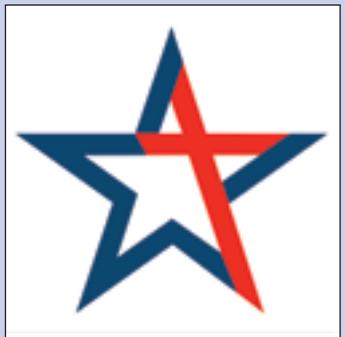


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ASSOCIATION

FIRE DESTROYS CHURCH BUILDING



By **JERRY FULTON**
Baptist Progress Editor

GILMER—At around 7:45 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 31, the Gilmer volunteer fire department, along with five other fire crews, responded to a fire at the Concord Missionary Baptist Church on Dahlia Road, near Gilmer. The church was a total

loss after crews worked for about three hours to put out the flames. There are no details on how the fire began and no injuries were reported.

Pastor Curtis Potter told *Baptist Progress* that even though the main church building was a total loss, there is a detached fellowship hall

on the church's property where the congregation will hold temporary services.

He said, "We have to wait for investigators to do their work before we can make any permanent decision."

The pastor said that the church

has received numerous offers of assistance from sister churches and fellow pastors for which they are very grateful.

A fund has been set up at the First National Bank in Gilmer to help with the church's rebuilding costs.



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By **JERRY FULTON**

A new year has arrived. With it comes numerous decisions. We will have various interactions with others in which we will have to decide how to respond. There will be some opportunities to which we will say yes and others to which we will say no. But have you ever stopped to ask yourself why you do what you do?

If we would be honest, a lot of our decisions to do something or refrain from doing it is based on our selfish desires. We sometimes do what we do because we want to produce something, possess something or provide something. While desiring to produce, possess and provide are not necessarily bad things, why we have those desires might very well be.

Do we want to be productive because we wish to be known for something? Do we want to possess things because of the esteem that we think comes with it? Do we want to provide things for others because it makes us feel good about ourselves? Why do we say yes to some opportunities and no to others? Why do we do what we do?

If we do things for any other reason but our love for God and others, we are wasting our time.

In order to do things because of love, we must first understand what biblical love is. The apostle Paul clearly describes love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. There he says, *“Love suffers long and is kind...”*

Do we easily give up on others and put our interests before those of others or are we truly patient and kind in our dealings with them?

Understanding biblical love helps us to know how to respond to others. Paul continues, *“...love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.”*

Paul’s words were written to a dysfunctional church whose members envied one another, were boastful and prideful, self-centered in arguments and lawsuits and even rude in the way they took the Lord’s Supper. He makes the case that love is not behind any such attitudes and behaviors.

Real love is patient, kind, free of envy and pride, selfless and not easily angered. It celebrates the victories of others and puts up with a lot.

Let’s be sure to practice the kind of love that Paul talks about in the new year and respond to each other in patient, kind, selfless ways.

I’m convinced that love should be the reason why we do what we do, and if it is, we will experience a blessed 2017. Happy New Year!



▲ Jerry Fulton

BAPTIST PROGRESS MINISTRY CONNECTION WORKSHOP

MARCH 9, 2017

*Would you like to prepare better sermons?
Well, here's your opportunity to learn how.*

BRO. JERRY BURNAMAN WILL PRESENT

“Patterns for Preaching”

from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Thursday, March 9, 2017.

The workshop will be held at the BMA of Texas Building at 632 Farley Street in Waxahachie. There is no cost for the workshop, but registration is required. Lunch will be provided. To register go to www.baptistprogress.org/registration1.html or call 972-923-0756.

Q & A Christian

GOT QUESTIONS?

Question:

"WHAT SORT OF NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION SHOULD A CHRISTIAN MAKE?"

Answer:

The practice of making New Year's resolutions goes back over 3,000 years to the ancient Babylonians. There is just something about the start of a new year that gives us the feeling of a fresh start and a new beginning. In reality, there is no difference between December 31 and January 1. Nothing mystical occurs at midnight on December 31. The Bible does not speak for or against the concept of New Year's resolutions. However, if a Christian determines to make a New Year's resolution, what kind of resolution should he or she make?

Common New Year's resolutions are commitments to quit smoking, to stop drinking, to manage money more wisely, and to spend more time with family. By far, the most common New Year's resolution is to lose weight, in conjunction with exercising more and eating more healthily. These are all good goals to set. However, 1 Timothy 4:8 instructs us to keep exercise in perspective: "For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come." The vast majority of New Year's resolutions, even among Christians, are in relation to physical things. This should not be.

Many Christians make New Year's resolutions to pray more, to read the Bible every day, and to attend church more regularly. These are fantastic goals. However, these New Year's resolutions fail just as often as the non-spiritual resolutions, because there is no power in a New Year's resolution. Resolving to start or stop doing a certain activity has no value unless you have the proper motivation for stopping or

starting that activity. For example, why do you want to read the Bible every day? Is it to honor God and grow spiritually, or is it because you have just heard that it is a good thing to do? Why do you want to lose weight? Is it to honor God with your body, or is it for vanity, to honor yourself?

Philippians 4:13 tells us, "I can do everything through Him who gives me strength." John 15:5 declares, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." If God is the center of your New Year's resolution, it has chance for success, depending on your commitment to it. If it is God's will for something to be fulfilled, He will enable you to fulfill it. If a resolution is not God honoring and/or is not in agreement in God's Word, we will not receive God's help in fulfilling the resolution.

So, what sort of New Year's resolution should a Christian make? Here are some suggestions: (1) pray to the Lord for wisdom (James 1:5) in regards to what resolutions, if any, He would have you make; (2) pray for wisdom as to how to fulfill the goals God gives you; (3) rely on God's strength to help you; (4) find an accountability partner who will help you and encourage you; (5) don't become discouraged with occasional failures; instead, allow them to motivate you further; (6) don't become proud or vain, but give God the glory. Psalm 37:5-6 says, "Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun."

Reprinted by permission from GotQuestions.org



I cried for days—praying as I packed that I could understand why this was necessary, and asking God to make me adequate for the big transition ahead. What was I thinking? God didn't owe me an answer to either request. And even if He had chosen to share His reasons, my heart was not listening. I simply couldn't stop looking back. It didn't make sense. We had invested our lives and given our hearts to a precious church family, loving and sharing life with them for seven years. And without a doubt, God had changed all our lives in the process. We started this ministry begging God to keep our sweet church together and to make us a strong, vibrant witness for Him once again. And that's exactly what He did, proving Himself faithful every step of the way. When we were in the "valley" or on the "mountain top," God was there, giving new hope, new life and a new vision to our church—and to us as well!

Now we were leaving. And I didn't want to go. For 365 miles (or so it seemed) I couldn't take my eyes off the rearview mirror. As we drove away from our dear friends in Amarillo, Texas, to our new home and new ministry in the Dallas/Ft. Worth area, I was sad. And I'm ashamed to say, I worked hard at staying sad for several months.

The truth is, seven years before I had felt the same way about packing up and moving away from our friends and church family in deep East Texas. That time it was 500 miles!

You see the trend. The distance doesn't really matter. I just hate saying goodbye to people I love, and in addition to that sense of great loss, I always have doubts. And questions. What will our new assignment be like? Will I fit in? Will there be a place for me to serve? Will they like and accept me? You're right! That is silly, immature, youthful thinking which, if allowed to continue, never ends well. I know because I've been down that road before.

This time He used our 5 year old son to deliver the message. I was having a melancholy morning with thoughts of past friends and lonely moments when, out of the blue, John Mark said: "Mom are you going to cry again?"

How could he have known? I wondered. And at the same time it totally irritated me to be called out by my young son. New resolve swelled up on the inside as I responded with a defiant attitude: "No I am not going to cry!" And off I marched to find my Bible. . . not to study, but simply to find a soothing answer for my hurting heart. Today I needed help! Grabbing my Bible, it opened to 1 Thessalonians 5 and I began to read. These were good words, but not exactly what I was looking for. Then I came to verse 16 about being joyful and verse 17 which said to pray and don't stop. This didn't help either because I didn't feel like doing either of those things. Verse 18 wasn't any better. In fact, it seemed more difficult—even impossible. Paul was suggesting that I give thanks in everything because this was God's will. I definitely could not do that and tried to quickly move on, but my eyes seemed glued to the page. Literally. So I read. I argued. And I re-read the verse until the tears began to flow. Pictures of my sweet family and dear friends filled my mind. Ministry opportunities and God's provision every step of the way came into full focus. How had I been so blind? Of course I had MANY things for which I could thank God! And that's exactly what I did! The result? A breathtaking awareness of God's presence settled over me, followed by a fresh reminder of His promise that He would never leave me alone—not ever! And that I am never ON MY OWN with any assignment He gives.

Sometimes looking back can be good. This important day in my life happened four decades ago, and the message still rings loud and clear in my mind and heart. God is faithful! Always has been. Always will be. In spite of our circumstances and regardless of our challenge, this is true!

And that's good news! The prospects of this new year may seem daunting for some; exciting for others. The truth is, all of us will have our own mix of good and bad. It's not what happens TO us, but quite possibly what God is doing IN us and what He will do THROUGH us that's important. When we dwell on that, our joy will be full to overflowing, spilling out and blessing everyone who crosses our path. That's my prayer for this new year! Wishing you a JOY-filled 2017!

Pat Quesenbury has been active in ladies' ministry for years. She is a pastor's wife, mother and active member of the Women's Missionary Auxiliary. Contact her at pquesenbury@gmail.com.



BMA of america



Mardi Gras Mission update

By **HOLLY MERIWEATHER**

BMAA Missions

BMA Missions is teaming with Campground Baptist Church in Gulfport, Mississippi, to offer a special short-term mission trip that is close to home and affordable to BMA church members. Since 2004, Campground has done mission work in their area during Mardi Gras season. Campground Pastor Bryan Atwood says, "It is the greatest gathering of lost people in one place in our area all year. We want to invite you to come help us."

