

The Good News

Newsletter - January 2015

A Publication of University Baptist Church, Hattiesburg, MS

The purpose of University Baptist Church is, through guidance of the Holy Spirit, to assemble and worship God, to love and encourage one another, to proclaim the gospel of Christ, to minister to all people, and to live in peace.

In a world where difficult issues remain, University Baptist Church continues its commitment to be a church where “there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male or female, for (we) are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28)



The Light of the World is Born

Discovering that the Messiah was to be born, three kings set out on a journey. The Three Kings were among the wisest men of their time. After hearing of the one true king being born, they organized an expedition to find him, following a star that led them to a little town called Bethlehem. This journey was sure to be filled with wonder and anticipation. It's not every day you get to meet the savior. When arriving at the house, these wise men paid Jesus the kind of respect only God deserves, bowing before him and worshipping him. They offered gifts to him fit for a king. What it must have felt like to be in the same room with the one true king and living God. The excitement would be uncontrollable. After these wise men met Jesus, they did not go back the way they came.

When we get to know Jesus Christ, we are changed forever and cannot go back to our previous life. A lesson to be learned from the three kings is when we seek God with sincere determination, we will find him. He is not hiding from us, but wants to have an intimate relationship with each of us. His love for us never fades no matter what road we travel and how lost we get. He is always the light when it is the darkest and showing us the way. We just have to have our eyes, ears, and heart open for his direction. Much like the three kings did.

John 8:12

Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."



Staying on Fire

Read Psalm 36:9; Proverbs 4:18

Every time you turn on the TV, there's a lot of wildfires burning somewhere and causing chaos to families, to homes, to businesses, and to animals, as well. The fire I want to talk about is different. The fire that I want to see ablaze in people is that spiritual fire from God. God's fire burns deep inside all of us but most don't want to show their flames.

Have you noticed how people are so emotionally engulfed in flames at church but as soon as they leave church they dim themselves down? Instead of letting your flame burn dim, why not just let your light shine and be proud of the kindling spirit that God has blessed you with? I understand that it's hard in today's world because everywhere you turn today people want to separate the church from work, school, and anywhere outside of the church itself.

It is unfortunate that there's a separation of church from the state when our forefathers founded this country on the very beliefs of the church. We have to learn to talk more with God, include him in our everything, and listen intently to what he has to say.

If we want God to stay afire inside of us, we have to spend more time letting that flame burn brightly all around us. Let's let his love and his compassion flow through us to the lost and the found (II Samuel 23:4). Light your fire and light up the world so that people will know that you are a member of the boy of Christ. God bless you always!

Stay on Fire

Temperatures are rising and everything around
Me is smoking
Slowly comes a blaze and now everyone around
Starts choking—Stay on Fire!
Tears creep from each eye down so many puffed
Up cheeks
The roof is on fire and has been burning
Up for weeks—Stay on Fire!
The fire has everybody dancing and stomping
Across the floor
Nobody's called the Fire Marshall and nobody's
Headed towards the door—Stay on Fire!
The fire has burnt us all up because of
Him we trust
Ashes to ashes and from dust we return
To dust—Stay on Fire!
This fire that burns is God's fire within
All of our souls
From the heavenly known to all those
That Heaven knows— Stay on Fire!

Justin Underwood

Can Faith Alone Save You?

A major misunderstanding which has had a great influence on people for many centuries is a misplaced emphasis on the place of faith, or on the place of works, in relation to our salvation. We can rightly say that faith is the first step that we must take to receive mercy and help from God. We must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. Faith is believing, but connected with that faith must be the second step of works or action. God through his spirit leads each sincere, seeking soul to the place where he can experience the miracle of regeneration. We are born again by his working power through the blood of Christ. Salvation cannot be earned or merited by the good that we do or by our self-righteous acts. Works do not have merit. We must obey and follow on as the spirit of God speaks, promotes, convicts, and leads. In order to obtain mercy from God, we must arise and go to the father through Christ much like the prodigal son did. Jesus' promise in Matthew 7:7 is, "ask and it will be given to you, search and you will find, knock and it will be opened for you." Faith must move us to action or we'll never experience salvation. In James 2 it says, "what good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you?" Then it goes on to say, "for just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead." Jesus tells his disciples in Matthew 16:24, "If any want to become followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." A follower here indicates doing the things that Jesus did when he lived here on earth, and obeying the voice of his Spirit, who leads us in the paths of service for our Lord. This is a faithful saying, and I desire that you insist on the things, so that those who have come to believe in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works, these things are excellent and profitable to everyone (Titus 3:8). So then deny yourselves, take up the cross and follow Jesus Christ. God Bless You!

