOUGHTS

for the quiet hour

by Sonja Vernon

CONFESSION AND FREEDOM

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed.”
—James 5:16a NASB

For the last several years I have worked in a mentoring capacity with young people, and in that time I’ve noticed something. Those who undergo real and lasting life change are the ones who wholeheartedly embrace confession and repentance. Those who tightly hold on to their “dignity” and never completely come clean about their spiritual state are those who never really experience the beauty of grace and freedom in their lives. Confession is powerful. When we engage in the practice of confession we acknowledge truth about ourselves that God already knows. Confession is hard. It can be ugly and even painful. But confession frees us. When we confess, we open ourselves up to receive grace—healing and powerful grace—grace that enables us to live differently. Yes, we have the ability to go straight to God with our confession, but there is something powerful that happens when we acknowledge the truth about ourselves before another human being as well. Nehemiah 9:1-37 documents a great gathering of people confessing and repenting. James encourages us to confess our sins to each other. Pride can rob us of something beautiful and transformational that God longs to do in our lives.

Are you tired of the rut of sin you’re in? Are you tired of being tripped up by the same things over and over again? Do you long to know real freedom? I think I know the secret. Confession. Honesty. Vulnerability. Pride is exhausting and will keep you a slave forever. Open yourself up to grace. Confess. ■

Sonja Vernon is Dean of Women at God’s Bible School and College.

*Merry Christmas &
Happy New Year*
From the GBS Family

