

TAKE TWO: GIVE ONE TO A FRIEND

— KANSAS — FAITH AND FAMILY

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"FOR WHOEVER WANTS TO SAVE THEIR LIFE WILL LOSE IT, BUT WHOEVER LOSES THEIR LIFE FOR ME WILL FIND IT." MATTHEW 16:25

America's 250th Birthday: Remembering the Faith That Shaped a Nation

By Faith BroKar

As Americans celebrate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, many will reflect on the events of July 4, 1776, when thirteen colonies declared themselves free from British rule. Yet beyond the fireworks and patriotic celebrations lies another important part of our nation's story—the significant role that faith and religious conviction played in America's founding.

Long before the Declaration of Independence was signed in Philadelphia, many of America's earliest settlers crossed the Atlantic seeking religious freedom. The Pilgrims arrived in 1620 hoping to worship according to their convictions. Puritans, Quakers, Baptists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, and many other Christian groups helped establish communities throughout the colonies, each contributing to the nation's developing character.

The influence of Christi-

anity was evident throughout colonial America. Churches often served as the center of community life, education, and civic discussion. Ministers preached not only about eternal matters but also about justice, liberty, and personal responsibility. During the years leading up to the American Revolution, many Patriot clergy encouraged colonists to consider whether resistance to tyranny was consistent with biblical principles, while other ministers remained loyal to the British Crown or urged neutrality.

Even before independence was declared, America's leaders publicly called the nation to seek God's guidance. On June 12, 1775, the Continental Congress proclaimed a National Day of Humiliation, Fasting, and Prayer, encouraging the colonies to confess their sins and ask for God's blessing and direction during a time of growing conflict. Throughout the Revolutionary War, Congress also

issued several proclamations recommending days of thanksgiving and prayer, reflecting the belief that the nation's future rested under the providence of God.

When the Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence, the document itself reflected a belief that human rights come from a higher authority than government. It famously declares that "all men are created equal" and "are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights." Rather than presenting rights as gifts from kings or legislatures, the Declaration grounds them in the Creator, making them inherent to every person.

The men who founded the United States did not all share identical religious beliefs. Many were members of Christian churches, while others held views ranging from traditional Christianity to forms of Deism. Despite these differences, there was broad agreement that religious liberty was essential for the new nation.

That conviction eventually found its way into the First Amendment to the Constitution, which guarantees that Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. The founders sought to protect both the freedom to worship and the freedom from government interference in matters of conscience. Historians generally agree that this commitment to religious liberty became one of America's defining principles.

George Washington frequently acknowledged God's providence in public addresses and called Americans to cultivate religion and morality as supports for good government. In his Farewell Address, he wrote that "religion and morality are indispensable supports" for political prosperity. Likewise, John Adams observed that the Constitution was made "only for a moral and religious people," reflecting the widespread belief that self-government depended

upon virtuous citizens.

The influence of faith also extended beyond government. Churches established schools, colleges, hospitals, charities, and missionary societies that helped shape American culture for generations. Institutions such as Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and many other early colleges were founded with strong Christian purposes, even though many later became secular institutions.

At the same time, America's history includes moments when the nation failed to live up to its own ideals. Slavery, unequal treatment under the law, and religious discrimi-

nation remained painful realities despite the Declaration's proclamation of equality. Many of the movements that sought to correct these injustices—including abolition, prison reform, and the Civil Rights Movement—were themselves deeply influenced by Christian convictions and biblical teachings.

As the United States marks 250 years since independence, Americans from many faith traditions—and those with no religious affiliation—will celebrate together. For Christians, the anniversary

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Misunderstood Scriptures: What Malachi 3:9 Really Means

By Faith BroKar

“Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.” – Malachi 3:9

Few verses are quoted as often — or applied as broadly — as Malachi 3:9. It is frequently used to warn believers that failure to tithe will result in financial hardship, divine discipline, or even a curse from God. But when this passage is lifted out of its original context and applied directly to Christians today, its meaning is often distorted. A careful reading of Malachi shows that this verse is not a universal financial warning, nor a standing threat over believers. It is a specific covenant accusation, spoken to a specific people, at a specific moment in redemptive

history.

The Common Misunderstanding: “If You Don’t Tithe, You’re Cursed”

Malachi 3:9 is often preached as a timeless principle: *Fail to give ten percent, and God will curse your finances.* This interpretation has led many sincere believers to live in fear — believing hardship, debt, or lack must be evidence of spiritual failure. But Scripture must always be interpreted in context, and Malachi’s context is both historical and covenantal.

The Actual Audience: National Israel Under the Mosaic Covenant

Malachi was written to post-exilic Israel, not the New Testament church. The people had returned

from Babylonian exile and rebuilt the temple, but their spiritual condition was deteriorating. The priests were corrupt. Worship was careless. Justice was neglected. And the people were withholding the required offerings that supported the Levitical priesthood. The phrase “this whole nation” (Malachi 3:9) is critical. God is not addressing individuals randomly — He is confronting Israel as a covenant nation.

Under the Mosaic Law, Israel had entered into a conditional covenant with God:

- Obedience brought blessing
- Disobedience brought curse

This is outlined clearly in Deuteronomy 28. Malachi 3 is functioning within

that same covenant framework.

What Does “Robbing God” Mean Here?

The “tithes and offerings” in Malachi were not voluntary donations. They were mandated provisions that sustained:

- The Levitical priesthood
- Temple service
- Care for widows, orphans, and foreigners

By withholding these required offerings, Israel was not merely being stingy — they were violating covenant law and undermining the system God had established for worship and justice. Thus, the “curse” was not a mystical punishment but the natural covenant consequence already spelled out in the Law.

Why This Cannot

Be Applied Directly to Christians

Christians are not under the Mosaic Covenant.

Scripture is clear:

• *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13)*

• The Law was fulfilled in Christ, not enforced upon the church

• The New Covenant operates on grace, not threat

To tell a Christian they are “cursed” for not tithing is to re-apply a covenant Christ has already fulfilled and closed. The New Testament never commands tithing in the same way Malachi does.

Instead, believers are instructed to give:

- Freely
- Cheerfully
- According to ability
- Without compulsion

“God loveth a cheerful giver.” — 2 Corinthians 9:7

The Heart of the Passage: Faithfulness, Not Fear

Malachi 3:9 is not about squeezing money from God’s people. It is about faithlessness among covenant leaders and a nation drifting from God. God’s rebuke is severe because Israel had reduced worship

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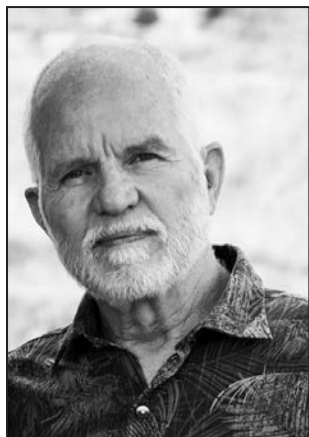
If you have a message, testimony, or faith-based topic you would like to share, we would love to hear from you.

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Faith BroKar

KANSAS FAITH AND FAMILY

A Prayer for True Freedom for the Unsaved



By Carl D. Everhart

Chances are you know someone you think may not yet be saved; these words are written for them.

It does little good to pray for anything that is against God's will. One example is if we pray He will "make" someone follow Him. Unfortunately, because of free will, He will allow us to sin, ruin our lives, and send ourselves to Hell! Indeed, we're free to make our own choices, however, we're not free from the consequences

of those choices. God will choose us as His children ONLY after we choose Him as our Lord and Savior. God's will for our life is that we live "His will" in our life.

Ask yourself how you came to follow Jesus ... was it gradually or did His Truth just hit you between the eyes one day? Whatever it was, mankind must approach Him with eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart to receive His glory.

So, keeping all that in mind, you can pray God will draw those who are not yet saved, to Him, by using any or all the following experiences.

Pray God will wake them up if they're deceiving themselves by thinking that simply being a good person will get them into Heaven ... because it will not; neither will their "good works," because God cannot be bribed! Pray they'll ask God to in-

crease their faith, and He will if they just ask Him to. God helped many people see His glory, including Saul of Tarsus, by guiding them and drawing them into His light. He can do the same for our family and friends. Pray they'll sense an inspiration leading them to God's Way, the kind that steers them to an epiphany seeing His plan for their life, and even His science. Science that includes true knowledge about the creation of the world. The challenge is, when their ego's so strong that they fail to control it, it can override the Holy Spirit.

Pray they'll recognize how much God loves them, allowing them to see His mercy. Pray they'll build Spiritual insights from His quiet calling, gentle pursuit, and soft nudging. Pray they'll receive a revelation and choose Him as

their Lord and Savior. Pray they will embrace all the Spiritual input they're exposed to, hear Jesus knocking, and then open that door to receive the greatest miracle of all, the miracle of Awakening that leads to Salvation. The miracle that opens the eyes of their heart, allowing them to be rescued from the penalty of sin, realizing if they don't allow Jesus to pay that penalty, then they'll be forced to pay it themselves. The miracle that changes them from sinner to forgiven sinner, from lost to found, from unrighteous to righteous, from being God's enemy to being His child, and then from death to life. Then ultimately, pray they'll fully understand why Jesus came, what He did for them, and what He expects from them.

Pray God will wake them up by using opportunities, circumstances, and His witnesses (you and me), and then com-

prehend the redemptive power of the Gospel. Pray they'll investigate their curiosity and then put their puzzle pieces together revealing the picture of God's grace that offers to rescue them from their sins. Pray they'll receive a vision or a dream about Jesus, then they'll wake up to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, moving them into the center of God's will. Pray they'll get a feeling that there's more than just life on earth and then realize they can have eternal life after death. Pray they'll learn the difference between the first and the second death. Pray they'll even become "knowingly uncomfortable," realizing they're wrong in their former thinking, and then act on it, because tomorrow is promised to no one.

