

Baptist Progress

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May 2014 be a year of God's greatest blessings upon the churches and departments of the Baptist Missionary Association of Texas!

Happy New Year

*from Baptist Missionary Loan Association,
Baptist Progress, Jacksonville College, State Missions
& Texas Baptist Home for Children.*

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2014 standard mileage rates for business, medical and moving announced

WASHINGTON—The Internal Revenue Service has issued the 2014 optional standard mileage rates used to calculate the deductible costs of operating an automobile for business, charitable, medical or moving purposes.

Beginning on Jan. 1, 2014, the standard mileage rates for the use of a car (also vans, pickups or panel trucks) will be:

- 56 cents per mile for business miles driven
- 23.5 cents per mile driven for medical or moving purposes
- 14 cents per mile driven in service of charitable organizations

The business, medical and moving expense rates decrease one-half cent from the 2013 rates. The charitable rate is based on statute.

The standard mileage rate for business is based on an annual study of the fixed and variable costs of operating an automobile. The rate for medical and moving purposes is based on the variable costs.

Taxpayers always have the option of calculating the actual costs of using their vehicle rather than using the standard mileage rates.

A taxpayer may not use the business standard mileage rate for a vehicle after using any depreciation method under the Modified Accelerated Cost Recovery System (MACRS) or after claiming a Section 179 deduction for that vehicle. In addition, the business standard mileage rate cannot be used for more than four vehicles used simultaneously.

These and other requirements for a taxpayer to use a standard mileage rate to calculate the amount of a deductible business, moving, medical, or charitable expense are in Rev. Proc. 2010-51. Notice 2013-80 contains the standard mileage rates, the amount a taxpayer must use in calculating reductions to basis for depreciation taken under the business standard mileage rate, and the maximum standard automobile cost that a taxpayer may use in computing the allowance under a fixed and variable rate plan.

Liberty Association hosts International and North American Missions Rally

By **CHARLES JOHNSON**

Rosewood, Gilmer Pastor

DIANA, Texas—The Liberty Baptist Association held a rally for International and North American missions Dec. 12, at Simmons Hill, Diana. Pastor Gabriele Knopp welcomed the churches and their messengers to the meeting.

After a business meeting presided over by Moderator Greg Miller, pastor of Cross Roads, Pittsburg, the program was presented by Dr. John David Smith, executive director of missions for the BMA of America.

Dr. Smith challenged the group with a message from God's Word using Colossians 4:7-15 as his text. He preached on the subject, "What Would You Do in Fifteen Years to Win the World?" He used the premise of the apostle Paul having an earthly ministry of some 15 years to win the world for Jesus. He spoke of the several individuals Paul invested his time and energies into for the purpose of discipling these to multiply and win more to the Lord. He emphasized the role of Paul modeling the role of a church multiplier and encourager.

Dr. Smith shared of the ministry and status of the current missionaries of the BMAA which now reach into 85 nations in the world. He shared specific prayer requests for missionaries and reported the recently incorporated 65/35 plan had been successful with the newly elected missionaries being able to raise their needed support.

During a question and answer session, Dr. Smith announced remodeling of the Lifeword building began Oct. 1 and that July 1, 2014 is the target date for the Missions Department to move from Little Rock to Conway.

Refreshments and fellowship were enjoyed by the messengers after the service. Liberty Association's next meeting is on Jan. 16 which will be a rally for Jacksonville College at Antioch, Gilmer.

Polygamy ban in Utah declared unconstitutional by federal judge

By **TOM STRODE**

Baptist Press

SALT LAKE CITY (Baptist Press)—A federal court has struck down a vital section of Utah's anti-polygamy law, lending credence to arguments by defenders of marriage that the reshaping of the institution would not end with legalizing same-sex unions.

Clark Waddoups, a judge in the U.S. District Court of Utah, invalidated a portion of the state law that prohibits bigamy, essentially decriminalizing polygamy in the process. In a 91-page opinion released Dec. 13, the federal judge ruled as unconstitutional a section prohibiting a married person from cohabiting with someone who is not his or her spouse.

In effect, Waddoups legalized polygamy as it is practiced in Utah primarily by members of fundamentalist spinoffs of the Mormon religion. Such polygamous households typically do not have multiple marriage licenses but treat all relationships between a man and the women with whom he lives as marriages. Waddoups ruled the cohabitation section of Utah's anti-polygamy law violated the free religious exercise clause of the United States Constitution's First Amendment and the due process clause of the 14th Amendment.

The ruling came in a lawsuit filed by Kody Brown and his four wives, who are featured in the television reality show

"Sister Wives" on TLC. Brown and only one of his wives have a marriage license. They are members of the Apostolic United Brethren, which believes polygamy is "a core religious practice," according to Waddoups' opinion.

Defenders of the biblical and historic view of marriage said the decision undermines the institution and provides more evidence that its redefinition will be more expansive than just incorporating same-sex relationships.

"Sadly, when marriage is elastic enough to mean anything, in due time it comes to mean nothing," Russell D. Moore said in a statement released Dec. 14. Moore is president of the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC).

"This is what happens when marriage becomes about the emotional and sexual wants of adults, divorced from the needs of children for a mother and a father committed to each other for life," Moore said. "Polygamy was outlawed in this country because it was demonstrated, again and again, to hurt women and children."

R. Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, said in a Monday (Dec. 16) blog post, "In one sense, the decision was almost inevitable, given the trajectory

of both the culture and the federal courts. On the other hand, the sheer shock of the decision serves as an alarm: marriage is being utterly redefined before our eyes, and in the span of a single generation.

"Now, with the logic of moral revolution transforming marriage in all respects, polygamy follows same-sex marriage," Mohler added. "If marriage can be redefined in terms of gender, it can easily be redefined in terms of number."

Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council, said in a written statement, "Same-sex marriage advocates have told us that people ought to be able to 'marry who they love' but have also always downplayed the idea that this would lead to legalized polygamy, a practice that very often victimizes women and children. But if love and mutual consent become the definition of what the boundaries of marriage are, can we as a society any longer even define marriage coherently?"

Waddoups' ruling came in the wake of two more states, Hawaii and Illinois, legalizing gay marriage in November. Those actions brought to 16 the number of states to approve same-sex marriage. The District of Columbia also has legalized the unions.

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Polygamy continued from p. 2

The opinion also followed by less than six months the U.S. Supreme Court's June ruling that struck down a section of a federal law defining marriage as only between a man and a woman. In that 5-4 opinion, the justices said the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) violated "equal protection" under the Constitution by refusing to recognize gay marriages. The ruling opened the way for same-sex couples to access federal benefits previously limited to heterosexual couples.

Utah officials had yet to announce if the state will appeal Waddoups' ruling by mid-day Monday, but Gov. Gary Herbert said Dec. 14 he wants to review the opinion before a decision is made. The scope of Waddoups' opinion is limited to Utah, but marriage defenders are concerned about the continuing legal trend.

The ERLC's Moore said, "The loss of a marriage consensus is about more than just social policy. Marriage is an embedded picture of the Gospel, the union between Christ and His church. That's why Jesus pointed back to the beginning, to God's creational purposes. We must talk about these issues not simply from the point of view of nature, but from the point of view of the Gospel.

"When reality TV scenarios drive our judicial decisions, we've truly reached a strange time in American life," Moore said. "But the Gospel was given in strange times, and remains the power of God to salvation, calling us to repent of our self-made attempts at autonomy and back to God's purposes."

Waddoups, in his ruling, took issue with a 1973 state law that says a "person is guilty of bigamy when, knowing he has a husband or wife or knowing the other person has a husband or wife, the person purports to marry another person or cohabits with another person."

In writing about what he called "religious cohabitation," Waddoups upheld the "purports to marry another person" language while striking "cohabits with another person."

To save the law, Waddoups adopted a narrow interpretation of "purports to marry," thereby allowing it "to remain in force as prohibiting bigamy in the literal sense -- the fraudulent or otherwise impermissible possession of two purportedly valid marriage licenses for the purpose of entering into more than one purportedly legal marriage."

