

TAKE TWO: GIVE ONE TO A FRIEND

— KANSAS — FAITH AND FAMILY

MEMBER



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"FAITH IS BEING SURE OF WHAT WE HOPE FOR AND CERTAIN OF WHAT WE DO NOT SEE." HEBREWS 11:1

Waiting on God: When Healing Looks Different Than We Hoped

By Faith BroKar

"But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles..."
— Isaiah 40:31

There are some stories that stay with a community forever. They remind us that courage isn't measured by age, strength isn't determined by size, and faith often shines brightest in the darkest valleys.

For many across southwest Kansas, Tyson Barnett's story is one of those stories.

At just 10 years old, Tyson was diagnosed with Ewing sarcoma, a rare and aggressive form of cancer. What followed was a journey that no child should ever have to endure—years of chemotherapy, radiation, surgeries, hospital stays, setbacks, victories, remissions, and heartbreaking recurrences. Yet throughout those years, Tyson became much more than a young cancer patient.

He became an inspiration.

His battle brought people together. Churches prayed. Communities held fundraisers. Friends wore shirts bearing his name. Complete strangers lifted him and his family before the Lord. Time after time, people watched as Tyson faced unimaginable obstacles with remarkable courage. His journey reminded countless people to cherish each day, love their families a little tighter, and never underestimate the strength that God can provide in life's hardest moments.

On Sunday morning of July 26, Tyson's earthly battle came to an end.

Whenever someone so young leaves this world, the question that naturally fills our hearts is, "Why?"

It is perhaps the oldest question in human history. Martha and Mary asked it when Lazarus died. Job asked it as he

lost everything. David cried out with tears. Even Jesus, hanging on the cross, quoted the words of Psalm 22: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

The Bible never promises that we will understand every trial. In fact, God often calls His people to trust Him before He explains Himself.

Proverbs 3:5-6 reminds us:

"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

Waiting on God is one of the hardest lessons a believer will ever learn.

Sometimes we wait for healing.

Sometimes we wait for answers.

Sometimes we wait for a miracle.

And sometimes we wait only to discover that God's answer looks different than the one we prayed for.

That doesn't mean

God stopped listening.

It doesn't mean He stopped loving.

It doesn't mean He abandoned His children.

Isaiah reminds us:

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord." — Isaiah 55:8-9

Paul himself pleaded three times for God to remove what he called his "thorn in the flesh." Instead of taking it away, God answered:

"My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness."
— 2 Corinthians 12:9

Sometimes God's greatest miracle is not removing the storm—it is carrying us through it.

That truth doesn't erase grief.

Jesus Himself stood outside the tomb of Lazarus and wept, even though He knew resurrection was only moments away (John 11:35). Grief is not a lack of faith. It is evidence that love existed.

Today, the Barnett family grieves.

Friends grieve.

A community grieves. And yet, Christians grieve differently than those without hope.

Paul writes:

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep... that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope." — 1

Thessalonians 4:13

Our hope is not found in avoiding death. Our hope is found in the One who conquered it.

Jesus said:

"I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." — John 11:25

Tyson's life reminds

Continued on page 19



Misunderstood Scriptures: “Judge Not” Doesn’t Mean What Many Think

By Faith BroKar

“Judge not, that ye be not judged.” — Matthew 7:1

If there is one Bible verse that believers and unbelievers alike can quote from memory, it is Matthew 7:1: “Judge not.” It has become the go-to response whenever someone points out sin or stands for biblical truth.

But is that really what Jesus meant?

The Context Matters

Jesus was not forbidding all forms of judgment. In fact, just a few verses later He says:

“First cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s

eye.” (Matthew 7:5)

Notice that Jesus never says to ignore the speck in your brother’s eye. Instead, He tells us to first deal with our own sin before lovingly helping someone else with theirs.

The issue is hypocrisy, not discernment.

Jesus condemned the Pharisees because they were quick to condemn others while refusing to acknowledge their own sins. They held everyone else to a standard they were unwilling to live by themselves.

Christians Are Called to Exercise Discernment

Many people assume Christians should never make moral judgments. Yet Scripture teaches the

exact opposite.

Jesus Himself said:

“Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.” (John 7:24)

Notice He doesn’t say, “Don’t judge.” He says to judge righteously.

There is a world of difference between condemning someone from a prideful heart and discerning right from wrong according to God’s Word.

Paul instructed believers to lovingly confront sin within the church (1 Corinthians 5), restore fellow believers caught in sin with gentleness (Galatians 6:1), and test every teaching against Scripture (Acts 17:11).

None of those commands are possible if

Christians are forbidden from exercising discernment.

Love and Truth Always Go Together

Our culture often defines love as acceptance without correction. The Bible defines love differently.

If your child ran into a busy highway, you wouldn’t lovingly applaud their decision. You would urgently call them back because you care about them.

In the same way, biblical correction is motivated by love—not superiority.

Ephesians 4:15 tells believers to speak “the truth in love.”

Truth without love becomes harsh.

Love without truth be-

comes compromise.

Biblical Christianity calls us to both.

Before You Correct Someone...

Jesus’ warning still applies today.

Before confronting another person, ask yourself:

- Have I examined my own heart?
- Am I motivated by love or by pride?
- Am I relying on God’s Word or merely my own opinion?
- Is restoration my goal?

When those questions are answered honestly, correction becomes an act of grace rather than

condemnation.

The Bottom Line

Matthew 7:1 is not a command to ignore sin or abandon biblical convictions. It is a warning against hypocritical, self-righteous judgment.

Followers of Christ are called to be humble enough to recognize their own need for God’s grace while also loving others enough to point them toward His truth.

The goal is never to win an argument.

The goal is to help people see Jesus.

“Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.” — John 7:24



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The
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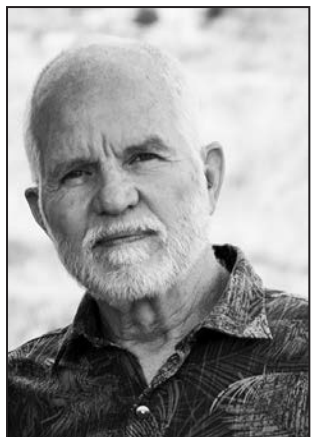
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Faith BroKar

KANSAS FAITH AND FAMILY

Expanded Sinner's Prayer



By Carl D. Everhart

Dear Heavenly Father, I come to You with a humble, honest, and open heart, asking You to rescue me from my sins. Lord, please have mercy on me, I know I am a lost sinner in need of a Savior. I openly declare that You are the only Savior. I believe You love me so much that You sent Your Son to be punished for sins that He did not commit, but instead, for every sin that I committed. I believe He died

on the cross taking the sins of all of mankind upon Himself. Because of that, I believe He was separated from You for the first and last time, for all eternity. With that separation, I believe He experienced my "second death," so I would not have to. Then I believe He rose from the grave, securing a place for me in Heaven with You. Please forgive me for my unbelief, and for all my sins. I turn away from my sins. I place my trust in You for my Salvation. Lord, whether I have two days or twenty thousand days left on earth, please come and take control of my life. I accept Your free gift of eternal life. Thank You for Your grace and mercy. I pray this in the mighty name of Your one and only Son, Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior. Amen.

Is it really possible

that someone can receive their Salvation simply by repeating a short prayer, or by raising their hand in the back of a church? The most accurate answer is this: Maybe. What we know for certain is that the penitent sinner hanging on his cross, next to Jesus, gained entrance into God's Kingdom after he spoke only three sentences, with 44 words. He had no time to jump down and go to church, Sunday School, or Bible study; to get baptized, to try to be a good person, or to do any good works. Apparently, there was just enough time for Jesus to look into his heart and see something that caused Jesus to tell him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).

One group of Biblical scholars embrace the concept of simply say-

ing what has come to be known as the "Sinner's Prayer," and one can be saved. However, there is another group that embrace just the opposite, saying "not so fast friend." Either way, just like with that penitent sinner, Jesus will look into the heart of every person, and He will determine who is righteous and who is not.

While it is always rewarding to see someone make the commitment to follow Jesus for the rest of their life, I personally believe that Salvation was never intended to be a "one and done" event. Christians know the importance of a follow-up Discipleship plan. This plan must teach new believers how to grow their lifelong relationship with their Savior. Without an effective plan to feed their "hunger and thirst for righteousness" (see Matthew 5:6), the chances are good that

their "seed of faith" will not survive the first winter. In the Parable of the Sower, found in Matthew 13:18-23, Mark 4:1-20, and Luke 8:5-15, Jesus clearly explained four different kinds of hearts and that only one of them leads to Salvation. This Parable is key to understanding why so many people either fall away from Christ or choose not to follow Him at all. Indeed, the commitment to be a follower of Jesus does not expire when it is made, nor does a life of strong and fruitful faith happen automatically, it just begins then.

Please do not misunderstand, only what Jesus did on the cross can rescue us, not our works, or our good intentions. But we must do something, because, while Jesus did the heavy lifting, He said that our burden is light, He did not say it is weightless (see Matthew 11:30). He also said

that His Way is hard (see Matthew 7:14). There are some basic things we can do to help the new believer increase their faith, and that is what the Discipleship plan must offer. These are not difficult tasks, but they must be genuine and intentional; they are not legalistic or compromised; they are Biblical and fully explained.

When sincerely asking the Lord to come into one's heart and save them, it is irrelevant how many words are spoken; a life change can occur where there is a heart change. Either way, this expanded Sinner's Prayer offers a "starting point" for the new believer; feel free to share it with others.

To read more from this lay pastor, God-fearing, born-again, sinner (saved by grace), and one who's not ashamed of it, search: everhartandsoul.com, then select Blog.

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5 Things You Should Know About Fighting Sin

By Jonathan Master, Ligonier Ministries

1. The threat is real.

The Bible makes it clear that we face significant temptations from the world, the flesh, and the devil. Those are all significant enemies.

The world is not on our side. The system of the world often is conspiring to push us in a certain direction. This is why Paul warns all Christians, "Do not be conformed to this world" (Rom. 12:2). Being conformed to the world in terms of what it prizes, what it tolerates, and how it defines success may change from culture to culture, but it must be resisted and tested against Scripture at every turn.

Our flesh also wars against us. We are sinners by nature, bent away from God and toward our sinful lusts. Sometimes, in the miracle of the new birth, God graciously removes some of our sinful ten-

dencies, but the remnants of our sinful life remain. We cannot simply follow our hearts and expect them to lead us in the right direction.

