

BAPTIST TRUMPET

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JTC Responding After Tennessee Tornadoes

By Jeff Herring, Executive Editor

Just the Crumbs (JTC) is currently on the field in the Clarksville, Tenn. area after the tornadoes that crossed through the area on Saturday, Dec. 9. According to the National Weather Service, the greater Nashville region was pummeled by an estimated 13 tornadoes. Clarks-

ville was hit with an EF-3 tornado that had 150 mph winds and was 600 yards in width that destroyed 91 homes and damaged 675. An EF-2 tornado also tore through Madison, Hendersonville and Gallatin, with winds up to 125 mph and a width of 400 yards. Officials said 6 people died Saturday night in Clarksville and Madison, and 83 people were reportedly transported to area hospitals.

"The damage is heavy, and several have lost their lives, their homes and are affected in many ways. We would appreciate any support you can give us and prayers are always needed," said Bryson Haden with JTC. "Volunteers, prayer and funds are what is needed," he added.

If you would like to volunteer, contact Brandy Haden at (601) 441-4586 to set up a time to help.

You can also help by making a donation at paypal.me/JustTheCrumbs or via the BMA Missions website where you can designate your offering for Disaster Relief at tiny.cc/BMADisasterRelief. Donations can be mailed to Just The Crumbs, 10 Wagon Trail, Sumrall, Miss. 39482; or BMA Missions, P.O. Box 878, Conway, Ark. 72033. (Please specify for "Just The Crumbs.")

MOVING with Ministers and Staff

This is only a news column, and the publishing of a person's availability should not be considered a recommendation by the Trumpet. To view previous listings from this column, visit our website at www.BaptistTrumpet.com.

CountyLine Baptist Church in Marvell is seeking a full-time pastor. Inquiries may be made to Tommie Shackelford at (870) 338-2873.

Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church in Mineola, Tex. is seeking a full-time pastor. Resumes may be sent to Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church, 5848 S. State Hwy. 37, Mineola, Tex. 75773 or mpmbc.mineola@gmail.com.



Two New Safe Haven Baby Boxes Dedicated

Two new Safe Haven Baby Box locations were dedicated this week in Arkansas bringing the total in the state to 23. The new Safe Haven Baby Boxes locations are at the Mayflower Police Station and Russellville Fire Department Station No. 3.

"The Mayflower Baby Box is the first Arkansas location to feature the anonymous surrender option at a police station," said Safe Haven Baby Box Founder Monica Kelsey. "For years, police departments have been a site for the Safe Haven Law's surrender, but we are now adding the condition of anonymity," she said. "What is so crucial is protecting these infants and their brave birth mothers. If we can ensure they do not have to choose between protecting their infant or their identity, we can end infant abandonment. We know the community of Mayflower will be better off for this additional measure of protection."

Russellville Mayor Fred Teague said, "We, as the City of Russellville, are grateful to be part of the

See BABY, Page 12



BMA Global Keepsake Christmas Ornament

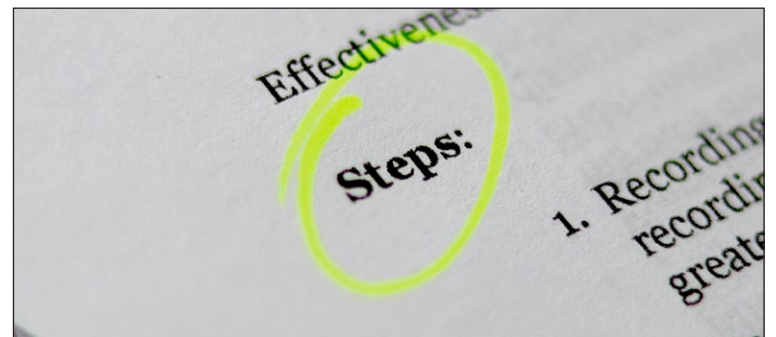
By Holly Meriweather

Missionaries have been my heroes since learning about them through GMA (Girls' Missionary Auxiliary). I passed that down to my daughters when they memorized the missionaries' names and sent letters to them. But it wasn't until I began serving at BMA Global that I understood the broader picture of how we serve our missionaries' needs.

God's mission to make Jesus known may take them to far corners of the world in isolated villages. Others have been called to urban areas, planting churches that reach local people. Some are in closed or creative access countries that require name changes. They are not fearful of their safety; when they say "home," they mean the place they serve.

But sometimes, they need a special kind of care.

Director Dr. Jonathan Montgomery leads BMA Global Missionary Care. He prepares, equips and ministers to BMA missionaries so they can be fruitful in life and ministry. The purpose is to serve our mission- See ORNAMENT, Page 2



Is Your Financial House in Order?

By Dr. Steve Crawley, Executive Director • BMA Financial

The end of the year is approaching, and it's a great time to take steps that can help improve your personal finances. Here are 10 finance steps to consider before the end of 2023:

- If you're not retired, review your contributions to retirement accounts, such as IRAs.
- If you or your spouse is 72 or older, Required Minimum Distributions (RMD) must be taken before Dec. 31. Otherwise, you could incur an additional 50% penalty tax.
- Make charitable contributions you want to be able to claim as a deduction on this year's tax forms.
- Compare this year's spending against your budget and make any necessary adjustments for next year.
- Do you expect to earn more next year? Consider putting all or part of your expected increase into savings.
- Check your asset allocation and make any necessary changes.

See HOUSE, Page 12

In This Issue

BMA of Arkansas: Transformed (pg. 5-8)

Abortion Battle Lines in Arkansas (pg. 4)

Prayers for Seasons (pg. 4)

Spotlight on Missions (pg. 9)

The Epic Story of Truth — Part 1 (pg. 10)



Terry Kimbrow
President



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Sports News

By Erik Holth

Men's Basketball

• **Blue Mountain, Miss., Dec. 9** — Playing on the road for the ninth consecutive game, CBC took on the Toppers of Blue Mountain Christian University (BMCU) at Topper Gym. CBC (8-3) trailed at halftime, came back, but ultimately saw their five-game winning streak come to an end, 59-58, to BMCU (5-5). **Deshawn Corprew** led the way with a 20-point, 11 rebound double-double, his fifth double-double of the season, while **Sage Borbon** chipped in with 18 and **Jonas Carlisle** had 10. CBC trailed in statistical categories all over, getting outrebounded 37-34, committing 12 turnovers while forcing only 6, getting outscored in the paint 34-22 and getting outscored off the bench 21-2.

Wrestling

• **Walnut Ridge, Dec. 7** — Returning to the mat for the first time since Nov. 18, CBC took on the Eagles of Williams Baptist University (WBU) inside the Southerland Mabee Center. CBC got two individual wins and another win by forfeit, falling to WBU 40-16. The forfeit came at 125 pounds for the Mustangs and CBC's nationally ranked wrestler, **#25 David Corretjer**, moved up to 133 pounds for the evening and won by fall at that weight class, while **Alejandro Mas** was able to score a major decision victory at 149 pounds.

ORNAMENT (Continued From Page 1)

ary families as they serve others by caring for spiritual, physical and emotional needs. Jonathan contacts them daily, assessing their spiritual and emotional needs and providing encouragement and counseling.

Jonathan is selling these beautiful BMA Global Christmas ornaments for \$25 to continue providing critical aid to our heroes. Uniquely designed to replicate the Missionary Care Conference Christmas tree, all proceeds go to Missionary Care.

Please consider purchasing an ornament so you and your family can remember to pray for our missionaries. You can order yours at tiny.cc/BMAGlobalOrnament. The ornaments can also be purchased at the BMA Global Missions Center in Conway. For more information, contact Bro. Jonathan at jonathan@bmaglobal.org or call (501) 455-4977.



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Our Hearts During the Holidays

If we aren't careful, our hearts can be focused on the completely wrong things during the holidays. It doesn't matter if we are 14 or 45. We tend to reflect our culture, which has consistently moved away from a Christ-focused Christmas. We can turn on "A Charlie Brown Christmas" and hear Linus share Luke's account of Christmas, but that doesn't make up for all the other junk we focus on. We are asked what we want for Christmas and even instructed to make lists for others. We are encouraged to make the holiday about us from the earliest of ages. And trust me, I don't share these ideas from a "judgey" place. I have made lists and have asked for lists. However, that is not what Christmas should be about.

As student ministry workers, our goal is to help our students become more faithful followers of Jesus. That makes it essential to help our students focus on the important things of the holidays. What should we and our students think about?

• **Think about Jesus over the silly Christmas characters.** I love "Frosty the Snow Man" and have sung "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" more than once, but they aren't Jesus. Utilize your lesson times to make much of Him. If you are doing a Christmas series, spend time with the greatness of God's gift. Make Him the center of your activities, ministry opportunities and gatherings. That doesn't mean that we cut the fun. It simply means we celebrate what is most important. During the quieter times, use an Advent devotional. Spend time thinking about what Jesus' coming means to you and your students.