Waddoups did not rely on the Supreme Court's June decision in the DOMA decision, but he did demonstrate a reliance on *Lawrence v. Texas*, a 2003 high court opinion that struck down state laws barring homosexual conduct. The *Lawrence* ruling was based on a "liberty interest" found in the Constitution's due process clause.

Waddoups quoted the *Lawrence* ruling, which said, "Liberty presumes an autonomy of self that includes freedom of thought, belief, expression, and certain intimate conduct." The *Lawrence* opinion, written by Associate Justice Anthony Kennedy, said laws barring specific sexual acts "seek to control a personal relationship that, whether or not entitled to formal recognition in the law, is within the liberty of persons to choose without being punished as criminals."

Jonathan Turley, lead counsel for the Browns and a law professor at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., connected the homosexual and polygamy causes in his reaction to Waddoups' opinion.

"[P]lural families present the same privacy and due process concerns faced by [the] gay and lesbian community over criminalization," Turley wrote.

"The decision affects a far greater range of such

relationships than the form of polygamy practiced by the Browns," he said. "It is a victory not for polygamy but privacy in America."

Kody Brown expressed gratitude for the opinion, saying in a written statement, "Like thousands of other plural families, we have waited many years for this day. While we know that many people do not approve of plural families, it is our family and based on our beliefs. Just as we respect the personal and religious choices of other families, we hope that in time all of our neighbors and fellow citizens will come to respect our own choices as part of this wonderful country of different faiths and beliefs."

Some women who have left polygamous marriages in Utah criticized the decision, however.

"I don't think there's any good polygamy," Kristyn Decker told *The Salt Lake Tribune* in a Dec. 15 article. Decker abandoned polygamy after 50 years in the Apostolic United Brethren.

The problems with polygamy include the fostering of abuse, especially of women and children, and coercion of women in polygamous communities, Decker said. Their salvation is based on their belief in polygamy, women are taught in such communities, and they face ouster from their families if they disagree, she told *The Tribune*.

"It's not about choice," she said. "It's about coercion."

President George W. Bush nominated Waddoups to the federal judiciary in 2008. Waddoups holds a law degree from the University of Utah and an undergraduate degree from Brigham Young University.

The text of Waddoups' ruling can be accessed at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/191414121/Sister-Wives-Ruling>.

Finding leadership for the small church

By DR. JOE MCKEEVER

I recognize that "small" is relative. In Texas, land of vast distances and megachurches, a congregation of 200 souls may rank as tiny indeed. In Nevada and Montana, a church of that number would be seen as one of the larger congregations.

One thing we know, small congregations fight a never-ending battle for money to pay the pastor a living wage, money to cover the regular bills plus invest in missions and money to maintain a decent program. Leaders of small churches are forever looking for ways to be more effective with limited resources.

Decision-makers of such congregations might want to take a lesson from the owner of a major league baseball team situated in one of the smaller markets in this country.

Stu Sternberg is principal owner of the Tampa Bay Rays, Florida's American League baseball team. In the June 30, 2008, issue of "ESPN Magazine," Sternberg shares "8 things you should know about running a small-market baseball team."

In his article, we can find clues and insights here for a business or church being dwarfed by the big guys and having to get creative to stay competitive or effective.

1) Timing is everything. Sternberg says there is no point in his team paying big bucks for a player he cannot afford to keep. So, what he does is watch for windows of opportunity, a moment when a quality player might be available for fewer dollars due to circumstances.

A small church may scrounge enough money to fund an ambitious program one time, but then what will it do? Better to prayerfully find the kinds of ministry suitable to their church, their mission field, their resources. Nothing is more important than seeking in prayer the will of the One who is the Sole Owner

of your church.

2) Follow those Marlins. Sternberg's team learned from the Florida Marlins, a bigger-market team in his state, but still not in the running with New York, Los Angeles or Chicago. To stay competitive, the Marlins built a farm system which would take young players and prepare them for the majors, added key players for only two years at a time, and learned how to let stars move to other teams when they could no longer afford to keep them.

In most circumstances, a small church will not seek out its pastors or staffers in the "free agent market." That is, they will not try to entice a minister-on-the-cusp-of-greatness to their church, but will go a different route in building its staff. They might look within their own church for a layperson, find a young minister just starting, or talk to a successful one nearing retirement.

Even large congregations are known to use this system. I sat in Adrian Rogers' office a few years back and heard this well-known pastor tell how he had brought most of his staff right out of his congregation. I said, "They don't have seminary?" He laughed, "What do they need Hebrew and Greek for? We teach them how to do ministry!" He had his own farm system.

3) We have to pick well.... Sternberg says a team with little money will find its best future in selecting young players with great potential and investing in them. You take chances, he pointed out, but you have no other choice.

4) ...And scout well. Scouting—for the non-sports fans among us—refers to the process of checking out teams far and wide to find new talent. In major league ball, this often means

looking at players in the Caribbean, South America or Asia.

For the church, it may mean the pastor opening his eyes to great leadership inside his own or a neighboring congregation. A wise minister is always scouting for potential helpers.

5) ...Because we can't pay well. When a great player comes available as a free agent, even if his team doesn't have the money to compete with the big boys, Sternberg says they don't rule out trying to get him, but not with money. They try to find out what else the player is interested in. One pitcher wanted to be a closer and the Rays gave him that opportunity. Another longed to live in central Florida near his home.

A church should not automatically rule out a potential pastor or staff member who may be "priced out of your market." Some years ago, when the First Baptist Church of Lincolnton, NC, was seeking a pastor, I wrote them with a recommendation. I had preached a revival in that church and had come to an appreciation of their people and that town. Dr. Dixon Free, pastor of a larger church in Charlotte and a former neighbor of mine, would be ideal for Lincolnton, I thought. "However," I pointed out in the letter, "since his is a larger church, it might not occur to you to consider Dixon as a possibility for your pastor." I assured them he was a godly man of great character and that the desire of his heart is to do the will of God. "If God calls him to Lincolnton," I said, "he'll come." He did, and stayed with that church some 15 years.

6) We pull for other teams. Sternberg points out that baseball clubs in small-market teams often need each other's help to be able to compete with the large, wealthier teams.

Pastors should build networks of friends in the ministry

Finding leadership continued on p. 5

FROM THE EDITOR

What will you do?

If you were informed that the Lord would be returning for His bride in seven days, what would you do? My guess is that first, you would contact those you love the most in life and make certain they are ready for eternity. After speaking to those you love most about eternal life, you would probably take to Facebook, Twitter and use every other means of communication to reach out to as many people as possible with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Perhaps you would jump in your car or run up and down the street, knocking on doors and urging others to be saved by accepting Christ as Savior. It is possible that you would race to the nearest hospitals and nursing homes going door to door sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. It could be that you would hold a Bible study in your home to teach others all you could about the world to come and who Jesus is.

Knowing that the time of Christ's returning was extremely near, perhaps you would get in touch with those you have wronged and ask for their forgiveness. Maybe you would call every person who ever did something kind for you and express your appreciation. You might even tell the people you love, but have taken for granted, just how much they mean to you.

If you knew that seven days from now the eastern sky would spilt open and you would indeed see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of the air, my guess is that you would hit your knees,

tell the Lord how much you love Him, ask forgiveness for the numerous times you could have done more but didn't, or for the countless times you could have refrained from doing something you should not have but did anyway. I'm sure you would ask the Lord to help you make the most of the time you had left to do what could be done for His glory.

Supposing I am correct in all the things I've mentioned above, I pose this question to you: "If you were informed that the Lord would be returning for His bride in seven days, and that caused you to begin doing all the things I've mentioned above, then why aren't you doing them now?" Why am I not doing them now?

When the Lord told His disciples that no man knows the hour of His returning, and later said that He is coming quickly, I believe He meant it.

You see, the truth is the Lord could return seven days from now. He could even return today! So, let's get to doing what needs to be done!