Pastor William C. Clegg wrote, "Know this, that every soul is free to choose his life and what he'll be; for

this eternal truth is given: That God will force no man to heaven. He'll call, persuade, direct alright, bless with wisdom, love, and light; in nameless ways be good and kind, but never force the human mind."

Lord, knowing You want no one to perish, if it's Your will, please give them another hint, another idea, another inclination, and another glimpse of Your Truth, in such a manner as to give them a breakthrough from Satan's darkness into Your light. I pray these words will encourage anyone who has a family member or friend, who has not accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior, to never give up praying for their Salvation.

To read more from this 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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The Pastoral Virtue of Avoidance

By Daniel Bouchoc, Zach Hollifield, BP Toolbox

At least seven times in the pastoral epistles, Paul directly charges Timothy and Titus to “avoid” and to “have nothing to do with” ideas and people who pose a threat to their flock. This is jarring since one of the main purposes for these letters is to encourage Timothy and Titus to engage false teaching and teachers. Yet here is where the paradox emerges: Paul teaches a pastoral virtue of avoidance—showing that sometimes the wisest form of engagement is careful restraint.

So, what is going on here? Given that Paul clearly wants false teaching and teachers dealt with and also wants these pastors to avoid certain discourse and people, the question arises: What is Paul prohibiting here and what does it mean for pastors today?

Why Paul Commands

Avoidance

Paul applies this virtue to two broad categories: words and people. Five of the seven times Paul commands Timothy and Titus to “avoid/having nothing to do with,” it is regarding “irreverent silly myths” (1 Tim. 4:7), “irreverent babble” (1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 2:16), “foolish [ignorant] controversies” (2 Tim. 2:23; Titus 3:9). In the two other instances, he tells them to avoid or have nothing to do with certain people (2 Tim. 3:5; Titus 3:10). But what is it they are not to engage in?

It is difficult to come up with any real difference between myths, babble, and controversies—especially when you consider that in each place Paul attaches a similar negative adjective such as “foolish,” “silly,” “irreverent,” “ignorant.” In each case, Paul has in mind a certain kind of speech that Timothy and Titus are not to engage

in. The specifics of the speech might differ case by case, but they are all of a similar pointless, ungodly, and muddled nature which renders it unworthy of these pastors’ time and attention. But why does Paul want them to avoid it?

This point is clearer as Paul gives reasoning for his command of avoidance:

- 1 Timothy 4:7 – Avoid irreverent, silly myths because “godliness is of value in every way.”

- 1 Timothy 6:20–21 – Avoid irreverent babble and contradictions because “by professing it some have swerved from the faith.”

- 2 Timothy 2:23 – Avoid foolish ignorant controversies because “you know that they breed quarreling and the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone.”

- 2 Timothy 3:5–7 – Avoid the ungodly people because “among

them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened by sins, and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.”

- Titus 3:9 – Avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law “because they are unprofitable and worthless.”

- Titus 3:10 – Avoid those who stir up divisions; “knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is already condemned.”

- 2 Timothy 2:16–18 – Avoid irreverent babble

because “it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene.”

In 2 Timothy 2:16–18, Paul gives the most insightful reasoning. Here we get the content of the “babble”: The resurrection has already happened. Paul wants Timothy to avoid this idea because it spreads like gangrene, leads “people into more and more ungodliness,” and upsets their faith. The principle is that sometimes the way to stop a disease from spreading is to avoid the disease rather than fight it head-on. It’s a virus rather than a can-

cer.

This is somewhat bewildering as we think about the pastor’s role to protect the flock from “fierce wolves” who will not “spare the flock” (Acts 20:28–29). It is also contrary to what most of us feel internally and would amount to what some would deem an abdication of our responsibility as leaders. So, what are pastors today supposed to take from these commands?

Biblical Avoidance

The outworking of this command will differ depending on the immediate context we pastor in.

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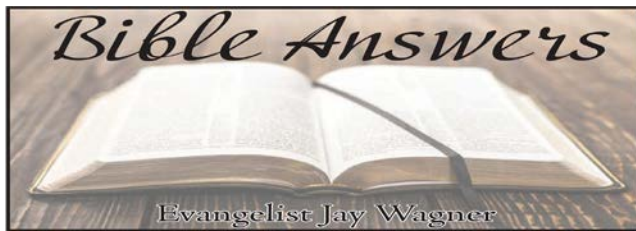
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Q: I see lots of articles, videos, and even books and TV shows about near death experiences. Are these real and are they of God?

A: I had a similar discussion with another preacher several years ago. The first thing we agreed on was that "near death experience" is a poor name for this phenomenon. Since death is the absence of the soul from the body, we felt that these would be better referred to as temporary death experiences. However, we had a bit more difficulty with Hebrews 9:27, "...it is appointed unto men once to die..." He took the position that people only die once, therefore these temporary death experiences couldn't be real, but were more likely some sort of psychological phenomenon. However, I would like to point out that it is appointed once to die. In my mind this implies an appointment. If I make an appointment with my doctor for next Thursday, this doesn't mean that I can't show up at the clinic Tuesday, I just won't have an appointment and probably won't be able to see my doctor unless I have some emergency. If, as I take the presence of the word "appointed" in Hebrews 9:27 to mean, we have an appointment with death, there is nothing there that says we can't temporarily die prior to that appointment.

One thing I have noticed in this plethora of temporary death experiences is the inconsistency. One person says they went to Heaven and Jesus sent them back to warn others (rather inconsistent with the parable of the rich man and Lazarus as found in Luke 16:19-31). Another claims to have gone to Heaven and seen people of all faiths there, completely contrary to Jesus' claim in John 14:6 that "...no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Others claim to have seen Hell or to have been given special insight into the future (I saw one a few days ago claiming that Jesus had told him something was going to happen with President Trump this summer, but he was careful not to disclose anything that might later prove him a fake). About the only thing that seems to happen most times, if not every time, is they see a bright light and are drawn toward it. This is certainly not proof of these experiences being from God since, as we are told in 2 Corinthians 11:14, even Satan masquerades as an angel of light.

However, there are temporary death events in the Bible, including Lazarus, the man who was thrown into Elisha's grave, several people that Jesus raised from the dead, and Dorcas. Clearly, then, there are precedents of God removing a soul from its body and then returning it to His own glory. I certainly believe that God can and does do the same things now that He did before since He promises that He doesn't change (Malachi 3:6). There certainly may be instances of temporary death experiences from God, but there are too many contradictions among the many reports to accept all of them as coming from God. This is one of those areas where we need to be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10:16) and not accept every claim of one of these experiences as fact or, when we do accept it as fact, not blindly accepting it as a work of God.

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

Scripture

Continued from page 2

to ritual while withholding obedience. The issue was never just money — it was the heart.

When that same verse is used today as a financial threat, it risks producing:

- Fear-based giving
- Guilt-driven obedience
- A distorted picture of God's character

None of which reflect the gospel.

What Malachi 3:9 Teaches Believers Today

While the verse is not a command to the church, it still teaches important principles:

- God cares about integrity in worship
- Faithfulness matters in how we steward what He gives
- Withholding obedience affects spiritual health

But those truths must be filtered through the New Covenant, not enforced through Old Covenant threats.

A Verse That Requires Context, Not Repetition

Malachi 3:9 is a powerful verse — but power without context becomes distortion. When read properly, it does not place believers under a curse. Instead, it highlights the contrast between law and grace, and the freedom believers now have to give out of love rather than fear.

A Clear Gospel Reminder

Christ bore the curse so His people would not live under one. And giving, under the New Covenant, is no longer about avoiding punishment — it is about reflecting the generosity of the God who gave everything first.

Birthday

Continued from page 1

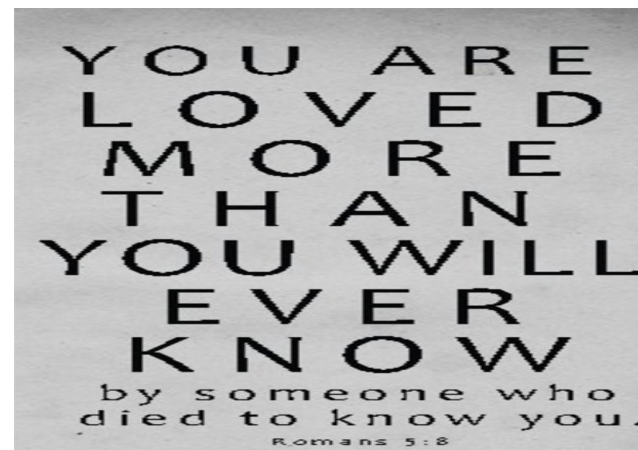
offers an opportunity not only to appreciate the nation's history but also to remember that liberty carries responsibility.

The Declaration reminds us that our rights come from our Creator. Scripture reminds believers that freedom is ultimately meant to be used in service to God and others: "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another" (Galatians 5:13).

America's founders built a republic that protected the free exercise of religion rather than requiring a particular faith. Two and a half centuries later, that protection continues to allow churches, ministries, and believers to worship,

serve their communities, and proclaim the gospel freely. As the nation celebrates its 250th birthday, it is fitting to remember both the enduring ideals of liberty and the important role faith has played in America's remarkable story.

As celebrations take place across the country throughout this anniversary year, Christians have an opportunity to give thanks not only for the blessings of liberty, but also for the God whom so many early Americans publicly acknowledged as the source of those blessings. While the nation's history has been marked by both remarkable achievements and undeniable failures, America's founding documents continue to point toward enduring truths about human dignity, liberty, and the Creator from whom those rights ultimately come.



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GRACE**



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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*

P.U.S.H



PRAY UNTIL SOMETHING HAPPENS ONE NATION UNDER GOD

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

Avoidance

Continued from page 4

Here are six principles and suggestions that arise from this virtue that apply universally (in no particular order).