• **Think about others over ourselves.** Christmas can turn into a very selfish holiday if we aren't careful. It can be about us, even when we think we are focusing on others with family gatherings and activities. We want to buy someone the best gift so we feel good. It is a very fine line to walk, but if we simply embrace the Great Commandment from Matt. 22:36-40, we understand we are to love God and love people. Christmas shouldn't be about us but about others. How can we bless our friends, family and neighbors? That should be toward the top of our list.

• **Think about giving over receiving.** If we think about it, the 'Ole Christmas list is a bit of a problem. It promotes the idea of "What am I going to get?" And we perpetuate it by asking our students and family members what they hope they will receive for Christmas. As hard as I look in Scripture, I can't seem to come across that idea. However, we see on many occasions where we are to share with others and provide help and love. Encourage your group to think about how they can impact their friends and neighbors. Provide opportunities for your students to support a worthy cause financially.

Getting our hearts right during the holidays means getting our thinking right about Christmas. It is essential to take time to think about what we are doing and what that says to our students, children and congregations. I love Christmas traditions, but if they don't make much of Jesus, it may be time to set them aside. It is okay for us to be different than the culture around us. Let's make sure our hearts are focused on the great gift of Jesus during Christmas.

CENTRAL BAPTIST COLLEGE

5TH ANNUAL SCHOLARSHIP GALA

+

ENDURING Faith

March 1, 2024

ANTIOCH BAPTIST CHURCH
150 Amity Road • Conway, AR 72032
6:00 P.M.

Fifth Annual Scholarship Gala

Central Baptist College's Fifth Annual Scholarship Gala will take place on Friday, March 1, at 6 p.m. at Antioch Baptist Church in Conway. The black-tie optional event will be catered by CBC Dining Services under the direction of Chef Billie Rodriguez. The night will be a celebration Enduring Faith and will feature keynote speaker, Dr. Jack Graham. The proceeds from the event will benefit the CBC Scholarship Fund, which supports institutionally funded scholarships.

Dr. Jack Graham is the senior pastor of Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano, Texas. He is known for being the leader of one of the nation's largest, most dynamic congregations. Dr. Graham began preaching at Prestonwood in 1989 to a congregation of around 8,000 people. In the years since, the congregation has grown to 57,000 and continues to flourish in the North Texas region. Dr. Graham also served as president of the Southern Baptist Convention for two terms. He is married to Deb Graham and has three children and eight grandchildren.

Dr. Graham has written many books, including: *A Man of God: Essential Priorities for Every Man's Life*; *Unseen: Angels, Satan, Heaven, Hell, and Winning the Battle for Eternity*; *Angels: Who They Are, What They Do and Why It Matters*; *Powering Up: The Fulfillment and Fruit of a God-Fueled Life*; and *Courageous Parenting*, written with his wife, Deb. His most recent book is *Reignite: Fresh Focus for an Enduring Faith*, in which he talks about how to keep Christ in focus during dark days.

The teaching of Dr. Graham is available to people across the country through PowerPoint Ministries (his radio, TV and internet ministry). On this platform, Dr. Graham teaches culturally relevant lessons meant to make an impact on the lives of his audience. Dr. Graham is known for straightforward messages and powerful preaching styles.

Tickets are now available for an incredible evening of **Enduring Faith**. Event sponsorships begin at \$2,000. Single tickets are on sale for \$100 each. For more information or to purchase tickets, visit cbc.edu/gala or contact Peggy Pillow at ppillow@cbc.edu or (501) 205-8834.



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Little is much when God is in it

Small Things

Years ago in a revival meeting, at the end of every service, Pastor Rufus Crawford would end the meeting by singing, “Little is Much When God Is in It!” The truth of that song being sung every night was a great reminder that Jesus is more interested in the quality of our walk with Him than the number of people present. Jesus likened His kingdom to a mustard seed and leaven. Henry Blackaby stated, “We measure success by the number of people involved in our ministry. We seek spectacular displays of God’s power. We must learn to view success as God does. God is interested in the heart; He is pleased with obedience.”

Small churches matter, and God has the wonderful habit of working in extraordinary ways through very ordinary-looking circumstances. During this Christmas season, we are reminded that God has responded throughout history by sending a baby, such as Isaac, Moses, Samuel, John the Baptist and, of course, Jesus. Henry Blackaby stated, “When Jesus selected His first disciples, He could have enlisted a multitude to follow Him, but He chose 12. It was not the number of the disciples, but the quality of their walk with Him.” D.L. Moody understood this by stating, “The world has yet to see what God will do with a man fully consecrated to Him.”

Jesus began His ministry “upside down” compared to how we would rather start—with the big and spectacular. Jesus began with the seemingly insignificant. The debate has been ongoing for a long time about which is better, building a church from crowd to core or from core to crowd. Jesus’ ministry was focused not only “upside down” but also it was “inside out.” Most churches seem to focus on centrifugal force by creating motion in the middle and believing it will “pull” others toward them. It is the Field of Dreams mantra, “Build

it, and they will come!” Who does not love a full auditorium and a packed-out service?

You hear, “Well, they must be doing something right at that church. Look at how full the parking lot is on Sunday!” Is that the best metric to use for “success” in ministry? Size, in and of itself, whether large or small, does not guarantee that a church is biblically sound or that it is not. All too often, we are enamored with the motto, “Bigger is better,” while God has repeatedly focused on and worked through the small, ordinary and seemingly insignificant. Zechariah 4:10 (HCSB) says, “*For who scorns the day of small things?*” The focus of the Great Commission is centrifugal force, where the church is living on mission by going out and making disciples.

Small beginnings give you an opportunity to start again by hitting the reset button. It is a new chance to do what is right, a new opportunity to live according to His plan, a new time to experience new things and to live and fulfill God’s mission through obedience to His Great Commission. Do not judge what others are doing or not doing, but begin believing again that “little is much when God is in it.” Yes, God loves small churches, but He also loves big churches, and one of the worst things you can do is compare because it tends to breed jealousy and envy. The focus is more on the message and mission than the methods utilized.

Scott Hubbard stated this about Zech. 4:10: “Christians worship a big God with a big mission that will one day reach this whole big world. Yet, for all His bigness, our God has a remarkable love for the small. He sets his eye upon small people in small places during small moments (Psalm 33:18; Matt. 6:4). The Son of God, who ‘...did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,’ (Phil.

2:6-8 ESV) even became small to save us.” We love to embrace the truth of how big God is, but then struggle to embrace God’s love for the small, such as Gideon’s 300 or the little boy’s 5 loaves and 2 fish.

Scott continued, “What will it mean for us to worship a God who works like this? It will mean praying for the big, longing for the big, and working for the big—all while faithfully and contentedly devoting ourselves to the small. Pray for revival, then prepare breakfast for the kids. Dream of the knowledge of God’s glory flooding the Earth (Hab. 2:14), then bring a taste of that glory to the neighbor next door. Preach a grand vision to dozens or hundreds on Sunday, then sit and listen to the wounded one on Monday.” It means faithfulness where you are, to the people around you, and to the task God has placed before you.

Who is that one person you need to call and encourage? Where is that neighbor you need to build a relationship with to, hopefully, share the gospel? Who is the person you need to begin discipling by intentionally meeting with them consistently with a reproducible process? Where is the one you need to invite into your home and have a “small” time of fellowship over a meal to let them know they are loved? Where is that needy person you could serve through some “small” act of kindness that would make a “big” impression on their life? Do not underestimate the mustard seed or leaven.

Start small through awareness. How many people in the last week have you made aware of God, your church or you in a positive way? (Acts of kindness, encouraging words, a smile, etc.) In the last week, how many from the awareness category do you know by name, they know your name and you are praying for them regularly? (Prayer is not optional.) How many from the connections category do you know their story, they know you know their story and you connect with them on a regular basis? (Have coffee with them, go shopping with them, help them with yard work, etc.) How many from the relationships category know that you know Jesus, and you want them to know and grow in Jesus?

Little is much when God is in it!

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OF A BMA OF ARKANSAS CHURCH?

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Spinning My Gears

a young pastor's perspective

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Community And The Call For Transparency

Funeral services are not what we want to think about with Christmas knocking at our doors. The liturgical themes of Hope, Joy, Peace and Love do not mesh well with reflections on death. Nevertheless, at this time of year, many families have no choice as they gather around a table with an empty chair.

I am confident that I am not unique in providing instruction at the funerals I have participated in to remember grieving families during the holidays. With that in mind, I ask the readers of this column to remember those who celebrate Christmas differently for the first time. Of course, feelings of emptiness and isolation are not plagues reserved for those familiar with loss.