▲ Jerry Fulton

An open letter to the churches of the BMA of Texas

Some wise man once said, "God must love small churches, because He made so many of them." With the larger majority of BMA churches being small, and getting smaller, we must deduce that God loves us an awful lot. I do not know the statistics, and I personally do not care what they are, but the fact is that the culture of a church-centered community has gone the way of the Dodo bird. And with it goes the ability of these small churches to adequately support the ministries that once meant so much to us.

As the pastor of a small church, I recognize the extreme difficulty of trying to keep the doors open because of financial hardship. It seems that the sacrificially faithful in the churches are becoming fewer as the churches get smaller. For whatever reason, and there are many, our BMA churches are getting smaller, fewer, and less able to support very important ministries, such as Jacksonville College. I certainly do not intend to demean the other departments, but since I serve as the president of the Jacksonville College Board of Visitors, that is where my heart must be at this moment. And it hurts my heart, as it should for all of us, that the college is suffering when it should not have to. God has clearly, and wonderfully, blessed the college with growth, vision, and opportunity. Yet the offerings from BMA churches have all but dried up.

Yes, it is difficult in this current climate for us to keep having our pockets turned out by an ever encroaching socialist government that wants to take away everything that we work for. But that does not relieve us of our responsibility in making our offerings for the service of our God. We rob God by not

giving sacrificially. Look it up, you will find it to be true.

I prayerfully beseech all BMA churches and church members to get on board with a renewed heart for Jacksonville College. While on the verge of a great opportunity, the slightest nudge either way could pave the future for this worthy ministry. If it is too hard to make a regular contribution, at least make an offering. The financial hardship that our churches are facing, is also being faced by our College. Just remember that "Little is much, when God is in it." And as our Lord could make a few loaves and fishes into a feast for thousands, He can take a little from us and make a miracle that will continue to bring glory to Himself through Jacksonville College.

Please, join me, in your churches, in your hearts and consider the need of the sacrificial giving that once put Jacksonville College together. And she will be able to continue the glory to God that she has always done.



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Finding leadership for the small church cont.

whom they love and respect. Then, when they are looking for an idea, seeking a staff member or trying to solve a problem, this network will often provide answers and unexpected resources.

7) Small things are big. “We don’t draw (crowds) like the Yankees,” Sternberg writes, “so we have to give extras.” The Rays’ ballpark, he says, offers free parking, impressive restrooms and the best hotdogs in the country.

Churches of all sizes would do well to seize their uniqueness and emphasize that in their community. Trying to do everything the big churches do will guarantee only failure and frustration since they don’t have resources to compete. However, every church of any size has strengths in the talents and abilities of its members. Leaders will do well to take advantage of the potential God has built into their congregation and no other.

It might come as a surprise to some people to learn not every creative ministry costs big bucks. The last church I pastored gathered up hundreds of unused Bibles which members had lying around their homes and gave them away on a Saturday morning in front of the church campus. This developed into a twice-a-year ministry of one of the adult Sunday school classes. The members not only gave away Bibles, but bore a gospel witness to people stopping by, made hundreds of new friends, took prayer requests and ministered to the needy. In the process,

it developed a reputation for giving, always a good thing for a church.

We did spend a few dollars on the restrooms, however. Anyone who attends sporting events in stadiums has seen the long lines outside restrooms, particularly the ladies’. When our sanctuary was constructed in the 1980’s, money was scarce and the restrooms were built too small. We left the men’s rooms untouched, but knocked out some walls for the ladies’ rooms and enlarged them.

We also have free parking, but never did get around to providing hot dogs.

8) Designate this. In the American League, teams are allowed to have a player called the designated hitter (DH). Almost always, the DH is an older player no longer quick in the field or fast on his feet, but still with hitting power at the plate. The DH does not play defense, but merely bats. Sternberg says, “We don’t have the money to pay a player who doesn’t field.” So, the Tampa Bay team does not have a DH.

It’s a wise church leader who decides his congregation does not need every innovation and trapping the big churches in town feel is necessary.

I recognize that some church leaders may be uncomfortable looking at ministries and leadership positions as the owner of a

sports team would see the challenges of his particular situation. However, just enough similarities exist between the church and that small-market team to suggest important clues to assist the smaller congregation and its leaders.

I keep thinking of a couple in a town not far from Mississippi State University who became “adoptive parents” for the quarterback of that school’s football team, the MSU Bulldogs. For four years, they welcomed this student athlete into their home for meals and a family atmosphere. In his last year, when the team was excelling and the quarterback had become a star, someone asked my friends how they had managed to “get the big dog.” They answered, “We got him when he was a pup.”

Another clue for the small church looking for great leadership: It’s all around you, just waiting to be recognized and developed.

Dr. Joe McKeever is an itinerant preacher who served five years as director of missions for the 100 Southern Baptist churches of metro New Orleans, and several years as a pastor. Visit www.joemckeever.com.



Gradual, steady, consistent

By DR. TRAVIS PLUMLEE

It should be no surprise to us that the devil is already trying to mess us up in 2014. That’s his job. He never tires of trying to discourage the followers of Christ. But we shall not let him have the victory. We are overcomers (John 16:33).

The Lord tells us to be happy because he has overcome the world. He tells us we will have tribulation in this life. Tribulation I think is worse than trouble. Sometimes in our life, we have troubles. But other times, we have tribulations. Those are the really hard times.

Don’t be surprised as it says in 1 Peter 4:12, even in a new year, you will have trials. As long as we are on this earth; there will be good times and hard times in any given year. The devil will try and discourage you through your troubles, but Jesus is here for you.

Nothing can come into your life or that of your family this year that Jesus has not already conquered. We have the victory in 2014 from day one to the last day because we have Jesus. There is victory in Jesus! Now that I have established our foundational attitude for the year; let’s move ahead on the changes we want to make for the better.

As I started out saying, the devil will tell you to just give up the first time we fail. However, our goal is not perfection. No matter what goal or New Year resolution we establish for ourselves, we will still not be perfect, and that is okay.

Take a bad habit. It could be smoking, cursing or yelling at a loved one. Maybe you have resolved in your mind to give up that behavior for the New Year. The first time you go ahead and have a cigarette, or eat a Twinkie, the devil will tell you to just give up. Your thought pattern will go something like this: “You blew it. You just did what you said you wouldn’t. You are not going to make it. You might as well give up.” But don’t.

Laugh in his face and say out loud the name of Jesus and the enemy has to run. He has no power over us because Jesus

has already defeated him, and Jesus is reigning inside of us.

We want to have a pattern of behavioral change that does not necessitate instant perfection with no setbacks. Set a goal of gradual improvement. Walk three steps forward and realize you may go one step back. When that happens, don’t quit. Pick yourself back up by the power of God and grow on.

Eventually, we want to move to steady improvement. This is where we are now going most days in the right direction. We are seeing a steady improvement each month. This is good. The setbacks still happen, but they are becoming less and less frequent.

Finally, we want to get to the point where we have consistent improvement. Now we have this new behavior as a habit and part of our daily routine. Occasionally, we will have a setback, but these are rare. It still does not defeat us because we know we are not perfect. We simply pray to our perfect Heavenly Father and He will lift us up every time. Go read Psalm 37:23, 24 and be encouraged. Your New Year goal for change should be to move from stopping the bad behavior, and moving in a line from steady, to gradual, to consistent.

When you fail, acknowledge the fact. Then, find out what preceded the event that caused you to fail. Recognize this trigger and try and avoid it as much as possible in the future.

If work stresses you out, or family does, so that you resort to your negative ways of dealing with it, and you can’t avoid work or family; then find new ways to respond to the daily stressors. Occupy your mind by quoting scripture. Pray. Keep your hands busy. Find a ministry or a hobby. Idle hands and idle minds are truly the devil’s playground.

Don’t keep yourself so busy that you are exhausted. Find some balance. But just remember you can control your thinking, and that is the majority of the battle with whatever you seek to overcome in 2014.