Jason K., Parchman Death Row

Gifts or Blessings

In my last piece I wrote about the infinite grace available to us from our Lord, comparing it to the unlimited boundaries of space. We humans will never understand the boundaries of either, if in fact there are any. With grace comes blessings given to us by our Lord. Blessings, or gifts, if you will, are sought by all who serve him. We often pray that we will be blessed with good health, good fortune, or ask that these be bestowed upon another. But, what happens when we do not receive the blessings we believe we deserve? Should we begin to have doubts about the whole concept? It can be difficult and trying to look around and see people enjoying all sorts of material blessings, and yet, living a life as far from holy as one can get.

When faced with such evidence, the temptation is to start trying to "bargain" with God. I have a good friend who has served the Lord for many years who once told me he had made a deal with God. One of his children had a lingering medical issue and he says he told God if a healing took place, he would give up his only vice—coffee. My friend is convinced to this day that his offer, and follow through, was the reason the medical problem went away. I have heard other such examples along the same lines over the years, but contrarian that I am, I look at the many healings of people who have never had a "deal" offered up on their behalf.

I believe we have to be careful when comparing our personal blessings to those of others. After all, our needs are all we are promised. This life is not meant to be a continuing game of Let's Make a Deal. The only deal my God has made with me is a promise of eternal life in return for my belief in and service to him...or her. There is a promise that he will hear our prayers and requests but no promise that every one will be granted. Just as a child may ask Santa for a whole list of gifts, and only receive what "Santa" thinks is appropriate, so it is with our Lord.

The greatest gift, or blessing of all was given to all mankind over 2,000 years ago. Anything beyond that is truly a blessing and should be accepted as something not earned and not bartered for by trying to put God "on the spot." That could be a bad mistake.

Richard Jordan
Parchman, DR

*We Need to Shine as Lights**

Philippians 2:15: that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation among whom you shine as light in the world.

We as believers know that we are living in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation in this world today. We need to follow the example that Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior has set for us when he walked among a crooked and perverse generation while on this earth. But Jesus shone as a light among them and that is what he is saying to us today—shine as lights in this world. We as believers need to shine as lights in this world. We as believers need to shine as lights, telling everyone that we meet about the good news and how it can make them shine as lights as well. But we need to keep on the lookout for the devil and his demons because they don't want us or the people that we encourage to shine as lights. But it is time that we shine as children of God, because he is coming soon and we need to be ready. And we need to let our hearts, souls, and minds shine toward each other instead of living in darkness. Once we start shining as lights the devil and his demons will flee from us. So let us be there to help someone else shine as a light when they are down and out. And we know that when we are going through our trials we know as long as Jesus is in our hearts and in our lives we will shine bright as a shining star. The devil will try to always keep a dark cloud in our lives, but we know that Jesus is our shining star and he will break through those dark clouds that the devil has in our lives. Amen.

Brother in Christ,
Stephen Elliott Powers
Parchman, DR

* Please note that this was written on 6/19/01. Stephen has suffered multiple strokes and currently has a bleeding aneurysm. I am pleased to report that he remains our brother in the faith. I am glad that we have some of his thoughts pre-stroke.—Roger

A Response to "How Can You?"

Dear Justin,

I want to thank you for "How Can You?" It is straightforward and challenging, even for those who are already convinced that the death penalty is so very wrong. But it does not come across to me as an angry question. Rather, it is a "come now and let us reason together" type of question.

I remember that in my younger years as a pastor I had kind of avoided thinking about the subject. I didn't know anybody on death row. Later I came to know the families of a couple of people who had been murdered. One of those families was clamoring for the death penalty to be imposed. The other family, just as devastated and grief stricken as the first, believed that the Lord was calling on them to forgive and bear a Christian witness to the one who had taken their son's life. First of all, just as a practical matter of finding a way to move forward with their lives, the members of that family began to experience some real peace in their lives., c the members of that family began to experience some real peace in their lives. Not that they ceased grieving, but their grief was not like the grief of those who lived in bitterness. Then they began to pray honestly for the one who had been convicted of their son's death. It was beautiful to watch. And they are the kind of people who help folks like me to think through and pray through an issue that up until that time I really didn't want to face.

Now I have genuine brothers in Christ who are on Death Row, and I have even stronger reasons to oppose capital punishment. I have seen people's lives transformed and see them still being transformed by the same grace that is at work in my life, transforming me.

So thank you, my dear brother, for raising that soul-searching question again: "How can you be of Christ who represent life, and want to put me to death?"