Recently, I have noticed an air of loneliness in several young people. The irony that I write this article “from a young pastor’s perspective” is not lost on me. The youngest adults today are in a group called “Generation Z.” They are between 11 and 26 years old. This age group is the first generation to grow up with cell phones and social media as an ingrained part of their life. After growing up with an artificial community and synthetic relationships, it is apparent that this generation of young adults is desperate to belong to a tribe of their own.

My wife, Michelle, got a text message from a Gen Z friend that we were a part of discipling while we were in Northwest Arkansas, expressing this very thing. Our friend said, “I want real, raw relationships, transparency without judgment and deep conversations.” In my head, I used to mock comments like that. You may be doing the same thing now. Having been a part of the writer’s life, I know that “transparency without judgment” does not mean “confession without accountability.” The call for “deep conversations” isn’t an appeal for more sensationalism or goosebump moments during Bible study. My young friend wants to live out their faith with their tribe. Understanding this message gets my gears going.

As the age scale moves higher, the tendency to protect oneself with vagueness under the guise of diplomacy slides with it. As a young

pastor, I am frequently frustrated with failed attempts at getting my mature church members to open up. I understand why we may be guarded or reserved in the workplace. I’ve had the proverbial knife stuck in my back, too. I get it. The community of God’s people should look different, though. There are consequences to failing our fellow Christians in this way. We can avoid these consequences with some easily implemented behaviors and commitments to one another. If successful, the potential is sincerely awe-inspiring.

This year will be the first Christmas without my mother-in-law. Like many families I have had the privilege of ministering to this year, our table will have an empty chair. Comforted by God, there is still a longing in our home for things to run “normally.” Our loss this past year includes the transparency that allowed deep conversations. I miss conspiring with my mother-in-law to surprise my wife. It seems as though I am without my grown-up shenanigan buddy. This grief helps to explain the loneliness of today’s youth. While many grieve what was once here, the young adults long for what they’ve never had. Where does this longing for community come from? Christ’s advent aimed to “seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). The lost are why we don’t escape to Heaven’s glory at the moment of salvation. The lost are why our gears keep spinning. The desire for community is often the beginning of God directing His lost sheep back to their flock.

The consequence of failing to provide the relational needs of a grieving heart and a lonely person is that there is today an abundance of alternative quasi-communities that may allure and misdirect them. Innocent fandoms become idols. Hobbies define the person instead of the person defining the hobby. God made humanity to desire community. He designed you and me as social beings. Before the fall, the first thing that the Lord declared “not good” was for “man to be alone” (Gen. 2:18). Most church members realize the responsibility that comes with caring for the

See GEARS, Page 12

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The Battle Lines Are Now Being Drawn

By Larry Page, Executive Director • Arkansas Faith & Ethics Council

Arkansans for Limited Government is a ballot question committee that recently filed a proposed state constitutional amendment to legalize abortion throughout the entire pregnancy. If the initiative qualifies for the November 2024 general election ballot and is approved by a majority of the state's voters, it will do away with all the hard-earned gains we have won in protecting the innocent and defenseless preborn in Arkansas.

After decades of struggle and intense efforts, we have managed to chip away at the illicit "right" to kill the precious unborn in our state. Today, our state's laws impose a near complete ban on abortion, with the only exception being if abortion is absolutely necessary to save the life of the mother.

This amendment — should it find its way into our state constitution — would allow virtually unrestricted abortion for all nine months of pregnancy. The drafters of the amendment sought to craft it in such a way that it would deceive voters into thinking that it was not such an extreme expansion of a restored right to abort a child. They attempted this bit of subterfuge by providing that abortion would be allowed up to 18 weeks after conception. However, language was included in the amendment that would provide exceptions and allow abortions at any stage in the pregnancy for rape, incest, fatal fetal anomaly or to protect the life or **health** of the mother (Emphasis added).

What does the nebulous word "health" mean in the amendment, and what conditions might justify the performance of an abortion at any time — even up to the time for birth? Well, those with experience in parsing this kind of legal jargon in the context of abortion laws tell us that health can mean virtually anything a doctor construes it to mean. In other words, abortion could be permitted under this proposal in situations like mild depression, anxiety and in any number of nonserious, manageable conditions. And nothing would prevent a nonexistent condition from being put forward to permit the abortion to be performed.

As you can easily recognize, this so-called "moderate" abortion initiative is a stealthy attempt to allow virtually unrestricted abortion in Arkansas, make no mistake about it. The Arkansans for Limited Government committee is a serious, no-nonsense group of committed zealots who are set on a course to make abortion a wide-open proposition in Arkansas, and they will be well-funded.

Groups like Arkansans for Limited Government have already greatly expanded access to abortion in seven states — California, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Montana, Vermont and, most recently, Ohio. In all these states, the pro-life groups opposing the efforts to increase abortion availability in their states have been vastly outspent by the pro-abortion groups, with funding coming from wealthy liberal groups and individuals.

From all indications, this battle will soon be on us. We must begin to organize, raise awareness and bring our grassroots network into the loop, raise funds and craft the proper messages to give people reason and purpose in helping to protect the precious unborn who cannot speak for or defend themselves. They must count on us to do that for them. Let's please not fail them.

To everyone, thanks for allowing us to serve you. And to those who support us with your prayers and financial gifts, we appreciate that you have chosen to partner with us. Our gratitude for you runs deep.



Leave it to Cleaver

By Dr. Tony Cleaver

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Prayers for Seasons

Executive Editor's Note: The following are excerpts from Dr. Cleaver's book, Prayers for This Year that is available on Amazon.

Introduction

People need to pray. Christians want to pray to their Lord, and recent polls indicate that most Christians pray daily. Some of us who have lives with ragged edges probably pray more than once a day. Here are 366 prayers for this year. Use them as an impetus to spur your own prayers onward and upward!

I believe the key to prayer is more than asking God to fulfill a wish list or to listen to a list of "gimmies." Praise and thankfulness are keys to prayers, and both of these elements are best practiced as we pray.

There are many aspects of praying. I remind myself of these easy-to-forget simplicities as I pray:

- Think of being in divine presence — pray that way.
- Think of being in desperate need — pray that way.
- Think of being in dire hopelessness — pray that way.
- Think of being in delirious joy — pray that way.

I hope these words will assist some other sister or brother along the way as we all walk together in the path of the pilgrim following Jesus. Words of Christian greats have influenced me as I have prayed. I am not a Christian great, but I hope these words can encourage you to be a great Christian as you pray.

I wrote these prayers over a period of three years from my calendar of significant life events. Because of that, the sequence, may at times, be out of chronological order. Keep this in mind as you read and pray with me each day in *Prayers for This Year*.

Thanksgiving

Lord of the harvest, hear my prayer this great American day. I didn't know until I lived in another country that everyone did not celebrate Thanksgiving. I assumed as a child — even as an adult — that all people celebrated this Thanksgiving Day like I had always done. Well, I found out they don't. Other countries may call it by another name or celebrate it in another season.

That first Thanksgiving is writ-

Prayers for This Year

366 prayers for the year

Tony Cleaver

ten in all our minds from childhood. We dress in Pilgrim costumes, Indian costumes and other assorted theatrical clothes to present the "First Thanksgiving" at our elementary school play. That is good. It helps us to recall a grand event.

That first Thanksgiving was not necessarily one of abundance as I know it. It came from sickness, death, privation, hardship, cold, fatigue and relentless work in a strange land. What a day that

must have been! What a contrast to today. I bow my head at Your beneficent hand on my land. I bend my knee for Your grace. I let my heart rejoice in Your blessings on this land. Thank you.

May I celebrate this Thanksgiving with the true "thanksgiving" of a Christian on a pilgrimage joined hand to hand with those around me and connected to those in the past. This Thanksgiving is due to the open-handedness of the God of Heaven. It is due to the sacrifice of those who have gone before me. I do not sit at this loaded table on my own.

As I sit here, may I remember there are those who are not with me in abundance. May I focus my "thanksgiving" on them in order to alleviate some of their hunger, disease, and hopelessness. I think this best done through Your Church. Bless this prayer today that others may have good in this land. Amen.