Philippians 2:5 says, “Let this mind be in you that was

also in Christ Jesus.” Think like Jesus. Proverbs 23:7 says, “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he...” 2 Corinthians 10:5, “Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”

Scripture is full of admonitions for us to put our thoughts on Christ, and godly things and watch what we think about. The mind dictates our behavior. If you don’t like doing something and want to change, then you must first change your mind—then change your behavior. The real victory comes from a mindset of change. And God will give you the power to do this. Don’t enter into thinking you are going to change a behavior, if you still have doubt in your mind. The heart dictates the mind, the mind dictates the emotions, and the emotions dictate the behavior. You can’t just change the external behavior. Lasting change requires a change of heart and mind.

Finally, change up the environment. Put scriptures up. Quit watching certain movies, reading certain magazines or going certain places. Whatever you are trying to stop, it helps greatly to change the routines and the surroundings. If you don’t have donuts in the house, you are much less likely to eat them. Sing praises to God. That always changes us for the better. Consistently sing unto the Lord and have a great 2014!

Dr. Travis Plumlee is a full-time professional speaker and leads Family Ark Ministries. He is national board certified as a therapist/specialist in various areas of human behavior. For more information or to contact him, visit www.travisplumlee.com.



An Expression of everlasting love

Many of our friends choose to honor or remember a family member, a friend or an associate with a gift for the children of the Texas Baptist Home. Texas Baptist Home, in turn, notifies the appropriate person. Listed in capital letters are those honored or remembered from Nov. 1, 2013 to Nov. 30, 2013.

ENDOWMENTS

MYRA STOKES: Bill Stokes

HONORARIUMS

ALL CHILDREN: Fugate & Sons Heating & Air, Mr. & Mrs. James O. Hill

ALL LITTLE CHILDREN: Charles & Vera Baucum

ALL SERVICE MEN & WOMEN: James D. Murphy

GOLDEN JUBILEE: Oscar & Christine Smith

BRO. JOHN & NELL GREGSON: Oscar & Christine Smith

BRO. CHARLES JOHNSON FOR PASTOR APPRECIATION: Larry & Pat Kearby

JANIE JOHNSON: Jean Anderson

MY GRANDCHILDREN-MAGGIE, CLAIR, & JACK: Billy Sanders

DEWRELL C. SPECK: Riley & Donna Waldrop

TBH CHILDREN: Earlene Crenshaw

JOHN & POLLY TOWNLEY: H. V. & Betty Minter

ALEX & ANDI: Danny & Diane Yount

MEMORIALS

J. T. ADAMS: Fair Park, Tyler

HAZEL ROSS ANDERS: Mrs. Peggy Lewis

RAYMOND BALL: Joe & Lorraine Alvarez, Mr. & Mrs. Earl Middleton

J. S. BASS: Charlotte Morgan

M. G. BOBBITT: Nelma Bobbitt

JULIE BOW: Virginia R. Sanders

JAMES "BUDDY" BRAGG: Jerry & Helen West

RUTH BRAZIER: Linda Lewis, Mrs. Bess Johnson, Irvan & Ruth Anthony, Dan & Margaret Anthony

MARTHA NELL CANON: H. J. Cannon, Jr.

RYDER BLAZE CHANEY: Mr. & Mrs. Glen Saxon

MRS. NELLIE CLAY: Margie Wolfe

FREDA CLINE: Annette's Fraternal Merchandise, Jerry Null

F. MICHAEL COKE: L. B. & Freedia Coke

HAZEL COOKSTON: Mrs. Carolyn Polasek

GEORGE DIETZ: Jerry Null

CECIL DOWNEY: Carlie Downey

BRO. OWEN DRY: Dorrell Freeman

WALTER C. DUNAVANT: Mrs. Janie Dunavant

LA VERNE MOORE EREKSON: Mr. & Mrs. John J. Moore

ALBERT EVANS: Lenora Evans

DALE FILES: Bro. & Mrs. Duane Turner

WESLEY E. "WINK" GIBSON: Bro. & Mrs. Charles M. Johnson, Palmour & Bertha

TBH Memorials continued on p. 7

DiscipleGuide Spring 2014 Compass: A Life Worth Living



By **SCOTT ATTEBERY**
DiscipleGuide Executive Director

The spring adult Sunday school studies from DiscipleGuide Church Resources began to take shape several decades ago when a nine-year-old boy headed out for Vacation Bible School with his mind on free candy. There he heard stories from the Bible for the first time in his life.

"On the last night," says Allen Tilley, "I heard about Jesus and His love for me, causing me to receive Christ as my Savior."

More recently, Dr. Tilley culminated the plans for the spring quarter by writing the lead publication on "A Life Worth Living," based on Ecclesiastes.

Dr. Tilley now pastors First, Carthage, Texas. In the years since he found Jesus at VBS he has earned degrees at Dallas Baptist University, the Baptist Missionary Association Theological Seminary, and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he received his doctorate.

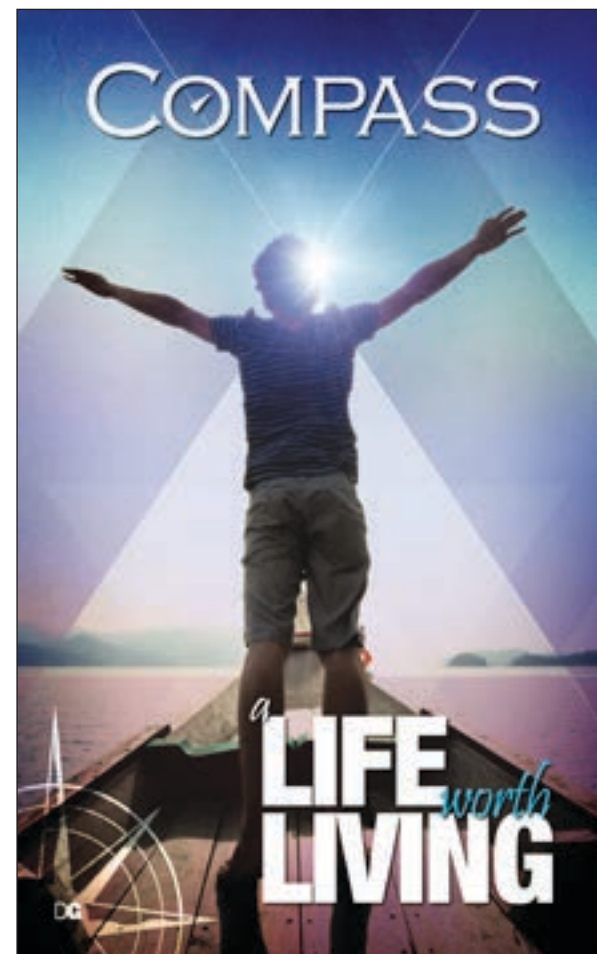
Based on his own life story, his years of ministry in BMA churches, and his in-depth study of Ecclesiastes, Dr. Tilley gives this reason for getting into this Old Testament book: "We need God and His influence in our lives. With the declining moral values of our country, life can appear hopeless, resulting in a what's-the-use mentality. Jesus makes life worth living."

In Ecclesiastes, King Solomon bared his soul about the futility of life without God. Evidently in his declining years, he wrote this book after drifting away from God and falling into a downward spiral. According to Dr. Tilley, "In Solomon's attempts to explain life without God, life lost its meaning. Everything seemed pointless."

Finally, after 12 chapters of depicting the emptiness of life from an earthly perspective alone, Solomon hit upon the greatest insight of his famous wisdom: "Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (12:13). And devotion to that duty turns life into a fulfilling adventure.

For Dr. Tilley, writing this quarter was personal. Here is his testimony:

"I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis five



years ago. Pain is my constant companion. Studying Ecclesiastes has taught me that if I face each day in my strength, pain will rob me of joy and deplete my faith. However, if I give each day to the Lord, He can take my frailties and use them for His glory. There is no greater satisfaction than knowing God has a purpose in all things, and He takes care of His children."

To obtain materials on "A Life Worth Living" for your church, type "Compass" in the search box at www.DiscipleGuide.org or call 800-333-1442.

Then gather the people for a relevant series of Bible studies. If necessary, offer them free candy.