1. AVOIDING DOESN'T MEAN PASSIVITY (2 TIM. 2:23, 25).

Given that Paul wants Timothy and Titus to engage certain false teaching and teachers, it seems that he has a kind of refusal to be "drawn in" in mind. The avoidance he commands does involve interaction and providing reasons, but it stops short of aggression, lashing out, fighting, "sinking to the level," or becoming obsessed with defeating them. We must avoid without neglecting to protect.

2. AVOIDING MEANS GIVING

YOUR TIME TO WHAT IS PROFITABLE.

In order to avoid, you need to know what does or does not need time and attention. Pastors should be devoted to cultivating godliness rather than tearing down the ungodliness of others. Rather than using most of our limited time to engage with "irreverent babble," we ought to focus on worthwhile things (Phil. 4:8).

3. AVOIDING DOESN'T MEAN BEING UNINFORMED.

The more informed you are, the more you are able to know what proportion of time to give or not give certain ideas. Pastors, by nature, are more informed than the flock. They understand doctrine, implications of certain ideas, when cultural issues shift from tier 3 to tier 2, and so on. Through

training and the Spirit's guidance, they discern what and when to avoid.

4. GENTLY AND FIRMLY REMOVE THOSE WHO ARE BREEDING QUARRELS IN THE CHURCH.

Warn them once, then twice, then remove them from the fellowship of your body, having nothing to do with them until they repent (Titus 3:10). Rather than tolerance, avoidance may look like an active decision to "cut out" infected tissue so that it does not spoil the rest of the body (2 Tim. 2:16-17).

5. DON'T GET SUCKED INTO THE PSEUDO-WORLD OF SOCIAL MEDIA.

Social media is truly an endless chasm of debating ideas and worldviews. Think of it as a video game server that is constantly live and filled with everyone from the entire world. You could literally spend all your time there. Don't. Join the server in appropriate proportions and be strategic as to how you engage. Spend most of your time and energy logged in to the server of your immediate context.

6. FOR A PASTOR TO DO ALL OF THIS, HE MUST BE SOBER-MINDED.

A quarrelsome man has lost his senses. He feels threatened and offended. He is annoyed and angry. He bites the bait of the fool. He can't walk away or let the issue rest. He can't simply say, "No more," but has to win and get the upper hand. Everything is a "hill to die on" to him. So, in time, he will die on every hill, and it will be for the wrong things. Sober-mindedness allows a pastor to discern when engage, when to step back, and when to protect the flock without overacting.

In a day and culture where many assume the virtuous thing to do is always to enter fully into every debate and squabble, Paul's pastoral virtue of avoidance forces us to ask ourselves, "Is this something I should be engaging with? If so, how, and to what extent?" Because pastoral malpractice is not only possible by cowardly holding back, but by impassioned rushing in as well.

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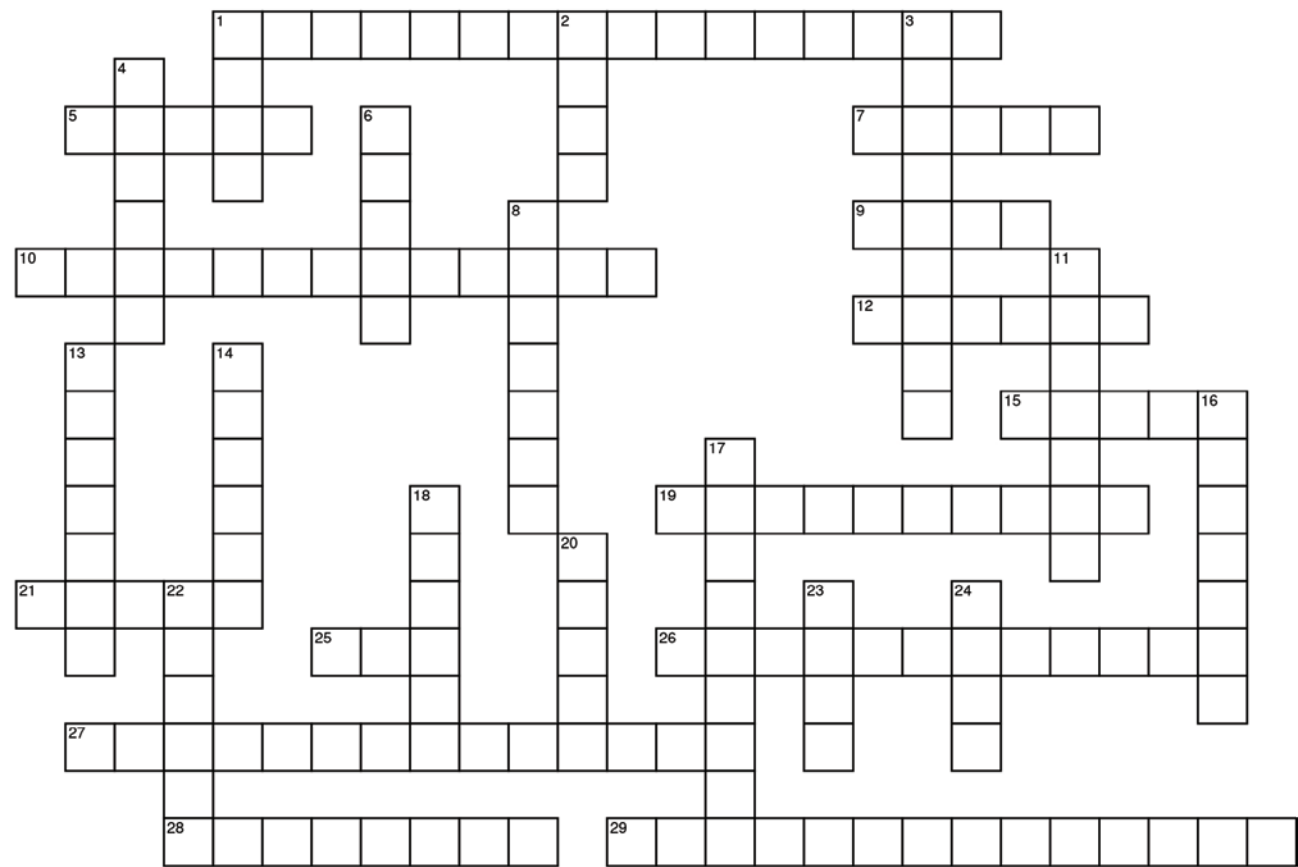


A Little Bit of Laughter and Fun

Proverbs 17:22 – “Laughter is like taking a good medicine.”

ALSO KNOWN AS

Mikey’s Funnies



ACROSS

- 1 City of David (2 wds)
- 5 Sarah
- 7 Hades
- 9 Saul
- 10 The first five books of the Bible (2 wds)
- 12 The doubter
- 15 Abraham
- 19 Uncultured or uncouth individual
- 21 The betrayer
- 25 The first woman
- 26 Sea of Tiberias (3 wds)
- 27 Isaiah 53 (3 wds)
- 28 Jesus (3 wds)
- 29 YHWH

DOWN

- 1 The first man
- 2 The disciple Jesus loved
- 3 Bethlehem
- 4 The Hebrew name for God
- 6 The betrayer
- 8 Satan
- 11 Teacher, in Aramaic
- 13 Thomas
- 14 Peter
- 16 Levi
- 17 Simon (2 wds)
- 18 Barsabas
- 20 The Lamb of God
- 22 Seraphim, cherubim
- 23 Kinsman redeemer
- 24 Mother of Jesus

Answers in next
month’s issue

The only survivor of a shipwreck was washed up on a small, uninhabited island. He prayed feverishly for God to rescue him, and every day he scanned the horizon for help, but none seemed forthcoming.

Exhausted, he eventually managed to build a little hut out of driftwood to protect him from the elements, and to store his few possessions.

But then one day, after scavenging for food, he arrived home to find his little hut in flames, the smoke rolling up to the sky. The worst had happened; everything was lost. He was stunned with grief and anger.

“God, how could you do this to me?!” he cried.

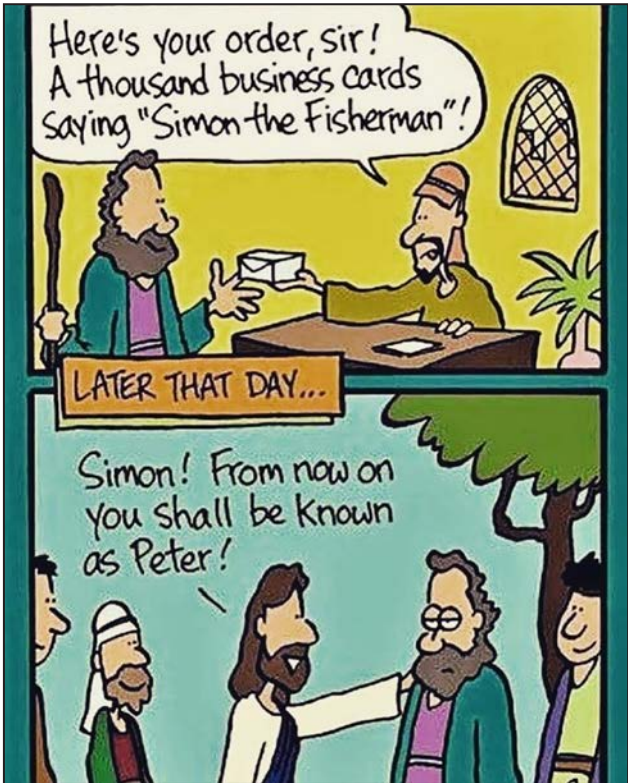
Early the next day, however, he was awakened by the sound of a ship that was approaching the island. It had come to rescue him.

“How did you know I was here?” asked the weary man of his rescuers.

“We saw your smoke signal,” they replied.

Dear God: I have a problem. It’s me. A college business professor was lecturing about different ways to bill customers. He asked, “Who can give me an example of a system where you are billed before you actually receive your goods?”

One student piped up, “Tuition!”



Freedom and to Be an American

By Van Yandell

Matthew 24: 14 “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.”