The Gift of Christ

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for Your gifts to me. The unspeakable gift is Christ. His life, ministry, death, burial, resurrection, ascension and coming again made possible my salvation. This is a gift that comes to a person like me totally undeserved but of Your grace and mercy! Thanks be to God for this unspeakable gift! Certainly, and surely, I enjoyed the giving of gifts in my home this Christmas. Our tree was sur-

See SEASONS, Page 12

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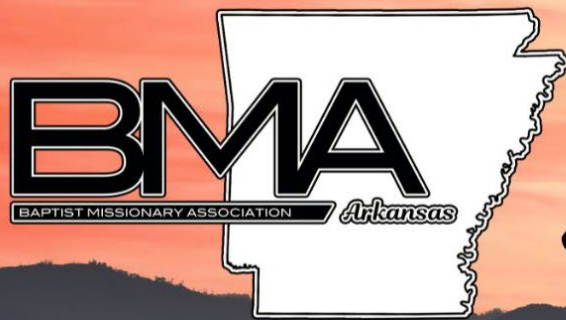
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ARKANSAS: TRANSFORMED

Stories of Transformed Lives



By Dan Carson, Director

Student ministry doesn't end at high school graduation. While the weekly meetings and activities may be over, our students are trying to navigate their next steps. For many of them, college is what is next. I am thankful for the men and women who invested in me during those pivotal years. I think about Johnnie Hoffman, who served as the Association of Baptist Students (ABS) director in Conway while I was in town, as well as the couples at Antioch Baptist Church of Conway and Eastside Baptist Church of Conway who loved on me and my wife while we were young and didn't know much.

Our ABS ministries are incredibly valuable as a stop-gap, but they are more than that. They help students find their way and are constantly mindful of reaching their campuses for Christ. Stuart Estes is the Ministry Team Leader at the University of Arkansas ABS. They go by "The Hedge" and are working to make an impact on the 30,000 students connected to the U of A. If you have a student in Fayetteville, you should let them know about The Hedge. Read as Stuart shares about their ministry:



By Stuart Estes, Team Leader

If ever there was a place where people seek things, it is an American university campus. Students from all over the globe flock to these institutions seeking many different things—a bright future, a soulmate, a season of coming of age and some even come looking for an education. Among Arkansas' universities, none draws a greater number of these students than the University of Arkansas (U of A) in Fayetteville. With over 32,000 students enrolled, the U of A hosts students from 49 states and more than 100 countries. The university is composed of 10 different colleges and schools that offer more than 265 academic programs. It is indeed a bright, vibrant and lively place.



But it is also a very dark, cold, and dead place.

Many of the students who flock to the University seeking things, find something different. A bright future becomes an all-consuming idol. A soulmate becomes a string of broken and painful relationships. A season of coming of age becomes a spiral of sinful revelry. And they receive an education far more frightening and hopeless than they expected.

Students come seeking an abundant life, yet in seeking that life on their own terms, they find death. *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death"* (Prov. 14:12 ESV).

Jesus was a seeker, but not in the same way students at the U of A are. In Luke 19:10, Jesus said of His own purpose: *"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."* At the Association of Baptist Students (ABS) at the U of A, we seek what our Lord seeks. We seek the helpless and the harassed. We seek the sheep who have no Shepherd. We seek the lost, and we lead them to the Savior who can save them.

A Strong Foundation

ABS at the U of A was organized more than 50 years ago by the BMA of the Ozarks. Jim Shine was a director early in the ministry's history, followed by Warren Dugas, who served in that role for 42 years. Brad Harris, pastor of Prairie Oaks Baptist Church in Prairie Grove, served alongside Bro. Warren for more than 15 years as the assistant director. I am a relative newcomer to this work, as I am in my fourth year of serving as the ministry team leader.

One thing that strikes me about this ministry is the deep impact it has had on students who have been a part of it. I often talk with Razorbacks who are older than me, and they recount the stories of how God used ABS to completely transform the trajectory of their lives. God has, indeed, saved many souls, strengthened many disciples and started many

a good work through this ministry.

Another thing that strikes me as I have these conversations is how God has used the simplest of things to do this work—community. Many an ABS alumnus has told me that the community of faith at the ministry was the thing that brought them to the work, and it was also the thing that brought them closer to the Lord. As they share with me, they cannot help but speak of their faithful brothers and sisters who were at the ministry with them. There is no way for them to separate what God has done in them from what He was also doing in their friends. Certainly, there is no need to separate these things.

One final thing that strikes me about this ministry's past is its leaders' allegiance to the Word of God. Often, I sit and talk with Bro. Brad about the things my students are struggling with and the places I am sending them in the Word of God for their answers. It's as if I'm telling him things he already knows—and he does! He offered those precious passages to his struggling students. God uses His Word to transform students, both now and then.

A community of faith centered around the Word of God. That's our basic play, and we run it over and over again. This mentality led a group of students in the 2000s to start calling ABS by another name. What they found at ABS was a place of protection, a refuge of faith from the world around them. So they aptly started calling their Tuesday night gathering "The Hedge." It quickly became the moniker of the ministry house on Clinton Drive in Fayetteville as well, and now my students carry on this tradition. On the U of A campus, we are The Hedge, and we are proud to be known and to know others in this way.

Compel Them to Come

Jesus' final words to His disciples before His ascension were: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And, behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age"* (Matt. 28:19-20). This command is at the heart of the work at The Hedge, but what is increasingly driving our pursuit of this cause is another thing Jesus said during His earthly ministry.

In Luke 14, Jesus told a parable about a man who threw a great banquet and invited all his friends. Once preparations had been made, the man sent a servant to tell his invitees that the feast was ready. One by one, those he invited made excuses about why they could not attend—one had to inspect a field, one had to go look at a team of oxen, one had to be with his newlywed wife. So, the man sent his servant to gather the poor, crippled, blind and lame to come to the feast. And even at that, there was still room for more attendees. So, the man said to his servant, *"Go out to the highways and the hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled."*

That parable is shaping our approach to making disciples at the U of A in two particular ways:

• **We are looking to the highways and hedges.** It's very easy for a campus ministry funded through the support of

BMA churches to fall into a line of thinking that essentially makes the campus ministry the "next level" youth group for BMA students. But that's not what we want to be at The Hedge, and we are looking to the highways and hedges of the U of A to find anyone the Father is drawing unto Himself. We are seeing the fields that are ripe for harvest, and we are praying for laborers to be sent.

• **We are prioritizing compelling.** At the start of the semester, we started a new weekly meeting. Every Friday, my wife and I and a group of 5-7 students have been meeting in the Arkansas Union for a time devoted to the work of evangelism. We eat, drink and breathe evangelism at these meetings. We've talked about the necessity and importance of sharing the gospel. We've shared tips for how to share the gospel and how to prepare to share the gospel and, most importantly, we have shared the gospel. I have sat with many of my students as they shared the gospel for the first time. As we have walked away from those gospel conversations, we've debriefed the experiences. Most did not end with someone coming to Christ, but I'm reminded over and over again that as we are prioritizing compelling, we are prioritizing obedience, and my students are finding deep and satisfying joy in that obedience. I know that, given time and effort, we will see the house filled as we continue to compel them to come.

The Lord has positioned us in a unique reality. People from all nations come to the U of A seeking things. The ministry has a strong foundation as a community centered around the Word of God. We feel a growing sense of the magnitude of compelling others to come to the Lord. The only thing more exciting than to be in this work in this moment is to eagerly await what the Lord will do next. He has commanded us to go into the highways and hedges to compel them to come to His house. He will see it done, and we, at The Hedge, will continue to marvel as He does it.



U of A students, and even some ABS alumni share a night of fun and festivities at the annual Welcome Back to School Event at The Hedge.

- Plan to attend SMWR 2024 on Sept. 14, 2024
- Check out the Student Ministry Matters podcast at studentministrymatters.podbean.com or through most major podcasting platforms.
- Join the Student Ministry Matters Community on Facebook at Facebook.com/groups/StudentMinistryMattersCommunity.



72 years (1951-2023) of sharing the gospel across ARkansas and beyond.
Our heARtbeat is to see lives changed for the glory of God as we
spread the gospel by planting new churches in AREas where
people need to be connected to Jesus through a community of faith.



Working on a Building!

By Johnny Shew • Faith Chapel, Flippin

Hi, everyone. I just wanted to update you and share a few pictures of the new building you are helping us build. We have a steeple, and the outside is complete! Praise God!

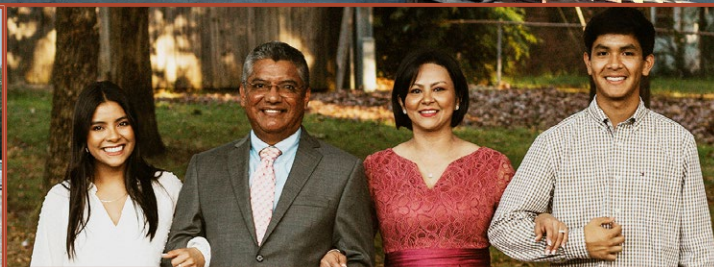
When I put in my weekly report that the steeple had come in, I got a lot of interest and advice from people and churches that had experience with putting them up and maintaining them over the years, and we appreciated that so much! It helped us plan and execute the installation so that it went 100% according to plan, and we should avoid any unexpected issues going forward! Thanks to all who helped us with that.