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Doctrinal Distinctives

By **DR. MIKE SMITH**

“Although Jacksonville College had been accepted by the Baptist Association of Texas as their institution, the charter was not amended until November 7, 1923” to reflect this relationship (*A Centennial History of Jacksonville College* by John W. Gregson, p. 68). Jacksonville College is currently owned by the Baptist Missionary Association of Texas and in 2004, became affiliated with the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention.

The Board of Trustees has the final authority over Jacksonville College. Ten trustees are members of a BMA. of Texas church; three trustees are members of a Southern Baptists of Texas Convention church, and two trustees are “at large” members and recommended by the president. At their annual meeting, the BMA. gives its approval for the trustee candidates by voting. The Trustees direct the president to oversee the day to day operation of the college.

The Baptist Missionary Association of Texas and The Southern Baptists of Texas Convention each have doctrinal statements. Some of the common distinctives in both doctrinal statements are:

- The Bible is the inerrant, infallible word of God and is the final authority in all matters of belief and practice.
- There is one and only one living and triune God.
- Christ is the eternal Son of God. In His incarnation, Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.
- Salvation is the gracious act of God through faith in Jesus Christ and Him alone.
- Believers are to mature in the faith through discipleship and serve God and others through a New Testament Church
- Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth.

Because Jacksonville College was founded and continues to stand upon a Biblical foundation, Jacksonville College adheres to the above doctrinal statements.

Mission Statement

Jacksonville College exists to provide a quality education from a biblical worldview that challenges minds, transforms lives, and equips students for servant leadership and lifelong learning.

Every student who attends Jacksonville College will receive a quality education in a Christian environment. Pray for us and encourage students to attend Jacksonville College.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Registration for Spring 2014

January 14

Classes begin

January 15

Homecoming 2014

February 7-8

For the Homecoming schedule

visit www.jacksonville-college.edu/homecoming-schedule.htm.

For more information, contact Neatha Cagle at ncagle@jacksonville-college.edu.

Dr. Mike Smith is the president of Jacksonville College. Contact him at msmith@jacksonville-college.edu or 903-589-7106. You may also visit the Jacksonville College website, www.jacksonville-college.edu



TBH Memorials continued from p. 6

McCool, Tommy & Virginia Gipson, Mrs. Myrtie Langford, Joe Jack & Norma Lyle

HEATH GREEN: Jimmy & Cynthia Green

WANDA HICKINGBOTHAM: Bob Hickingbotham

DOROTHY HILL: Raymond O. Dennis

ESTELLE HYMER: Bro. & Mrs/ Charles M. Johnson, Larry & Pat Kearby, Palmour

McCool, Mrs. Myrtie Langford, Mike & Dana Hymer, Tim & Rhonda Thompson,

Danny & Becky Miller, Mrs. Lena Ruth Green

FRANCES HYMER: Mrs. Lena Ruth Green

RAYMOND T. JOHNSON: Chad & Alison Johnson

BECKY JONES: Linda Lewis

SYBIL KALLUS: Linda Lott

STANLEY T. KENT: Mrs. Dolly Kent

BILLY KING (HUSBAND) & BILLY KING (SON): Mrs. Margaret King

PETE LAGRONE: Lillian Pierce

ELVIN LAWSON: Alva L. & Velma Stinson

ROY LEWIS: Linda Lewis

VELMA LUSK: Billy L. Lusk

SARA BETH LYON: William Lyon

OLETA MAGEE: Chester & Linda Kennedy

JAMES MARSHALL: Jerry & Linda Richardson, Bro. & Mrs. Duane Turner

AUNT MARY MASON: Ray & Cheng Rhodes

MARY MAY: Willing Workers Class, First, Red Oak

IONA MCCOOL: Lake Highlands, Sulphur Springs

CHARLES MITCHELL: Mrs. Gay Mitchell

TAYLOR PARRISH: Judy Lambert

BRUCE PLEMONS: Tracy & Rose Moore

STEPHEN EDWARD ROBERSON, SR: Virginia R. Sanders

MAUDE ROBERTSON: Mrs. Carolyn Polasek

JOSIAH ALEXANDER RUIZ: Concha Rouse

MY WIFE JEAN: Billy Sanders

EMILY & DANNY SANNBERRY: Larry & Wanda Arnold

ELBERT SHAFER: Willing Workers Class, First, Red Oak

KENNETH SLAYTON: New Hope, Mineola

CAYDEN SIAS: Dickey & Kathy Hartley

TOMMY SIMPSON: Mrs. Marilyn J. Simpson

ROY STOUT: Joe Jack & Norma Lyle

JIMMY TANKERSLEY: Margaret Tankersley

LANDAN THIELE: Bro. & Mrs. Eddie M. Booth

MARGARET TILLEY: Bro. & Mrs. Charles M. Johnson, Sertrucha Class, First, Carthage

RADENE WEST: Francis A. West

BESSIE WILSON: Mr. & Mrs. Creasy, Brenda Lowe, Gene & Mary Ann Wilkerson

MARY EVELYN WOLFINGTON: Laura Mittelstedt, Fellowship Sunday School Class, Harmony, Normangee

AUXILIARIES

Happy New Year from your state WMA officers

By SHARON COLE

The greeting, “Happy New Year” has been said and will be repeated many times in the next couple of weeks, but it has not always been celebrated on Jan. 1. It was observed in ancient Babylon 4,000 years ago. Many years later it was celebrated on March 23 and lasted for 11 days. Because various emperors tampered with the calendar, it became out of synchronization with the sun, so in 153 B.C. the Roman Senate declared Jan 1 as the beginning of the New Year.

Early churches condemned the festivities of celebrating the New Year because of paganism. As Christianity became more widespread, the early church began having its own religious observances concurrently with many of the pagan celebrations, and New Year’s Day was no different. January 1 has been celebrated as a holiday by western nations for about the past 400 years.

There are many different traditions all over the world that people participate in, one of which is food. Some think you must consume black-eyed peas seasoned with hog jowl or ham which symbolizes prosperity. Cabbage and rice are also used in some regions for that purpose. The song, “Auld Lang Syne,” is sung in almost all English speaking countries of the world. The old Scottish tune literally means “the good old days” and was published in 1796.

As we reflect over the past year, some days were filled with sadness, mistakes and unfulfilled dreams. We must put the past behind us and go forward. Look at each new day with anticipation, remembering God is faithful. *“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”* Lam.3:22, 23.

As the New Year begins, each of us will be given 365 days; or so we think and plan for. What will we fill them with? 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 and

honored with our daily activities?

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 are plenty of things to hinder us. Many times we get discouraged if we don’t attain the goals that we set for the new-year and just give up trying. But we must realize that *“whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”* (Col.3:17). So there, it is God who we should try our best to please and not people.

There is no place for a Christian to quit. We may slow down or change our roles in life, but God never intends for us to quit. If you can speak, punch numbers on a phone, or just smile, you can be a blessing to someone. There is a phrase, “off with the old, on with the new.” A cosmetic surgeon can make us look new; a beautician can give us a new hairdo. These are external improvements.

As believers we are to have a new look on the inside. That change can only come when we let Jesus control our lives. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:17, *“...old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new.”* The New Year is filled with wonder of what it will bring. This is the time of year when we resolve to do better, turn over a new leaf, or change some things in our physical and social life.

We resolve to lose weight, quit some unwholesome habit, or be a better neighbor, but what about our spiritual life? We make excuses about why we don’t study our Bible, attend church faithfully, accept positions of responsibility or witness for Christ. They are all excuses hatched in our minds by Satan to keep us from being all we can be for God.

If you are someone who makes the traditional “resolutions,” perhaps the following suggestions will be more productive in letting your life count for Christ:

1. Rise every morning with a song in your heart

(Psalm 108:1, 2).

2. Begin a consistent prayer time (Philippians 4:6),
3. Control our words, thinking, and actions (Colossians 3:17).
4. Develop a relationship with a new friend (Proverbs 18:24).
5. Use our God-given talents (Philippians 1:6).
6. Renew our desire for knowledge and wisdom (James 1:5).
7. Commit one scripture to memory each day (Psalm 119:11).
8. Resolve to have a more positive attitude (Proverbs 17:22).
9. Practice the Golden Rule (Luke 6:31).
10. Seek new ladies in our church and community to join WMA (Luke 14:23).