“Oh, The Places You’ll Go,” (Dr. Seuss). Working in missions where tourists rarely go has afforded me the privilege of seeing living conditions, meeting people and experiencing the foods few Americans have had as a tourist. Being there and witnessing such conditions makes me glad I was born in America.

In the Himalaya I saw where people lived in caves. In Sub-Saharan Africa, to sit and discuss the Gospel of Christ with

people in their yard, in front of a mud hut with a grass roof and dirt floor produced a permanent memory.

In Africa and South America, it is not unusual to see people living under old car hoods, in houses built with sheet metal from burnt buildings or mud houses on mountain sides that could wash away the next big rain.

To realize millions of children go to bed hungry every night is heart breaking. Infant mortality rate is still very high in many areas of the world.

Many children have never seen a mattress or a pillow. Sleep every night is on a dirt floor with no pad or cover. A dozen people may sleep

in a room the size of an American bathroom and to be sheltered out of the rain or cold is impossible for many.

Going to bed cold and hungry is not a condition any child or adult, should have to experience. But it is more common than we may think.

In communist countries people have only what the government hierarchy deems necessary. Not having tools to work with or a hardware store or lumber supply to purchase materials limits capabilities. While government hierarchy eat steak and lobster, ordinary citizens live on rice and beans.

I’ve had conversations with witch doctors, Maasai tribesmen and Kikuyu farmers. Talking to people of other cultures about our precious Savior Jesus is a great privilege God has blessed us with.

Sitting in an African village and being offered a meal of ugali (thick corn meal mixture) or githeri (corn, beans and rice combination) was an honor. To be told kari-buni (welcome) when we entered their villages made us very comfortable.

The wazungu (white man) was an unusual sight for many of the children. They were not shy at all and crowded around me like I was a rare site, which to them, I was.

Many Americans haven’t a clue what we

have here. Millions of people in this world only have access to food they can grow or in some way produce themselves. There are no grocery markets to go to on a whim to procure something different for dinner.

In the case of a drought, many starve. The predictions of Jesus in Matthew 24: 6 are happening in our world today. “For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.”

One source tells us 25,000 people die of starvation or nutritionally related conditions every single day; another reference states as many as 60,000.

Famines as stated by Jesus nearly 2000 years ago are happening right now. Pestilences such as covid, Ebola and the other viruses are infecting humanity at alarming rates.

People in many parts of the world are dying of curable diseases. While medicines exist as cures, many have no access to those and governments make no efforts to secure

them.

Jesus said, “nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.” Wars are killing thousands of innocent people in many places. All in all, we are witnessing Bible prophesy happening.

America has not seen a major war fought on this soil since the first American Civil War. Of course we’ve experienced the 9/11 terrorist attacks, but wars such as Vietnam, WWI and II have not come to our land.

When Americans think

Continued on page 11

Answers to last month’s Crossword

ALABASTER JAR

Solution:

ALABASTER JAR

PARABLE OF THE MONEY LENDER

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FORGAVE THE DEBT

THE GREATER DEBTOR

RECTLY

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HONEY

CORN

BEANS

RICE

WAZUNGU

KARI-BUNI

UGALI

GITHERI

MAASAI

KIKUYU

EBOLA

COVID

PESTILENCES

FAMINES

STARVATION

NUTRITIONALLY

HUMANITY

WAR

TERRORIST

CIVIL WAR

VETERAN

WORLD WAR

AMERICAN

NATION

KINGDOM

PEOPLE

DIE

ACCESS

FOOD

GROW

PRODUCE

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A Disciple's Journey: The Map.

By Micah Powell, Grace Community Church of Great Bend

Before Bilbo Baggins ever saw the Lonely Mountain, he was given a map. It didn't show every shadow or shortcut, but it gave him a sense of where he was going and why. It pointed toward something beyond the safety of the Shire. Without it, his journey would have stalled before it began.

God gives His people something similar. Not a GPS with every detail, but a trustworthy map, His Word. It does more than inform us. It guides us, anchors us, and shapes the way we walk. In Deuteronomy 6, Moses is standing before a new generation of Israelites who are finally ready to enter the Promised Land. After decades of wandering, they are about to settle into daily life, homes, jobs, harvests, and families. And Moses knows something we often forget: the greatest danger to faith is not always hard-

ship, but comfort. Once the dust settles, the real temptation is to drift.

So, before he hands them the land, he gives them the map.

1. God's Word Is to Be Learned and Lived (Deuteronomy 6:1-3)

Moses begins by reminding them that God's commands are not just to be remembered, but also to be obeyed.

"That you may do them...that it may go well with you."

These words are not for scholars. They are for families, workers, farmers, and children. The Word of God is meant to be lived out in the rhythms of ordinary life.

But notice the long view: Moses mentions "you, your son, and your son's son." Faith is never meant to be kept to ourselves. It's generational. He's saying, "Don't just hold onto this map, pass it on." In a world where every generation is being disciplined by something, handing down the Word of God is not optional. It is essential.

This is not rigid rule-

following. It's a way of flourishing under God's wisdom. Like a worn trail map passed from father to son before a long mountain hike, it's not there to slow you down; it's there to get you home.

And let's be honest. Many of us have treated the Bible like those unread instruction manuals from Ikea. We start confidently, ignore the guide, and wonder why things don't fit like they should. But God doesn't give us His Word to shame us. He gives it to shepherd us.

2. God's Word Anchors the Heart in Love (Deuteronomy 6:4-6)

At the heart of this passage is a call not just to listen, but to love.

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one."

That declaration, the Shema, is more than a creed. It's a call to loyalty. There are no other gods. No competitors. He alone is worthy.

That is why Moses follows it with the command to love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and strength. This is not about adding God to

an already full life. It is about giving Him the whole of who you are, your thoughts, emotions, energy, and influence. God is not content with part of us. He calls for all of us.

And this love, Moses says, must not stay abstract. "These words shall be on your heart." That is where discipleship starts, not with performance, but with affection. If obedience is only ever duty, we will eventually burn out. But love roots us. Love moves us. Love carries us forward when the road is long.

In The Lord of the Rings, Samwise didn't carry Frodo through Mordor because it was his job. He did it because he loved him. That kind of love endures suffering and keeps walking. That's what Moses is calling for, a deep, covenant love that endures and obeys because it delights in the One who gave the Word.

3. God's Word Saturates Daily Life (Deuteronomy 6:7-9)

Moses gets practical. He tells the people not to treat God's Word like

something that belongs in temples or scroll cases. It belongs in everyday life, whether you sit, walk, lie down, or rise.

In other words, discipleship is not something we schedule once a week. It's a way of being. The home becomes the classroom. The commute becomes the conversation. The bedtime routine becomes sacred ground.

And it must be taught "diligently." The Hebrew word carries the idea of sharpening a blade. It is intentional, consistent, and repeated. That is how faith is passed on. Not in grand

speeches, but in everyday conversations that show our kids what it means to love and follow Jesus.

Research confirms this. Barna and Pew tell us that the majority of kids who grow up in church will walk away after high school, many never returning. Not because they were unconvinced by Sunday sermons, but because they never saw the Word lived out in their homes. Moses knew this before we had data. If we do not disciple our children, someone else will.

Continued page 13

Why should Christians never work out?

Answer:

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Christians in India denied clean water, jobs, food in ongoing religious persecution

By Diana Chandler, Baptist Press

Hundreds of Christians in central India have been denied clean water, fresh produce and employment for nearly a month in unsuccessful attempts to force them to denounce Christianity, International Christian Concern (ICC) reported May 29.

More than 180 Christian tribal families in Chhattisgarh state in central India are blocked from community rivers and other water sources; have been denied employment in a scheme orchestrated by the government, and are barred from collecting and selling non-timber forest products, a main tribal

source of nourishment and income.

The families, termed Vivasis because of their tribal heritage, are spread among 32 villages in the Kanker district of Chhattisgarh, where many Christians reside among the majority Hindi nation of nearly 1.5 billion people.

"Christian community leaders have stated that these severe boycotts are aimed at pressuring believers into abandoning their faith and participating in Ghar Wapsi or 'homecoming' programs, meaning re-converting to Hinduism," ICC said in reporting the persecution. "These areas of the Kanker districts have also previously seen broader ten-

sions in the past, with various local village authorities issuing resolutions to restrict Christian burials and the entry of pastors."

Violence often follows such boycotts and religious exclusions, ICC said, "with police and district administrations unable to take decisive action to prevent the atrocities."

Chhattisgarh civil rights groups including the Progressive Christian Alliance and Jila Masih Astha Samaj have complained in writing of the abuse, but the targeted Christian communities continue to face severe hardships.

The persecution follows the May 13 murder of three Christian

church leaders among the indigenous Kuki-Thadou people in northeastern India's Manipur State, and tracks with increased persecution of Christians, Muslims and other minorities the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has noted.

Pastor Paogoulen Sitlhou and two preachers, Vumthang Sitlhou and Kaigoulun Lhouvum, were killed when unidentified gunmen opened fire in mountainous terrain on a larger group leaving the United Baptist Convention Assembly in Churachandpur District, Christian persecution watchdog CSW re-

Continued on page 17

Freedom

Continued from page 9

about what is happening as well as what is not happening, we live in the safest, most secure and strongest country in the world.

We have freedoms that millions can only dream of. While we have the American dream, their dream is to come to America or for their country to become like America.

We have our Bill of Rights securing freedom of the press, speech, religion and assembly. Those among other freedoms provide us with a greater freedom. That is the freedom of opportunity.

The right to educate ourselves, to capitalize, to come and go as we please and to speak freely our opinions, are freedoms many of the over eight billion on planet earth do not have.

The Fourth of July is nearly here. It is time to celebrate 250 years of freedom and opportunity. We must not sit idly by and let the purveyors of bondage destroy us.

An Irish philosopher, Edmund Burke said,

"When good men do nothing, evil triumphs." This has never been truer than in America today.

Nikita Khrushchev said, "you will destroy yourselves." Ronald Reagan said "Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same."