A mandatory training session will begin at 7 p.m. on Friday, Feb. 24. On Saturday, teams will serve at the parades in the morning, and those who can will serve at the parade in the afternoon. (All Mardi Gras parades will be on Saturday, Feb. 25.) The \$35 registration fee will provide everything for the trip including a snack Friday night, breakfast on Saturday, accommodations at the campground, a team shirt, and Bibles to hand out at the parade.

BMA Missions offers many short-term trips throughout the year through Baptist Medical Missions International and Volunteer Student Missions. This is another opportunity for BMA churches to introduce their people to evangelism and hands-on missions.

Spots are limited, so register now at www.bmamissions.org/mardigrasmission. For more information contact Angela Rice at angela@bmamissions.org or 501-455-4977.

Liberty Association hosts rally for seminary

By **CHARLES JOHNSON**

Pastor of Rosewood, Gilmer

GILMER—Liberty Baptist Missionary Association hosted a rally for the Baptist Missionary Association Theological Seminary Dec. 15, at Pine Acres, Gilmer where Bro. Michael Manis is the pastor. Represented at the meeting were 13 churches.

Following the business session led by Liberty moderator Leon Ross, Dr. Charley Holmes, seminary president, presented the work of the seminary department and the current status of the school. Two current seminary students, Jarod Shaw and Christian Israel Martinez-Gonzalez, gave their testimonies of their calls and how the seminary is helping them fulfill those callings.

Dr. Holmes preached from I Corinthians 4:6 and Ephesians 3:20, 21 concerning "Why We Are Associational Baptists." He noted the principles of Baptists traced all the way back to the New Testament churches in the Bible, but made specific emphasis on the development of associational Baptist trends in England and the United States. He showed how some Baptists insisted on "staying within the bounds of the Scriptures" in their practices.

A generous offering was received for the seminary. Following the service, the host church provided a variety of delicious refreshments for the messengers.

The threat to Religious Liberty



By **DR. JOHN M. ADAMS**

BMAA Moral Action

There is now a large threat to religious liberty that exists in America's armed services. Military life has always had strong ties to God's churches and chapels down through the years of American life. From George Washington until modern day God has had a great presence. But now in recent years there has been a satanic effort to remove any religious/Christian expression in military life.

From the book, "A Clear and Present Danger", we present in behalf of Moral Action and the Family Research Council a list of events against religious liberty. We must pray for our military and leaders.

2011—WALTER REED MEDICAL CENTER BANS BIBLES AND RELIGIOUS MATERIAL

Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, the leading medical institution for the U.S. armed forces, issued an official patient and visitor policy banning Bibles. It stated, "No religious items (i.e. Bibles, reading material, and/or artifacts) are allowed to be given away or used during a visit." In December 2011, the policy was rescinded after a political firestorm erupted in the House of Representatives.

FEB. 7, 2012—AIR FORCE REMOVES "GOD" FROM UNIT'S LOGO

The Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers complained to the Air Force about a logo from the Rapid Capabilities Office. It read in Latin "Doing God's Work with Other People's Money" and was changed to "Doing Miracles with Other People's Money." Rep. Randy Forbes (R-Virginia) and 35 other lawmakers sent a letter to Air Force Secretary Michael Donley and Air Force Chief of Staff Norton Schwartz demanding an explanation for the removal of a non-religious reference to God. The Air Force said they would investigate.

JUNE 15, 2013—A SOLDIER IS PUNISHED FOR SERVING CHICK-FIL-A

Army Master Sergeant, Nathan Sommers, was punished for serving Chick-fil-A sandwiches at his own promotion party in honor of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). Sommers was investigated, reprimanded, threatened with judicial action, and given a bad efficiency report. The invitation said, "In honor of my promotion and in honor of the Defense of Marriage Act, I'm serving Chick-fil-A sandwiches at my promotion party." Sommers was told that "he was no longer a team player and was not performing up to standards." Chick-fil-A and DOMA were frowned upon.

MORAL ACTION continued on p. 15

WILL YOU JOIN US IN REACHING THE NATIONS FOR CHRIST?

BMA Missions is sending and God is blessing. With over 70 US missionary families and hundreds of national missionaries in over 70 countries and 5 continents, God is blessing. Churches are being planted. Leaders are being raised. Disciples are being made. God is blessing. Will you consider becoming part of our team? Thirty percent of the World Missions Fund is raised through our World Missions Day program. Pray with us that through your support, HIS Kingdom will be greatly expanded!

**JOIN YOUR CHURCH ON SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 26,
IN SUPPORTING WORLD MISSIONS DAY
OR DONATE DIRECTLY YOUR ONE-TIME GIFT
OR RECURRING SUPPORT TO:**



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P.O. BOX 878 • CONWAY, AR 72033



Excited for what God has in store

By **HEITH MITCHELL**

I couldn't be more excited about what God has in store for your BMA of Texas Mission Movement in 2017. He blew me away in 2016 with:

- 18 Missions underway in English and Spanish
- New Missions underway in Houston, Benbrook and Nacogdoches
- 3 interns preparing to start new churches this year
- He provided the funds necessary to take care of these missionaries, associates and interns
- Training and coaching necessary to help these missions succeed

God has chosen to use us to do our part in reaching the 27 million Texans who need Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. This task is bigger than our association but we have an important part to play. God is using us and other mission movements like us to build his Kingdom. I believe we have an important and unique roll and I also believe he is empowering and equipping us to do it.

OUR VISION CONTINUES TO BE:

Equipping Missionaries who follow Christ in building Missional Churches with the support and intimate involvement of local BMA Churches.

OUR GOAL WE ARE PRAYING FOR IS:

16 new Texas missions underway at a time and a Hispanic work alongside every BMA church that has a burden to reach Hispanic people in their community.

We are honored to assist you and your church in making disciples across the state of Texas. We have seen this year that "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few." Matthew 9:37b God is at work! He is doing this work through you and your church thanks to your involvement, support, and prayers.

A WORD FROM YOUR MISSIONARIES

DARREN LEMONS – THE REFUGE CHURCH, TERRELL

Thank you! Thank You! You have helped us reach our goal of being self-funded. Sometimes you question whether or not giving to Missions to help with churches is working. We are a witness to your offerings and prayers helping. We would not be where we are today with many churches and individuals helping fund us. Also, we would not be where we were at without God blessing us. Please continue to pray for us as this is a giant leap towards where we fill God wants us to be as a church. Our goal is to start other churches and support new missions work as we continue to grow. Once again, Thank you!!



▲ Darren Lemons

ARNULFO MALDONADO – TEXAS HISPANIC MISSION COORDINATOR

My January calendar is full with visits all over Texas looking for future leaders and pastors. Many of these visits are with churches that would be willing to partner with us in fulfilling the great commission. The new church planters Neptaly Molina in Nacogdoches, George Garcia in Spring, and Fernando Duran in downtown Houston are doing well. Intern Christian Martinez is off to a good start in Jacksonville. Each of them are doing well in the areas of evangelism and disciple making. Praise the Lord!



▲ Arnulfo Maldonado

GARY SOUTHARD – THE CHURCH AT VALLEY RANCH, PORTER

We look forward to the new year as we get back from all the holiday festivities. We constantly have first time visitors on Sunday morning.

God has seen fit to bless us with some new people these last few weeks. Most are single individuals or moms with their small children. We are grateful as we have work in assisting to restore families with their walk with God.



▲ Gary Southard

We are starting to see our Home Group meetings pick up in attendance. We currently meet in two homes - one on Tuesday evening and the other on Wednesday. It will not be long that we will need to go to a third Home Group meeting.

I am praying we can start one in our local apartment complex called The Villas at Valley Ranch. We have one individual living in the complex.

MATTHEW PRATHER – THE BRIDGE MISSION, MIDLOTHIAN

The month of December is a hectic time for a new church that is moving toward launch. We continue to meet new people as we are building our launch team and having monthly Sneak Peek Services. It is great to see more new faces and building relationships with them and doing everything we can to impact them with the Gospel. In the month of January we are planning to start our third small group that meets in homes for bible study. There are several ways you can be praying for us. First, that we would add five more new families to our launch team. Second, pray for our third small group that will be starting soon. Last,



▲ Matthew Prather

please pray that we find a consistent location that we can meet in and afford. We have received many no's when looking for a location but know through prayer God can and will provide what we need. Thank you so much for your continued prayer and support.

RICK SYDNOR – LIFE CHANGE MISSION, LINDALE

Isaiah 61:1 is my prayer for 2017. "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners."



▲ Rick Sydnor

JOHN HARRIS – FOUNDATION COMMUNITY MISSION, BENBROOK

Be praying for us as we begin a *War On Debt* program in the community, and continue building relationships in our immediate neighborhood. God has answered some prayers for us this month, and we are looking for more as He leads us!



▲ John Harris

WILL HUTCHINSON – RESONATE COMMUNITY MISSION, HUTTO

December was a great month for us in Hutto. We have so many exciting ministries kicking off for the new year. Our Small groups are starting the first of January, with a bang. Our ladies will be starting some amazing group trips. Starting with a trip to Cornerstone, Jacksonville for the *She Laughs Conference*. We will be handing out warm clothing and supplies Jan. 14th in Austin to the homeless there, and we partnered with 3 other local churches for Hutto's first community prayer night. We focused on our police and fire departments for this meeting and will host more of these thru the year.

Please pray with us as we are seeking a minister to join us here. In 2017 Hutto will reach the 25,000 mark in population. This is a huge milestone for our community. Recently the city did a survey and 80 percent of our population stated they have no religion. This fits everything we have learned in our short time here and with church attendance around our community. Please pray God will continue to open hearts to us as we share our faith. God has given us amazing people to work with here and we pray constantly for our relationship with the community.



▲ Will Hutchinson



insights for pastors

A successful church

By DR. ALLEN TILLEY

Church growth is an act of God. Jesus made it clear in Matthew 16:18 that He is the builder of His church. That's why I've grown accustomed to saying, "The Lord has blessed my church in spite of me than because of me. I'm also convinced that sometimes we unintentionally do things that unnecessarily keep our churches small. Over the years, here is what I've learned about church growth.