Perhaps we have a neighbor, relative, close friend or just an acquaintance that we can enlist in WMA. Ask her to attend with you and tell her about the WMA Plan of Work. 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 to others. Ladies, let’s help our churches do the command of the Great Commission by getting others involved. Pray that God will be glorified in all we do this year.

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.



Happy New Year from WMA President

By DIANA MORRIS
Texas WMA President

I wish all the ladies of the BMA of Texas a Happy New Year. As your new state WMA president, I am looking forward to getting to know you. Since I may not get to meet you personally, allow me to introduce myself to you.

My name is Diana Smith Morris and I have been married to Calvin, a retired Dallas firefighter for 40 years. We have two children and six grandchildren. Our daughter, Tiffani lives in Rowlett and is a medical assistant. Our son Trevor and his family serve as our BMAA missionaries in Cuenca, Ecuador. My parents, Joe

and Frances Smith, served and pastored churches for over 35 years before my dad passed.

Our home church is Union Hill, Brownsboro where I serve as a musician on our praise team. I teach elementary music and have an opportunity to touch many children’s lives. I lead council time each week in AWANAs. Our church hosts KiDs Beach Club, an afterschool program at our schools, and I have the opportunity to share Jesus with all students who attend. Every Tuesday at 4:15 I have the privilege to share the plan of salvation with 50 to 75 students. That is doing missions on our home

mission field!

My goal for Texas WMA is that we reach out to other ladies and be the hands and feet of Jesus in our own mission fields as we offer God to everyone we meet. Let us strive to be the servant in Matthew 25 who took his talents and doubled them for his master.

I would love to visit each and every district in our state. Please contact me if I can help in anyway.

Diana Morris, Texas WMA President, 11671 Hwy 31 E, Brownsboro, Texas 75756; 903-288-7575, grammydi1013@msn.com.

Mission Life

By JERRY BURNAMAN

As pastors and church leaders, we've been thinking about how we can develop ministry projects and effectively engage people in our community during 2014. Have you asked these questions: What is the church supposed to do? What is our purpose? What actions would demonstrate that purpose?

Good questions and there are possibly many answers. Here are some summary statements advocated by Bob Logan and others who emphasize the idea that believers and churches are on mission—Jesus' mission. There are three categories:

Sacrificial Service

Jesus illustrated sacrificial service by washing the disciples feet (John 13:14-17). He said, "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."

Just as Jesus served the poor and brought hope to the broken, we are to follow in His footsteps. We are sent on mission to the world around us. Sacrificial service means forgetting self, removing selfish ambition and serves others as Jesus did.

Authentic Relationships

- What kind of authentic relationships are we talking about? The relationships that result from living out the "one-another" commandments:
- Be devoted to one another in love.
- Honor one another above yourselves.
- Live in harmony with one another.
- Serve one another humbly in love.

- Be kind and compassionate to one another.
- Forgive one another.
- Teach and admonish one another.
- Encourage one another.
- Love one another as brothers and sisters.

With a casual glance to conclusion is that these commandments refer only to relationships within the church. However, authentic relationships are not limited to other believers. We're called to engage honestly and respectfully with those who see life differently than we do. We are to take the initiative to be present and hospitable. We're to be our authentic selves—sharing our joys, struggles, doubts and beliefs—as we engage in relationships.

Spiritual Transformation

As we serve sacrificially and engage in authentic relationships a wonderful thing happens: *transformation* (Note Matthew 25:40). We see the power of the gospel transforming us, others, and communities around us.

We are talking about the confession of sin and the expression of grace—repentance, changed lives, baptism, and the celebration of the Lord's Supper. We cannot truly engage with God without coming away changed.

"Some people think, 'I witness with my actions.' Others think, 'I witness with my words.' Both are necessary. We need to demonstrate the gospel and articulate the gospel. As you serve sacrificially, look for responsive people with whom you can share the story of Jesus."—Dave Devries

Robert E. Logan in his book *The Missional Journey* gives examples of how to practice these three categories of ministry. It is well worth the price to purchase a copy and share the ideas with your ministry team and leaders.

Here are some workshops we offer through State Missions to assist churches in discovering how they can serve one another in the church, and sacrificially serve in the community to see life change

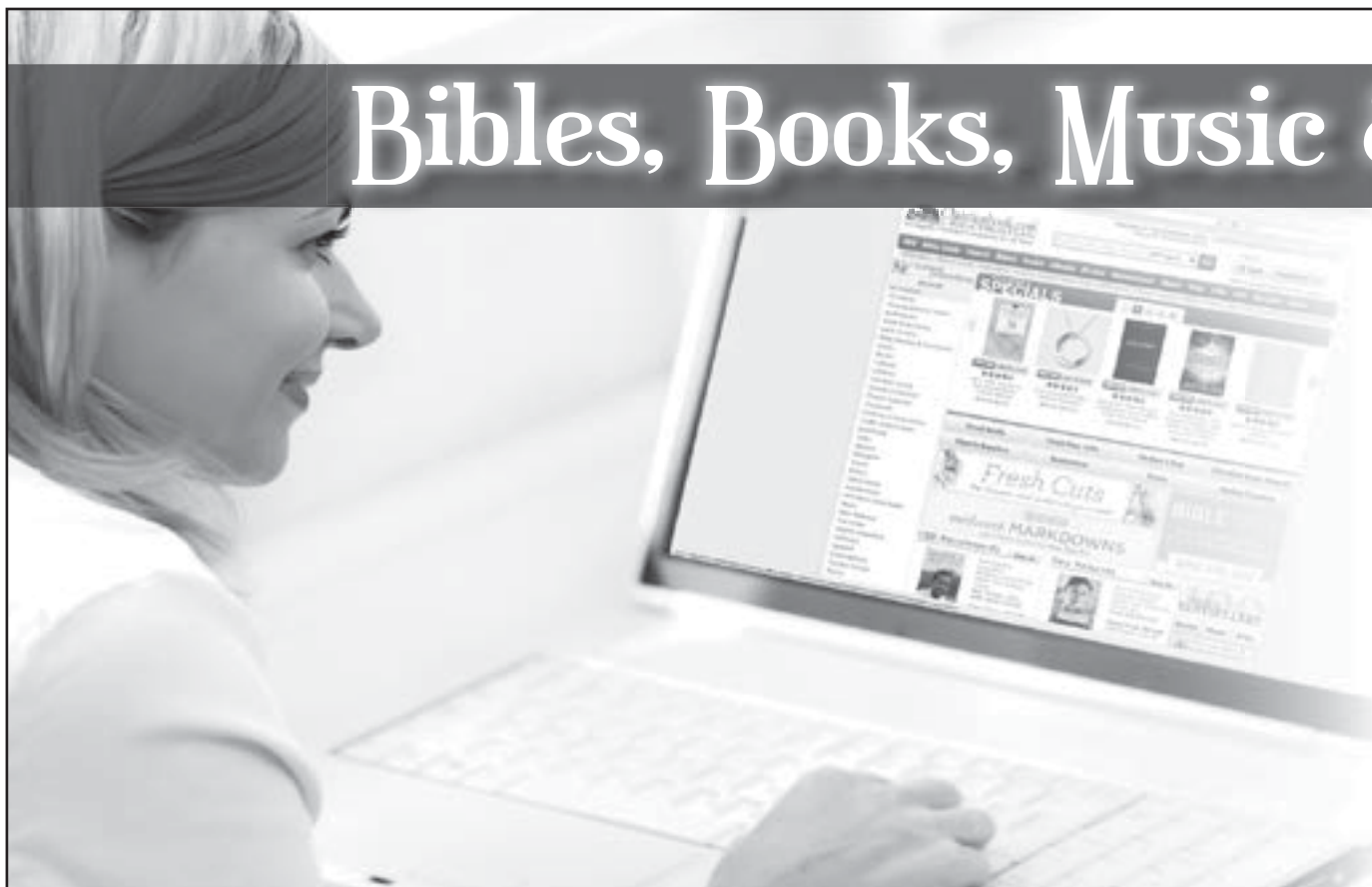
- Generations (Their impact on church and ministry).
- PRISM Perspectives (Introduction & basic). Understanding yourself and others.
- Keys to Building Leadership.
- TEAM Building (Building the right TEAM).
- The Church, Call and Culture.
- Reclaiming the Cause.
- Laying the Foundation for Growth.