Then there is the devil. The Scriptures warn us to watch out, because "your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). If a skilled assassin was hired to kill you, you would be on your guard constantly. You would lock every door and check around every corner for his presence. Satan is much more powerful than any man. We must always be sober and watchful.

2. Temptation starts before you know it.

When we fall into sin, it is often because we have failed to protect ourselves ahead of time. We cannot engage in our normal activities as if we are not susceptible to sin. Often, the best way to fight against sin is to avoid places and activi-

ties that tend to lead us in the direction of temptation. For some, this means that they need to keep busy, since solitary boredom leads them into temptation. Some need to avoid certain people, whose influence will put them in the path of sin. Some need protective mechanisms to keep them away from certain content. There are things we know we should never watch, places we should never go, and times we should never be by ourselves. While these people, places, and occasions may not be immediately sinful in themselves, engaging with them can make us susceptible to temptation and put us at great risk of falling into sin.

3. The fight against sin must address the heart.

Jesus makes it clear that sin comes from within (Matt. 15:19). Our hearts are the source, and so fighting sin must address the inner man.

We must be careful to cultivate our hearts in accordance with God's Word.

Psalms 119:11 puts this succinctly:

I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

The psalmist knew that his heart needed to be overflowing with God's Word to keep him from sin. The same is true for all of us.

We cannot simply follow our hearts and expect them to lead us in the right direction.

This is why daily Bible reading, Bible memorization, and prayer according to God's Word

is so vital. What we think about will reflect in our words and actions. In light of this, the Apostle Paul writes, "Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Phil. 4:8).

4. The triune God empowers us.

Despite the temptations that we face as Christians, the Lord is on our side. The Bible says that those who are born again, "beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into

the same image, from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18). Christians have the promise that "he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion on the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). And again, "It is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

More than that, we are told specifically:

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not

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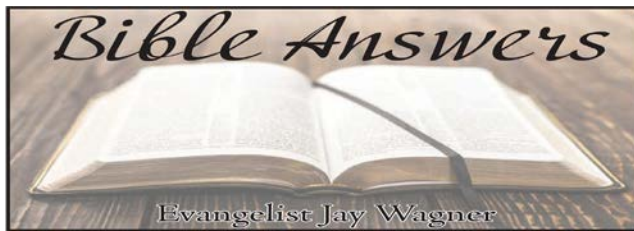
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Q: Is tithing still required from Christians?

A: The key word here is "required." This indicates that you're thinking of tithing (literally 10% of all gains) prescribed by the law of Moses. Romans 6:14 reminds us "... ye are not under the law, but under grace." The law referred to here is, of course, the Mosaic law, which was fulfilled for us by Christ so that we do not need to try to keep its (impossibly high for a normal human) standards.

Within this freedom from the law we further find the New Testament standard that, "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." (2 Corinthians 9:7). When one is giving out of a sense of legal duty, as with the tithe, it is difficult to be cheerful about it, especially when you really needed that money elsewhere.

I am a tither, but I have found that God always meets my needs so I can afford to give, and because I have the heart for souls that accompanies an evangelistic calling so I can give cheerfully even when I might prefer not to because I am careful to make sure that my tithes are going to activities that will win souls. Not everyone is given the same passion for souls or has the same experiential faith, so I never say so as I do. We all have our own life to live in Christ.

Whether tithes or offerings, I never recommend giving beyond your faith. I often hear preachers talk about "seed faith" and "giving out of your need." If you do, in fact, feel led by the Holy Spirit to give when your mind is telling you that you can't afford it right now, then by all means obey, but don't respond to what is nothing more than some preacher trying to put a guilt trip on you. God does not expect you to give what you need for your own well being unless, from time to time, He may want to show you that He will provide when you follow Him.

Recently I heard Pastor Mark Hoover of Wichita's NewSpring Church provide some clarity to Malachi 3:10, a favorite guilt trip scripture for many preachers. "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it." This is the one time in the entire Bible where God invites us to put Him to the test, not because He needs our money ("The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine." – Hagga 2:8), but because He wants us to know that we can trust Him with all things. As Pastor Hoover put it, God isn't looking for donors, He is looking for partners in His business. This is why He wants cheerful givers rather than dutiful givers, because a cheerful giver understands that they are giving to further God's business. God's business is souls, and in partnership with us He will make His business very good.

I welcome reader questions. E-mail your question to answer67547@gmail.com.

Anxiety Attack

By La Rena Hildebrand,
Ellinwood, Kansas

2 Corinthians 4:8

We are often troubled but not crushed; sometimes in doubt but never in despair; there are many enemies but we are never without a friend; and though badly hurt at times we are not destroyed.

Psalms 94:19

Whenever I am anxious and worried, you comfort me and make me glad.

Isaiah 41:10

Fear not, for I am with you. Be not dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

I believe that once in our life, if not more, we have all wondered or have been anxious about how our lives have or are turning out. We have asked ourselves where have we been, where

are we going; what have we accomplished, why certain things have happened to me? We have doubted the choices we have made and the paths we have taken. With a relationship with Jesus Christ, you need not to be anxious for anything, if you place your trust in Him and allow Him to control you and the situations you encounter, you experience comfort and peace. Psalms 94:19 says, "Whenever I am anxious

and worried you comfort me and make me glad." God has a continual presence in our lives. As Psalms 94:14 says, "The Lord will not abandon his people; he will not desert those who belong to him" and Psalms 91:11, says, "God will put his Angels in charge of you to protect you wherever you go." These are fantastic promises. Not only are they promises, for the future, these promises are reality, right now.

Sin

Continued from page 4

let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. (1 Cor. 10:13)

While the enemies we face are strong, God is stronger. His Holy Spirit—who raised Jesus from the dead—is at work in our bodies today. The Bible reminds Christians that "he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

5. It never ends until glory.

Until we enter the presence of our Savior, we can expect to be in a fight against sin. The Bible makes it clear that "if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8).

The fight against sin means that our time on earth is a time of spiritual warfare. We should never expect to be able to rest until we enter the eternal rest of heaven.

But one day, we will be changed. When Jesus welcomes us to our eternal home, we will be like Him. The battle will be over, and the fight will be won.

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"Quality Creates It's Own Demand"

Southern Baptist Sen. Lindsey Graham Dies Suddenly at 71, Remembered for Loving Nation, God



Sen. Lindsey Graham speaks at the Carolina Celebration of Liberty June 28 at First Baptist Church of Columbia, S.C. It was one of his last public appearances before his sudden death July 11.

By Diana Chandler, Baptist Press

U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, a longtime Southern Baptist who began supporting Donald Trump after first challenging him for the 2016 presidency, died suddenly July 11 after reportedly suffering an aortic tear at his Washington home.

The 71-year-old had returned hours earlier from a diplomatic meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zel-

enskyy in Kyiv and was poised for re-election to a fifth term as the senior senator from South Carolina after winning the Republican primary in June.

His support of Ukraine and Israel under an aggressive foreign policy platform characterized his political service, as did his engagement with the church and God as a Southern Baptist.

Tony Wolfe, executive director and treasurer of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, led the

executive staff in praying for Graham's family today (July 13).

"Sen. Graham was a consistent and passionate advocate for many of the policies and ideals that South Carolina Baptists prioritize," Wolfe told Baptist Press. "Following the announcement of his death this weekend, social media teemed with remembrance and gratitude from many of our Convention's pastors and church leaders. This morning, our executive staff took time to thank God for his service in office, to pray for his friends and family, and to ask for God's wisdom and favor in the selection of his successor, both immediately by appointment and permanently by election."

Graham was a member of Corinth Baptist Church in Seneca, S.C., where he was baptized.

"One thing that stands out to me is his love for

America," his pastor Tim Tate said in worship Sunday, July 12. "One thing he always wanted to talk about was his country. The last conversation I had with him just a couple of weeks ago ended in prayer, as I always ended our conversations in prayer. We prayed for wisdom, knowledge and discernment."

President Trump hailed Graham as "one of the greatest people and senators" he had ever known, tweeting that Graham "was always working, and was a true American Patriot. Lindsey," Trump said, "will be greatly missed."

Graham had served in the U.S. Senate since 2003. He chaired the Senate Budget Committee and was a member of the Senate Committee on Appropriations, the Senate Judiciary Committee and Senate Committee on Environment

and Public Works.

Prior to serving in the Senate, Graham was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1994 as the first Republican from the Third Congressional District of South Carolina since 1877. He was widely loved among Republicans across the state, in 2008 becoming the first candidate to receive more than 1 million votes in a general election, according to his official Senate biography. He served more than six years in the U.S. Air Force as an attorney and was a veteran of both the South Carolina Air National Guard and the U.S. Air Force Reserves. He retired from the Air Force Reserves in 2015 as a colonel.

Graham was known for his humor, which he displayed while speaking June 28 at First Baptist Church of Columbia,

S.C., during the Carolina Celebration of Liberty, this time marking the nation's semiquincentennial. He mentioned a series on Netflix about the nation's Founding Fathers and division.

"The only thing we had in common, apparently, is we didn't want to be governed by a king and after that, nobody could agree on much else. Two-hundred-fifty years later it's still the same way, right," Graham said. "Speaking of kings, President Trump said hello," Graham quipped to laughter and applause. "I told him I was coming here. He said tell everybody in Columbia at the First Baptist Church I love them, and I can't say anything else he told me because we're in church."

Graham made numer-

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Graham

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ous diplomatic trips to Ukraine and Israel and championed an aggressive response in Iran. Zelensky and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu were among many who expressed condolences on social media.

“Lindsey understood that the security of Israel

and America are inseparable,” Netanyahu posted. “Israel has lost one of its greatest friends.”

Zelensky said he was “deeply saddened” by Graham’s death, describing the late senator as “a true defender of freedom and the values that make our world safer.”

O.S. Hawkins, president emeritus of GuideStone Financial Resources, commended Graham’s support for Israel.

Graham’s “unwavering support of Israel was never about politics or policy. He grew up in a Baptist church hearing ‘God will bless those who bless Israel,’” Hawkins tweeted, referencing Genesis 12:3. “And he believed it and never wavered from it.”

Graham grew up in the small town of Central, S.C., as the son of a businessman who owned a bar, restaurant and liquor store, although the business has also been described as a restaurant and pool hall. Both his parents died within months of one another, leaving Graham to care for his 13-year-old sister when he was 21. His sister, Darline Graham Nordone, is among his surviving relatives.