Stay out of God's way. God wants all of His churches to grow, not only numerically, but in obedience to His Word. His church is His plan to redeem our fallen world. How can we stay out of God's way so our churches will grow? Seek Him first in all things. Make His Word, not our preferences, our highest priority. Give Him all the credit. And, remember it is not about you; it's all about Him. Anytime our wishes or personalities take preeminence, we lose His blessings.

Include everyone. The church doesn't belong to the pastor, or the deacons, or a select few. The church belongs to all its members, so incorporate ways for all the members of your church to become engaged. When people have a role,

they develop feelings of belonging and responsibility.

For our church, we've done away with committees by establishing ministry action teams (mats). The function of a committee is to bring back a report to a governing body or the church. On the other hand, mats are free to exercise their ministry, spend their portion of the church budget, and enlist others in achieving their goals.

Develop a budget. Too many churches treat their church budget like a checking account ledger, only recording what is spent. A church budget is forged out of the church's mission statement and includes a forecast of contributions and expenses of the church, broken down into four main areas: contributions, ministry expenses, ministers expenses, and missions giving. A budget is proactive instead of reactive because it tells people how much they can spend instead of telling them they spent too much. Keeping conflicts to a minimum, budgets encourage the work of the ministry.

Set people free to worship. God loves variety. Just look at the people in your congregation and you will see shapes, sizes, and personalities of all kinds. A look at creation also

tells us that God loves variety. Why then do we think there is only one way to worship? Instead of forcing people into a mold, let them worship as God created them. Include all styles of worship in your services. As long as hearts are lifted up to Him, I doubt very little that God cares whether it is the result of a hymn or chorus.

Be patient. I tell young pastors that pastoring an established church is like steering a large cruise ship. You can turn the large ship, but you must do so slowly. Change is more readily acceptable when it occurs slowly. If you change too much or change too fast, you not only destroy the church, but you destroy lives.

Dr. Allen Tilley is pastor of First Baptist Church of Carthage, Texas. He has over 30 years of pastoral experience, and God has continually blessed his ministry with dynamic spiritual and numerical growth. Contact him at allen@firstbaptistcarthage.com.



**Registration for
the free online class
for spring is now available.**



BMA SEMINARY
Christ-centered since 1955

- So you are a new church worker, a new deacon, a new Sunday School teacher, a new youth worker, or any newly selected worker in your church. You feel you are in need of more information and study of the Scriptures to help you do your work.
- Here is the FREE course you have been looking for. Baptist Missionary Association Theological Seminary is providing you a FREE course this Spring. All you need to do is sign up at the seminary website, purchase the book (listed below) and begin your eight-week study of the New Testament.
- What is the course about? Glad you asked that question. Here is a brief synopsis: This course is a survey of the entire New Testament. The general background, authorship, and content of the various books of the New Testament are

covered. The life and work of Jesus, the organization of churches and early missionary enterprises are especially stressed.

- Your place in this class is waiting for you. Class will begin on or about February 1, 2017.
- **TEXTBOOKS:** (Textbooks required)
The Holy Bible-Student selected English translation
Encountering the New Testament, 2nd edition Walter A. Elwell and Robert W. Yarbrough, Baker Books, ISBN 0801021561 (any edition new or used) (Text outline used by permission of Contracts and Permissions, Baker Publishing Group.)
Supplemental atlas suggested (not required):
Holman Bible Atlas, Broadman and Holman Publishers, ISBN 1558197095

Please follow the link below to fill out the registration form.
<http://bmats.edu/other-educational-opportunities/free-courses/>

You may also contact the Seminary by phone:
903-586-2501/1-800-259-5673



church health

10 steps to make the most of 2017

By LARRY BARKER

Another year, 2017, is here and 2016 is part of history. Where does your church go from here and how do you enter this new open door of opportunity? There is a place for planning and strategy as you prayerfully seek what the Lord has for your ministry. Here are some thoughts about how to approach the new year so that you can intentionally lead those of whom God has given you the oversight.

First, plan a prayer retreat as soon as possible! If you have not already planned some time alone to seek God's face and ask Him for direction, do it now. You must be very practical about this and pull out your calendar to schedule it. If you do not block the time off, it will not happen. A prayer retreat has been defined as "a time you set aside to go away and be alone with God." You may want to fast from food but especially fast from your phone, the internet and social media. Be still so you can hear His voice.

Second, utilize the S.W.O.T. analysis to determine where you are. Be willing to evaluate 2016 with other leaders in your church and determine your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (or challenges). Every church has strengths and it is good to celebrate what you are doing well. Yes, look at your weaknesses and challenges but do not overlook where God is blessing and be thankful for what He is doing in your midst. Then begin to focus on where you can improve in 2017 to be the church Christ designed you to be.

Third, become strategic and intentional. What practices do you need to put in place to accomplish what you believe God is leading you to fulfill? We say we value certain things like evangelism and discipleship but are there consistent patterns evident in our lives that support what we say we value? If people look at our schedules can they tell we value these things? If an outsider looks at our church budget what would they say your church values?

Fourth, remember that church culture begins to change with the language we use. Do you have a clear, concise and simple mission statement? Have you developed a simple strategy that clearly articulates how you plan to carry out that mission statement? A mission statement is not a fix everything solution but it is a great place to begin the journey. We must remind

our congregation regularly that God is able to do above and beyond all we think and even beyond what we can imagine.

Fifth, schedule a leadership-planning meeting to cast the vision for the future. There are several components that need to be a part of this process. This is a wonderful opportunity to hear from everyone about what they think should be the church's focus. There are some helpful guidelines to follow but do not be afraid of constructive criticism and input. A creative think tank approach can accomplish great things. There should always be honest transparency with your leadership or you will never be able to move forward.

Sixth, determine some strategic imperatives that prioritize what you must focus on first. What are 3-5 items that you feel must be focused upon first? Be sure to remain focused on God's heart and where the Holy Spirit is working right now. What are the "most" important things you must do to achieve your vision. We are assuming at this point that you know why you exist and what you desire to accomplish as a church. Make a list of what your leadership believes are imperatives and narrow it down to three to five.

Seventh, develop goals for each of these imperatives to move you forward in reaching them. These imperatives can be new ministries, improving present ministries, or even stopping unproductive ministries. The key here is to list at least three goals for each strategic imperative that will help to make them a reality and not just an idea. You need to know what you need to know but that is only information. You also need to be passionate about that information but that is only inspiration. Involving the head and the heart is necessary but the next step through goals is involving the hands and the feet.

Eighth, designate what needs to be done and who is responsible for making sure it happens. This is where leadership can really drop the ball. Committees tend to be a group of people not involved in a particular ministry telling those who are involved what to do. Leadership teams always focus on what needs to be done and who is responsible. You must determine measurable objectives and then assign who is responsible for making sure it happens. Values are good but values with goals are even



better.

Ninth, develop the leaders around you by giving them the resources they need. We say we want to develop more leaders but how much time are we actually spending doing that? We say we value defining and developing leaders but no mentoring or apprenticeship is occurring. The process is clear in the word of God that everyone needs a Paul as a mentor and then they need to find a Timothy to mentor. Find receptive, willing, and teachable potential leaders. Then develop a process to intentionally and consistently train them.

Tenth, seek others outside of your church and ministry to help. There is something to be said about "outside" eyes. We know the scriptures tell us that there is wisdom in the multitude of counsel. Somebody knows what you need to know, so find him or her and find out what they know. Somebody has been through what you are going through so listen to his or her story and learn from it. Somebody has been where you want to go so find out what that looked like for them. These godly advisors can talk you in off the ledge or they can motivate you to take that step of faith that you need to take.

Healthy churches lead prayerfully, intentionally and strategically!

Larry Barker is the pastor of Cornerstone, Jacksonville. He also serves as the operations director for North American Missions. For more information or to contact him, visit www.bmamissions.org.





Randy Decker

AS NEW DIRECTOR OF THE JC MUSIC PROGRAM



By **DR. MIKE SMITH**
Jacksonville College President

Beginning in the spring semester of 2017, Randy Decker will be the director of the historic, choral music program at Jacksonville College. Randy, a former student of long-time director Gerald Orr, accepted this position after the announced retirement of current director Tim Timmons. Randy was once a student of Gerald Orr, and the two will be working together again 40 years later.

Randy's arrival on the campus of Jacksonville College in the fall of 1974 changed the direction of his life. Upon becoming a member of the choir, he discovered an untapped passion for music and transitioned from pursuing civil engineering to music education. At JC, students frequently discover their love for music, make career changes, and become lifelong participants and leaders in church and school music programs. This is the legacy that Randy hopes to continue.

After singing in the choirs and ensembles at Jacksonville College, Randy completed his formal music education at Dallas Baptist University. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Music Education with All-Level Music Certification from DBU, a master's degree in education from Stephen F. Austin University, and additional Texas certifications as a math teacher and principal.

When asked about his educational background, Randy said, "I received quality instruction while at Jacksonville College and Dallas Baptist University. In the musician's world, one is usually shaped more by mentors than by performance experiences. From Gerald Orr and Jacksonville College I learned that choral music can be a very personal experience and offers tremendous opportunities. I knew nothing about choir, but a whole new world was offered me as we travelled from coast to coast singing great music, deepening lifelong friendships, and meeting thousands of wonderful people. I was truly in the right place at the right time. From Dr. Wesley Coffman and my piano instructors at DBU, I learned the craft of making music. Musicianship, text and context, phrasing, and vocal technique were developed as I completed my formal music education. My time working in Jacksonville ISD with Larry Cigainero reinforced all I knew about the value of hard work. While there, I was introduced to the world of competitive music in Texas. My grounding in the fundamentals and my approach to music preparation is based on emulating those things he did to achieve such amazing degrees of consistent excellence. He treated me like an equal when I wasn't worthy to carry his notepad. I will forever be grateful to all three of my mentors and the experiences they afforded me. They were more than just my teachers and mentors; they were and are dear friends."