As I said, the outside is complete except for setting the heat pumps on the pads that we poured, and all the pre-drywall work inside is also done! Praise God for that too! We are waiting for the drywall contractor now, but that shouldn't take too long, and we have a lot of little details to work on in the meantime.

It will be so good to be in there finally. We still don't have a firm date, but we are patient, knowing that God will have us in there in His timing, and we trust in Him completely. We also know that building this building is not our primary mission. Sharing Christ with this community is, so any time we are not working on the building, we can focus more on that. We have to be careful that the building does not become a distraction. So far, it hasn't, though; it has actually generated a lot of interest in our mission, opened a lot of doors, and made us a more permanent part of the community. Praise God again!

We thank God for you, your support and your prayers. Please continue because God is answering them!





Playground at ICC

By Juan Carlos Posadas • Misión Creciendo en Cristo, NLR

We at Iglesia Creciendo en Cristo (ICC) wholeheartedly wish to send a clear and strong message to the children and their families that we love them and are willing to dedicate the necessary resources to ensure they have what they need to establish a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This determination leads us to aim for well-trained teachers who instruct them in Sunday School. We take advantage of every opportunity to teach them the Word, including Vacation Bible School, the Christmas season and every Wednesday during discipleship meetings.

With 50% of attendees under 12 years old and no playground in our building, chaos ensues when children seek places to play after meals during communion meetings, often ending up in the halls and nursery. Identifying the need for a safe place for children to play under adult supervision was easy. In August, we enthusiastically began the construction of a playground on the east side of the temple. As of Dec. 9, with 250 volunteer hours and 80 hours contracted, the equipment and its safety surface are installed. We have the pending task of installing a chain-link fence for the children's safety.

The acquisition, construction and installation process has taken longer than expected. The children eagerly await the moment when the park is ready for use. Little Julito looked joyfully at the installed equipment one afternoon and asked his mom if he could go play. Cindy explained that it wasn't safe yet and that they needed to wait for the fence to be installed. With sadness, Julito lowered his head and asked when it would be finished. Thankfully, we only need a couple more weekends to have it ready for the children to start enjoying. It will be a lovely Christmas gift for our children.

We are very grateful to the Missions Office and the Revolving Fund, as through these funds, we have been able to access financing to develop the playground project.



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Mustang Message

Jeff Riddle: “I Have Seen God’s Hand” By Mason Crymes

Jeff Riddle is currently in his 39th year at Central Baptist College. After entering as a student in 1985, he has held numerous roles, being involved in every academic year since. He began as the basketball team manager when he was recruited to the position by Coach Robert Stewart. He then worked as assistant coach and intramural director as he finished his education at the University of Central Arkansas.

After this, Riddle began working as a full-time employee, starting as an Admissions counselor in 1991. He continued working in the Admissions office until becoming Director of Admission in 1994. After this, from 1996 to 2003, Riddle served as dean of Students and vice president for Student Services.

After working in these administration capacities, Riddle transitioned back into the gym and began working as chair of the Physical Education Department and Athletic director. Not long after this, he transitioned out of the role of Athletic Director, becoming a full-time instructor in 2006. Since then, he has continued working as the PE Department Chair and Division Chair.

Riddle has played a big part in many students’ lives over the years, always being available and willing to help them along their academic journey. Almost any student since 1996 probably has memories of Fall Hay Day at the Riddle Farm, which has become an enduring tradition. Hay Day began when Riddle was dean of Students after the Student Government Association developed the idea as a CBC alternative to a Halloween Party. “We have enjoyed having so many students at our home through the years. Our favorite part is watching students interact with each other who would normally not have a chance to hang out together,” Riddle said.

Riddle’s family has been very involved at CBC over the years. His sons, Blake and Landon, and his wife, Julie, attended CBC. “We are a CBC family! Julie and I met at CBC. Blake met his wife, Chelsea, and Landon met his wife, Hannah, at CBC. It’s hard to imagine how our lives would be if not for CBC!” Riddle says.

Through all his years here, Riddle gives God the glory and credit for sustaining and guiding him. “I have no doubt that God placed me here in 1985 and has opened numerous doors to allow me to serve Him in this place,” he says. His biggest highlight over the years has been simply watching God work in the students’ lives and being able to play a part in their experience here. “CBC is still a place where God changes people’s lives by giving them a foundation for spiritual growth,” Riddle said.

Riddle has filled many roles over the years and has been faithful to the mission of CBC. Looking back, Riddle is confident that God has worked through the school, impacting people’s lives. “I have been at CBC for over half of its existence. I have seen God’s hand on so many things,” Riddle says, “It has been incredible to see His faithfulness in this place.”



CBC is committed to transforming lives by providing an education that integrates Christian faith and academic excellence in a Christ-centered environment.

Spotlight On Missions

Send offerings to BMA Missions

P.O. Box 878 • Conway, AR 72033-0878 • 501.455.4977 • www.bmamissions.org



Mickeal & Sharon Quillman • Zambia

"I want a hippopotamus for Christmas. Only a hippopotamus will do. I don't want a doll, no dinky Tinkertoy. I want a hippopotamus to play with and enjoy!"

I used to sing that song all the time as a kid, never thinking I would live in a place where I actually have hippos! A few weeks ago, Sharon and I were given the opportunity to go canoeing on the Zambezi River with a couple of friends we have made here. We were told this area of the river only had 23 hippos in total, and the hippos never went where we would be.

As we began our journey down the river, everything was fine. We were going through different rapids and small waterfalls, and I was beginning to relax. For those who know me, you know I do not like water — swimming, tubing, canoeing, etc. — but my wife loves it, so into the water I go. We turned a small bend, and there were some rapids approaching, so, with Sharon in the lead canoe and me in the following canoe, we placed our oars up as instructed by our guides. Suddenly, I heard a loud splash, and the guide in Sharon's canoe started yelling and whistling loudly.

Sharon grabbed her oar and started paddling vigorously. It was then that I noticed them — two full-grown hippos ran from the bank and into the water. Sharon was safely ahead, but my canoe was right next to them. I can tell you this, I have never paddled a canoe faster than I did that day. Fortunately, the hippos only gave a small chase of 10-12 feet before giving up due to the rapids.

As we are ministering here in Zambia, we are always teaching and reminding the new believers to be on guard. As they are coming out of animism and other false religions to follow the One-True God, Satan is always lurking and scheming to attack. The Bible likens him to a roaring lion (which we also have here) seeking those he can devour. We must be prepared to fend off these attacks, but sometimes, we do

not see them coming and are caught off-guard because they come from areas we were not expecting.

One of our recent new believers is the wife of a local headman. She has been very faithful to attend all our Bible studies — even walking 90 minutes to attend them. Her husband is not a believer and follows the traditional witchdoctor and their beliefs. One of her first challenges came when the headman wanted to take their seed for planting to the witchdoctor and pay him to "bless" them. For those who are not familiar with animism and witchdoctors, the simple explanation is that it is the belief that all living things have a soul — plants, animals, rocks, mountains, rivers, people, etc. It is a very evil practice of dark witchcraft with roots based in the occult. She told her husband that this was a false god and they should ask the one true God to bless them.

This caused a major battle for her, as women here are seen as subservient to men and are not to question their husbands. In this patriarchal society, women are not even addressed by their name but as "the mother of" their firstborn child's name. When we arrived the next day, Sharon noticed that she was not her normal, happy self and went to speak with her. She explained everything that happened and how she refused to go with her husband to the witchdoctor. He said if she wouldn't go to the witchdoctor that she wouldn't be going to Bible study either. Even though they live in this patriarchal system, her husband has always treated her more as an equal. The headman's wife was not expecting this attack from her husband of 20 years. She

also let Sharon know how she told her husband that she would be asking "her God" for the true blessing. She was then worried because, as a new Christian, she did not even know if it was okay to ask God to bless their crops, but she knew it was not okay to pray to a false god.

Sharon gave her a hug and told her that we can ask our God for anything and explained John 14:14 to her. We told her we would also be praying that God would give her a harvest that could not be explained other than the one true God had blessed her faithfulness. During our Bible study, which she was not allowed to attend, we had a special prayer time for her, the fields, the rains and the future harvest. We know Satan likes to appear and cause problems, but our God is all powerful, and provides what we need, when we need it. While we were praying, I noticed it was getting harder to hear. The one true God had sent rain while we were praying! The sound of the rain on the metal roof was almost deafening so we just began to praise God for sending it.