Yes, America is a great nation, but with so many within intent on destroying her and few left to defend the true and original America, what will we be in twenty years?

Celebrating 250 years is a significant milestone. Our faith in country and God is paramount in our values and actions. We must also remember America was founded upon freedom of religion and that religion was Christianity.

We must teach the only eternal salvation is a faith based belief in Christ Jesus crucified for the remission of sin and resurrected.

Van Yandell is a retired industrial arts teacher, an ordained gospel evangelist and commissioned missionary.

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Helping Teens Navigate a Sexualized Culture

By Walt Mueller, *Ligonier Ministries*

"I know where babies come from!" Those were the words my eight-year-old son blurted out in the midst of a conversational lull during a family dinner back in 1994. Before asking him what he had learned on the topic, I awkwardly swallowed my mouthful of food and asked him about where he had received his information. With genuine enthusiasm he answered, "Donnie told me...on the playground!"

I'll spare you the details of Donnie's not-even-close-to-accurate sex-ed lesson, but Donnie's mis-education had dropped in our laps a golden parenting opportunity for beginning a series of conversations with our young children about God's good and glorious design for His gift of sex and sexuality.

That conversation took place thirty years ago. Today, it isn't just "Donnie" on the playground. Kids are receiving a dangerous mis-education on sex and sexuality that runs at high volume on a 24/7 loop through smartphones, social media, streaming television, and more. Truth be told, this ever-present

narrative washes over our kids, misshaping them from preschool right into adulthood.

When I think about our culture's obsession with sex, I can't help but ponder the wise words of Proverbs 14:12:

There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.

As parents, we are called by God to use our words and our example to teach our children and teens God's good design for sex and sexuality, offering correctives to help them find their way through the cultural narrative's lies. Here are three essential elements to lead them into hearing, believing, and following God's will and way about sex that is right for all of His image-bearers.

1. We must teach God's creational design.

If our sexualized culture is getting sex wrong, where do we go to get it right? We go to the Bible. God's order and design for sexuality is clearly stated in the creation narrative (Gen. 1-2), reflected in the teachings of Jesus (Matt. 19:4-6), and maintained consistently throughout the Bible. God's plan way back "in the beginning"

(Gen. 1:1) reflects the way things are supposed to be. Because of humankind's rebellion against God and fall into sin (Gen. 3), everything and everyone is broken. Because of sin, our default setting is to rebel against God's good order and design for our sexuality. The cultural narrative is one of the great weapons of deception the enemy uses to steer our kids away from understanding God's creational place and purpose for sex.

Our responsibility is to teach that God's place for His good gift of sex is in marriage. God's design and plan for marriage is that it is to be a committed, lifelong, monogamous, heterosexual, physical union between one man and one woman.

God also has a purpose for giving this good and

beautiful gift of sex to be shared and experienced only within the context of marriage. The purpose of sex as God has given it to us is to consummate and seal the marriage relationship between a man and a woman, to foster continued mutual intimacy, to enable mutual pleasure, to respond to God's command to "be fruitful and multiply" (procreation), and to reflect Christ's relationship to His bride, the church (Eph. 5:22-33).

2. We must teach God's design continually.

Most of us who grew up in Christian homes had parents who struggled to know what, how, and when to teach us about sex. There was a kind of awkwardness that made "the sex talk" something to be anticipated and approached

with fear and trepidation. Whether the talk lasted for only a few minutes or for a few hours, parents and kids both would breathe a sigh of relief at the end and think, "I'm glad that's finally over with." But don't think about your responsibility to teach God's design for sex as a one-and-done endeavor. Parenting in a sexualized culture requires us to speak early and often.

Continually remind them about the truth of the loving God who has made them and the truth about His good gift of sexuality.

The early is necessitated by the fact that our kids are

being catechized by a culture that speaks about sex in seemingly every medium. With kids seeing and hearing sexual messages beginning in their preschool years, we must remember this basic reality: whoever speaks first to a child about sex has set the bar for truth. In other words, everything else they hear in life will be judged against what they first heard. This means that for those of us raising older teens, while it might seem too late since they've already heard so much, we need to realize their des-

Continued on page 13

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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Teens

Continued from page 12

perate need for a proper biblical sex-education.

The often is also necessitated by the fact that our kids are being catechized by a culture that speaks about sex incessantly. We must understand that “the talk” is never going to be enough. Rather, we need to engage in “the talking.” Helping kids navigate the sexualized culture is an on-

going activity rather than a once-and-done endeavor to simply check off our parenting list. And like anything else in life, the more we talk, the easier it becomes to keep on talking, and the more freedom our children will feel to come to us with their questions.

3. We must take advantage of “cultural prompts.”

If we were to summarize the culture’s narrative on sex, it might go like this: “When it comes to

sex, you can do whatever you want, whenever you want, wherever you want, however you want, with whomever you want.” As you spend time with your children and teens, you will be hearing and seeing countless messages that communicate the culture’s erroneous understanding of the place(anywhere) and purpose (personal pleasure) for sex. Television shows, movies, music, social media sites, billboards, advertisements, and news reports all communicate the culture’s narrative explicitly and implicitly. If you’re looking and listening, you can’t miss these messages. Point those messages out, using their presence as an opportunity for a teachable moment where you can teach discernment by thinking with your kids

about what they’re seeing and hearing. Ask them a series of questions: What is being said here about sex? How does that message agree or disagree with God’s Word on sex? Is this a message I should believe, or a message that gets it wrong?

Parents, we not only want our kids to know where babies come from, but we want them to know the Divine Designer of sex and sexuality. Don’t leave their sex education to chance, thinking that one day they’ll get it all figured out. “Donnie” and our sexualized culture will step in by default. Continually remind them about the truth of the loving God who has made them and the truth about His good gift of sexuality.

Journey

Continued from page 10

That is why Moses ends with such vivid imagery, bind the Word to your hands and between your eyes, write it on your doorposts. Let it shape your actions, your thoughts, and your family culture. The Bible is not just for personal devotions. It is for your dinner table, your schedule, your budget, your conversations, and your prayers.

You do not need to lead a seminary in your living room. But you can read a verse before bedtime, pray on the way to school, or ask your child what they learned about God that day. It will not be perfect. It does not

have to be. It just has to be faithful.

The Journey Ahead

We are all on a journey. We are all following something. The question is not whether we are being formed, but by what. God gives us His Word, not to weigh us down, but to guide us home.

And where we have failed, Jesus has not. He loved the Father with all His heart. He obeyed perfectly. He lived the Word. And He died for those of us who so often forget it.

Through Him, we are forgiven. Through Him, we are empowered. And through His Word, we are led. So open the map again. Follow it. And place it in the hands of someone who is still learning the way.

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 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE

From Trial to Testimony: Amanda Patterson's Journey to K-LOVE Kids



By Mark Maynard, Baptist Press

Christian music has always been woven into Amanda Patterson's life. Raised in a Kentucky Baptist family filled with music, she grew up surrounded by song as her father served for years as a worship pastor while her mother and four siblings all shared the same passion.

Music opened doors for Patterson in her teens and early 20s as her profile in Christian music circles continued to grow. Then, at age 30, everything changed. First, it was a Stage IV

colon cancer diagnosis, followed by thyroid cancer that threatened to take her voice. Over the next year she went through eight months of chemo, six weeks of radiation and five surgeries.

What once looked like a bright future suddenly became uncertain, but her faith never faltered.

Through the crisis, Patterson leaned on God, her church family and countless people who prayed for her. She had met her future husband, Reid, a little before the cancer diagnosis and gave him an out in

the new relationship. He instead asked her to marry him. Today, the couple has an 8-year-old daughter even though doctors did not expect her to be able to have children. God had other plans.

K-LOVE Kids project

Now Patterson is writing a new chapter as the creator behind K-LOVE Kids, a new social media platform that launched May 1 with the goal of connecting children to faith through fun, Christ-centered content.

The vision is to create a trusted place where children can engage with music, videos and shows that point them to Jesus.

Patterson said the opportunity came because of a connection with Tom Stultz, CEO of the K-LOVE radio network. They both have roots in Greenup County, Ky.

Amanda Patterson leads a session with K-LOVE Kids, a new venture of the Christian ra-

dio giant.

"We connected because nobody is from where we're from," Patterson said. "We knew all the same people, had a bunch of people in common."

They also both had an interest in ministry to kids. Patterson was overflowing with ideas that she had played out in her mind for years.

"I've had this idea of bringing music to kids, especially in the Christian world, for a very long time," she said. "There's not a lot that exists, especially doing cover songs. I pitched what I thought it could be and he (Stultz) loved it."

Patterson said Stultz's belief in the project made K-LOVE Kids possible.

"This would not have happened without him," she said. "He believed in the entire thing before he could even see it. He put nonstop faith and trust in me and what it

could be. He fought over and over again to make it become reality. It is all because of him. He cries every time he sees something that we do."

Stultz said the emotional reaction comes naturally.

"I cry every time I hear the kids sing for three reasons: one, their voices sound so good and pure; two, I get the feeling the Lord is working in and through this so it has a great chance of working and, three, because I know how hard Amanda had to work and how many obstacles she had to overcome to get this ministry to where it is today.

"I told her I was basically giving her a pile of dirt and asking her to go build a farm," he said. "She has, and I couldn't be prouder. She was willing to risk it all because, at the time, we did not know if we should invest in this ministry or not. She spent over six months

investigating what else was in the marketplace, what had been tried before and creating plans for implementing her bold idea."

Stultz said the K-LOVE board agreed to fund the venture for at least three years to see how it would develop. "Her poise and commitment won us all over."

Experience proves beneficial

"We created what I call demos, what I thought could be possible," Patterson said. "I found some kids to record three different songs. We did three music videos in one day. We put together the whole plan for the next five years of what could be possible. I pitched all of that at the end of July last year. I asked for the world expecting a little to be approved. They approved the whole world."

Drawing on 15 years of experience in Chris-

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K-LOVE

Continued from page 14

tian music, Patterson believes every stage of her life prepared her for this moment.