Randy taught choir at both the junior high and high school levels for twenty-five years at Jacksonville High School and Middle School, Bryan Adams High in Dallas, Mt. Pleasant High, and Gilmer Junior High and High School. His students consistently performed with excellence in choral and individual performances, shows, and competitions. As a result, they received numerous awards and recognition. While he is proud of the trophies and recognition received in both group and individual competitions, he takes greatest pride in seeing so many students develop into outstanding men and women.

In addition to his work as a teacher/director, Randy served the Texas Music Educators Association as Vocal Chair, Region Vice-President, and State Music Advisory Board member for approximately 12 years of his career. Randy also composed and arranged many pieces that

were performed by his junior high choirs in U.I.L. competition. He has written many sight-reading pieces used in Texas Music Educators vocal competitions as well. Randy was also active in leadership on the high school campus while in Mt. Pleasant Texas. He was selected by his peers as president of the site-based committee for Mt. Pleasant High. Their work over a two-year period and the campus wide improvements in academic achievement resulted in national recognition and an opportunity to present a workshop at the National Accelerated Schools Conference in St. Louis.

Randy served on church staff in the areas of youth and/or music while at First Baptist Church of Ennis, First Missionary Baptist in Terrell, Calvary Baptist in Jacksonville, and Walnut Street Baptist Church in Winnsboro. He was ordained as a deacon while a member of First Baptist Church of Gilmer. He currently serves as Minister of Music at Tundra Baptist Church in Canton.

Randy has maintained an active connection with Jacksonville College for 40 years through the Jacksonville College Alumni Association. He served as president of the Bearden-Bonner-Gaylor Chapter and a member of the Executive Council of the Alumni Association for most of the last 10 years. He has also volunteered many hours during the summer special projects programs. Randy currently serves as Director of Alumni Relations, a position he will maintain on a part-time basis in addition to his duties as choral director.

When asked about the opportunity to return to his alma mater, Randy said, "Mine is the story of a son returning after many years to work in the family business. I was meant to be a teacher. I was meant to be a choral director. I was meant to have the Jacksonville College experience. I was meant to share the Jacksonville College experience. There is an amazing energy on this campus. New opportunities are being developed across the board even as the century old focus of our school is being reinforced. These are great days to be a part of Jacksonville College."

Randy is the eldest child of Rev. and Mrs. George Decker. Bro. George pastored at East Center Baptist Church in Grand Saline while studying at Jacksonville College. He pastored Tundra Baptist Church for 11 years while that historic church was transforming from a little rural church of about twenty to one of the strongest churches in our work. Randy was raised in that little farming community south of Canton and gives credit to those blue-collar folks for shaping his life and work ethic.

His mother, Joan, has been very active in the BMA with her support of Bro. George's ministry, work with the GMAs, and involvement in the WMA. Randy's brother Jerry and sister-in-law Sherry Decker (current President of Texas WMA) met at Jacksonville College.

Randy is married to Gay Lynn Decker, his wife of 36 years. Gay is an RN whose work history includes 16 years as a visiting nurse and 20 years as a community outreach educator and nurse educator. Their son, Ryan, is a design engineer for Bell Helicopter. He, his wife Katie, and daughters Chloe and Ellie live in Amarillo, Texas. Randy and Gay's daughter, Melissa Moulton, and her husband, Mike, live in Texarkana, Texas with their son, Jeremiah. Melissa works in marketing and graphic design and was the third generation Decker to attend Jacksonville College. Prayers are already being offered for the fourth generation.

HOMECOMING 2017 ACTIVITIES ANNOUNCED

By **RANDY DECKER**

Jacksonville College Director of Alumni Relations

Mark your calendar for Jacksonville College's Homecoming 2017. The two-day event will take place on February 17 and 18 on the JC campus and at various locations around Jacksonville.

I am excited to announce that this year we will celebrate the ministry of Gerald Orr and his legacy. Bro. Orr arrived on our campus 55 years ago, and he continues today as our teacher and mentor. The primary emphasis of this celebration will be the assembling of an alumni choir under his direction. There is nothing more meaningful for a choir director than having his former students want to sing under his direction again. In addition to the traditional singing of the "Hallelujah Chorus" at the end of the Saturday morning event, Bro. Orr has chosen to lead Wilhousky's "Battle Hymn of the Republic" and is in the process of selecting a third piece.

The second part of the tribute will involve compiling pictures, personal notes, and letters of thanks from former students to create books of memories for Bro. Orr. Details for submissions are available by contacting Jean Galyean in the alumni office at jgalyean@jacksonville-college.edu or (903) 589-7143. In addition, our alumni web page, Facebook pages, and emails also include a Homecoming RSVP form with an opportunity to become involved with the twofold effort.

Once again, we are reaching out to our decades groups. An emphasis is being placed on contacting alumni who attended JC in the years ending in 7 (1937, 1947, 1957, 1967, 1977, 1987, 1997, and 2007). Last year's group of 6's brought in approximately 400 people over the two days, and we are hoping for more than 500 this year. We will also have the opportunity to crown our Coming Home Royalty. It is always a joy to honor those who exhibit an enduring love for and service to our college.

Get on the phone, make those connections, and come home and see the amazing things taking place at Jacksonville College. For more information and to become involved in this year's Homecoming Celebration, call the Office of Alumni Relations at (903) 589-7143, email us at rdecker@jacksonville-college.edu or jgalyean@jacksonville-college.edu, or visit the alumni web page at jacksonville-college.edu/alumni.

JAG MANIA 2017: SENIOR PREVIEW DAY

Pastors, church staff, parents, alumni, and friends are encouraged to bring high school seniors to Jacksonville College on February 18 for Jag Mania 2017. Attendees will meet faculty, staff, and current students and have the opportunity to ask questions, see the dorms, and interact with other prospective classmates. In addition, auditions will be scheduled for those who want to be considered for choir or theater participation and possible scholarships.

For more information and to register online, visit www.jacksonville-college.edu/jag-mania.

HOMECOMING 2017 LODGING ACCOMMODATIONS *in Jacksonville*

Rooms will be offered at a discounted price. To receive this rate, call the hotel directly and ask for the Jacksonville College Alumni Homecoming rate.

EXECUTIVE INN

1848 S. Jackson

(903) 589-8500

\$58 + tax (King or 2 Queens)

Includes breakfast and a visiting area for groups available in the dining area.

No elevator, so specify ground floor room, if needed.

BEST WESTERN

1659 S. Jackson

(903) 586-0007

\$69.99 + tax (King or 2 Queens)—

Extra \$5 per person if more than 2 guests

Includes a full hot breakfast and an indoor swimming pool. An elevator is available.

LAQUINTA INN AND SUITES

1902 S. Jackson

(903) 586-6504

\$69 + tax (\$77.97)—King or 2 Queens

Includes a full hot breakfast, indoor swimming pool, and a visiting area available in the dining area.

An elevator is available.

HOLIDAY INN EXPRESS

1923 S. Jackson

(903) 589-8900

\$89.99 + tax (King or 2 Queens)

Includes breakfast and an indoor swimming pool.

An elevator is available.

68th Annual Meeting of the BMA of America



Greetings to the churches of the BMA of America!

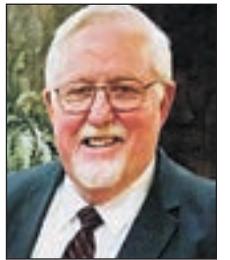
Well it is nearing that time of the year when we have the opportunity to gather and conduct the Lord's business as an Association. This note is to remind each one that this May 1-3 has been set aside as the time for our 2017 annual meeting to convene in Arlington, Texas. It is my prayer that God will continue to bless all of our departments, agencies and churches. I hope you are already making plans for your church to be represented at this year's meeting.

Again this year you will be given the opportunity to choose between several great breakout sessions presented this year by our National departments and agencies. It is the desire of your officers and those involved in planning to provide you with materials and practical instruction that you will be able to use in your respective fields of service. Of course, these are provided in addition to

the times of conducting business and opportunities to gather for worship.

Please review the enclosed preliminary schedule of this year's meeting. This will help you in your planning and travel schedule.

Remember, this year's theme "Brick by Brick" is built around teamwork with the emphasis on increasing our attendance for the purpose of strengthening every area of our ministry. Make plans now to join us and may God bless every aspect of our time together.



In His Service,
Paul White
BMAA President

68th Annual BMA of America National Meeting

May 1-3, 2017

Arlington Convention Center
Arlington, Texas

Program

Monday Morning, May 1

8:30 Display/Exhibit Set-up
2:30 Registration Set-up (Enrollment and Finance Committee)

Monday Evening, May 1

7:00 General Session — 1
President's Message Paul White

Tuesday Morning, May 2

8:00 Brotherhood Meeting Room: M7 & M5
9:00 WMA Meeting Room: Grand Hall Salon A
9:30 Committee Meetings
DiscipleGuide Room: M1
Lifeword Room: M2
Missions Room: M4
Moral Action Room: M9
Seminary Room: M10
Nominating Committee Room: M11

10:00 Women's Conference
Topic: "When Life Gives You Lemons... Grace Wins"

11:00 Breakout Sessions
1: Missions Spending in the Local Church Room: M1
2: Disciple-Making Churches Room: M9
3: Honoring God With Our Finances During Life & Beyond Room: M5
4: BMA Retirement at Ministers Resources Services Room: M7

Tuesday Afternoon, May 2

2:00 Breakout Sessions
1: Missions Spending in the Local Church Room: M1
2: Disciple-Making Churches Room: M9
3: Understanding the Times Room: M3-4
4: So You Want to Go to School Room: M12-12

3:00 General Session — 2

Reporting:
BMA Foundation
Master's Builders
DiscipleGuide
Brotherhood
5:30 Seminary Dinner Room M5-6

General Sessions Grand hall Salon A
Registration Outside of Grand Hall
Exhibits Grand Hall Salon B

Tuesday Evening, May 2

7:00 General Session — 3
Congregational Singing
Special Music Samantha Pamish
Introduction of Speaker Terry Kimbrow
Annual Message Donny Pamish
Hand of Appreciation Richard Smith

Wednesday Morning, May 3

8:30 General Session — 4
Reporting
Seminary
Lifeword
Ministers Resource Services
11:00 Breakout Sessions
1: Understanding the Times Room: M1-4
2: Defending the Faith with Ancient Documents Room: M9-12
3: How Individuals and Churches can Influence Their Legislators Room: M5
4: The Future of Latin Ministry in the United States Room: M7
12:00 Missionary Wives Lunch and Session
Lunch Room: M6
Meeting Room: M8

Wednesday Afternoon, May 3

2:00 General Session — 5
Reporting
Coordinating Council
WMA
Moral Action
3:00 Guest Speaker
Jack Graham, Pastor
Prestonwood Baptist Church, Dallas, TX

Wednesday Evening, May 3

7:00 General Session — 6
Missions Report
Missions Commissioning Service

Enrollment Committee Schedule

Monday 2:00-4:00 p.m.
6:00-7:00 p.m. and 30 minutes after session
Tuesday 8:30-9:00 a.m., 2:00-3:00 p.m.
6:30-7:00 p.m. and 30 minutes after session
Wednesday 8:00-8:30 a.m.