Graham remained a single Christian and childless, which he defended in his 2015 bid for the Republican presidential nomination.

“I think I’m the best prepared to protect this country. I am single like many other people. If you’ve got a good marriage, God bless you. If you’re single, there’s nothing wrong with you,” Graham said in a 2015 interview on “Face the Nation.” “The last time I checked there was nothing in the Constitution or at the White House that said single people need not apply. I’m going to be a ready-to-go commander-in-chief, protect everybody, single people included.”

Graham’s funeral arrangements were pending. While the responding medical examiner said Graham suffered an aortic dissection, routine toxicology results are also pending.

THE TRUE GOSPEL

The good news of God’s grace, through His Son, for the glory of His grace.

1 GOD’S SOVEREIGN GRACE



Salvation begins with God. He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world.

Ephesians 1:4-5

“Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.”

2 OUR TOTAL DEPRAVITY



We are sinners—spiritually dead in transgression and unable to save ourselves.

Ephesians 2:1

“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins.”

3 CHRIST’S ATONING WORK



Christ died for His people. His death was a sufficient sacrifice to save completely.

John 10:11

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

4 IRRESISTIBLE GRACE



God’s grace effectively calls His chosen people, giving them new life and faith.

John 6:37

“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.”

5 PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS



Those whom God saves, He keeps. His grace preserves His people to the end.

Philippians 1:6

“He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”



THE GOSPEL IN ONE WORD: JESUS

We are not saved by our efforts, but by His. It is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, for the glory of God alone.

(Ephesians 2:8-9)

HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND?



Repent of sin



Trust in Christ alone



Rest in His finished work

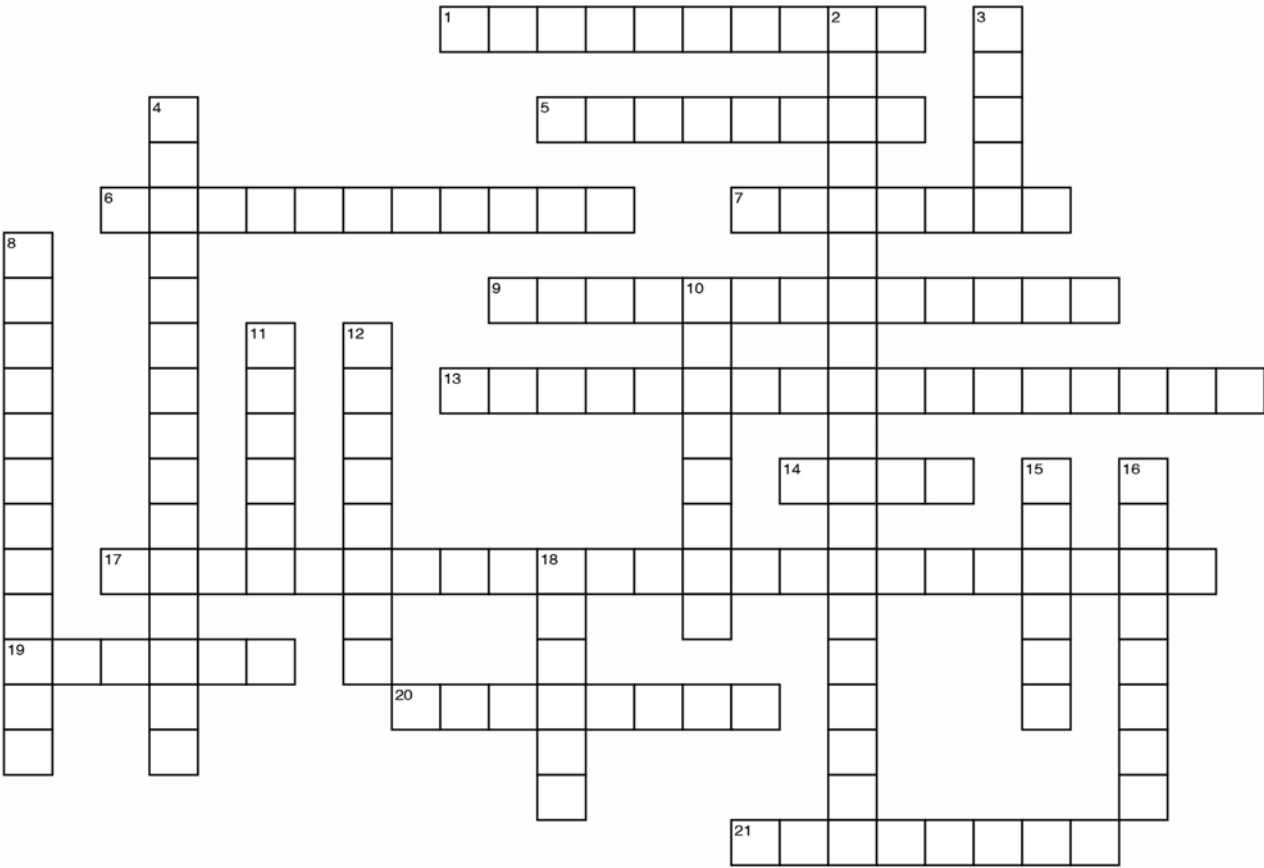


Follow Him in grateful obedience

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” 2 Corinthians 5:17

A Little Bit of Laughter and Fun
Proverbs 17:22 – “Laughter is like taking a good medicine.”

END TIMES



ACROSS

- 1 About that day or hour (3 wds)
- 5 They will come in the last days
- 6 It will come suddenly
- 7 All will not sleep, but all will be _____
- 9 The Father has set them by His own authority (3 wds)
- 13 Not worth comparing to the glory to come (2 wds)
- 14 It will be as in the days of _____
- 17 People will be saying it (5 wds)
- 19 They will be transformed
- 20 Rejoice if your name is written here (2 wds)
- 21 They will be gathered from the four winds (2 wds)

DOWN

- 2 You will hear of them (5 wds)
- 3 Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will do this
- 4 They will rise first (4 wds)
- 8 The perishable will clothe itself with this
- 10 He will be coming in the clouds with great power and glory (3 wds)
- 11 "For we must all _____ before the judgment seat of Christ"
- 12 It waits in eager expectation
- 15 He has gone to prepare a place for believers
- 16 Those who are alive will meet the Lord there (3 wds)
- 18 Even the _____ don't know the day of Christ's return

Answers in next
month's issue

Mikey's Funnies

An old wild west fort was about to be attacked. The wily old general sent for his trusty Sioux scout, Tonto.

"Tonto, you must use your many years of skill in trying to estimate the sort of army we are up against here," requested the general.

Tonto laid down and put his ear to the ground. "Large war party, maybe three hundred braves, four chiefs, two on black stallions, two on white stallions. All have war paint; Many many guns. Medicine man also with them."

"Good grief!" exclaimed the general, "You can tell all of that just by listening to the ground?"

"No," replied Tonto, "I can see under gate."

I used to be addicted to never showering. Thankfully, I've been clean now for five years.

When my three-year-old son opened the birthday gift from his grandmother, he discovered a wind-up monkey that plays drums. He squealed with delight.

I was not so pleased. I turned to Mom and said, "I'm surprised at you. Don't you remember how we used to drive you crazy with that?"

Mom smiled and then replied, "Oh, I remember."



Pro-life Groups Unhappy as Planned Parenthood Receiving Federal Dollars

By Scott Barkley, Baptist Press

The expiration of a one-year provision in the Big Beautiful Bill that defunded Planned Parenthood has pro-life groups and supporters questioning whether their voices are still being heard in defense of the unborn.

President Donald Trump's reconciliation bill that was signed on July 4, 2025, brought celebration among those who had worked for years to prevent federal funding to the nation's leading abortion provider, even if the stipulation was for only one year. However, Planned Parenthood now stands to receive more than \$800 million annually.

Those funds come through Medicaid and are specified for non-abortion services. Pro-

life leaders, though, argue that they nonetheless bolster Planned Parenthood's finances and thereby its capability to provide abortions.

"Last summer, the pro-life movement celebrated a historic milestone: the first federal defunding of Planned Parenthood and other large abortion providers," said Evan Lenow, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission. "We celebrate the impact this one-year provision had on the lives that were saved and the abortion clinics that permanently closed their doors, but we grieve that its expiration means that Planned Parenthood can now, once again, receive federal reimbursements under Medicaid."

In numerous meetings he took part in last week

in Washington, D.C., Lenow said, he urged lawmakers to take actions that strip "federal funding entirely" from Planned Parenthood and other large abortion providers.

"This includes finding legislative pathways in Congress to renew the now-expired defund provision, while also calling upon the White House to protect life through executive branch action," he said. "We have urged the Trump administration, in particular, to not delay in reinstating the Protect Life Rule, a commonsense regulation that would prevent abortion providers from receiving federal dollars under the Title X Family Planning Program."

Senator Josh Hawley (R-Missouri) called on those from his own party to action.

"Is this Congress, a Republican Congress, going to provide hundreds of millions of dollars in taxpayer money to the worst, most notorious abortion provider in the United States of America?" asked Hawley, speaking July 16 on Capitol Hill in a press conference. "... There is no excuse, none, for Planned Parenthood to be receiving taxpayer money to be carrying out the murder of the innocent unborn."

House Speaker Mike Johnson has not directly addressed the issue

when asked.

"I come from the pro-life movement. Everybody knows where my resolve is," Johnson told the Washington Examiner. "We're going to get the job done as soon as we can."

It's hard to argue that the upcoming midterms don't factor into Republican reticence. Eighteen congressional seats are considered toss-ups. Fourteen belong to Republicans.

"I don't think Planned Parenthood should receive federal funds, but it's very challenging,"

said Sen. Cynthia Lummis (R-Wyo.) in late June. "We're so close to 50-50 in both chambers to get everything we, on my side of the aisle, that we want as Republicans."

Both Sens. James Lankford (R-Okla.) and John Cornyn (R-Texas) also expressed support for another defunding measure, but were doubtful.

Regardless of renewed funding, last year's bill has factored in nearly 60 Planned Parenthood clinics closing. But that doesn't mean the issue

has been settled, Lenow asserted.