"Working with crazy talented kids, I've been there," she said. "I performed when I was a kid. I knew what I would have wanted to have when I was 14. My whole entire history, everything I've been through, has led to this moment. So much of it I didn't understand and why the Lord had me there at that moment. Looking back at everything, it was all so worth it. I fully understand what I'm doing and what could be possible."

Part of the vision came from research Patterson conducted while working at K-LOVE. She discovered that 72 percent of Christians decide to follow Christ before age 18, with nearly half making that decision before turning 12. Yet much of Christian media targets either preschoolers or teenagers, leaving children ages 5-12 underserved.

K-LOVE Kids aims to fill that gap.

After a nationwide casting call that drew 200 auditions, the team narrowed the field to 12 children from states including California, Texas, New Jersey, Tennessee and Kentucky.

"Each video will have four kids. You will eventually see all 12 of them. We chose 12 because

most of the kids are in school full-time. I wanted them to still have a life, do sports, and have friends. They rotate and take turns (performing). It keeps them with their families."

Patterson said character mattered just as much as talent during auditions.

"We also looked at the heart of why they might join something like this. We wanted kids who knew how to speak, talk well and knew their audience. We wanted the older kids to speak to the younger kids."

The group has already recorded multiple albums, including a full release scheduled for July 26. Short K-LOVE Kids talk episodes are also in production, along with Christmas music projects.

Patterson hopes the platform becomes a positive alternative for children spending hours online each week.

"If they are spending time there, if I can reach them where they

are, I'm willing and able and wanting to do it. We want them to eventually get interested in the Bible, church and each other," she said.

In many ways, Patterson said the inspiration started with her daughter, Adalyn.

Patterson recalled taking her daughter to a children's concert that "was definitely not about Jesus." Watching the excitement in the crowd sparked an idea.

"She was having a good time, and I looked out over the crowd and thought, 'What if these kids were worshiping and having the same amount of fun?' It was colorful, bright, entertaining. Why can't we have this and have kids worshiping at the same time?"

Adalyn now attends every video shoot and has developed a love for music herself.

A family tradition

That passion for worship runs throughout the family.

Patterson's father, Jim

Wilcox, served 22 and a half years as worship pastor at First Baptist Church Russell, Ky. Today he and his wife, Lisa, live in northern Kentucky while their children continue serving in worship ministry roles.

"Amanda has always exhibited a penchant and drive toward excellence, being willing to

make sacrifices and take risks to grow into new, varied and challenging roles," he said. "In her late teens and 20s, she spent years working in the contemporary music industry recording, touring, leading worship and meeting others in the industry (sound engineers, producers, videographers, etc.) that have prepared her to

be able to now pass on those things to the next generation.

"Her mom and I both believe strongly that our great God has been growing and testing her faith through varied life experiences and some significant hardships and fire, preparing her for such a time as this to lead K-LOVE Kids at K-LOVE Radio."

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Community Celebration Highlights Faith, Recovery, Connection in Great Bend

Stepping Stones to Recovery hosted a community celebration on June 20, bringing together individuals, families and supporters for an afternoon centered on faith, recovery and fellowship.

The event featured live music, raffle prizes and powerful personal testimonials from individuals whose lives have been transformed through recovery and spiritual growth, said Charity Muth, Stepping Stones owner. Attendees shared stories of perseverance, healing and the role that faith has played in overcoming life's challenges.

The celebration focused on honoring a

relationship with God and the recovery journey, while participants reflected on blessings received, miracles witnessed, and the struggles that often accompany personal growth and change. Speakers emphasized the importance of leaning into faith rather than turning away from it during difficult times.

"I want to thank everyone that attended," Muth said. "While some came as strangers, all left feeling a little closer to one another in some way. The gathering served as a reminder that recovery is not only about overcoming addiction or hardship

but also about building meaningful connections and finding purpose through faith and community support."

Muth noted that life change of any kind often requires individuals to step beyond their comfort zones and embrace hope even when the path forward is uncertain. For many in attendance, faith was described as a source of strength, guidance and resilience.

The event concluded with a message of encouragement for anyone facing personal struggles. Attendees were reminded that healing is possible, community matters and that making space for faith

when pursuing any life change is not only a vital component of spiritual health. It can become the language of life support during life's most challenging seasons.

"Participants left with a renewed sense of connection, hope and shared purpose, reinforcing the work of Stepping Stones to Recovery - helping individuals find strength, support and restoration through faith and recovery," Muth commented. "A special thank-you goes to ATF Records and Muth Multimedia Productions for their dedication in coordinating this event. Their leadership and countless hours of behind-the-scenes

work made the celebration possible.

"We are also grateful to Melanie Ryan and her band, whose energy, talent and heartfelt performance demonstrated music's unique ability to connect with the soul and inspire hope."

Special recognition goes to Rice Ministries, which traveled to join the celebration. In addition to preparing and serving food, they shared powerful testimony through music and personal witness, promoting transformation, acceptance, unity and the love of Christ, Muth added.

"A sincere thank-you goes to Jessie Trevino,

whose expertise and commitment ensured that every performance and message was heard clearly," she said. "His professional sound production helped bring the entire event together and reminded us that, much like people, every voice matters and contributes to a greater harmony."

"The tireless efforts of these individuals illustrate what can happen when a community comes together in support of a shared purpose. Their service demonstrated that we are stronger together and that meaningful change

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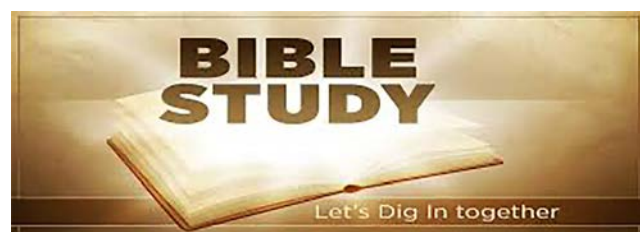
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True Freedom in Christ

Key Scripture: Galatians 5:1 — “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”

Introduction

Each July, Americans celebrate the freedoms we enjoy as citizens of this nation. While we are thankful for these blessings, Scripture reminds us that there is an even greater freedom—freedom from sin through Jesus Christ. Earthly liberty is valuable, but only Christ can truly set us free.

Teaching

In Galatians, the Apostle Paul reminded believers to stand firm in the freedom Christ had won for them. Salvation is not earned through good works or religious rituals but is received by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Jesus declared in John 8:36, “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.” This freedom is not permission to live however we please. Rather, it is freedom from sin’s guilt and the joy of living in obedience to God.

America has long protected the freedom to worship, and we should be grateful for that blessing. Yet even if earthly freedoms were lost, no one can take away the eternal freedom found in Christ.

Application

This month, ask yourself:

Am I trusting in Christ alone for my salvation?

Does my life reflect the freedom found in Him?

Am I using the blessings God has given me to serve Him and others?

Closing Thought

As we celebrate our nation’s independence, may we never forget the greater freedom purchased through Jesus Christ. Nations come and go, but the freedom found in the gospel is eternal.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for the freedoms we enjoy in this country and, above all, for the freedom found in Your Son. Help us to stand firm in the gospel, live faithfully according to Your Word, and use our freedom to glorify You. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Persecution

Continued from page 11

ported May 22. At least five others suffered life-threatening gunshot injuries and were taken to Shija Hospital in Imphal, CSW said.

Celebration

Continued from page 16

is possible when people unite around faith, hope and recovery.”

That spirit of generosity was equally reflected in the many volunteers who gave their time before, during and after the celebration, Muth emphasized. “Their willingness to serve helped create a welcoming and successful event.”

Proceeds from the raffle were donated to local artists, cash donations were directed to a local ministry and all donated food was given to the Barton County Food Bank. These contributions reflect the event’s commitment not only to recovery and faith, but also to strengthening and supporting the broader community, Muth said.

THE PRAYER OF JABEZ

“O that you would
wonderfully bless me and
help me in my work; please
be with me in all that I do,
and keep me from all evil
and disaster.
1 Chronicles 4:10

The Baptist convention focused on reconciliation and peacebuilding among tribal communities in Manipur. But the killings spurred days of retaliatory violence, CSW said, with reports of armed Kuki groups abducting Naga civilians, and Naga village members and armed groups abducting Kuki.

“These targeted attacks on revered church leaders who were returning from a dedicated mission of peace and tribal reconciliation constitute a horrific assault on human life and the freedom of religion or belief in Manipur,” CSW Founder and President Mervyn Thomas said. “The subsequent retaliatory abductions and hostage crisis underscore how rapidly instability can spiral when faith leaders and peacebuilders are targeted. ... The international community must not look away as tribal Christian communities and peace advocates in Manipur face escalating vulner-

abilities.”

The U.S. State Department should designate India a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for egregious religious freedom violations, USCIRF recommended in its 2026 annual report, noting persecution of Christians, Muslims and other minorities despite religious freedom guarantees in India’s constitution.

In October 2025, Indian police arrested U.S. citizen James Watson, accusing him of converting Hindus to Christianity in Maharashtra. Watson was released on bail after two weeks, but USCIRF did not disclose in its report any resolution of the case. Watson and two Indian nationals were charged with “hurting religious sentiment.” India accused them of “violating the state’s anti-black magic law, luring individuals to convert by promising ‘miracle cures’ and prosperity,” USCIRF said in its annual report.

Religious freedom

continued to deteriorate in India in 2025, USCIRF said in its report, with the government enforcing harsh laws against Christians and other minority communities and states attaching longer prison sentences to anti-conversion laws. Detention of members of minority religious communities, illegal expulsion of citizens and religious refugees, and unchecked vigilante attacks on minority religious communities increased.

Among India’s numerous laws targeting minority religious communities are the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, the 1967 Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, the 2019 Citizenship (Amendment) Act, the National Register of Citizens, the 2025 Waqf Bill, and the 2025 Immigration and Foreigners Bill. Article 295A of the Penal Code functions as a blasphemy law by criminalizing actions deemed to “outrage religious feelings.”