We all know the importance of having a good harvest of crops, but here, it is the difference in life and death. One bad season of crops can mean starvation for an entire community. I ask that you pray for her to remain strong in her faith, pray for the headman to have his eyes and heart opened and for me as I continue to seek ways to share the true gospel of Jesus Christ with him. In addition to the material crop, please be praying for the spiritual harvest here as we see God moving and changing lives. Also be praying for the spiritual attacks that come our way around every



TRAVELING WITH OUR LITTLE BLESSINGS



Joshua & Meagan Phiri • Zambia

As we approach the beginning of a new year, I wanted to share some exciting updates and prayer requests concerning our return to Zambia and the future of our ministry. This journey back to Zambia will be unique as we will be traveling with our three little blessings — a four-year-old, an almost two-year-old, and a three-month-old. Your prayers for safety, health and peace during the travel are deeply appreciated.

Return to Zambia — We are excited to announce that on Jan. 9, we will be embarking on our journey back to Zambia, with our anticipated arrival on Jan. 11. It has been an incredible time for us here in the States, speaking in churches and witnessing the Lord's work in various communities.

• **Call for Support** — As we prepare to return, we are carrying a valuable resource for our ministry — an entire set of audio Bibles. These audio Bibles are a powerful tool for sharing the gospel, especially in areas where literacy rates may vary. They allow us to reach a broader audience, making the Word of God accessible to those who cannot read.

In addition to the audio Bibles, we also have other essential materials for our ministry, including educational resources, discipleship materials and literature that aids in teaching and spreading the message of Christ effectively. To ensure the safe transport of these crucial ministry tools, we are reaching out to you, our valued supporters, for financial assistance. Your generous contributions will cover our travel expenses and facilitate the shipping of these materials to our destination.

• **Future Ministry Endeavors** — As we look forward, our ministry continues to emphasize the training of individuals in the villages where we plant churches, empowering them to serve as ambassadors for Christ in their communities. We also plan to conduct leadership training sessions in Zimbabwe and Botswana. These efforts are essential to our mission of making Jesus known in various regions. We firmly believe that equipping local leaders is crucial to fostering lasting and impactful change.

• **Prayer Requests** — Please pray for safe travels for our family, especially with three young children. Lift up our new connections in Botswana and Zimbabwe so these relationships may be fruitful for the kingdom. Pray for the success of our training initiatives, that they may empower and inspire individuals to share the love of Christ in their communities.

• **How You Can Help** — If you feel led to support our journey, you can contribute financially toward our travel expenses and the shipment of audio Bibles. Your generosity, whether big or small, plays a crucial role in advancing the kingdom. Visit tiny.cc/ZambiaPhiri to donate.

As we enter this new season, we are grateful for your continued prayers and support. Together, we are making a lasting impact, and we are excited to see what the Lord has in store for the coming year. Thank you for being an important part of our journey.

bend. Also, please do not get me a hippopotamus for Christmas!

We ask you to also join us in praying for the following:

- The planting/rainy season to be fruitful,
- New Bible studies,
- Health during the anthrax outbreak,
- A location to build the Bible school,
- Spiritual warfare and
- Chabantu Missionary Baptist

Academy Primary School.

The current needs we have for our ministry are for a solar pump and tank for the water well, a place to baptize near the church and ongoing monthly supporters.

We praise God for Ridgcrest Baptist Church in Jonesboro for providing funds for completing the church building, being welcomed into four more villages to begin Bible studies and four new students beginning pastor training.



The Epic Story of Truth: Part 1 (Creation, Curse & Promise)

The Bible reveals God to His Creation, and it shows us how we're to live, but it also tells one whole, cohesive narrative — an amazing narrative that is continuing today and that we're each invited into. Often in our presentation of the gospel, we present a true, but abbreviated portion of this narrative. Looking only at a sliver of the story keeps us from seeing why the Old Testament, prophecy, the return of Jesus, the Millennial Kingdom and Israel matter today. It's as if we treat each subject in the Bible as an individual book rather than recognizing it's a box set. From Genesis to the maps, God is telling the same story. Over the next several articles, I want to summarize this cohesive narrative and I hope the story of truth you cherish becomes bigger — becomes epic! Even more so, I hope you can see your opportunity to step into this epic story. You've been invited into the most epic life of all.

This might seem like a departure from the topics I have been writing about, but it's another way of looking at them. It's placing the continued plan for Israel, the return of Jesus and the establishment of His kingdom in the narrative with everything else we know.

As you know, this epic story starts with God speaking into the void and speaking the world as we know it into existence, or does it? Let's come back to that question. The Bible begins with the account of Creation. This was written around 1400 BC by Moses. God guided Moses to write the first five books of the Bible while he was in the wilderness while headed to the Promised Land. These books make up the Books of the Law. In Hebrew, it is referred to as the Torah. Though those books were written nearly 3,500 years ago, they begin telling a history that took place nearly 6,000 years ago. We have that

time frame because Moses includes genealogies that includes life spans which trace back nearly 6,000 years. This lineage is important for us to be able to understand ancient history.

I'm a "young earth" creationist, meaning I believe God created the earth in a literal week and that it was created 6,000 years ago. Though I admit I struggle with how that fits with astronomy, I just always want to err on straightforward reading. Though in that debate I believe it is extremely helpful that we make clear that if there is debate over the time frame of Creation, there isn't a debate to human history. Scripture confirms nearly 6,000 years of human history. The biblical case is strong.

There in the beginning, God created everything in a successive plan laid out in Genesis 1. On the sixth day, He created mankind, starting with Adam, then at some point, God made Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden. The most amazing part of the snippet of life in that garden we're given is that God, Himself, walked with Adam and Eve daily. There was perfect fellowship between mankind and God. Unfortunately, that fellowship was broken through the sin of Adam and Eve that led to them being thrown out of the garden and the Earth being cursed. That sin led to us all inheriting the consequences of their sin.

That is the first three chapters of the Bible, but as I asked earlier, is the Genesis creation account the beginning of the epic story? No, it is not. There are pieces in the Garden of Eden account and the rest of Scripture that started before that Genesis account.

God existed — that is a seemingly obvious statement, I realize, but it's an important part of the epic story. God has always existed.

He sits outside of creation and time. However that works, God has always existed. John 1 reveals that Jesus also existed there in the beginning. Though we, undoubtedly, assume this as we retell the creation account, it's important that we spell that out for children, teens and new believers.

Along with God, celestial beings (angels) existed. I used the phrase "celestial beings" because, though the word angel often is used to cover all such beings, an angel is a specific celestial being. An angel is a celestial messenger. Throughout Scripture, we see different "kinds" of celestial beings — angels, seraphim, cherubim, etc. We're not told in Scripture when these beings were created. Realizing that celestial beings existed before the Garden of Eden account is important in understanding the deception of Satan. We focus on Satan being a serpent in the garden, but we probably first should see Him as one of these celestial beings.

In our modern context, we're likely missing an understanding about the Garden of Eden that the ancient world would have intrinsically known. Throughout all ancient cultures, their gods and goddesses lived on high places and in gardens. I believe, going back to the original audience, this was meant to be understood about Eden. This was the "home" of God the Father. It was the home of the celestial beings. This would be why there was such an intimate fellowship between God and Adam and Eve. Also, if this was the case, Adam and Eve would have existed and interacted with celestial beings, which would make the fact that Satan speaks far less weird. I believe when we jump to the New Creation in the Book of Revelation that we see this restoration of Eden with the presence of God the Father and interaction with the celestials.

The creation account is epic, and when we add in the details of God's preexistence and the angelic world, it becomes larger, but I believe it is Gen. 3:15 (ESV) that points to the "epicness" of the narrative. The context of that verse is in the cursing of the earth, mankind and the serpent. God said to Satan, *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring (or seed) and her offspring (or seed); he shall bruise (crush) your head, and you shall bruise his heel."*

Here in the opening of the Bible, God summarizes the narrative. A "seed" or "offspring" of the woman will come — a "Promised One," if you will. He will come and ultimately destroy the serpent who Revelation 12 reveals is Satan, but Satan will get a shot in on this Promised One. It's also at this time that the curse will end, and creation will be restored.

See EPIC, Page 12



Oh, The Places!

By Valarie Fish

I love to travel to new places. Just about everything on my bucket list includes going somewhere new and exciting!

I'm working on a new Bible study with my ladies on places in the Bible and their significance. In my study, I found several intriguing passages where God references "the place where I record my name."

Add that place to my bucket list!