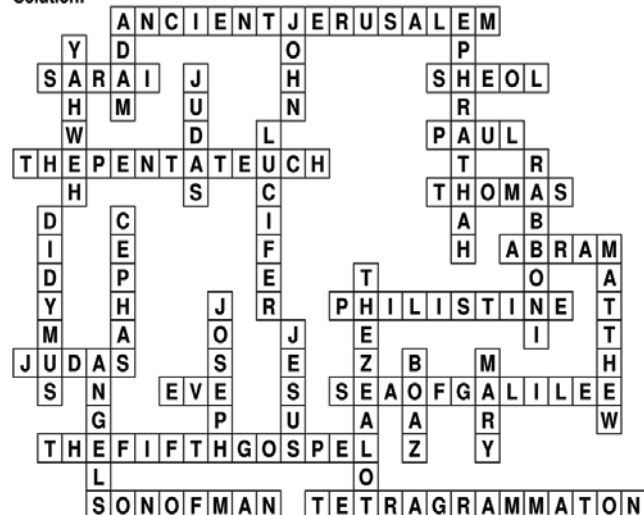
"How we spend our money shows what we value as a nation," he said. "Southern Baptists stand on the truth that innocent preborn lives have innate, immutable value conferred to them by God and they deserve protection from the predatory abortion industry. This conviction compels us to call upon our officials to ensure federal dollars are not flowing into the hands of organizations like Planned Parenthood."

Answers to last month's

Crossword

ALSO KNOWN AS

Solution:



FAITH minus REASON equals IRRATIONAL UNBELIEF

By John MacArthur

Many people mistakenly think of faith as inherently noble. A once-popular song extols the virtue of faith, or believing: "I believe for every drop of rain that falls, a flower grows."

No one really believes that, of course, but that is not the point. The song is a paean to faith—without regard to the content of that faith. The object of faith was of no concern to the songwriter. The sentiment that song expresses is by no means biblical. It is an echo of one of the worst lies of our age—the notion that it isn't important what you believe as long as you believe passionately enough.

Did you know that faith can be seriously harmful? Some varieties of faith actually lead away from the true God—they substitute superstition, falsehood, or faith itself in place of truth. Such faith inevitably leads to spiritual disaster. It is reckless faith.

Reckless faith goes to

two extremes. At one end of the spectrum it looks within—relying on feelings, inner voices, fantasy, or subjective sensations. At the other extreme it fixes its hope on some external human authority—the teachings of a supreme leader, religious tradition, magisterial dogma, or some other arbitrary canon.

An obvious non-Christian example of the first extreme is New Age mysticism. A similar example of the second is Islam. But even among groups that profess Christianity, both varieties of reckless faith are clearly seen. The charismatic movement, for example, tends toward the first extreme; Roman Catholicism epitomizes the second.

(Interestingly, there have been recent developments of a strong convergence occurring between the charismatic movement and Roman Catholicism. Such a bizarre unity reminds us that the vast spectrum of theological errors all flow out of one satanic

origin. More on that in the coming weeks.)

Note that at both poles, reckless faith seeks spiritual truth apart from Scripture—and that is the very point at which it becomes reckless. Both kinds of reckless faith also have this in common: they are irrational and anti-intellectual. "Anti-intellectual" doesn't mean they oppose intellectual snobbery. It means they spurn the intellect and encourage blind, uncritical trust. Anti-intellectuals often set faith against reason, as if the two were opposites. That kind of faith is gullibility. It is foolishness, and not biblical faith. Biblical faith is never irrational.

Authentic faith, in contrast, can never bypass the mind. It cannot be irrational. Faith, after all, deals with truth. Truth is objective data to be known, studied, contemplated, and understood. All those are activities that engage the intellect.

That means genuine Christianity cannot be anti-intellectual. The body of truth on which our faith is based has depths that are mysterious—unfathomable to the merely human mind, or inscrutable—but truth is never irrational. The difference is all-important. God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). Therefore what God says is true—and the antithesis of what He says must be false. Truth cannot be self-contradictory. Truth makes sense; nonsense cannot be true.

Moreover, the doctrine on which we base our faith must be sound—which is to say it must be biblical (1 Timothy 4:6; 2 Timothy 4:2–3; Titus 1:9; 2:1). "If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing" (1 Timothy 6:3–4, emphasis added). Sound,

biblical doctrine therefore underlies all true wisdom and authentic faith. The attitude that scorns doctrine while elevating feelings or blind trust cannot legitimately be called faith, even if it masquerades as Christianity. It is actually an irrational form of unbelief.

God holds us accountable for what we believe as well as how we think about the truth He has revealed. All Scripture testifies to the fact that God wants us to know and understand the truth. He wants us to be wise. His will is that we use our minds. We are

supposed to think, to meditate—to be discerning. And that is what we will continue to pursue as this series unfolds over the coming weeks.

Make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding; for if you cry for discernment, lift your voice for understanding; if you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will discern the fear of the Lord and discover the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding. (Proverbs 2:2–6)

Why couldn't they play cards on the Ark
Answer:
Because Noah was always standing on the deck

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Keys to Revitalization

By Todd Gray, BP Toolbox

Editor's note: Todd Gray is executive director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

During July, many of us have been praying for the revitalization of rural Kentucky Baptist churches. But what is church revitalization, and what are some keys to experiencing it?

Church revitalization could be defined as a local church functioning in the way it was intended by its Creator. Acts 2:42-47 is often used as a picture of a healthy church. The believers in this early congregation were gathering frequently, spending time in God's word and fellowship, they prayed and worshiped together; and

the early church grew numerically as God was adding to its number those who were being saved.

Many churches today, perhaps even the majority, would not be described as healthy. They are seeing a decline in attendance and giving. They are having fewer families engaged in the life of their congregation and, for many, it has been a while since anyone was saved and baptized through their ministry.

What are some things that pastors, elders and ministry leaders can do to help their church function the way God intended? Here are three considerations.

1. Address emerging problems with God honoring solutions: In

Acts 6, the church in Jerusalem was increasing in disciples, but an issue arose with the daily distribution of food for the widows (Acts 6:1). That problem, which threatened the unity of the congregation and stifled the growth of the church, was addressed, and the number of disciples began to increase again (Acts 6:2-7).

Pastors, elders and ministry leaders who hope to lead their church toward revitalization must address emerging problems. Whether the problem is a lack of parking space, the need for a building remodel, addressing leadership deficiencies, or even the removal of a staff member or church bully, problems must be addressed if a church is to

move forward in health and growth.

To address emerging issues, pastors must identify the problems, gather the church's appointed leaders to help understand them, prayerfully develop God-honoring solutions and then implement those solutions.

2. Return the church to its biblical mission:

Pastors, elders and ministry leaders soon discover that solving problems alone is not enough to bring about renewal and revitalization. Addressing church gossip, remodeling the church building or updating the constitution and bylaws will not result in renewal. Unless the church returns to its original purpose — that is full engagement in the

Great Commission — it is highly unlikely that any real revitalization will occur.

Dr. Tim Beougher, longtime evangelism professor at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, has reminded aspiring ministry leaders for decades that "a church will drift into fellowship but must be led into evangelism." As a church begins to reach new people in its community through intentional outreach efforts, those churches typically see greater enthusiasm, new families getting engaged, more guests in their services and increased giving for the needs of the church.

The church has one mission, the Great Commission, and one key to local church revitalization is for a pastor to determine by the grace of God to lead the church in faithful and effective evangelistic outreach.

What that evangelism strategy looks like will be different for each congregation. I saw on social media recently a response to one pastor's post about God's call-

ing on his life. This reply stated to the pastor, "You are a blessing!! Most of all don't stop knocking on those doors!! That one knock put a lot of souls in the seat that truly needed and been longing for!!" That quote was a reference to a lady who was reached by the church through intentional outreach and today has filled two pews of attenders in the church through her witness. Every local church pastor must prayerfully discover how he will most effectively lead the congregation to bring the gospel to its community. God will help you as you seek Him for a plan.

3. Care well for the people in the church: People matter to God, and they must matter to us. People are not the means to an end they are the objects of God's love and grace and deserve the highest attention of the leaders who are called to serve them. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, loved and cared for His disciples. He trained

Continued on page 17

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Who Are God's 'Chosen People'?

Dr. Rodney Crowell

Is it Israel, the Church, or both? The question is both practical and theological due to surging anti-Semitism in America – an 893% increase in attacks over the last decade, says the Anti-Defamation League. It's all due to hatemongering fueled by an evil partnership between Marxist "progressives" and Muslims, falsely smearing Jews as the perpetrators of a new Holocaust instead of repeated VICTIMS of them. Such bigotry emerged lately in New York City, where an Asian and a Jewish man were knifed, minutes apart, by a man shouting, "Allahu Akbar!" during each separate assault – and this while Muslim Mayor Mamdani urged residents to riot because his police force wouldn't arrest Jewish Prime Minister Netanyahu for merely existing! It can't get much uglier, you would think. But God's Word says that Israel will never cease to be a nation before the LORD (Jeremiah 31:35-

37)! So biblically faithful Christians and Jews must defend each other and oppose the political extremists who seek to eliminate them.

For this, we need three Bible truths: (1) A consistently literal reading of Scripture will show three main groups of humans identified – the NATION Israel, GENTILES or non-Jews, and the CHURCH. Our second truth is (2) that not every Christian or Jew who claims to have faith is a true believer "at heart." As the prophet Isaiah admonished his fellow Israelites, saying, "These people...honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (Isa. 29:13), so Jesus warned His own disciples that "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven..." (Matt. 7:21). True believers possess genuine faith in God and His promises, especially those concerning the Messiah proclaimed in BOTH Testaments, New and Old. So, God's chosen people are all true believers in Christ,

with the believing, Messianic Jews among them RETAINING their national identity as Israel's "Remnant" (Isa. 10:20-22; Zeph 3:13). Jewish Christians therefore have a type of "dual citizenship" as the true nation Israel and members of the one Body of Christ (Eph 2:11-22). Why? To glorify God in His Kingdom through their national heritage.

Do we then have two ways of salvation, Jewish Law and Gospel Grace? No, only Grace, and that leads us to our third Bible truth: (3) There are several Old Testament covenants and Calvary ends only ONE of them – the covenant of MOSAIC LAW (Rom 10:4; Gal 3:23-25). Christ's New Covenant, His sacrifice on the Cross, alone provides salvation; yet several other Old Testament covenants still apply throughout Time and Eternity with BLESSINGS for Christians and Messianic Jews alike. They continue in effect because the future Millennial Kingdom on earth (Rev 20:1-6) will

exhibit these blessings as fulfillment of God's promises to Israel or celebratory recapitulations of God's work in their history. Some examples:

In His covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3), God promises to bless all the families of earth through him as "the father of all who believe" (Rom 4:11-12), whether Jewish or Gentile. Same goes for the Palestinian covenant which promises the future restoration of the nation Israel (=Messianic Jews) to the Promised land, which will then extend from the Nile in Egypt to the Euphrates in Iraq (Gen 15:18-20; reaffirmed in Deut 30:1-10 and Ezek 47:13-20).

The Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7:12-16), guarantees that the Virgin Mary's son (Luke 1:31-33) will "receive the throne of his father David ... and his kingdom will never end." The thousand-year earthly Millennial kingdom promises its fulfillment in Christ's governance (Psalm 2:6-9; 72:7-8 and Isa 9:6-7 and 11:6-9), continuing in the New

Jerusalem of Revelation chapters 21-22.

Finally, we have the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:33-34: "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and I will remember their sin no more."

This dovetails with the New Testament's New Covenant in Christ (Mark 14:24), for Jeremiah's version includes NATIONAL blessings for the true, Remnant Israel ("they will all know me," hence no more 'stiff-necked' people!) alongside SPIRITUAL blessings for all believers, Gentile and Messianic Jew alike ("I will forgive their wickedness"). Any other national blessings for true Israel? Well, how about the presence of Christ in the Millennial Temple of Ezekiel, chapters 40-47 as world headquarters for His rule? (Ask yourself why God would leave such detailed instructions about His future Temple if it were merely "symbolic.")

How about Jerusalem Temple sacrifices and the Levitical priesthood restored NOT to atone for sin but as object lessons (like a pageant) illustrating Christ's superior sacrifice – that's the entire argument of the book of Hebrews! -- calling all those born during the Millennial Kingdom to faith in Christ? Of course, in the later Eternal State or New Jerusalem (Rev chapters 21-22), the object-lesson sacrifices will END, as God the Father and Jesus will be the Only Temple We Need (Rev. 21:22).

I encourage all Gentile Christians not to boast of themselves being the "new Israel," for God says that literal, true Israel remains "the apple of his eye" (Deut 32:10; Zech 2:8). Paul reminds us in Romans chapter 11 that God hasn't forgotten them, and that they will be saved (Rom 11:1-26). He also reminds us that we are merely grafted-in branches to most of Israel's covenants, replacing the ones broken off by unbelief. TRUE Israel still has a future, and as U.S. Ambassador Mike Huckabee recently said, we owe our "very existence" to what happened in the Holy Land. Our gratitude for one another will glorify God and keep us committed to mutual defense. Christians, continue to stand with Israel!

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Quiet Peace

*When we wait upon you Lord,
In the stillness of your peace
And the silence of our hearts,
Your strength is then released.
Quiet, O Lord, our restless souls
And let our fretting cease,
For as your love envelops us,
We shall know your quiet peace.*

By M.S. Lowndes

OPPOSING VIEWPOINTS

From day-one, it has been the position of Faith and Family not to endorse nor condemn any denomination. We strive to offer readers a wide variety of Christian views and perspectives and allow each individual to come to your own conclusion. Because news sources and contributors to Faith and Family come from a wide variety of sources, it is possible that some stories, opinions and views may conflict with certain beliefs.

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Big Brothers Big Sisters: Dylan and Kamari

*By Kristi Tedesco,
KWCH News*

Kansas Big Brothers Big Sisters is raising money through a raffle to help connect more children with mentors. Raffle tickets are available for purchase through the station's website or app, with a grand prize of \$25,000.

To become a mentor, applicants

must be at least 18 years old and pass a background check. Those who prefer to support the program financially can do so by purchasing a raffle ticket.

A match in action

Kamari was matched with his Big, Dylan Domangue, shortly after turning 10 years old. The two share a common interest in sports,

including football, baseball and miniature golf.

"I want to be an NFL player, but if I don't be an NFL player, I want to be a lawyer," Kamari said.

Dylan said Kamari also has an interest in weather.

"Any time we have severe weather, he knows the first thing that happens," Dylan said. "He's talking

about things we don't have here in Kansas. Tsunamis."

Kamari said the relationship has extended beyond shared hobbies.

"One time for Mother's Day, he helped me get my mom a gift," Kamari said. "And when stuff comes up, like my mom's birthday or dad's birthday, he helps me get stuff."

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From GRAPES to WRATH Part 2



Pruning the grape vines

By Chuck Kirk

Driving in the thick fog of a predawn day is not for the squeamish.

Weeks earlier, I had booked another two-week trip with HaYovel which was my third time in about a year with them. This one was a "men only" grape vine pruning trip. My wife and I left in the early morning hours, driving to Garden City's Airport and were served with a breakfast entrée of "Pea Soup" fog.

*The journey begins,
But could this be the end?*

Driving in the fog is kind of dicey.

*We lift up a prayer,
To dispel our despair,
Praise the Lord, who lifted the fog up nicely.*

Arriving at the airport we were told our flight had been canceled. My only hope now was driving on to Wichita for a flight to Dallas, and then on to Boston and Tel Aviv. We made it with not much time to spare, saying my goodbye, then hustling inside the terminal.

*At the airport door,
We found my flight was no more,*

On to Wichita we had to hustle.

Spending extra time with her,

*Was a bonus for sure,
We placed another piece into life's puzzle.*

The eleven-hour flight to Tel Aviv was uneventful and before I knew it, I was on a bus with other pruners headed to HaYovel. Their base of operations is located on the Mount of Blessing in Samaria.

Today is the date, Israel awaits,

The adventure is about to unfold.

Spiritual prospectors around the world,

Around 45 of them I've been told,

Are readying their flags to be unfurled.

We hit the ground running the next morning after worship, breakfast and a teaching from the Bible. A nearby vineyard we had harvested back in August, was the classroom where we learned the fine art of grapevine pruning. Josiah Hilton,

the Volunteer Program Coordinator and Nir Lavie who owned the vineyard, gave us an impromptu lesson. Each vine had two horizontal branches anywhere from three to four feet in length. Each branch had numerous "canes" or sprouts growing out to a length which could reach as long as three feet. We pruned the canes back to the first or second bud which was one to two inches in length.

In the afternoon the group was taken to Elon Moreh where God promised in Genesis 12: 6 & 7 to Abram, his descendants would be given this land.

A tutorial begins with Josiah and Lavie,

Just cut here and there, it's quite easy to see.

A trip was then made to Elon Moreh (pronounced More A),

Do you think Abram asked, Lord, what did you just say?

The next two weeks was mostly spent pruning or doing restoration work in the mornings



Before Hebron's restoration

and then taking the afternoons off to experience some of the biblical sights in Judea and Samaria.

The exception to this was resting on the Sabbath. From Sundown on Friday to Sundown on Saturday no work was done. Meals were already prepared for Saturday so we just took a break and celebrated sabbath and being in "The Land".

That is when IT happened. Saturday February 28th. The evening before, we had enjoyed a Sabbath celebration meal full of praying and singing and delicious food. While in our bunks early that next morning the sound of planes, lots of planes, filled the air. Shortly after sunup I went outside and was greeted with an extremely cloudy and overcast day. I continued to hear wave after wave of planes flying east toward Iran but couldn't see them except for an occasional low flying one.

Around eleven a.m. members of the staff instructed us to install the Israel Home Front App on our phones. When-



After Hebron's restoration



Gathered in the bomb shelter

ever a missile was detected coming from Iran, a siren would sound on the phone. We had ten minutes to then head to a bomb shelter. A second siren would sound after the initial warning, which would then give us 90 seconds to take shelter.

The shelters were quite comfortable with lighting and air conditioning. They were metal buildings with heavy reinforced doors and a thick concrete roof. Their main function was to protect against falling shrapnel. We were

located almost directly in line between Iran and Tel Aviv. Since Iran was aiming their rockets primarily at the metropolitan areas, Israel's Iron Dome interceptors were taking out their rockets directly overhead. We visited the bomb shelter 16 times that first day with each visit lasting 15 minutes. After the all-clear signal, the children of HaYovel's staff would race out of the shelters in search of shrapnel. It was like a large-scale treasure hunt with brag-

Continued on page 15

Grapes

Continued from page 14

ging rights afforded to the one who returned with the largest piece of shrapnel.

The mood inside the shelter with rockets overhead was a mixture of lightheartedness with some joking and a stoic reverence toward our Lord. Hymns were sung along with prayers for protection. Some of David's Psalms were read aloud to fortify our spirits. The staff at HaYovel took such good care of us, that at no time did I ever feel afraid or in despair.

The next day was more of the same. That day we visited the shelter ten times. With the airport at Tel Aviv closed, the folks at HaYovel went to work looking for ways to get us out and back home. A phone call to the US embassy resulted in a phone number of a man who might help. When a HaYovel staffer called, they were surprised to hear a familiar voice on the other end. It was a close friend of theirs who had ties with the government. He was down at the border with Egypt helping to facilitate the extraction of Christians and Jews from Israel to

International Egyptian Airports. "Just give me their names and passport numbers and I'll arrange transportation in Egypt", he said.

That night after a farewell dinner, we packed our bags and boarded an armor-plated bus with bullet proof glass (like all buses in Israel) and headed south.

We arrived at the border crossing just a few miles from the beautiful resort town of Eilat, at 3 a.m. Eilat is located on the shores of the Red Sea's Gulf of Aqaba. True to his word, there he was waiting for us with a big smile on his exhausted looking face. That's what happens when you go without sleep for a few days, he said with a slight laugh.

We first went through Israeli customs without a hitch, but had issues going through customs in Egypt. A companion of mine had his \$500 shofar (ram's horn) confiscated by custom officials. "Hey, you can't take my shofar for no

reason he complained". "Watch me", he replied. "I don't like Israeli items coming into Egypt".

Our bus was waiting to take our group to the airport at Sharm El-Sheikh, located on the southern tip of Egypt's Negev desert which was another 4 to 5 hours away. We were accompanied by a rather stern looking Arab man wearing a suit adorned with an automatic machine pistol strapped to his side. Hoping to make a good impression, I bought him a cookie, which he took and ate without any change to his somber expression.

My Turkish Airlines flight to Istanbul was rather uneventful apart from a couple of moments. I sat across from a young orthodox Jewish man. I asked where he was from and he said "Brooklyn. "When I replied "I'm from Kansas," he said "Where is that?" At the airport terminal where we had just depacked, a group of about a dozen Arab men and

women, started chanting in a loud voice, "Free Free Palestine as they made their way down the long hallway. Being in an Arab country, I decided my best response was just to smirk as they walked by me.