2020

DEBT FREE IN THREE

_____(Your name/church)
commits to pray for Jacksonville College and to give:

_____ a month for operating expenses

_____ a month for "Debt Free in Three"

_____ as a special gift for "Debt Free in Three"

_____ Amount enclosed

(Cut out and mail this form to: Jacksonville College, 105 B.J. Albritton Drive, Jacksonville, TX 75766)

biblical

Stewardship



But what is it really saying?

Setting the stewardship standard Proverbs 3:9-10

By DR. O.S. HAWKINS

There are many pastors and churches that avoid the subject of stewardship like a plague. In fact, many modern church gurus are telling pastors across the country not to talk about money or stewardship. I find that to very strange since our Lord spoke of it in one-third of His parables. In the churches I was privileged to pastor, we made no apologies in challenging one another in the realm of stewardship for it was a great part of our own spiritual development and growth.

Money consumes us in our current culture. Our churches are full of financial planners, bankers, stockbrokers, money managers, venture capitalists, CPAs, lawyers and all kinds of men and women who are constantly giving financial counsel. How would you like the free counsel of a man recognized the world over as one of the richest, most successful, and wisest men who ever lived? This particular man “wrote the book” on international commerce. In fact, of him it was said, “God gave (him) wisdom and exceedingly great understanding, and largeness of heart like the sand on the seashore. Thus (his) wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the men of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men — than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was in all the surrounding nations. He spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five” (1 Kings 4:29-32). His name? Solomon. Listen to his counsel on money management. “Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine” (Prov. 3:9-10).

As far-fetched as it might seem, our finances generally mark the position of our own spiritual pilgrimage. We are no farther along in our walk with the Lord than the point in which we learn to trust Him with the tithe.

There are a lot of questions regarding stewardship. How can we afford to return one-tenth of our income back to God? How much should we give? There are four questions every believer should ask about stewardship: (1) What is the purpose of my stewardship? (2) What is the product of my stewardship? (3) What is the priority of my stewardship? (4) What is the promise of my stewardship?

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF MY STEWARDSHIP? HONOR THE LORD... (PROV. 3:9-10)

What is the purpose when we attend a worship service and the offering plate is passed and we place our gift in it? Note the first three words of our text — “Honor the Lord.” This should be our single most important goal in life — to honor God. It is always a good thing to check our motivation, our purpose regarding the issues of life. Honoring God should be our primary motive in everything we do, whether in our marriage, our social life, our business or whatever.

What is the purpose of our stewardship? Some are motivated by guilt. That is they give because they think they ought to. Others are grudge givers. That is, they give because they think they have to.

The New Testament teaches us to be grace givers — we give out of a heart of gratitude and love because we want to!

The Hebrew word that we translate into our English word “honor” is very enlightening at this point. What does it mean when we are exhorted to “honor God?” Often this word is used to describe the concept of being weighted down. For example, a king is weighted down with all the accessories of royalty — the crown, the robe, the train, the scepter, the medallion. When we honor God it means that we weigh Him down. Crown Him Lord! It is closely akin to what young people used to say, “That’s heavy!” This being translated means, “That is incomprehensible, awesome, powerful.” To say that we honor God means that we give Him His rightful place in our lives. He is Lord!

What is the purpose of our stewardship? Is it some lucky rabbit’s foot? Is it that I give so that I might get, as some teach? Is it some legalistic Old Testament discipline that keeps me bound to the law? Our purpose in stewardship has to do with honoring God by exhibiting trust in Him.

We are nothing more than stewards passing through this world. Fifty years from now everything you own will be in someone else’s name. Fifty years ago what is in your name today was in someone else’s your land, your home, your assets. When you entered this world, you entered it naked without a dime, and you will leave it the same way. In reality, we do not own a thing. We are simply stewards. Therefore, it is imperative that we honor God with our possessions. This is our purpose in stewardship. God makes an incredible statement in 1 Samuel 2:30 when He says “those who honor Me I will honor.” What is the purpose of our stewardship? It is to honor God!

WHAT IS THE PRODUCT OF MY STEWARDSHIP “... WITH YOUR POSSESSIONS...” PROVERBS 3:9-10

We are to honor God. With what? Our possessions, our money, our wealth. Note the product of our stewardship is not just our time. It is not simply our talents. This is not what Solomon is saying. It is our treasure that is specifically addressed here. Some of us live as if our lives were a hotel corridor with room after room. As God walks down the hall, He sees the family room with the door open for Him to come in. He sees our social room, our work room, our exercise room, our activity room, our hobby room, and they are all open to Him. But in many lives when it comes to the room where we have our possessions, our money, He sees a “Do Not Disturb” sign on that door. What is the one thing that is prone to dominate and dictate our lives? Money! In fact, God says in 1 Timothy 6:10 that “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. We get trapped by government policies and our own lifestyles into thinking that money is the answer to every problem. How many times have we asked someone how they were doing, only to have heard the reply that everything was ok and they had no problems that money would not solve! Thus, the Lord indicates an area of our lives which tells

us more about our spiritual condition than any other. He says it is our possessions, and hence Solomon says, “Honor God with your possessions.”

It is good to have things that money can buy. However, there is something better. It is to have what money cannot buy. We have recently had another first in our family. Our oldest daughter, Wendy, is now wearing a wedding ring. As I write these words I am thinking back to the ring I gave her mom. It is now in a stickpin. I was a student in 1970 and could only afford a small ring. I remember the salesman making a special deal on the particular ring I purchased because if you look closely enough you will see a big carbon spot in the middle of it. I would be embarrassed for her to know how little I paid for it. However, that ring symbolized a tremendous amount of love as well as the confidence that God had brought us together. At about the same time a college friend gave his fiancé one of the biggest, most beautiful diamond rings I have ever seen, worth thousands of dollars. The tragedy is that their marriage did not last a year. Money can buy a lot of things. It can buy million dollar homes, but all the money in the world cannot transform a house into a home. What is really important is not what money can buy, but what it cannot buy.

While some of us desire to honor God with our lives we never think of honoring Him with our possessions. How do we do this? There are three ways in which we honor God with our possessions. First, we honor God with how we get it. Some people get wealth in ways that are dishonoring to God.

We can also honor or dishonor God by the way we guard it. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 6:19, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth.” Many guard their wealth. Some even make arrangements to keep it hoarded and guarded even after they are gone. It is no accident that our last will is called our Last Will and Testament, or Testimony. It is the last opportunity we have to give our testimony to the world of what was really important to us. One day someone will read it and tell what really held your heart because Jesus said, “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:21).

James spoke of a man who “hoarded” his wealth (James 5:3). Later in this series, we will see that guarded wealth brings no joy. Some people get their stock portfolios or checking and savings statements each month. No matter how much we have we wish it were just a little bit more. When we begin to love money, it ceases to bless us and begins to curse us. No wonder Solomon said, “Honor the Lord with your possessions.”

God is as concerned with how we guard our wealth as He is with how we get it. Susie and I do not have much of an estate after one-quarter century of marriage. We have invested in the bank of heaven. Much of the savings of our first 20 years of marriage is in the auditorium in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, where hundreds of people came to know Christ every year and from where dozens

STEWARDSHIP continued on p. 11

But what is it really saying? Setting the stewardship standard cont.

of missionaries have been sent. Our daughters know they are not going to get much from us. I intend to leave them something far more important than a pile of money to hoard or to guard or even to throw away. We have sought to teach them the importance of laying up treasures in heaven. Why? Because our heart always follows our treasure (Matt. 6:21). If we wait until we feel like giving, we will never do it. The natural man wants to guard it. Thus Solomon gives us wise counsel when he says we are to “Honor God with our possessions.”

We honor God by not only how we get and guard our money, but also with how we give it. We are stewards of God’s blessing. How we give is vitally important. The Lord Jesus still sits over the treasuries to see how His people give. One day I will stand before this great God. He is not going to say to me, “Let me see your Bible.” Quite frankly, there is not a page in my Bible that is not marked and filled with notations. He is not going to look at me and ask, “Is your Bible all marked?” He is not going to say, “Let me see your sermon notebook. Are there any notes there?” I don’t believe He is even going to ask for my prayer journal. Some of us may be shocked. I think He might say, “Let me see your checkbook, I want to look at your canceled checks.” Why? Because how we use what He gives us tells us where our heart is. He said, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:21).

This is the purpose and product of our stewardship. The way we handle our possessions is so much a reflection of what is on the inside of us that our Lord Jesus Christ addressed it in one out of three of His recorded sermons and His parables.