Mission Life means that we want to be like Jesus and be involved in His Mission. If we can assist your church or association with one or more of these workshops, just give us a call at 972-923-0757.

Jerry Burnaman is the executive director of State Missions and the Baptist Missionary Loan Association. Contact him at jerryburnaman@yahoo.com or 972-923-0757.



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When you order through our website, Christian Book Distributors shares their sales profit with us. Get to shopping!

EVENTS

JANUARY 12, 2014

Concert & Message
@ Concord, Gilmer
by Jerry Fulton, Baptist Progress Editor
11 a.m.

JANUARY 16, 2014

Jacksonville College Rally
@ Antioch, Gilmer

JANUARY 19, 2013

James McCarty to be ordained to
Gospel Ministry
@ Farley Street, Waxahachie
2:30 p.m.

FEBRUARY 9, 2014

Baptist Progress Rally
@ Rosewood, Gilmer
Message & singing
by Jerry Fulton, Baptist Progress Editor
11 a.m.

FEBRUARY 23, 2014

World Missions Sunday
@ New Harmony Baptist Church, Tyler
North American Missions Operations
Director Larry Barker, guest speaker
Morning Service @ 10 a.m.
Missions Banquet @ 11:30 a.m.
Evening Service w/several missionaries
speaking @ 6 p.m.
March 13, 2014
Texas Baptist Home Rally
@ Brumley, Gilmer

APRIL 28-30, 2014

Annual Meeting of the BMAA
@ Statehouse Convention Center,
Little Rock, Ark.

MAY 15, 2014

BMMI Rally
@ Willow Oak, Gilmer

AUGUST 14, 2014

LifeWord Media Ministries Rally
@ Woodland, Gilmer

OCTOBER 13-14, 2014

Annual Liberty Baptist Association
@ Little Mound, Big Sandy

NOVEMBER 4-5, 2014

Annual Meeting of the BMA of Texas
@ Keltys First, Lufkin

PERSONNEL & POSITIONS

AVAILABLE POSITIONS

Pastor—Macune, San Augustine is seeking a full time pastor.
Send resume to the church, P.O. Box 774, San Augustine,
Texas 75972.

OBITUARIES

Duane Heflin, 83, died Dec. 14 at his home in San Pedro de Oca San Jose, Costa Rica. He was elected as a BMA missionary to Costa Rica in 1961 and retired in 2001. Survivors include his wife, Tommie Francis (Marshall) Heflin; two sons, Robert Marshall Heflin of Marshall, and Dr. David Heflin, who serves at Jacksonville College in Jacksonville; three daughters, Charlotte Hudler of Lake Charles, La.; Darla Moore of Fairfield; and Gina Easterling, whose husband, Robert, serves as pastor of Mahl, Nacogdoches; nine grandchildren and six great grandchildren. Funeral services were held Dec. 16 in Costa Rica, and a second service on Sunday, Dec. 22, at Hawthorne Funeral Home in Carthage.

James Edwin Burch, 93, of Conway, Ark., passed away, Dec. 14, 2013. He was an ordained Baptist minister and a member of Eastside Missionary Baptist Church in Conway. He served as music director and pastor for churches in Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Oklahoma. He served as chairman of the music department at Central Baptist College in Conway, Ark., and as assistant director of Harvest Gleaner Hour (Lifeword Media Ministries), also in Conway.

He is survived by his daughters, Jerene (George) Reddin of Greenwood, Ark.; Karen (Travis) Moore of Slidell, La.; and Lynnette (David) Stanley of Greenbrier, Ark.; his sister, Virginia Cecil of Hudson, Fla.;

Funeral services were Dec. 16, 2013, in the chapel of Griffin Leggett Conway, with his grandchildren officiating. Burial will follow at Oak Grove Cemetery. Memorials may be made to Central Baptist College or Lifeword Media Ministries.

DISCIPLEWAY TRAINING

January 24-25, 2014

South Park Baptist Church Fort Worth, Texas

Beginning at 8:30 a.m. on Friday
and concluding at 3 p.m. on Saturday

Cost is \$50 per person

Contact the church office if you would like to attend.

817-293-2760 or judy@spbcfw.org.

The registration deadline
and \$50 fee is January 10, 2014.



New *FREE* Course from BMATS!

BMA Seminary is offering a free online, non-credit course for Spring 2014: Life of Christ (NT213cf). This eight-week course taught by Dr. Tony Cleaver is an examination of the factual basis of Christianity as it is found in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. The purpose of the course is to promote subjective comprehension and response to the basic truths of Christianity which emerge from the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Students will receive a certificate of completion.

Textbooks:

The Holy Bible – Student selected English translation

A Simplified Harmony of the Gospels – George W. Knight, Broadman and Holman Publishers, ISBN 0805494235

Sign up online at: <http://bmats.edu/other-educational-opportunities/free-courses/>

CHURCHES IN REVIEW

DECEMBER 15, 2013

Church	SS	Worship	Additions
Anthony Drive, Ennis	60	81	
Cedar Creek, Teague	15	35	
Elwood, Wills Point	9	43	
Farley Street, Waxahachie	409	489	
First, Blooming Grove	210		2 baptism, 1 letter
First, New Summerfield	31	42	
First, Palmer	35	52	
Glade Creek, Gilmer	19	30	
Harvest, Lufkin	30	40	
Lake Highlands, Sulphur Springs	88	136	4 by letter
Little Flock, Lufkin		30	
Little Mound, Big Sandy	41	54	
Long Creek, Sunnyvale	67	82	
New Harmony, Tyler	277	347	
New Haven, Dallas	37	60	
New Hope, Mineola	76	123	
Pilgrim Rest #2, Golden	61	71	
Pine Brook, Tyler	26	79	
Rosewood, Gilmer	92	148	
Security Calvary, Cleveland	20	38	
Tundra, Canton	111	135	
Walnut Street, Winnsboro	139	172	
Woodland, Splendora	40	68	

For publication, statistics for Churches in Review must be received by Monday at 5 p.m.

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The Talleys in concert at

First Baptist Church,
Blooming Grove, Texas

Sunday, January 19, 2013
6 p.m.

A love offering will be received.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

Marriage by the book

By GARY HOUSE

DATE: January 5, 2014

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 7:1-40

LESSON IN BRIEF: For Christians, God's will overrides evolving cultural norms concerning marriage. Follow biblical principles in your marital decisions and conduct (Hebrews 13:4).

Marriage is a hot topic in today's culture, as many are disdaining the traditional norms of marriage as a God-given gift between a man and woman. God's plan involves one man, one woman for life. However, many have chosen to just live together, (no real commitment) or "starter marriages," marrying without the intent of staying permanently married to the same person. And we all are aware of the prominence of "Civil Unions" between two men, or two women (homosexual unions). Yet these are not modern issues; they were rampant in Corinth in the first century.

Chapter 7 of 1 Corinthians may be called Paul's advice about relationships between men and women. It is given to answer the questions of the Corinthian believers, who having heard the warnings against sexual immorality (Chapter 6) wondered, "Is it better to remain celibate or to be married?" A quick scan of the chapter reveals four areas of discussion:

- About Marriage (7:1-9)
- About Divorce (7:10-14)
- About Remarriage (7:15-16)
- About Singleness (7:17-40)

In this brief lesson, we can only summarize Paul's teachings.