From there the next day it was on to JFK in a 10-hour flight. Then to Dallas-Ft Worth. From there that evening, I

boarded their American Eagle flight to Garden City. Home at last, Home at last, but it was not to be, mona mi. My old nemesis, ground fog was at it again. We circled around Garden City's airport for about an hour before having to turn back to Dallas-Fort Worth. So close.

I did make it home the following day. Un-

shaven, stinky, exhausted and exhilarated to be back with my awesome wife in good old western Kansas.

You know, I think Dorothy was on to something when she said of Kansas.

"There is no place like home."

Well, maybe someday I can finish my poem.

Amen and Amen.



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'I've Lost My Taste for God's Word'

Bad Reasons We Neglect the Bible

By Greg Morse, Teacher,
Desiring God

I spoke to a friend the other day. Truth be told, I could hardly recognize him. He seemed beggarly, scruffy, gaunt, though dressed in nice enough clothing. His eyes were shifty. His gaze cold. Spring had fled from him.

I had to ask, "How has your walk with the Lord been?"

"It's been fine," he said. "Why do you ask?"

But he already knew.

We were both there at the beginning. Back when each new truth about Jesus increased our astonishment. Back when he could not get over that the Savior died for him. Back when he was zealous enough to

do things he wouldn't do now but was happy to do then. Back when he used to gobble up the word like Thanksgiving dinner, when no one needed to ask if he wanted seconds. Back when he grew greedy for wisdom, turning over Scripture in his mind, memorizing chapter upon chapter, studying book after book, yet readily giving it away to man after man, speaking about his great God's astonishing love to sinners.

But now? He makes excuses for why he sleeps in, why he doesn't read like he used to, why his mind wanders away. But we both know why the Bible by his bed is too often closed. The hunger has weakened;

the fire has cooled. He skips meals and leaves food on the plate. He has become predictably bored, bound to earth, and too busy for heaven.

Now that I'd mentioned it, he confessed to being distracted lately — busy, just a little lackluster, he guessed. It should pass.

"That's notable," I remarked. How differently we can speak of our wanderings. If it had been another, he would have used labels such as deceived, blinded, and lukewarm.

He remained silent.

"Friend," I said, looking my own soul in the face, "wake up. Wake

up; run anew to God; seek his face while he may be found. Turn from this neglect and half-heartedness. Before it is too late."

Where Is My Honor?

I asked my lukewarm soul to read a text with me that had piqued his interest the other day.

A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the Lord of hosts to you . . . who despise my name. (Malachi 1:6)

"You have forgotten God," I said. "Take Bible reading as an example. You say you don't have

much time, you say life is busy and tiring, you say it's a season, yet you have time enough to scroll your phone not knowing what for, explore avenues for supplemental income, and wander through Vikings updates. You have forgotten, forgotten him."

Perhaps you find yourself in a similar place. You can't recognize yourself lately. If so, God has questions for us. Will we answer them?

If then I am a father, where is my honor?

Is it there — half drooling over a Bible just opened fifteen minutes ago? Is it there — allow-

ing the mind to wander anywhere in creation but to him? Is it there — snacking on little devotional thoughts as a commercial break from life in the world?

Cold soul, remember your God! You don't need new tricks and programs; you need to remember that he is God. God! Your imagined god has been so light, so trivial, so practically irrelevant. Thoughts of him blow away, having less solidity than football scores, house projects, or today's weather. This God has become hollow, like helium in

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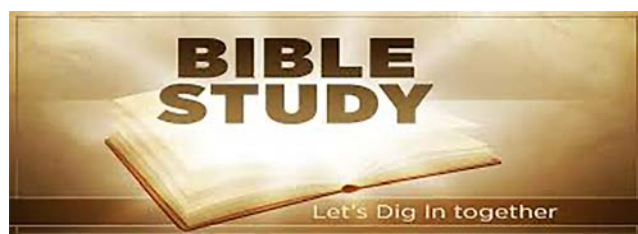
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Bearing One Another's Burdens

Key Scripture: "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." — Galatians 6:2 (KJV)

Introduction

God never intended for His people to walk through life's hardships alone. Whether someone is facing illness, financial hardship, grief, or discouragement, the church is called to come alongside them with compassion and practical love. One of the greatest testimonies to the world is seeing believers care for one another as Christ has cared for us.

Teaching

The apostle Paul commands believers to "bear ye one another's burdens." The word bear means more than offering kind words—it means helping carry a load that has become too heavy for one person to bear alone.

Jesus modeled this throughout His earthly ministry. He wept with those who mourned (John 11:35), welcomed the brokenhearted, healed the sick, and showed compassion to the hurting. As followers of Christ, we are called to reflect that same love.

Sometimes bearing a burden means praying faithfully for someone. Other times it means preparing a meal, making a phone call, sitting quietly beside a grieving friend, or giving generously to meet a need. Small acts of obedience often become powerful demonstrations of God's love.

Hebrews 10:24-25 reminds believers to "consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works." Encouragement is not optional in the Christian life—it is part of our calling.

Application

Think about someone God has placed in your life who may be carrying a heavy burden. Ask yourself, "How can I show Christ's love to them this week?"

Perhaps it's writing a note of encouragement, visiting someone who is lonely, helping a family in need, or simply stopping to pray with a friend. Never underestimate how God can use a simple act of kindness to strengthen another believer.

Closing Thought

No one can carry every burden, but everyone can help carry someone's burden. When we love others sacrificially, we reflect the heart of Jesus Christ. Our compassion points people beyond ourselves to the Savior who invites all who are weary and heavy laden to come to Him for rest (Matthew 11:28-30).

Prayer

Father, thank You for carrying my burdens when I am weak. Open my eyes to those around me who need encouragement, comfort, and practical help. Fill me with compassion, make me willing to serve, and help me reflect the love of Christ in both my words and my actions. Use me to strengthen someone this week and bring glory to Your name. In Jesus' name, Amen.

God's Word

Continued from page 16

your heart. But a son gives honor to his father. He reckons him as weighty, substantial, heavy, important. His words rouse the listless mind and quake the idle spirit. His presence sits him upright.

O my dear soul, have you forgotten how to spell the word reverence? You have not forgotten to read; you have forgotten that he of whom you read is holy, holy, holy. You have not forgotten the word, just whose word it is. You approach your Bible like a text message. He is not your homie. Not your neighbor. Not your wife. Would you approach the Almighty in flip-flops

and T-shirts, replying to his commands with LOLs and smiley faces?

Do you dare loiter casually in the presence of the Holy One? Should angels shield their eyes from his otherness, should Israel of old beg that no more be spoken to them from the mountaintop, and should his apostles fall as though dead at his feet, and you lounge before the throne of God, taking him only half-seriously?

Your time in the Bible needs this shot of adrenaline: You are holding God's word. God speaks. Sit up. Wake up. You are in the presence of the Being who created heaven and earth. You listen to the One who has loved you with an eternal love and ransomed your wayward

soul. Hear him ask before you dare open his Bible with casualness, with sleepiness, with sluggishness, "If I am your Father, where is my honor?"

And My Fear?

If I am a master, where is my fear?

The voice that spoke all worlds into being, all stars into orbit, all mountain ranges into their regiments — is this voice now to be yawned at, half-heard, or fallen asleep on? If he is your Master, do you obey his commands? Why bother to call him "Lord, Lord" if you do not do what he tells you, when he tells you, precisely how he tells you?

You may not do much of the bad you once did, but do you do much of the good you ought?

Let's remember the context of this verse. God here questions his people, specifically the priests, both of whom had not flung off religion. They had not ceased to march through the routines; they were not apostates; they even pretended to be clueless when the Lord brought his soul-searching questions about their devotion. But here God accuses them of despising his name.

"How have we despised your name?" they ask (Malachi 1:6).

Not by tripping over obvious sins, but by offering unworthy sacrifices (Malachi 1:7-8). By bringing blind animals to the altar. By going through the motions

and giving God the leftovers. By seeking the kingdom of God not first but fourth, fifth, or sixth. By giving God passing glances and mild consideration, but not the attention that befits their King.

In fact, their allegiance did not even befit rulers of earth: "Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the Lord of hosts" (Malachi 1:8). Such offerings were unworthy of lesser royalty, much less the King of heaven's armies. And has it been such with you? You would not dare to open your door and greet the mailman with such flatness. Will you be monotone and bring your blind sacrifices before your Creator?

At times, would it not have been better not to read or pray at all than to be content to do so with half a heart — as a mere formality, as an unspoken drudgery? Hear the Lord declare to Israel, "Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain!" (Malachi 1:10). Better to lock the doors than enter irreverently.

Awake, my sleepy soul. Awake, you lukewarm believers. Awake, and return to your first love. Give him your full attention, your heated devotion, your sustained adoration. Honor him as your Father. Fear him as your Master. Love him as your God.

Keys

Continued from page 11

them and sent them out on ministry assignments, but He also took them away for times of rest and refreshing. Pastors who will lead churches in renewal and revitalization must learn from Christ how to make sure the flock they are called to oversee is being cared for effectively.

If you are a pastor, elder or ministry leader, please be encouraged in God's calling on your life and know that God can use you to help a local church as you live out your calling in humble dependence on Him. There is nothing

easy about church revitalization, and there are no cookie cutter or silver bullet approaches that will promise the desired results. But we serve a risen Savior who has the power to make dead things live. May God be pleased to use you to help a local church experience its best days of ministry and gospel impact.

If your church is experiencing great health and growth then please join us in praying that every church will be a thriving church and that every leader will be a cared for leader. Imagine what would happen if every congregation was experiencing its best days of ministry right now.

Today's Little Boy is Tomorrow's Grandfather

By Van Yandell

Ephesians 6:4 (KJV): "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

As we grow older we realize the days get longer but the years seem shorter. Time becomes precious and seems to be limited by our thoughts, habits and attitudes.

We understand time has placed us in bond-

age. We are slaves to time. Our lives are governed by watches, clocks and calendars. It seems as though everything in our lives happens on a schedule.

We go to work, eat, sleep, and schedule our free-time activities based on dates and time. Why is this concept important? Time controls our lives and it also limits our lives. We are in bondage to time.

Even if we live to be

one-hundred years old, how long is that in the span of time? Astronomers and geologists tell us this earth is four and one-half billion years old. One hundred years is but a flash of light.

Why is this important to us? If a father raises a son or daughter and does not take the time to teach right from wrong, acceptable from unacceptable, expedient from foolish and success versus failure; time is wast-

ed, and responsibility is ignored. Ignorance may be bliss in some cases, but this is not one of them.