WHAT IS THE PRIORITY OF MY STEWARDSHIP? “... WITH THE FIRSTFRUITS OF ALL YOUR INCREASE...” PROVERBS 3:9-10

Note that Solomon is specific with the portion of our possessions with which we are to honor God. HE calls it the “firstfruits.” The Israelites brought the firstfruits of all their crops to God in order to acknowledge that He was the ultimate owner of the land. God said, “The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me” (Lev. 25:23). God owns the land of Israel today, and by His grace Israel is His tenant. Thus as they brought the firstfruits offerings they were honoring Yahweh. Should we do less?

The first portion of everything we own should be set aside for God’s use. The old and the New Testament both refer to it as the tithe — one-tenth of our income. The New Testament pattern is characterized by freedom. But freedom does not negate the validity of the tithe. The Believer’s Study Bible note says, “Tithing is only the beginning place of Christian stewardship, not the end. God does not want you to give less than a tithe, but He may want you to give so much more through His enabling grace.” For me personally, I have never felt that in this dispensation of grace that I should give less than the Jews gave under the dispensation of the law. Hence, tithing is only the beginning place, the firstfruits.

In his own inimitable way, Dr. W.A. Criswell frames this point with these words, “Four hundred years before the law was given, Father Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, priest to the most high God. Tithing was the foundation of supportive worship of the Israelites throughout the dispensation of the law. It was in that era that the Lord Jesus lived and had His being. It was He who said we ought to tithe (Matt. 23:23). In this dispensation in which you and I live, it is the Lord Jesus Christ who receives our tithes even though our human hands take it up in the congregation. Hebrews 7:8 says, ‘Here mortal men receive tithes, but there He receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives.’ There is a sense in which every time we receive an offering in church although mortal men

are serving as ushers to receive the gifts, it is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who is receiving them.”

What is the priority of our stewardship? We are to honor God. With what? Our wealth. And what part of it? Firstfruits. I well remember the day my pastor, W. Fred Swank, taught me this truth. I was a student at Southwestern Seminary and serving as assistant pastor at Sagamore Hill Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas. I was about to be married, and Dr. Swank called me into his office on a particular day. He was known for always being blunt and to the point. He said, “Son, your giving has been a bit sporadic.” With those words I knew I was about to learn a lesson. Those of us who were “his boys” never got away with anything! I quickly replied, “Preacher, I am trying to tithe, but I get to the end of the month, and it just seems like there is not enough there.” He looked at me and said, “We are to honor God with our possessions, with the firstfruits of all our increase.” He continued, “Now let me see your checkbook.” Reluctantly I handed it to him. He asked another question, “What is fruit?” “That which you earn,” I quickly replied. He countered, “What does first mean?” “First means first, the front of the line!” “Then, when you deposit your check on the first and fifteenth of each month make sure from now on the first check you write is the Lord’s tithe, the firstfruits of all your increase,” he said. He went on to explain to me that giving is an act of faith and showed me the meaning of Proverbs 3:5-6 which says we are to “trust the Lord with all of our hearts and lean not unto our own understanding. In all our ways acknowledge Him and He will direct our paths.”

Since that day years ago, I have never deposited a paycheck except that the first check I wrote after it was “unto the Lord,” the firstfruit. Many years ago, Susie and I discovered the joy of giving way over the tithe every year of our married life. We did it when we had little or nothing. We did it when we were struggling with a young family. We did it when we were responsible for college tuition, graduate school tuition, and weddings, and we are still blessed by it. It is the priority of our stewardship.

I am often asked by people who are contemplating becoming tithers if the tithe is to be given before or after taxes. For me, I never even considered the fact that taxes to a human government should be the firstfruits. To me the issue is plain. Solomon said, “Firstfruits” — of what? “All your increase.” That is how we honor God. This is the priority of our stewardship. If we wait until we think we can afford it and continue to give our firstfruits to ourselves, or to others, or to our own pleasures, it won’t happen. An unknown poet framed it best when he or she said,

The groom bent with age leaned over his cane
His steps uncertain needed guiding,
While down the church aisle
With a warm toothless smile
The bride in a wheelchair came riding.
Who is this elderly couple thus wed?
We’ve learned when we quickly explored it,
That this is that rare most conservative pair
Who waited till they could afford it!

Our purpose in life is to honor God. With what? With our possessions. And what part of our possessions? The “firstfruits” of all our possessions. There is one other question of stewardship that all of us should be asking.

WHAT IS THE PROMISE OF MY STEWARDSHIP? “...SO THAT YOUR BARNs MAY BE FILLED AND YOUR VATS OVERFLOW WITH NEW WINE.” PROVERBS 3:9-10

Full and overflowing! That is a far cry from the haunting call of many today — “Not enough.” Here we see the John 6 principle in

action. The boy gave his little lunch of loaves and fish. Thousands of people were fed and twelve baskets remained. In the words of Solomon, “Your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine.” This is an amazing thought we find in Proverbs 3:10, “So your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine.” It is supernatural. I don’t know how it works; I just know that after doing it every week for over quarter of a century it does work. If act, the word “be filled” in verse 10 is in the imperfect tense. It is an ongoing process. It just continues to be true as I continue to honor God with my possessions, with the firstfruits of all my increase. He just keeps on and on filling my barns.

Have you ever noticed that when God addresses our stewardship in the Bible, His emphasis is not on our giving, but on our receiving? Malachi says, “Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that here may be food in My house, and try Me now in this,” says the Lord of hosts, ‘If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such a blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.’” (Mal. 3:10). The emphasis is on our receiving. In Proverbs 3:9-10 once again the emphasis is not on our giving as much as it is on our barns being filled — our receiving. In the New Testament, Jesus said it like this, “Give and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you” (Luke 6:38). God’s emphasis is always on our receiving, not so much on our giving. Solomon’s statement in Proverbs 3:10 about our barns being filled is an incredible statement. It all boils down to one question, “Who are we going to believe?”

We have the wisest advice ever given on stewardship by the wisest man who ever lived. He put it like this, “Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine” (Prov. 3:9-10). What is the purpose of our stewardship? Are we honoring God? What is the product of our stewardship? Are we simply trying to be a steward of our time and talent and not with our treasure? God said the product of our stewardship is our possessions. What is the priority of our stewardship? Remember the firstfruits belong to Him. What is the promise of our stewardship? We can take Him at His word. However, the real question is not if we ask ourselves these four questions, but if we will act upon them. If we have not been regular tithers, will we begin to do so now?

The greatest stewardship verse in all the Bible is found in John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” The Lord Jesus was the product of the Father’s stewardship to you. He was His only Son, the firstfruits of all who would be born again after Him. We have a tremendous opportunity to honor God with our lives — the greatest of all our possessions. He said, “Those who honor Me, I will honor” (1 Sam. 2:30).

*Copied by permission from Dr. Hawkins book,
Money Talks—But What Is It Really Saying?*

Dr. O.S. Hawkins is the president and chief executive officer of GuideStone Financial Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention. He served as senior pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, and senior pastor three other churches. He is also the author of more than 25 books, including the best-selling *The Joshua Code*. Visit his website, www.OSHawkins.com.





Happy New Year

By SHARON COLE

“...Ye have not passed this way heretofore” (Joshua 3:4). We are well into the first month of this new year of 2017. We have not traveled this path before. Of course, some things will remain the same, but we do not know the outcome of all the details.

There are many questions we could ask ourselves. What does this year hold for me? Will I face financial hardship? Will I suffer through an incurable disease? By the end of the year will someone be missing around my dining table? On a lighter note, we could ask ourselves more positive questions. Will I be healthy enough to go about my daily life? Will I be willing to share Christ with whoever I meet and make an impact on their life? Will I live a godly example before my children and grandchildren every day? Will I show love to those who are less fortunate? All of these questions can't be answered immediately. They have to be lived out and placed in God's hands because He is in control.

Each year we are given 365 days, or so we believe. With what will we fill them? Will they be filled with worthwhile things? At the year's-end will we be satisfied with what we have done? A more pointed question is, “Will God be satisfied with our days?” Only God knows the number of our days on this earth. We need to make the coming year count in the development of our spiritual lives, even though there will be plenty of things to hinder us. Some people continue with the age-old tradition of making resolutions. We can decide for ourselves if we want to change something in our lives; make a resolution to do better. But unless we seek God's guidance in these changes, we probably won't stick to them.

You can be sure that when we resolve to do something to improve our spiritual life, Satan is right behind us challenging our efforts and declaring war on us for control of our hearts and minds. Satan seeks to ruin our effectiveness in our Christian ministry so we must be prepared for battle. We must put on the armor necessary to defeat our enemy. That armor is found in Ephesians 6:13-18. You can be sure that discouragement will come in trying to make positive changes, but you can't give up.

A cosmetic surgeon can make you look new. A beautician can give you a new hairdo. These are all external improvements. But as believers we are to have a new look on the inside. The old things have to go away before the new can be seen. We must put the past behind us and leave it there. Lamentations 3:22-23 says: “It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.”

WMA is a place God has given ladies to do a mission work in His church. Missions is our middle name. We do not

“WMA is a place God has given ladies to do a mission work in His church. Missions is our middle name. We do not know the future, but we know the One who holds the future. Our prayer must be that God will direct our paths and give us wisdom so His love will radiate through our lives.”

know the future, but we know the One who holds the future. Our prayer must be that God will direct our paths and give us wisdom so His love will radiate through our lives. Ladies, let's help our church do the “Great Commission” by getting involved in God's plan so that He will be glorified in all we do this year.

Remember that the new Texas WMA theme for the year is “Shine for Jesus,” using Matthew 5:16-“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father in heaven.” We are to let the light of Jesus shine through us to everyone we meet. The new project is Improvements to Daniel Springs Baptist Encampment in Gary. Many changes have been made over the last year and much more needs to be done. Begin now to raise funds for this project so that their needs will be met.