In Exodus 20, God is giving Moses instructions — including the 10 Commandments — and in the last half of verse 24, the King James Version says *"In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee and I will bless thee."* My Amplified Bible says, *"In every place where I cause My Name to be recorded and remembered (through revelation of my divine nature) I will come to you and bless you."*

Books can be written about the names of God — Yahweh, Jehovah, Adonai, etc. But when I looked up the Hebrew for "name" I found the word "shem" or as some say "Hashem" which means **the** Name. The "shem" was a mark or memorial of individuality, an appellation or a descriptive name or title. When you speak the name, there is an acknowledgement of the character attached to the name.

There are names of people and things that are associated with specific character traits in specific cultures. For example: "sly as a _____" or "wise old _____" are common to our western culture and we know the answer is fox and owl. Folks of different cultures might have different answers or be completely unaware of the character trait we readily associate with those two animals.

God had some specific requirements for dealing with His Name among His chosen people. They would be called by His Name and they would represent His Name.

No wonder God wanted them to be set apart from the rest of the world!

The instructions He gave Moses in Exodus repeatedly reminded them not to worship any other gods because no other god carried His character traits of mercy, justice, grace, faithfulness and so many more. To misrepresent His character was to take His Name in vain!

In the Old Testament, God chose to place His Name on His chosen people as a nation and specifically on the tabernacle and later Solomon's temple. This was the place where God placed His Name, but even the prophets knew the buildings were temporary. Ezekiel records the glory of God leaving the temple sometime before it was destroyed in 586 BC and there is no record of His presence returning to either the second temple or Herod's temple.

The next time God would enter the temple was when He sent His Son to earth. Jesus found the place where God was supposed to dwell with His people so unrecognizable, He called it a den of thieves.

Jesus also told the Samaritan woman that God had chosen a different place to put His Name than a building. He wanted those who would love Him to approach Him in spirit and in truth. He would write His Name on each heart who would repent and invite Him to take the throne of their life!

When you accept Jesus as the payment for your sins, you are inviting God to place His Name, His character and His holiness, on your life forever.

You see, you don't decide where God will place His name — He decides. And he will place His name in a heart willing to submit to His plans. And to give Him the glory He deserves. And where He places His name, he will come **closer**, and He will bless!

Scripture — Deut. 12:5-14; John 4:19-24; James 4:8-10

Prayer — Father, help me always surrender to You and Your plan for my life. Help me to draw closer to You by recognizing your amazing gift of salvation. Write Your Name on my life and use me to shine a spotlight on You so others can see what an amazing God you are. Amen

Respond — Think about this statement: "You are as close to God right now as you want to be." You may want to reject the thought, but

See PLACES, Page 12



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STATE MISSIONS

Missionaries

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Here Am I Lord, Send Me

"And Joshua said unto the people, Sanctify yourselves: for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you" (Joshua 3:5).

The command was to sanctify yourselves — make holy or purify. Sanctification is distinguished from justification and regeneration. Being sanctified denotes the carrying forward of that work of grace in the soul to completeness. Justification signifies the judicial relationship of the sinner to God. Regeneration changed our old nature into a new nature by the agency of the Holy Spirit.

When we are sanctified, this denotes the carrying forward of that work of grace in the soul to its completeness. One may be justified and regenerated and not be sanctified for one is never more justified. Regeneration is the new birth.

Sanctification is our spiritual attitude and character after we are saved. We know that one is saved by faith, but there is more to it than escaping Hell.

In our text, God has brought His people thus far. Their estate has changed greatly. As they prepared to advance to continue to grow, they were told to "sanctify yourselves." He never means for us to sit and quit. A new believer is, as the old children's song says, "I'm in the Lord's army." Once our shackles of sin have been removed, we are freed to go forth in service.

Notice the personal application of God's service. As we stand on the threshold of the time when we observe the Savior's birth, we must ask ourselves who has been forgiven. Are we ready to grow more like Jesus every day? Are we being sanctified daily?

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1).

Merry Christmas!

From Our Missionaries

Misión Creciendo en Cristo (Growing in Christ), North Little Rock: Juan Carlos Posadas writes, "Hello everyone! It is a pleasure to share with you again what God is doing with His work in North Little Rock. This week, the Wednesday and Sunday discipleship groups continued preparing their specials for the Christmas meeting. The Wednesday groups will be singing Christmas carols, and the Sunday group is preparing a dramatization. New actors, actresses, screenwriters, choreographers, singers, etc. have emerged. In short, we are having fun and adding times of communion in the service of the Lord.

"On Saturday, starting at 10 a.m., a group of 16 volunteers from the church met to install the borders of the security surface, the weed blocker and the rubber mulch on the playground. It was a day of arduous physical effort, but, at the end of the day, seeing the finished work was gratifying.

"José Carlos turned 20 on Sunday, Dec. 10. On Friday, we visited him as a surprise to have an almost 20th birthday lunch. We prayed with him, hugged him and told him how much we love him, and what a great blessing he is to our family and community. We had some good family time.

"On Sunday, he surprised us at home. We were not expecting it since it was his exam season. We went out to dinner with him and other friends from church. One of them, Yesmer, was also celebrating his birthday. We thank God for our beloved son, Jose Carlos and Yesmer's lives. Thank you for praying for my family and ministry. I appreciate your support."

Faith Chapel, Flippin: Johnny Shew writes, "We had a great week at Faith Chapel, with a good number, even though several were out for various reasons. That seems like the norm lately, but it's usually not the same people. As I have said before though, if we're all there at the same time, we wouldn't fit; but

that won't be the case when we get in our new building.

"I was blessed to be able to visit the North Arkansas Association's quarterly meeting, give them a report and bring the message on Saturday. It was, indeed, a blessing. I sure love all those folks. Jerry Clements was unable to be there due to recovering from knee surgery, and I sure missed him. Please join me in prayer for him.

"Not much happened on the building last week. We are now waiting for the drywall contractor to do his part. He is extremely busy, but he told us that in the beginning, so we can wait for him. He is a godly man, and we know he is the one God has sent us, and God's timing is always perfect. It gives us time to work on little details that need attention.

"We thank you for your support and prayers; they mean so much to us! We thank God for you always in ours."

Faith Journey, Benton: Bryan Clay writes, "We have started collecting gifts for a few people in our community who have needs during this Christmas season. The feeling of being able to help provide a gift for someone in need is such a special thing. God asks that we love and serve others so they may see His love through us. So, if you get an opportunity to bless someone this Christmas, please do!

"I am looking forward to speaking at one of our local schools for a Fellowship of Christian Athletes meeting this week. They asked that I share my testimony with this group of students. Please pray that God will provide the words to say that may reach the heart of one of these students so that they may come to know Him and begin a personal relationship with Christ. Have a blessed week!"

Misión Gracia Soberana (Sovereign Grace), NWA: Roberto Marcelletti writes, "We are very grateful to God for the week after our anniversary. We have been told by several families of the transformations God is making in their homes, specifically women who have been challenged by the Lord to put aside the struggle of roles in the home and take the place of suitable help and

UPCOMING EVENTS

Christmas Concert, Dec. 24, 11 a.m.; featuring Dylan Brock; Center Grove, Cord.

CBC Homecoming, Jan. 12-13; Central Baptist College, Conway.

World Missions Sunday, Feb. 25.

CBC Gala, March 1; featuring Dr. Jack Graham; Antioch, Conway.

BMA of America Annual Mtg., April 16-18, 2024; Chateau on the Lake, Branson.

SOAR 2024, July 3-5; Live! By Loews Convention Center; Arlington, Texas.

Student Ministry Workers Retreat; Sept. 14; Central Baptist College; Conway.

BMA of Arkansas Mtg., Nov. 7-8; Central Baptist College, Conway.

giving their husband the place of leadership. I know there is a lot of work to be done, but how wonderful to hear that the sisters have realized this and, with the Lord's help, correct it.

"On Saturday, the sisters gathered in the temple to make the last preparations for our Christmas service and dinner. We will have the participation of our children and a choir, and we are all very excited. This is our first Christmas activity as a church.

"Sunday, we continued our expository series on the book of John. The theme was 'It Is Necessary to Be Born Again' from John 3:1-14."

Epic Life, Pea Ridge: Jake McCandless writes, "We had an encouraging week. Even though sickness and holiday events kept several away from our Connection Groups, we had several encouraging moments. Amanda befriended a family at school through some unique circumstances last fall and had the chance to share about the church plant. Then in May, we had back-to-back divine appointments that connected our families. This continued throughout the year. Finally, after a year, they reached out to attend our monthly Collective Gathering Sunday. Unfortunately, an illness kept them from attending, but it goes to show God is at work.

"This week, we also saw an incredible breakthrough in our Bible study as participants seemed to be able to use Scripture to interpret Scripture. In that same Bible study, I was able to have a salvation discussion. I look forward to sharing about that profession of faith soon.

"To top the week off, we had a guest join us for our monthly

Reports from the Churches

First, Damascus added one by baptism; Daniel Williams, pastor.