We must also never forget beliefs (positive and negative) and prejudices are passed on through generations. We might be surprised at how our thoughts are parallel to our grandfathers.

Two months before I retired a student was heard by another teacher saying, "I'm going to bring a gun to school and kill Mr. Yandell."

That was before the onslaught of school shootings, and I did not take it too seriously. Perhaps I should have! He was brought to me, and we had a "little talk." I explained to him what would happen if he succeeded in killing me.

He would spend many years locked up in an 8' x 8' cell.

At some point in time I realized, no one had ever taught that young boy right from wrong. Was that his fault? Absolutely not! He was not the societal failure; his parents were!

Colossians 3:21 "Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged." When a parent doesn't take time to teach a child the basic concepts of a civilized society, trouble is on the horizon. Hate is not natural; it has to be taught.

So, who am I saying is responsible for the chaos we are seeing in today's world? Obviously the guilty are more than one.

Movies, cartoons and many books make killing acceptable. Sex is a

sport and vengeance is not only approved but encouraged.

Male father figures are essential in child rearing. Genesis 2: 24 "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."

While Genesis 2: 24 is not politically correct to many in today's world, it is still a teaching of God. If you want to argue this point, argue with Him.

Mankind cannot make up the rules; it simply isn't permitted. Our personal opinions and preferences do not apply. Only God's opinion matters!

Yes, today's little boy is tomorrow's grandfather. I very clearly re-

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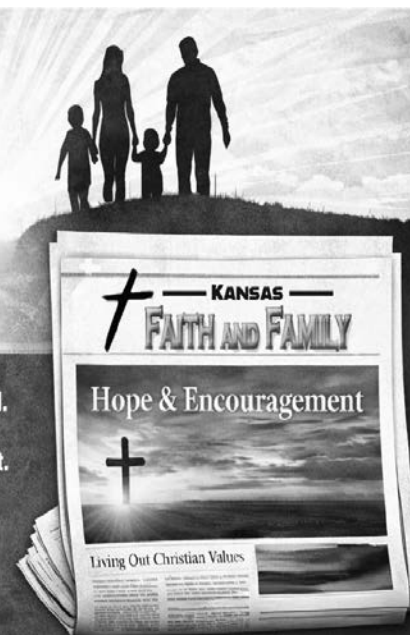
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Boy

Continued from page 18

member being a little boy growing up in a small western Kentucky town. Riding my bicycle to a fishing pond about two miles from town was a way of life.

Going to school, playing baseball and being forced to sit through church services were a part of my life as much as breathing.

Suddenly, here I am nearly an octogenarian and wondering where the time has gone. Sarcasm to confront old age is required. The stiffness of muscles and joints in the early morning hours are a reality.

The term “nuclear family” (father, mother and children) is now, considered by many as being obsolete. Possibly politically incorrect would apply but it should not. The traditional family was the backbone of America and the societal acceptance of that must return if survival is considered

a goal. The point is all fathers must take up their responsibilities and teach their children the pure, ethical, integrated and moral concepts of life. If these principles of civilized life are not conveyed from generation to generation, civilization will suffer a painful and violent death.

The resulting state is chaos and has become obvious. This is not limited to a specific location, country or family. It is world-wide and appears to be increasing exponentially.

Why have we failed? We can blame many individuals and people groups. But the truth remains society has failed. Proverbs 22: 6 “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” This is as true today as it was 3000 years ago when King Solomon wrote it! Plain and simple, this verse leaves little room for interpretation.

Pure negligence is the only descriptive term

offered for many fathers and mothers in the twenty-first century. A decent man doesn’t impregnate a woman and walk away.

Teaching children the importance of being a contributive individual in a civilized society and to follow the teachings of the Holy Bible are among and may be the most important role of a father.

To follow the Lord Jesus in faith certainly has more advantages than disadvantages. I ask the non-believer, “What if you’re wrong?”

The Bible teaches there is only one eternal salvation. That is by a faith-based belief (Ephesians 2: 8) that Christ Jesus was crucified (Matthew 27: 35) for the remission of sin (Romans 4: 25), resurrected (Matthew 28: 6) and ascended alive into Heaven (Acts 1: 9).

Van Yandell is a retired Industrial Arts teacher, an ordained gospel evangelist and missionary, from Fredonia, Kentucky. His email is vmy3451@gmail.com.

Waiting

Continued from page 1

us that influence isn’t measured by the number of years we live but by the number of lives we touch.

A little boy fighting cancer encouraged adults to pray harder.

He reminded families to treasure ordinary days.

He inspired communities to serve one another.

He showed us that courage can wear a child’s smile.

The Bible tells us: “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers...”

— 1 Timothy 4:12 Though Tyson’s race was far shorter than anyone wished, it mattered. Every step mattered.

As we remember Tyson, may we also remember the promise found in Romans 8:28:

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”

That verse doesn’t tell us that all things are good. Cancer isn’t good. Loss isn’t good. Heartbreak isn’t good.

But God is able to bring good even from our deepest pain.

Today, let us continue praying for Tyson’s family, for every doctor and

nurse who cared for him, and for every family currently walking a similar road.

And while we may not understand every chapter God writes, we can trust the Author.

One day, every tear will be wiped away.

“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain...”

— Revelation 21:4

Until that day, we wait.

We trust.

We pray.

And we hold tightly to the hope that, in Christ, death is not the end of the story.

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1 GOD’S SOVEREIGN GRACE



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Ephesians 1:4-5 “Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.”

2 OUR TOTAL DEPRAVITY



We are sinners—spiritually dead in transgression and unable to save ourselves.

Ephesians 2:1 “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins.”

3 CHRIST’S ATONING WORK



Christ died for His people. His death was a sufficient sacrifice to save completely.

John 10:11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

4 IRRESISTIBLE GRACE



God’s grace effectually calls His chosen people, giving them new life and faith.

John 6:37 “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.”

5 PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS



Those whom God saves, He keeps. His grace preserves His people to the end.

Philippians 1:6 “He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”



THE GOSPEL IN ONE WORD: JESUS

We are not saved by our efforts, but by His. It is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, for the glory of God alone. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

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Kansas Legislature's Closed-Door Meeting on Child Welfare Leads to Outpouring of Family Heartache

Committee engages in extraordinary executive session with state officials, contractors

By Tim Carpenter, *Kansas Reflector*

Nineteen-year-old Alexander Preston addressed members of the Kansas Legislature after lawmakers concluded five hours of closed-door meetings with administrators of the state agency responsible for the welfare of children and private contractors hired to deliver services to abused or neglected youths.

On Tuesday, Preston told House and Senate lawmakers he was dealing with wrenching frustration. He said he learned by necessity about fragility of the state's child welfare system after the mother of his daughter vanished with the child Sept. 5, 2025. He

said he called anyone he thought might help bring about his reunification with the infant, including law enforcement departments and Child Protective Services, which is part of the Kansas Department for Children and Families.

"From the very beginning of CPS' involvement," Preston said, "there were known concerns regarding the individuals around my daughter. There was a known narcotics investigation involving people connected to the environment where she was reportedly being cared for. Yet, despite all of that, I was later told that the environment where my daughter was staying was considered acceptable. Acceptable. That is the

word I cannot forget."

Preston, of Pottawatomie County, said drug testing was ordered for mother and child, but only the 5-month-old was examined.

"My daughter failed a drug test before she could even walk," he said. "Even after all of this, my daughter was not returned to me. That is why I am standing here today. This is not simply about my daughter's mother. This is about a system that had opportunities to act."

He was among a dozen people granted 4 minutes each to go face-to-face with the Legislature's Joint Committee on Child Welfare System Oversight. Preston as well as Lauryn Allen, Madeline Bouton, Sarah Goble, Robert Large,

Shawn Lee, Katie Martin and Meghann Miller filled the fifth-floor room at the Capitol with testimony about personal trauma, fatigue and anger.

Their turn at the microphone came after extraordinary closed meetings among the committee of House and Senate members, top officials at the state Department for Children and Families and representatives of five organizations holding DCF contracts to serve Kansas children threatened by abuse or neglect.

Close-door meetings

Each of the organizations — KVC Kansas, Saint Francis Ministries, Cornerstones, TFI Family and EmberHope — were given up to 50 minutes to confi-

dentially speak with legislators about their views on the challenges of caring for kids in need of care. The contractors or their lobbyists have routinely engaged with legislative committees, but previous interaction with House or Senate committees came in open public session.

The objective of executive sessions was for contractors to candidly share detail of problematic cases so the group of legislators would better appreciate difficulties of the job, said Rep. Cyndi Howerton, a Haysville Republican and chairwoman of the child welfare committee.

Before and after the closed-door meetings,

Howerton defended the executive sessions. She said legislators needed privacy to ask questions of providers while protecting families from public scrutiny. She said the nitty-gritty of cases should provide legislators in the room with fresh perspective.

"I don't know that we'll do that again for a long time, but it was very, very valuable," Howerton said. "I'm telling you my stomach was churning a little, but with the cases that were talked about, the trauma that these kids experienced, I think we as a committee needed to see that to kind of ground us. This is not

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Hope Amidst Chaos and Conflict

By Jeanette Shiew, *Jetmore, Kansas*

Jesus Christ can give mental rest to those who are bewildered. He can quiet your heart and give you inner serenity and joy if you will let Him have control of your mind and heart.

What we need is earnest prayer to Jesus. He is still in control. We will face various trials and tribulations. It won't be easy. Life never is. The world may seem like it is unravelling before our eyes, but we can have an abiding joy, since in the words of our Lord,

"I have overcome the world" – John 16:33.

Bible Trivia

Where was Moses buried?

Answer

In the valley of Moab

Meeting

Continued from page 20

about data. This is about families.”

Rep. Susan Humphries, a Wichita Republican on the committee, said she emerged with a sense that Kansas needed to segregate by age the policies and laws guiding foster care. Needs and expectations of a child less than three years of age were distinct from those of a teenager, she said.

The Legislature should consider setting expectations for law enforcement officers involved in child custody disputes, said Rep. Ford Carr, a Wichita Democrat. He said Kansans shared with him examples of officers taking a child from a home based on a court order and situations in which officers didn't remove a child despite a court order.

Rep. Lauren Bohi, a Lenexa Republican, said the private presentations raised questions about the frequency of behavioral and trauma issues among children in foster care. In

addition, she said more should be done to understand what happened to families when children in foster care weren't reintegrated with biological families.