BENEVOLENCE is a part of our Plan of Work. It is a positive way to express the love of Christ to others. Jesus said, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” Matthew 25:40. If you do not have an elected Benevolence Chairman in your group, any

lady can lead out in this area of service. When people are in need, there is an opportunity to show the love of Christ to them. Ladies can be organized to take care of the following needs: (1) Food and comfort to the bereaved. (2) Food and assistance for the sick, both in the hospital and at home. (3) Clothing for the needy. A clothes closet can be maintained in a central location using good, clean, used clothing. (4) Nursing Home Ministry: Small gifts for the residents on special occasions are appreciated. “Adoption of grandmas and grandpas” who may not have family who visit. Provide writing paper and stamps or write the letters or cards for them. Read them the local paper, mend their clothes, run errands. If they are able and if permission is granted, take them to a store with you. Share a smile, a funny story or a game of checkers. (5) Contact the Texas Baptist Home for Children to learn some needs they have that you can provide. (6) Send cards of cheer to the sick, shut-in, and bereaved. (7) Care-Basket Ministry: Flowers are nice sometimes, but when someone is in the hospital or sick at home, a care basket of useful items and unexpected goodies is much appreciated. (8) Offer your services to someone who is disabled, elderly or disadvantaged. Offer transportation to the doctor, a store or pharmacy, Offer to do yard or housework for someone who is unable to do it. Galatians 6:10 says: “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” Benevolence is a service that God has called you to do for Him. We serve God by serving others.

GMA NEWS

Our new GMA/YLA Promoter, Kendra Verhelle, and her Assistant, Cheryl Hughes are making great plans for the GMA Houseparty scheduled for March 17-18, 2017 at Daniel Springs. Kendra is updating the forms necessary for the Houseparty and these can be found on the GMA website: texasgma.org. There are forms for registration at the camp and for Miss, Jr. Miss GMA. The completed Miss/Jr. Miss GMA forms must be sent to Cheryl Hughes by February 20th. Any questions can be directed to Cheryl at hugheskc26@yahoo.com. or 903-340-5457.

Sharon Cole is the editor for the Texas WMA. Contact her at S9Co@aol.com. For more information on the Texas WMA, visit www.texaswma.com.



obituaries

Marion E. "Pete" Patterson, age 85, departed from his earthly life on Dec. 16, 2016, to be in the presence of our Heavenly Father. He was born on July 22, 1931 in Sayre, Okla., to Claude and Ruby Patterson. Bro. Patterson served as pastor of various BMA churches across Texas, having been a minister for 67 years, as well as serving as a local association missionary. He also served as a nursing home administrator. Bro. Patterson, ever wanting to serve others, donated his body to the medical field. A memorial service will be held at a later date to honor his life. Memorials may be given to Lifeword Media Ministries.

Danny Carrol Pitts, 66, of Laurel, Mississippi, went home to his heavenly Father on Dec. 21, 2016. Danny was a faithful minister, a great Bible teacher, scholar and a loving husband, father, grandfather and son. He served the Lord throughout his life as a pastor in churches in Mississippi, Texas and Florida. He was a member at First Baptist Church Shady Grove. He was most recently the President of Southeastern Baptist College. He enjoyed teaching and mentoring and had a love for Jewish backgrounds. Funeral services were held at Big Creek Baptist Church on Friday, Dec. 23. Memorials may be given to Southeastern Baptist College, Laurel, Mississippi.



Mary Jeanne (Jane) Carroll, 86, passed away peacefully surrounded by her family Jan. 4, 2017 after a brief battle with cancer. She was born in Coleman Jan. 22, 1930 to Howard and Edna (Lewis) Parker. She grew up and attended school in the small west Texas ranching community of Talpa. On Nov. 22, 1950 Jane married her high school sweetheart, Curtis Meadows Carroll. He served as editor of Baptist Progress. In 1960, Curtis Carroll began his 25-year tenure as president of Jacksonville College. Mrs. Carroll began her teaching career in 1966 at New Summerfield High School where she served as English teacher, librarian and yearbook sponsor. In 1980 she took a position as high school English teacher at Rusk High School and remained there until retirement in 1990. She was an active member of First, Jacksonville for more than five decades, until becoming homebound the last couple of years. She taught Sunday school, played the piano for various Sunday school classes, and served as the church librarian. A funeral service was Jan. 11, 2017 at Autry Funeral Home Chapel in Jacksonville. Memorial may be given to support the ministry of Misha and Meredith Goz, missionaries in St. Petersburg, Russia. Attach a note with #0436193 and make checks payable to: Cru, Att: Contributions, P. O. Box 628222, Orlando, FL 32862-8222.



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personnel & positions

AVAILABLE MINISTER

ROGER MANNING is available for pulpit supply, interim pastor duties, or a permanent call as Senior or Associate Pastor. He is ordained and has over nine years of preaching experience. Resume and past sermons are available at www.rogermanning.com. Roger lives in Waxahachie and can be reached at roger@rogermanning.com or at 402-510-3019.

SPEAKER FOR SPECIAL EVENTS

STACIE BOSTIC is available to speak at women's luncheons, youth retreats, adult conferences, seminars, Bible studies and other events. She has a powerful testimony that focuses on the art of surrender, walking by faith and rising above circumstances. Her message resonates with a wide range of listeners. She has the ability to tailor her message to fit a group's unique event theme. Stacie is a member of Liberty, Gun Barrel City. Contact her at claypotministries@outlook.com or 903-603-8597. You can also view her promo video on Godtube: <http://www.godtube.com/watch/?v=19MMCJNU>. Connect with Stacie on Facebook at <https://facebook.com/claypotministries>.

AVAILABLE POSITIONS

PASTOR—New Bethlehem, Cut and Shoot is seeking a pastor. Send resume to George Burks, 5992 Forest Dr., Cleveland, Texas 77328, cherylburks@sbcglobal.net or call 281-659-1970. ^{2/17}

PASTOR—Hill Creek, Whitehouse is seeking a pastor. Send resume and recorded sermon to Hill Creek Baptist Church, Pastor Search Committee, P.O. Box 1287, Whitehouse, Texas 75791.

PASTOR—Lost Prairie, Groesbeck is seeking a bivocational pastor. Send resume to 514 FM 3371, Groesbeck, Texas 76642. ^{TFN}

PASTOR—O'Quinn, Pollok is seeking a full-time pastor. Email resume to MLArnold1860@yahoo.com or mail to Marilyn Arnold, 6630 FM 843, Pollok, Texas 75969. ^{2/17}

PASTOR—Myrtle Springs, Quitman is seeking a pastor. Send resume to Myrtle Springs Baptist Church, 2185 FM 2225, Quitman, Texas 75783. ^{TFN}

PASTOR—Enon, Iola is seeking a bivocational pastor. Parsonage available. For information, call 281-731-7850. ^{TFN}

PASTOR—First, Rice is seeking a pastor. Send resume to fbricegale@yahoo.com or call 214-799-9244. ^{TFN}

PASTOR—Northside, Garland is seeking a pastor. Send resume to 2510 N. Glenbrook, Garland, Texas 75040 or northsidegarland@gmail.com, or call 972-495-2986 for more information. Visit the church's website at www.northsidegarland.org. ^{3/17}

events

2017 SESSION OF THE BMA OF AMERICA

DATE: May 1-3, 2017

PLACE: Arlington Convention Center, Arlington, Texas

HEADQUARTERS HOTEL: Sheraton, Arlington, Texas

SOAR

DATE: July 5-7, 2017

PLACE: Gaylord Texan Hotel, Grapevine, Texas

SENIOR ADULT CONFERENCE

DATE: November 13-15, 2017

PLACE: Branson Hilton Convention Center, Branson, Missouri

BAPTIST MISSIONARY ASSOCIATION 117TH ANNUAL SESSION

DATE: November 14-15, 2017

PLACE: New Harmony Baptist Church, Tyler, Texas

churches in review

DECEMBER 25, 2016

CHURCH	SS	WORSHIP	ADDITIONS
Anthony Drive, Ennis		94	
First, Omen		56	
Glade Creek, Gilmer		36	
Jackson, Joaquin		145	
Little Mound, Big Sandy		50	
Olde Tyme, White Oak		39	
Pilgrim Rest #2, Golden		47	
Rosewood, Gilmer		235	
Yellowpine Macedonia, Hemphill		25	

JANUARY 1, 2017

CHURCH	SS	WORSHIP	ADDITIONS
First, Omen	19	57	
Glade Creek, Gilmer	15	36	
Jackson, Joaquin	75	117	
Little Flock, Lufkin	10	10	
Little Mound, Big Sandy	40	53	
Merriman Hills, Sherman	10	21	
Nat, Cushing		15	
New Harmony, Tyler	261	310	
Olde Tyme, White Oak		60	1 by baptism
Pilgrim Rest #2, Golden	33	39	
Rosewood, Gilmer	117	224	4 by baptism, 1 by letter
Security Calvary, Cleveland	26	45	1 by baptism

JANUARY 8, 2017

CHURCH	SS	WORSHIP	ADDITIONS
First, Omen	34	95	
Glade Creek, Gilmer	16	35	
Jackson, Joaquin	78	143	
Little Flock, Lufkin	7	7	
Little Mound, Big Sandy	37	45	2 by baptism
Nat, Cushing	16	21	
New Harmony, Tyler	316	400	1 by letter
New Hope, Mineola	48	90	
Olde Tyme, White Oak		56	
Pilgrim Rest #2, Golden	31	34	
Pine Brook, Tyler	33	47	
Rosewood, Gilmer	144	270	4 by baptism
Security Calvary, Cleveland	27	55	

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Sunday School Lessons

The unforgiving forgiven

By PAUL GAUNTT

DATE: January 29, 2017

TEXT: Matthew 18:21-35

Jesus teaches a profound lesson in the principle of forgiveness. What is forgiveness, and what drives that act in a person?

One definition of forgiveness is “the intentional and voluntary process by which a victim undergoes a change in feelings and attitude regarding an offense, lets go of negative emotions, including vengefulness, and possessing an increased ability to wish the offender well.”