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FIRST-PERSON: A partnership born through Jimmy and Sarah

By Tom Stolle, Baptist Press

Editor's note: Tom Stolle is executive director of the Baptist Convention of Maryland-Delaware and served as chairman of the SBC's Disability Ministry Task Force.

In 2001, my wife Shelley and I were blessed with our third child – a wonderful little boy. We were attending Cresthill Baptist Church in Bowie, Maryland, and named our son after our pastor,

James Painter, to honor a man God had used powerfully in our lives. Both James Painter and our youngest son go by the nickname "Jimmy."

Even back then, we felt our Jimmy would also be used powerfully by God, though we didn't yet know how.

Shortly after Jimmy was born, we noticed behaviors that seemed odd to us. His hand flapping and foot twirling seemed constant, and he would

not hold eye contact. Jimmy's favorite toys were empty plastic soda bottles. He would either spin them or line them up and flap his hands while looking at them.

Upon medical diagnosis, we discovered that Jimmy was affected by autism. We had no idea what that meant, but upon seeing all the things that had led up to that point, and hearing the grim diagnosis from the doctor, our faith was

challenged.

"Why, God?" "Why do this to Jimmy?" "I'm a big boy. Why him? Do it to me, not Jimmy."

These were common phrases in my prayer time early on. There was much grief.

Shelley and I were determined to love Jimmy the best we knew how. We were determined to provide the best life possible for him.

Things got harder – much harder. Jimmy would hurt himself. Then, when he hit puberty, he began to hurt Shelley and me. Physical attacks were frequent. Destruction of our home became the new normal. Suffering and grief became acquainted with chaos. It was beyond difficult.

How we felt when Jimmy was born – that Jimmy would be used mightily by God – seemed like a distant memory. We hadn't thought about that in years. We were just trying to make it to the next day.



Tom Stolle and his son Jimmy

During this chaos was when I met Shauna Amick. Shauna serves at Joni and Friends. She began to tell me about her daughter, Sarah, who has Down syndrome. She also told me about the challenges they face. Shauna had a joy that radiated from her – a joy that reminded me that God is bigger than the chaos, that God has plans for Jimmy and Sarah.

My belief began to be recharged. I realized through prayer and through speaking with Shauna what God wanted me to do. God wanted

me to tell the story of Jimmy – to boldly proclaim that Jimmy, Sarah, and the many millions of people with disabilities are created in the image of God and must be included in the church.

Shauna partnered with me to start the first-ever disability conference for churches within the Baptist Convention of Maryland / Delaware (BCM/D). A partnership with Joni and Friends was born. In my conversations with Shauna as we prepared to launch our ministry partner-

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Partnership

Continued from page 18

ship, I told her that Sarah and Jimmy were leading the way. Then I was reminded of something I believed when Jimmy was born.

I understood that God is using Jimmy, and I saw that God was using Sarah.

This was the beginning of a partnership between Joni and Friends and the BCM/D. I didn't know how far the partnership would go. I didn't know what God had for us. I was just happy God was providing and knew more was coming.

Fast forward to what is happening now. God has grown this partnership in amazing ways. On June 10, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) presented a report from the SBC Disability Task Force to more than 10,000 people in attendance and to the world, requesting that churches and other SBC entities provide resources and include individuals living with disabilities in the life of the

church. All people are created in the image of God.

Joni and Friends, Shauna Amick, and Sarah Amick are key parts of this story.

Our partnership continues to grow. Shawn Thornton, president of Joni and Friends, traveled to Orlando to participate in a panel discussion on June 9 about the intersection of sexual abuse and disability, highlighting how vulnerable individuals affected by disabilities are to abuse and how the church can offer better protection to these precious people.

Joni Eareckson Tada is providing people, videos and resources for this cooperative effort to share the love of Jesus with individuals living with disabilities. This is not the culmination of a partnership. This is only the beginning. I am confident that still more is on the way – much more.

I am honored and humbled that this partnership is growing. It will continue to grow.

It all started with the birth of two children:

Jimmy and Sarah. I reflected on what I heard from God in prayer: God would use Jimmy mightily. I almost forgot that along the way. I am thankful for our God – a God who doesn't forget!

God brought Shauna. God brought Sarah. God is using Sarah and Jimmy mightily. In fact, Jimmy and Sarah have led the way! Our partnership would not have been born years ago if not for them.

I am reminded of 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 (NIV): "Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him."

What is happening in

the SBC through a partnership that was birthed with Joni and Friends years ago is all due to God.

God chose those the world would see as weak – Sarah and Jimmy – to begin something powerful. It is God who is moving us forward. God is driving the train. We just get to be on the train!

God, thank you for Jimmy and Sarah. Thank you for the way You designed them. You are using them mightily, and You designed them just the way they are for Your glorious purposes. I wouldn't have it any other way, and I'm confident my friend Shauna Amick would agree!

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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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2 Corinthians 5:17

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America At 250: Precarious Greatness, Part 1

Dr. Rodney Crowell

As he left the 1787 Continental Congress where our nation's Constitution was written, Benjamin Franklin was asked, "Well, Dr. Franklin, what have we – a Monarchy or a Republic?" Franklin replied, "A republic – if you can keep it." He realized that the brilliant founding documents of our nation, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, required the diligent involvement of an educated, moral and faithful citizenship. Two hundred and fifty years later, at our semiquincentennial, many of us wonder if we still have that prerequisite. Uncertainty and animus abound equally.

Jeffrey Bennett of TIME Magazine asks, "What, exactly, are we choosing to honor?" Ali Velshi of MS Now claims a "deep unease" about the celebrations. Why? As Brianna Ly-

man reports in "The Federalist," all this is "the predictable result of Americans being taught ... to hate this country and be ashamed of [it.]" Nearly 5,000 classrooms nationwide model their curriculum on the "1619 Project" claiming the Revolution was fought merely to preserve slavery. Predictably, a 2025 Gallup Poll found that only 58% of adults overall are "extremely" or "very proud" to be American; only 36% of Democrats share that view, while 92% of Republicans do. Even moderates are tired of this wokeness; HBO's Bill Maher recently quipped that "Every election year, Democrats seem to remember patriotism for about an hour when they're trying to win back swing voters ...but treat [it] as something vaguely embarrassing the rest of the time."

The roots of modern anti-Americanism, Ly-

man claims, stems from the 1930s when The Frankfurt School of neo-Marxists fled Hitler to regroup at Columbia University. The "cultural Marxists" like Herbert Marcuse sought to overthrow America by a "long march through the institutions" teaching "critical theory" that despised everything American: the nuclear traditional family, Christianity, capitalism and freedom of speech, condemning it all as oppressive. It nearly worked, for from these educated despisers evolved women's studies, the pan-sexual theology emptying our churches, critical race theory and woke, knee-jerk, anarchic rage generally. I lived this in the 1960s and 70s, even winning a University award for stupidly trying to merge Christian theology with Marxism. It took me a decade longer to repudiate it; I write so that you, reader,

may never submit to its folly.

In opposition to Marxist whining, Lyman affirms the long-neglected truth that "the United States is not merely a story of slavery and sin. It is the story of a people who have continually risked their lives, fortunes and honor to secure the blessings of liberty endowed to us by our Creator." Let's review how this quest began.

Britain sought to recoup its own expenses from the French & Indian War by an increasing series of taxes and duties upon the American colonies (including tea) resulting in the December 16, 1773 Boston Tea Party, where colonials disguised as Indians dumped three shiploads of British tea into Boston Harbor. "No taxation without representation [in the

Continued on page 21

Bible Trivia

Q: What was Sarah's idea for Abram to have a child?

Answer

A: For Abram to have a child with Hagar.

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Matthew 10:32



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America

Continued from page 20

British Parliament]!" was their cry. Their desire, like the Jamestown (1609) and Plymouth (1620) settlers before them, was freedom and self-determination by "a Civil body politick," to quote the Mayflower Compact. England was having none of it, so as their military presence increased, the colonists began to meet and form militias, particularly in Boston, a revolutionary hot spot. On April 19, 1775, war ensued when shots rang out at nearby Lexington and Concord. Freedom, not racism, was the issue, shown by Thomas Paine's popular 1776 pamphlet, "Common Sense," asking why a distant island (England) should rule a whole continent.

On July 4, 1776, the Second Continental Congress approved The Declaration of Independence defending certain BIBLICAL (thus "self-evident," Romans 1:19-20) truths: "that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalien-

able rights; that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness...." Humans are all created in God's image, male and female (Genesis 1:27), the One "who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment" (1 Timothy 6:17). Further, we are endowed with rights through the stewardship of Creation that the LORD first gave to Adam and Eve (Genesis 1:28-30) – for with God-given responsibilities comes the divinely-granted power to employ them, which cannot be revoked by any state or monarch. Obviously, it took another century, a Civil War, and some Constitutional amendments to apply such rights consistently to ALL citizens, but the historic "line in the sand" between oppressive monarchies and servant governments had been forever drawn, and approximately 25,000 Americans died in the Revolution to maintain it. The Declaration thus formed the political and spiritual "heart" of our nation, but it needed a legal "body" in which to reside.

That became our Constitution, ratified in 1788. Our Founders drew equally on the Bible as well as supporting political philosophies found in John Locke's "Two Treatises of Government" (1689) and Blackstone's "Commentaries on the Laws of England" (1765) to establish government's purposes: to protect citizens from evildoers, to punish criminals and to promote the general well-being of all people. A quick read of Romans 13:1-7 and Proverbs 28:2-5 is all you need to see the Scriptures resonating with its Preamble.

The drafting, defending, acceptance, and adherence to that Constitution would prove to be the greatest challenge of all – to construct and uphold the legal framework of what Michael Novak centuries later would call, "a system designed for sinners," meaning one that could counterbalance and survive the attempts of sinful humans to pervert it. It's endured for 250 years, but its future now rests in our trembling hands. More on that in Part 2 next month!