Shock and awe

Madeline Bouton, a lifelong Kansan married to a decorated U.S. Army veteran, told the oversight committee the couple was unable to have children naturally. Instead, she said, they decided to grow a family through adoption of children in Kansas foster care. She said the couple wanted to be an adopt-only family instead of a family that took in foster kids and considered adopting them.

“We believe there are many children in our great state that need love. Things like age, race are not important to us,” she said. “What has become painfully apparent to my husband and me is that adopt-only families are treated significantly differently than foster families, and it saddens me to understand why.”

Bouton said agencies in Kansas received financial reward for licensing

new foster families, which prompted providers to discourage adopt-only families. She said the couple was pressured by a representative of Restoration Family Services, marketing itself as delivering “Christ-like” services, to first become foster parents. She was told her idea of a family was not “as desirable” in the ordering of potential families approved for adoption.

“We have no children of our own,” Bouton said. “We have an incredible support system on both sides of our family, all of whom are close in proximity. We live in a safe neighborhood in a beautiful home. We seek strength and purpose through our faith in God and we live our lives in service to others. So, I ask this committee, what family would be more desirable than mine?”

She urged the committee to reconsider a strategy of prioritizing foster families over adopt-only families.

Sarah Goble, founder of the Honest Diagnosis Project, said her children were taken during 2024 due to

a misdiagnosis of child abuse.

“When my family was accused,” she said, “we quickly learned how difficult it is to challenge decisions once the system is in motion. In a system like this, the ability to seek accountability through the courts is not optional. It's essential.”

She rebuked legislators who voted for House Bill 2521, which was vetoed by Gov. Laura Kelly because it would be “dangerous and expensive” to provide private child-placement agencies contracting with the state broader immunity from lawsuits under the Kansas Tort Claims Act. During the 2026 session, Kelly's veto was overridden by two-thirds majorities in the House and Senate. The law took effect July 1.

“Many of you pander to your constituents about parental rights, being pro-life. You talk about limited government, cutting down on fraud and bringing accountability, but when it's your time to shine ... your actions do not reflect these talking points,” Goble said.

P.U.S.H



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If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. - 2nd Chronicles 7:14

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A Disciple's Journey: The Fellowship.

By Micah Powell, Grace Community Church, Great Bend

Think for a moment about the people God has used to shape you most. Maybe it was a sermon or a book that stirred your heart. But more likely, it was a person—a friend who prayed when you were struggling, a mentor who challenged you, a brother or sister who loved you even when you were difficult to love. That's not an accident. God designed growth to happen in community. Disciples don't grow in isolation. We grow as part of a body.

That's what Paul shows us in Ephesians 4. After three chapters of rich gospel doctrine, he turns to how that gospel

plays out in everyday life. And the first thing he says? Walk worthy of your calling by living with humility, gentleness, patience, and love. The Spirit has made us one family in Christ. Now, Paul says, live like it.

1) Unity in Calling and Character (vv. 1–6)

Paul's appeal begins personally:

"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called."

He's not writing from comfort. He's writing from chains. That makes his words weighty. He's saying, "Live a life that matches the worth of the gospel you've received."

And what does that look like? Humility, gentleness, patience, bear-

ing with one another in love. None of these comes naturally. They are the fruit of the Spirit. In the Roman world, humility was despised, seen as weakness. But in Christ, humility is strength under submission. Gentleness is not passivity—it's controlled power. Patience is having a long fuse, the willingness to endure without striking back. And bearing with one another means staying in the hard relationships instead of running away.

Paul then says,

"Be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Unity is not something we create. It's something the Spirit has already given us through Christ. But it takes effort to guard it. Unity doesn't grow by accident; it is

maintained through intentional love, forgiveness, and peace.

To drive the point home, Paul anchors our unity in seven shared realities: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. That's not just poetry—it's theology that binds us together. Different backgrounds, different personalities, but one God who unites us.

So here's the question: Are you living like unity is worth the effort? Do you fight to preserve it, or do you let bitterness, gossip, or pride chip away at it? Unity is not optional. It's essential to walk worthy of our calling.

2) Diversity in Gifting and Ministry (vv. 7–12)

Unity doesn't mean sameness. The church is one body, but every part has a unique role. Paul says,

"Grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift."

That means you are gifted for ministry—not just the pastors, not just the leaders, but every believer. No part is unnecessary. No one is overlooked.

To illustrate, Paul quotes Psalm 68:

"When he ascended on high, he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."

Christ is the victorious King who conquered sin and death. But instead of hoarding the spoils, He distributes gifts to His people. And what gifts does He give? Apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherd-teachers. The first two were foundational to the early church. The last two—evangelists and

pastors—remain today, equipping the saints for ministry.

That's the key phrase: "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ."

Leaders aren't meant to do all the ministry. Their job is to train and equip the church to do it. Ministry is not a stage performance. It's the work of the whole body, each part serving so that all may grow.

So ask yourself: Am I sidelining myself, assuming ministry is for someone else? Or am I stepping into the gift Christ has given me for the good of the body? The church doesn't grow by spectatorship. It grows when every member serves.

3) Maturity in Truth and Love (vv. 13–16)

Paul then shows us the goal: maturity. Christ gives leaders and gifts

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"Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven."

Matthew 10:32

Fellowship

Continued from page 22

"until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood."

In other words, the goal isn't just busyness or activity. The goal is Christlikeness.

Without maturity, Paul says, we're like children tossed around by waves—easily unsettled by new ideas, vulnerable to every voice that sounds convincing. But maturity anchors us. It steadies us in truth.

Yet Paul is careful: maturity isn't just about truth—it's about truth in love.

"Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ."

That's the balance. Truth without love can

crush. Love without truth can drift. But truth in love grows us into Christ.

And then Paul gives his final picture: the body building itself up in love.

"From him the whole body, joined and held together by every joint... makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."

Growth is not top-down. It's body-wide. Every part matters. Every gift is needed. When each believer contributes, the church flourishes—not because of programs, but because of people joined to Christ and to one another.

The Body That Builds Ephesians 4 is not a growth strategy. It's a gospel vision. One body, many parts, all growing together into Christ. Discipleship is never solo. From beginning to end, the Christian life is

shared.

And here's the gospel at the heart of it: Jesus descended into our world, bore our sin, and rose in victory. He ascended to the Father, not to leave us alone, but to give us His Spirit and His gifts. You don't earn your place in this body—you receive it by grace. And in that grace, you grow.

So let me ask: What kind of member of the body are you? Not what title do you hold, but what role are you playing? Are you walking in unity? Using your gifts? Growing toward maturity in truth and love? Or are you drifting on the sidelines?

The church doesn't grow by programs or personalities. It grows when every part does its work. You have a part. The question is—are you using it?



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Pastor Ezra Jin Safe in U.S. After China Frees Him in July 4 'Goodwill Gesture'



Pastor Ezra Jin Mingri with daughter Grace Jin Drexel

By Diana Chandler, Baptist Press

Wrongfully imprisoned Pastor Ezra Jin Mingri arrived safely in Los Angeles July 4 after China freed him in what is described as a 'goodwill gesture' coinciding with America's Independence Day, ChinaAid and others announced.

Jin, founder and senior pastor of the multi-site underground Zion Church, was released July 3 in response to talks between presidents Donald Trump and Xi Jinping. Jin had been held 266 days for preaching God's Word in the Communist nation. His family members including his wife Anna Liu and his daughter Grace Drexel, who had long advocated in the U.S. for Jin's release, were reunited with him July 3 in Los Angeles, according to a story first reported by The Free Press.

"We are feeling so overwhelmed with joy," Grace and her husband Bill Drexel said in a statement to The Free Press. "We thank God for this

tremendous miracle."

ChinaAid Founder and President Bob Fu also rejoiced upon Jin's release.

"We rejoice with Pastor Ezra Jin, his family, and the global Body of Christ on this remarkable Independence Day miracle," Fu said in a press release. "We thank Almighty God for hearing the prayers of His people. We are deeply grateful to President Donald Trump, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, and all U.S. officials who worked tirelessly behind the scenes to secure Pastor Jin's freedom. Their unwavering commitment demonstrates that principled leadership and persistent diplomacy can make a life-saving difference."

Jin had been detained since October 2025 when the government raided churches in a dozen cities across China, detaining Jin and 28 other Zion Church pastors. Jin and 17 others were formally arrested the following month on charges of "illegally using information networks." While nine of the pastors were released

in June on bail pending trial, Jin and eight others were transferred to the procuratorate to face prosecution, with the charges changed to illegal business operations and fraud, religious persecution watchdog CSW said in celebrating Jin's release.

"CSW welcomes the release of Pastor Ezra Jin Mingri and we are pleased to hear that he has been reunited with his family," said Mervyn Thomas, CSW's founder and president. "We emphasize however that he and the other leaders of Zion Church are innocent of the charges levelled against them."

Fu and Thomas continue to advocate for the release of other religious leaders and laity wrong-

fully imprisoned in China.

"While we celebrate Pastor Jin's freedom, our hearts remain with the countless pastors including eight other jailed pastors and coworkers from Zion Church, priests, bishops, house church Christians, Uyghur Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, Falun Gong practitioners, and other prisoners of conscience who remain unjustly imprisoned by the Chinese Communist Party," Fu said. "We respectfully call on President Trump and his administration to continue making religious freedom and the release of all prisoners of faith a top priority in every engagement with Beijing."

"True progress in U.S.-

China relations must include freedom for those imprisoned simply because they choose to believe," Fu said.

Thomas expressed similar sentiments.

"We remain concerned for the plight of those still in prison and on bail," Thomas said. "We call for their immediate and unconditional release, and for that of all other religious leaders and adherents who are currently imprisoned in China in relation to the peaceful exercise of their fundamental human rights, including Pastor Wang Yi of Early Rain Covenant Church and Christian human rights defender Zhang Zhan."

Zion Church, an unregistered Protestant congregation of an es-

timated 5,000 worshippers across several cities, has suffered persecution by the Chinese government several years, the church's main building in Beijing forcibly closed in 2018 when the church refused to install closed-circuit cameras for governmental monitoring.

Christian persecution watchdog group Open Doors places China 17th on the 2026 World Watch List of the 50 countries where Christians suffer the most persecution, citing Communist and post-Communist oppression and dictatorial paranoia. Christians there comprise about 6.7 percent of the population in the country where the Communist Party considers Christianity a threat to Communist rule.

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