GENUINE FORGIVENESS IS INDEFINITE.

Peter demonstrated a rather limited view on forgiveness by asking the question, “Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? til (up to) seven times? Genuine forgiveness is not just a certain amount with a cap on it — Genuine forgiveness is a lifestyle, to last for a lifetime. When Jesus told him, “But until seventy times seven. In other words, infinity.

GENUINE FORGIVENESS COMES FROM A HEART OF GENUINE COMPASSION.

Someone once said, “Vertical forgiveness is contingent on horizontal forgiveness.” In other words, we will receive forgiveness from above as we are willing to forgive others here. In Matthew 18:27, we find that the lord of the servant was moved to compassion. The servant was blessed to be the recipient of such. Jesus, on His Sermon on the Mount, was very clear about the need to forgive; “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” Matthew 6:14-15

GENUINE FORGIVENESS IS ABLE TO FORGET THE PAST OFFENSE. ISAIAH 43:25

“I, even I, am he that blotteth out any transgressions

for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.” God is able to forget past offenses which have been committed against Him. He expects His children to likewise forgive, and not dredge up the past.

UNFORGIVENESS HAS TORMENT.

By the servant, who experienced forgiveness from his master, unleashed unforgiveness on his fellow servant, and suffered judgement (Matthew 18:30) The master delivered him to the tormentors, until all his debt was paid. A person who carries bitterness, grudges and unforgiveness in his or heart toward another person, is living in torment.

APPLICATION:

Those who receive the forgiveness from Christ and become born again, has the God-given capacity to likewise be forgiving of others.

The persistent people’s court

By PAUL GAUNTT

DATE: February 5, 2017

TEXT: Luke 18:1-8

THE NON-CARING EARTHLY JUDGE

The earthly judge honored the constant barrage of the woman’s pleas to him (Luke 18:5) She was troubling and irritating to him. By his own admission, he had no regard for others, and had no feelings toward God. Yet, even he granted the persistent wishes of the widow.

THE LOVING, LISTENING FATHER

“And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel’s hand.” Revelation 8:4 On several different occasions in the book of Leviticus, it is mentioned that the aroma of a sacrifice is sweet to the Lord. Likewise the prayers of the saints please Him.

God tells us through the Apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to “Pray without ceasing.” God never tires of His children petitioning His throne in fervent prayer.

THE PERSEVERING PRAYER WARRIOR VERSE 1

We are not to lose heart in our petitions to God. John said in his first epistle, “And we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask,

we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.” 1 John 5:15. David wrote in Psalm 37 that God will give us the desires of our hearts, as long as we delight ourselves in Him. There are some conditions which must be met before we have an effective prayer life — a heart that does not regard sin (Psalm 66:18 A heart that is believing (Matthew 21:22) Asking in Jesus’ Name (John 14:13-14)

APPLICATION:

Continually persevere in prayer to God the Father. He wants to hear from you, and He will answer your prayer in His own good time, as it pleases Him.

The midnight guest

By PAUL GAUNTT

DATE: February 12, 2017

TEXT: Luke 11:5-13

THE NEED:

This parable involves a person, who apparently had an unexpected guest in his home — a friend, who was on journey. The weary traveler was hungry, and had stopped by a friend’s house - a friend who was given to hospitality, but had nothing to offer. So he goes to another friend’s house, at midnight — a friend, who had supplies, but was a little short on hospitality at midnight.

THE PLEA:

The one asking for the three loaves of bread possessed two qualities — he was persistent, and he was bold; (verse 8)

THE CONTRAST:

The parable has an obvious lesson — that is, that we come persistently and boldly to the throne of God to let our petitions be known to Him. He already knows, but He also knows we need the experience of asking. We need the experience of being bold and persistent.

The friend in the parable to whom the other friend made petition, felt infringed upon — it was inconvenient. He and his children were asleep. He finally acquiesced to the request for the bread, but his motive was different from that of our Heavenly Father. His motive is love and

care. If it seems His answer does not come as quickly as one would like, it is for a divine reason. (1) His timing is perfect — unlike ours; (2) He delays answers to our petitions oftentimes because He wants to teach us to persevere. Also, in this parable, we find that God the Father gives us what is needed — what is best — and He does not give us things just to get us “off His back” as was the case with the man in the parable. (verses 11-13)

APPLICATION:

Do not shy away from petitioning God’s throne. He has time for you — He loves you — He wants to meet your need. He already knows what you have need of, before you even ask.(Matthew 6:8)

Sunday School Lessons

Be prepared

By PAUL GAUNTT

DATE: February 19, 2016

TEXT: Matthew 25:1-13

THE BRIDEGROOM:

The Bridegroom is obviously a picture of Christ and His return for His bride. He comes suddenly, at a time when the virgins were beginning to nod off to sleep, and therefore they were taken by surprise. Jesus said in His Olivet discourse, He describes the condition of the world as it shall be when He returns. (Matthew 24:37) People will be disinterested in the coming of the “Son of Man” and therefore shall not expect him, as was the case in Noah’s day, as he was building the Ark, and preaching God’s impending doom upon the earth.

THE FOOLISH VIRGINS:

The foolish virgins are a picture of the unpreparedness of

the lost when Jesus returns to receive His bride. Their lamps did not have enough oil, and by the time they went to acquire more oil, the Bridegroom came, and they were left behind.

Many, in fact, according to the scripture (Matthew 7:14-15) fewer people will find that narrow gate which leads to everlasting life, but the broad path to hell will be filled with people — people unprepared, such as the five foolish virgins. The Amplified Bible describes them as “thoughtless, silly and careless.” Such is the mindset of those headed down the broad path to distraction.

THE WISE VIRGINS:

Again, referring to the Amplified Bible, the five wise virgins were “far-sighted, practical and sensible.” They were completely prepared to meet the Bridegroom. But the foolish virgins were only met with a door that was shut and locked. They cried, “Lord, Lord, open the door!” But he

replied, “I do not know you.” This is the verbiage used at the Great White Throne Judgement, held at the end of the age — the judgement of the lost. They will say in that day, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?” But the Righteous Judge will profess to them, “Depart, for I never knew you.”

APPLICATION:

Prepare to meet God! How? By being far-sighted, as the five wise virgins. Be prepared? How? By confessing with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believing in your heart God raised Him from the dead. Romans 10:13 says, “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Be sure you are ready to meet the Bridegroom when He makes His descent, and with a shout, calls for His bride (all of the saved.)

The talent show

By PAUL GAUNTT

DATE: February 26, 2017

TEXT: Matthew 25:14-30

The meaning of the parable of the talents is not just a treatise on how to wisely invest money, but is in regard to the gifts as given by Christ, Himself, to the church.

THE SOURCE OF THE TALENTS

The master, who was to embark upon a journey, (Matthew 25:14) entrusted the talents to the responsibility of his servants. They belong to the master. Ephesians 4:8 tells us that our Master, likewise embarked upon a long journey — to ascend back to His Father. Simultaneously, He gave His own giftedness to each member of His body, to invest in His kingdom. That gift is more than just a human talent — it is a supernatural empowerment upon each member of the Body, enabling that member to minister. Many have the gift of administration, others the ministry of giving, or compassion, or encouragement, or teaching. Those gifts most often correspond with the personality makeup He bestowed upon us.

THE VARIETY OF TALENTS

In our parable, one had five talents — two to another, and one received one. The distribution of these talents was totally at the discretion of the master. Two of them multiplied theirs, while the one with the single talent, buried it.

Christ did not gift each member of His body with the

same gifts — we all have differing gifts, all working together in concert to build up the body. Do not lament that one has what you think is a more “desirable gift.” Be satisfied with what He gave you and be faithful in the use of it.

THE DISPLEASURE OF THE MASTER OVER THE WASTED TALENT

While He said, “Well done” to the servants who multiplied their talents, he was angered at the one who wasted his.

At the Bema Seat of Christ (the judgement of the saved) Christ will judge His people according to works which were done to glorify Him. 1 Corinthians 3:15 says wasted works (works done in the flesh) will be consumed with fire, while works done to the glory of God will withstand the test of fire. He will say to you who were faithful to use your talent, “Well done.”

Paul Gauntt is the pastor of First, Palmer. He served for a number of years as the BMA of Texas Department of Church Ministries director. He has served several churches as pastor, and is a correspondent and featured article writer for Baptist Progress Contact him at pop.gauntt@gmail.com.



The threat to Religious Liberty cont.



JUNE 19, 2014—NAVY DECIDES TO REMOVE GIDEON BIBLES FROM HOTEL ROOMS ON ITS BASES

Prompted by a March 2014 letter from the Freedom from Religion Foundation, the Navy Exchange Service Command (NEXCOM) issued an order to remove Gideon Bibles from Navy Lodge rooms and take them to donation centers. After public backlash, the Navy announced on Aug. 14, 2014 that the Bibles in the rooms would remain while the policy was reviewed.

2015-16—

Sgt. 1st Class Charles Martland never guessed he’d lose his job for defending a young boy who was sexually abused. And yet, the heroic Green Beret was discharged from the Army for confronting an Afghan policeman who tied the boy to a post and raped him repeatedly. The nauseating story raised all kinds of questions about President Obama’s military.

1,000’s of petitions called for Sgt. Martland’s record to be cleared and an investigation into U.S. military policy in cases of child abuse and exploitation. In April 2016, Army officials decided to reinstate the decorated Green Beret.

As BMA Baptists, we are one of many influential groups that can contact our new President, his staff, our congressmen and senators with a voice for Godly, biblical decisions to be made. We must hold our leaders in Washington and in the military accountable to God.

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JUNE

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PRETEEN CAMP I JUNE 27-30
(4TH-6TH)

JULY

PRETEEN CAMP II JULY 11-14
(4TH-6TH)

ARK-LA-TEX CAMP JULY 18-21
(ALL AGES)

STUDENT CAMP II JULY 25-28
(7TH-COLLEGE)

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