MARRIAGE. It is better to marry than to burn with passion. Paul recognizes marriage as a legitimate refuge from pressures of sexual immorality. One should not feel they are immature or unspiritual because they desire to get married so as to not burn with passion. The purpose of marriage is not simply procreation, but companionship and intimacy. God told Adam that it was not good for man to be alone (Genesis 2:18) so he created woman. In verses 10-16 of the text, Paul reminds those married to value their vows. In other words, seek satisfaction and contentment within the bonds of marriage. Verses 3-6 details the principles of mutual sexual responsibility in marriage: The husband must render to his wife the affection due her, as does the wife to her husband. The emphasis is on giving, not just receiving. In God's heart, sex is put on a much higher level than merely being the husband's privilege and the wife's duty.

The principle in this passage is important. God makes it clear that there is nothing wrong, and everything right, about sex in marriage. Satan's great strategy, when it comes to sex, is to do everything he can to encourage sex outside of marriage, and to discourage sex within marriage. It is an equal victory for Satan if he accomplishes either plan!

DIVORCE (verses 10-14). Divorce and separation for Christian couples.

"Now to the married." A wife is not to depart from her husband. The Corinthians thought that if it were more spiritual to be single, they should break up existing marriages for the cause of greater holiness. Paul answers their question straight from the heart of the Lord: absolutely not! Even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband: Paul, in addressing a marriage where both partners are Christians, says that they should not—indeed, cannot—break up the marriage in a misguided search for higher spirituality. In fact, if one

were to depart their spouse, they must either remain unmarried or be reconciled.

God hates divorce! The two specific grounds under which God will recognize a divorce: when there is sexual immorality (Matthew 19:3-9) and in the case when a believing partner is deserted by an unbelieving spouse (1 Corinthians 7:15).

"And a husband is not to divorce his wife." Paul applies the same principle to husbands as to wives, and makes the important distinction between one who might depart (separation while still honoring the marriage covenant) and one who might divorce.

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE when a Christian is married to an unchristian spouse: (verses 12-16.) "Let him not divorce her." This spiritual concern is a valid and urgent reason for not marrying an unbeliever (2 Corinthians 6:14). But it is not a reason for ending an existing marriage with an unbeliever.

"For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife." Why should a Christian try to keep their marriage to a non-Christian together? Because God can be glorified in such a marriage, and do a work through the believing spouse to draw the unbelieving spouse to Jesus Christ.

"But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart." Paul has counseled that the Christian partner should do what they can to keep the marriage together. But if the unbelieving spouse refuses to be married, then the marriage can be broken; but this isn't to be initiated or sought by the believer.

The principle (1 Corinthians 7:17). You can live for God where you are right now. As the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. No matter what your station (married, single, divorced, widowed, remarried, whatever), God can work in your life. Instead of thinking that you can or will walk for the Lord when your station changes, walk for the Lord in the place you are at right now. This also is a warning about trying to undo the past in regard to relationships; God tells us to repent of whatever sin is there and then to move on. If you are married to your second wife, after wrongfully divorcing your first wife, and become a Christian, don't think you must now leave your second wife and go back to your first wife, trying to undo the past. As the Lord has called you, walk in that place right now.

SINGLENES. To be single is a special gifting from God. What is the advantage of remaining single? Essentially, singleness is a gift that allows a person to focus on God completely—no distractions. And according to Paul, who was single at this time, this is far better than marriage. Marriage is not wrong but singleness is better because of the ability to focus on God. Paul doesn't want anyone to think that being married was less spiritual, or more spiritual. It is all according to an individual's gifting. But the unmarried person is to remain celibate.

Most significantly, Paul is never implying that being married or single is more spiritual than the other state; this was the big error of the Corinthian Christians. For Paul, the most important thing in life was not romantic love, but pleasing God. For him, he could please God better as single, but another may please God better as married, all according to our calling.

Whatever choice a person makes—whether to remain single or to marry, he or she must also make another choice—to be committed to following God and living by his standards in that choice.

The limits of Christian liberty

By GARY HOUSE

DATES: January 12, 2014

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 8: 1-13

LESSON IN BRIEF: Do not insist on your liberty of conduct in Christ if it causes another to stumble. We should never influence a fellow Christian to do anything that the Holy Spirit through that person's conscience forbids him to do, because in doing so we may cause him to stumble in his faith (verse 9).

How far does Christian freedom go in regard to behavior not specifically forbidden in Scripture? This is the question of the Corinthians which Paul addresses in this chapter.

The background to this passage was the worship of idols which was prevalent in the apostle Paul's time. As part of this worship choice cuts of meat and other foods were placed before the idols who, since they were of stone or wood, could not eat the food provided. And so this food was either given away or sold. Some Christians argued that since they did not believe in idols eating such food was not a problem. The Apostle Paul agreed but noted that other, perhaps younger Christians, saw this as affirming worship of the idol itself and so were hurt in their faith, causing Paul to conclude that he himself would not eat food offered to idols because eating such a food could be the cause of other Christians falling away from their faith. As he put it, "if food is a cause of their failing, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall."

Liberty is a wonderful thing, but liberty needs always to be balanced with responsibility. I realize that this balance is easy to talk about but hard to achieve. How do we balance these two so that others are not hurt, but the individual also experiences the freedom Christ came to bring us? Fortunately, Paul provides guidance for us not just in this specific instance of eating or refraining of eating meat sacrificed to idols. If this was the only guidance Paul offered we would be in trouble because that practice has gone by the wayside thousands of years ago. No, Paul offers guidance which can cover the multiplicity of situations which we face in our lives where our freedom and someone else's well being may seem to be in conflict with each other.

Scripture is very clear on some issues. However, there are many behaviors that are not directly dealt with in scripture. Paul presents two principles that are to govern our liberty. **The Principle of Love over Knowledge (8:1-6.)** The problem with human knowledge is that it tends to reinforce arrogance. Many of the Corinthian Christians knew (by experience or learning or effort) that sacrifices were offered to the gods to gain their favor, but they knew that was not a reality. They had become self-confident and arrogant. They had knowledge without love.

The power of godly knowledge. (8:4-6) The more we know about God the less we believe in idols (8:4; Psalm 115:3-8.) We

must seek to balance knowledge with love. Right at the beginning of this passage he writes these words, "knowledge puffs up but love builds up." Not too many chapters later in this letter he writes those famous words, "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have not love I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal." Love, love for God, for the other, for self is the light which can guide us through the thorny issues of liberty and responsibility, not knowledge, or power, or wealth, or science, or religion but love because all these other things "puff up." Love alone "builds up." Love edifies others (8:1b.) Love experiences God (verse 3).

The Principle of Neighbor over Self (8:7-13)

We must be aware of the weakness of some believer's conscience (8:7-9).

Not all believers are mature in their knowledge and understanding of spiritual truths (8:7a).

Some believers struggle with past sins that we do not have to deal with (8:7b).

If those believers ignore or violate their conscience, they commit sin (8:7c; Romans 14:23).

Doing things not forbidden by God has no significance in our relationship to Him. They are spiritually neutral (8:8; Matthew 15:17-18).

We should never influence a fellow Christian to do anything that the Holy Spirit through that person's conscience forbids him to do, because in doing so we may cause him to stumble in his faith (8:9).

We must be aware of the witness of our conduct (8:10-11). Our behavior alone may influence other weaker Christians to go against his conscience (8:10). By our example a weaker believer may become involved in behavior that would cause them to sin (8:11).

We must not wrong Christ (8:12-13). When we cause a brother to stumble, we sin against our Lord. We who are strong should change our behavior in order not to cause our brother to stumble (8:13).

While the issue of eating meat offered to idols is no longer a problem, the issue represents a principle that still applies. Parading your Christian freedom can generate spiritual confusion. We are free to do anything the Bible does not forbid in word or principle. But if a Christian over whom we have influence is spiritually troubled by our actions, we should refrain from those actions. May God help us not to be a stumbling block.

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What sort of New Year's resolution should a christian make?

By S. MICHAEL HOUDMANN

GotQuestions.org CEO

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 Dec. 31 and Jan. 1. Nothing mystical occurs at midnight on Dec. 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."*



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