Slavery and True Liberty

*By John MacArthur,
Grace to You*

Understood correctly, the gospel is an invitation to slavery. When we call people to faith in Christ, we need to stress that fact in the same way Jesus did. On the one hand, the gospel is a proclamation of freedom to sin's captives and liberty to people who are broken by the bondage of sin's power over them. On the other hand, it is a summons to a whole different kind of slavery: "Having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness" (Romans 6:18). As the apostle Peter wrote, "Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil but use it as bondslaves of God" (1 Peter 2:16).

Both sides of the equation are vital. There is a glorious freedom in being the slaves of Christ, because "if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (John

8:36). On the other hand, being a true follower of Christ means the end of human autonomy. And that is as it should be, because self-determination turns out to be nothing more than an illusion anyway. The only kind of liberty it offers is "free[dom] in regard to righteousness" (Romans 6:20)—and that is the very essence of bondage to sin. Its inevitable end is death and destruction. If we want true liberty from sin and all its fruits, it's not autonomy that we need, but a different kind of bondage: complete surrender to the lordship of Christ.

In other words, everyone serves some master. No one is truly independent and self-governing. We are all enslaved in one way or the other. In the words of the apostle Paul:

Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one

whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. (Romans 6:16-21)

No message can rightly be called the gospel if it glosses over or denies those truths. The gospel according to Jesus calls

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'He gets all the glory': Canes' Slavin reflects on Stanley Cup win



Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Jacob Slavin celebrates winning the Stanley Cup after a 3-0 win over the Vegas Golden Knights in Game 6 of the NHL Finals on Sunday, June 14, in Las Vegas.

Photo courtesy of the Carolina Hurricanes.

By Chad Austin, Baptist Press

When Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Jacob Slavin finally wrapped his hands around the Stanley Cup and hoisted it over his head, he felt what every hockey player dreams about.

"Pure excitement," Slavin said nearly a week after the Hurricanes beat the Vegas Golden Knights to win the franchise's second Stanley Cup title.

And that's not the only achievement Slavin has experienced of late. In February, he captured

an Olympic gold medal with Team USA. Winning the Stanley Cup four months later put him in some exclusive company as just the second American and eighth player overall to win Olympic gold and the Stanley Cup in the same year.

For many players, such accomplishments would naturally lead to reflections on legacy and career milestones. But Slavin, who has long spoken openly about his Christian faith, viewed the moment through a different lens.

"I'm just grateful," Slavin said shortly after the Stanley Cup win. "Grateful for the win, grateful for the opportunity to glorify God on this stage, biggest stage in hockey. Got to at the Olympics and now the

Stanley Cup. God's so kind. He gets all the glory. So I'm just thankful and grateful."

Slavin added that the gold medal and Stanley Cup are remarkable achievements, but not ultimate ones.

"It's pretty crazy. It's pretty crazy, but again, going to that perspective of 'Those things are definitely rewarding; it's amazing, but I can't take them with me when I die.' Just gonna lay them at the feet of Jesus and give Him all the glory for it."

Nearly a week after winning the Cup, that perspective remains unchanged.

"As much and as big of awards that they are, you also sit back and realize they don't fulfill you," Slavin said. "You can appreciate them for

how rewarding they are, but you can also understand that there's nothing like having that relationship with Jesus."

That perspective has been a hallmark of Slavin's career. Long regarded as one of the premier defensemen in the NHL, he has consistently spoken about playing for God's glory rather than his own. And that conviction was tested throughout the season.

Slavin battled injuries early in the year that sidelined him for roughly two months, then briefly again after his return in December. Despite the setbacks, he won gold with the U.S. Olympic team and helped Carolina capture the Stanley Cup. Yet he said neither adversity nor success altered his foundation.

"My faith has played the most important factor in all of it because ultimately my faith is what gives me my joy," Slavin said. "That relationship with Jesus is where my joy is found. It's not based on circumstances, on winning or losing or being healthy or being injured. My joy was complete the whole time, as complete as it could be this side of heaven. It wasn't something that wavered with my circumstances, it was something that was constant throughout my circumstances."

Slavin said the highs and lows of the season only deepened that reliance.

"It really just makes you lean into it more,

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Children, always obey your parents, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not aggravate your children, or they will become discouraged.
Colossians 4:20-21.

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He who has
the Son, has life.
1 John 5:12



Liberty

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sinner to give up their independence, deny themselves, submit to an alien will, and abandon all rights in order to be owned by and controlled by the Lord. By confessing Jesus as Lord (Kurios), we automatically confess that we are His slaves (douloi).

What does this mean in practical terms? To borrow the words of Edwin Yamauchi,

It means that we have been captured, beaten, and enslaved. We discover, however, that our captor is a Despot of love and mercy. Neither is there anything slavish or servile about our slavehood, for we have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear but the spirit of adoption (Romans 8:15). Nor has our reduction to slavery been a debasement or an abasement...We have been elevated to serve in a heavenly court and

have been invested with a higher nature.

... [It also] reminds us of our ransom from another master at an incredible price. It was not with the fabulous sums of all the royal estates we were bought, nor was it for handsome features or some prized skill we were purchased. But rather unlovely, without any merit, rebellious at heart, we were redeemed with the precious blood of the Master Himself.

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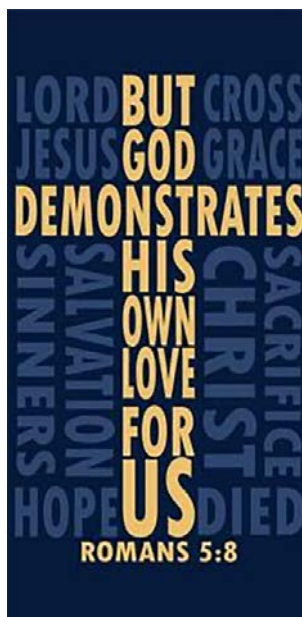
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and truly understand that joy is only found in the Lord," Slavin said.

Slavin is not alone in that perspective within the Carolina locker room.

Veteran captain Jordan Staal, who at 37 became the oldest player to win the Conn Smythe Trophy as the playoff MVP, has also reflected on the emptiness of chasing hockey success. Staal previously won a Stanley Cup with the Pittsburgh Penguins in 2009, and the 17 years between Stanley Cup championships is the longest gap in NHL history for a player. Staal was traded to Carolina in 2012.

"I really did have hockey as my identity, and it definitely pushed me to the player I was, but at the same time, it still left me empty," Staal told Hockey Ministries International in 2016. "I think I finally more or less realized that once

I made the NHL, and once I won the Stanley Cup (in 2009) and fulfilling all my dreams that I could ever think of, and then waking up a week later and realizing, 'That's it?' It didn't quite sit right at times.

"And now I understand, looking back, that hole that you might search for can only be filled by God. It's definitely something that's been nurturing in me and that I've tried to nurture and tried to grow in my faith and fill that hole with Jesus."

For Slavin, hearing teammates point to Christ in moments of success is one of the greatest encouragements of the season.

"You hear other guys in that locker room after the game giving glory to God, and it pumps you up," Slavin said. "It excites you. I'm out here battling with my brothers in Christ."

Slavin's influence in the locker room is perhaps most clearly seen in his relationship with fellow defenseman Jalen

Chatfield. Chatfield has described Slavin as both his best friend and a spiritual mentor, crediting him with helping him navigate the early stages of his Hurricanes career after beginning his NHL journey with the Vancouver Canucks.

After arriving in Carolina in 2021, Chatfield began attending chapel services and church with Slavin. Their friendship deepened over conversations about faith, eventually leading Chatfield and his wife, Drew, to profess faith in Christ and later be baptized by Slavin in the family's backyard pool.

"I had said before that if I never won a Stanley Cup in my career, but Jalen Chatfield came to know the Lord, I would consider that a successful career," Slavin said. "Now you can consider it a successful career in both aspects, right?"

Since arriving in North Carolina 11 years ago, Slavin has been part of Carolina's transformation from a rebuilding team into an annual Stanley Cup contender, culminating with this year's championship.

At the conclusion of the team's championship parade — which drew an estimated 180,000 people to downtown Raleigh on Saturday, June 20 — Slavin recalled a midweek home game during his rookie season in 2015 that only drew about 5,000 fans. Today, the Hurricanes regularly play before near-capacity crowds of roughly 18,500 fans per game.

Slavin also used the moment to point to what he says has remained most important to him throughout that journey.

"You guys know my faith is the most important thing to me," Slavin

told the crowd. "I give all the glory to God. I love this city, I love this team, and I can't wait to be a Hurricane for the rest of my life."

Since putting down roots in Raleigh, Slavin says he has experienced the depth of a church community he never fully knew growing up in Colorado as part of a busy hockey family. He attends The Summit Church and says he has found people there who support him not because he is an NHL star, but because he is a fellow brother in Christ.

"They're fans because I play for the team, but they're brothers and sisters in Christ that support me in prayer, that encourage me, that hold me accountable," Slavin said. "They don't see me as Jacob the hockey player. They see me as Jacob the person, Jacob the brother in Christ."

They want my faith to excel more than anything else."

As is tradition, each member of the Stanley Cup-winning team receives a day with the trophy during the off-season, allowing players to share it with family, friends and their community.

"I've been talking a lot about it with my wife," Slavin said. "We're trying to figure out the logistics, the details and all of that, but it will involve family, friends and good food. Just enjoying the day with it."

Following the Hurricanes' 2006 championship, former defenseman Glen Wesley took the Cup to his church in Cary during his day with the trophy.

"I don't know what we're going to land on," Slavin said. "But we brought up taking it to church, so we'll see."

God and a Day

*Consider but this single day's demands,
Its dower of work, its wage of smiles and tears!
So rich with opportunity it stands:
One day with God is as a thousand years.
But when the clock of time shall cease to beat,
And Heaven's high call our answering hearts obey,
There waits a service and a rest so sweet,
A thousand years shall pass as one bright day.*

By Edward A. Church

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