Flat Rock, Quitman gained one by baptism; Myles Evans, pastor.

Old Hickory, Hattiesville received two by letter; Blake Martin; pastor.

Sulphur Springs, Fordyce witnessed one by baptism; Stan Hobson, pastor.

Opportunities For Service

Ronnie Johnson is available for pulpit supply as the Lord leads within a driving range of Stuttgart, preferably on Sunday mornings. He has been pastoring churches for 21 years. Contact him at (870) 659-7774 or his wife, Barbara at (870) 659-7274.

Meadowside Baptist Church in Pittsburg, Kan. is seeking a bi-vocational pastor. Contact Greg Hardister at (620) 704-6860.

DISTRICT CALENDAR

Mt. Vernon Youth in Harvest, Dec. 18, 6:30 p.m.; Fourth St., West Helena.

United Dist. WMA, Jan. 6, 10 a.m.; Denver Street, Greenwood.

Jonesboro Dist. Brotherhood, Jan. 9; Bethany, Jonesboro.

Central Ark. Dist. WMA, Jan. 13, 10 a.m.; program by Valerie Fish; Oak Park; Little Rock.

Jonesboro Dist. Brotherhood, Feb. 13; Nueva Esperanza Mission, Jonesboro.

gathering unexpectedly, and she loved it."

El Faro #2 Hispanic Mission, Cabot/Jacksonville: Michael Hight writes, "We were able to make several new contacts in a new area of Cabot this week. They have given me permission to come back and visit with them some more.

"We are going to be very busy this week. We have a dinner for the missionaries on Thursday, and Sunday afternoon we have an outreach planned in a trailer park that is mostly Hispanic.

"Sunday was a blessing as I got to preach for Guilmar in Alexander. God is blessing this church in so many ways. Please keep us all in your prayers!"



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BABY

(Continued From Page 1)

Safe Haven Baby Box Network. Although we, as Fire and Police Departments, have always been safe options for surrendering a child, the Baby Box allows a safer and more secure option for parents who find themselves making this decision. This system will ensure the highest quality of care for the infants coming into our care."

Safe Haven Baby Boxes are installed on the exterior wall of a designated fire station, hospital or police station. Other boxes in Arkansas are located in Cabot, Jacksonville, Hot Springs, Rogers, Springdale, Mountain Home, Jonesboro, Conway, Fort Smith, Maumelle, DeQueen, Nashville, Magnolia and El Dorado.

Arkansas Right to Life has promoted the Safe Haven Law through a billboard campaign that began in Harrison in June 2019. Since then, billboards have been placed in 32 Arkansas counties.

Executive Director of Arkansas Right to Life Rose Mimms stressed the importance of the billboard campaign and mothers knowing about the Safe Haven Law. The Safe Haven Baby Box hotline number is listed on all billboards. "The Safe Haven Law can help a mother to safely surrender her child to an official location, hospital, law enforcement or manned fire department in Arkansas or anonymously in a Safe Haven Baby Box," Mimms said.

The Safe Haven Law, enacted in Arkansas in 2001, is designed to protect babies from being hurt or killed by abandonment by parents who are unwilling or unable to provide parenting. Under the law, a parent may give up an infant anonymously at a hospital emergency room or law enforcement agency, but in 2019 the law was amended to include manned fire stations as a surrender location. The amended law sponsored by

GEARS

(Continued From Page 3)

bereaved. We should apply the same to the lost, the immature, the wandering and the lonely.

Incorporating transparency and depth into our relationships isn't rocket science. Avoiding these consequences does not require a unique program or training session. Ultimately, it comes down to applying the truths of the Bible to our daily character and life. We must be honest about our insecurities, vulnerabilities, fears and desires. Allowing ourselves to be emotionally vulnerable, we should avoid withholding our unpopular opinions. Transparency alone will not build a deep community. We must model allowing ourselves to be held accountable by others. Such accountability also demands taking personal responsibility.

If we faithfully did these things, the church would be stronger, and there would be growth in the church. Instead of seeking fulfillment in the things that can never fulfill the person, our neighbors would see the church, and ultimately God, as the answer to their perceived problems. Additionally, church members would be more likely to serve. When I've asked the people I serve alongside what has kept them going in ministry, I have never heard duty or obligation in their response. Anyone serving in ministry longer than 10 years has always alluded to the needs of others. Such selfless and discerning people who do not need the concealed needs of their neighbors to be explained to them are a gem. If there were no partiality in who we were transparent with, there would be no need to explain the need to anyone.

Arkansas Senator Cecile Bledsoe and Representative Rebecca Petty also approved the installation of newborn safety devices at surrender locations.

SEASONS

(Continued From Page 4)

rounded by gifts to this one and from that one. The family was gathered in celebration of this season. I praise God for this gathering of family in this traditional time of the year.

The gold, frankincense and myrrh were gifts of the Magi. I don't think I know what myrrh or frankincense are. I have seen a little gold in some jewelry. These gifts were given to the Child. Probably his parents received them in His name. I don't know if the gold was used to go to Egypt or the spices used for His burial later in life. Whatever the use, before they gave their gifts, they worshipped Him. So let it be now in my life. I worship You now, Lord Jesus. Receive the gifts I bring to You because of Your gift of Christ to me. Amen.

Between Everlastings

Dear God of years, months, days, hours and minutes — Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God. I cannot imagine time when there is no time. But You are God from eternity past through time to eternity future. I worship You and I want to serve You today. Hear my prayer; mine is not unlike countless others who petition You right now.

Today is not the end, even though it is the end of the year. Today is the beginning, and it falls at this period of Advent. Today is the beginning of life with You. May I make it the best beginning I have had in a long time? I don't know what to expect this day, much less as I face a new Western calendar year. I know this past calendar year has been good through Your grace.

From everlasting to everlasting, and I am right now in the middle of that phrase, in this period we call time between everlastings. I am not an Abraham, Isaac or Jacob. I am not a Peter, Paul or even one of the unnamed Christians of the first century. I am not that caliber of man, but I am the man You can use in the service of Christ and His church. Here I am. Send me. Through Him, in Him, by Him; all things are in Him and by His power. I pray this prayer in His name. Amen.

Speak, Lord (New Year)

Dear heavenly Father, hear my prayer this morning — I want to pray to You. I want to be with You. I want to spend time with You. Today is that day called New Year's Day. I do not know if it is a day to begin or end. Obviously, the old year is gone. Today is that first day of this brand-new year. So may I take this time to be still, to listen, to be in Your presence.

HOUSE

(Continued From Page 1)

• Take some time to define your family's financial goals and concerns for next year: Do you want to save more for retirement or for college? Is a particular budget category consistently over budget? Do you expect any unusually large bills next year, such as college tuition or a new roof?

Taking the time to address these items now can help make next year successful.

We are ready to help you with these steps. Contact us today at bmafinancial.org/contact or call (844) 262-8637! Not a BMA Financial Member yet? We invite you to schedule a free financial assessment at bmafinancial.org to see how we can help you manage God's money, God's way, for God's glory!

May I speak and act on words similar to the little boy Samuel when he said, "Speak, Lord, Your little child is listening." You had already spoken to him several times. Now he was ready to hear You as You spoke again. May I hear You this day as You speak again in my life and the life of my world.

Quietly, in Your company, and in reverence I ask to hear a word from You. Yes, I want to tell You about my leaving undone so much good and doing the wrong things so often. More than that, I need to hear words from You. The words You have for me to hear are life words and words of wholeness. May I attend this year with You in moments like this each day. Will You help me to do this? I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.



Gary L. Hunt, 77 of Haskell, passed away Dec. 7. He was a member at Celebration Baptist Church.

Dorothy Lorene Rolling, 91 of Newark, passed away Dec. 7. She was a member of Cedar Grove Baptist Church in Cord.

Charley Lingenfelter, 92 of Jonesboro, passed away Dec. 6. He was a member of Prospect Baptist Church.

Rena Verl Pike, 99 of Quitman, passed away Nov. 22. She was a member of Kaley Hill Baptist Church.

PLACES

(Continued From Page 10)

that statement is so true! You can be as close to God as you want to be! What do you need to be as close to God as you want to be?

— These articles are shared via the *National WMA web page blog* that can be accessed at nationalwma.org/blogs.

EPIC

(Continued From Page 10)

There is so much in this one verse. It hints at the virgin birth of Jesus by using the phrase "seed of the woman." It tells the whole account that will unfold. Everything in the rest of Scripture and life today hinges on this one promise.

Dive into the Epic Story yourself by reading Genesis 1-3 and John 1:1-3.

— *Jake is a state missionary and would love to share about the work in Northwest Arkansas and encourage your church to stand firm.* (standfirmministries.com)



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