Anonymous

Mother's Prayers

In 1990, up in Grand Rapids, Michigan, I started attending Calvary church. I was with my girlfriend and she told me about a street outreach program the church did early Friday evenings where they went out and spoke to people who were doing various activities such as prostitution, drug-dealing and pickpocketing downtown. I watched the first Friday and I saw the witness. I thought, I can do this. Well, God had a plan. I saw one man, Larry, who looked like he was doing pretty well financially, but I could tell he had a hustle going on. I approached him with 2 cups of hot chocolate and asked him how long he's been living in Grand Rapids. He looked at me and told me he'd lived there all his life. I realized then that his family is in Grand Rapids, as well, so I told him about the first Christmas I spent without my Dad. We spoke about brothers and then I told him that I haven't talked to my mom since 1974. I told him how much it hurt not to see her. We spoke about how I'd never had a mom's love, but I didn't tell him all of my story because I noticed his demeanor change. He began to cry. I had never encountered something like this. He told me that he hadn't spoken to his mom in 3 years; he told me he didn't have a father; he told me his mother told him to leave her home when she found out he was selling drugs. I asked him if the drugs were worth never seeing his mother. He dropped something into the sewer drain and walked over to his van. We drove together to his mother's house and parked out front. I went to the door, and when his mom answered the door, she looked frail. I asked her if she had a son named Larry. She began to cry, thinking I was bringing bad news. I told her how I had spoken to Larry and told him my own story. I told her that Larry had told me he had not seen her in 3 years because of his choice to deal drugs. I told her Larry had quit selling and tonight, had accepted Jesus as his savior, and I asked her if she'd like to see him. His mother told me how she had prayed for Larry, how her church had prayed for Larry, and how she had fasted all the last week, praying to God that her son would come back home to her.

I have just recently written my own mom for the first time since 1974. She is 83 years old. I wrote her to clear the slate for myself. God is in the healing business. Forgiveness and change are part of our walk with Christ. May the peace of Christ and the joy of the holidays be with you all. May we all learn to forgive this season—we only have each other.

Timothy Evans
Parchman, DR

A Time of Joy: Lord, for all my family and friends, for all who share this time of Joy, I give thanks for your gift Lord and ask you to keep them always in your loving care... May this time of joy be a joyful one, for all those I hold so dear. A time of your greatest love in their lives. A time when we all feel close, enfolded in your love,
Amen.

Seek and Ye Shall Find: Count your blessings at the close of day, review your storehouse of gold... the golden love of family and friends, that rewards you with pleasures untold...take time to visit your garden of blooms. In each there's a message of love...the beautiful colors that brighten your day, can warm your heart like a glove...enjoy your dreams so you glide in your living, travel back to yesteryear's ways... hold in your arms loves from the past, back in your rapturous days...and whispers to you. Thanks for praise, for the grace of each days.

In closure, this last thought given to me by my big Daddy! My beloved mother's father born back in 1892! Whenever time comes really hard and difficult, he told me that if I'd raise my hands and bow my head, I'll find those words written in red. Praise God!

Verses to read: Luke 11:23, 28; John 6: 35-40, 45-48; Romans 4:8, 5: 1-6; Galatians 3:5-9; Ephesians 1:4; Philip-
pians 1:6, 4:13, 19; 2 Timothy 1:7; 2 Peter 3:14-18; 1 John 3:1-3

*Remember me and all of us here at Parchman as we remember you.

God Bless you with love,
Roger E. T.

Patience, part II

Psalm 37:7: Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him!

To my brothers and sisters of the Good News,

Patience is not a virtue for many of us. We live busy lives in a busy world full of commitments, deadlines, chaos and stress. Yet, through it all, God waits patiently for us. He's always present no matter where we are and he's always waiting for us to approach with open hearts and minds.

We're not always able to make that connection at a precise time and that's definitely a lack of concentration on our part. Maybe we're distracted by sadness, worry, or even joy. Maybe we're simply not ready, willing or able to hear what God is trying to tell us. Yet, God still waits patiently for us!

So, we can all understand the work involved in taking matters into our own hands and making situations work out to our satisfaction. Sometimes such determinations are good and a necessary thing but often we end up grieving others or vexing ourselves as we strive even in matters of faith.

Greater than fear and greater than desperation is the knowledge that God loves and cares about us. It's the confidence that he wants to take care of us and has the power to do so. But greater still is his desire to lift our attention about those things to break into our neediness and turn our hearts to him.

Believe today that God will give you what you need, and it's not all up to you to push forward and take it on yourself. God wants to work with you and loves you just as you are. Even as he sees all that you can become, we should be concerned with knowing his love and the rest of his gracious blessings will surely follow.

We have the strength to persevere (Acts 1:8).

A spirit of confidence in him is ignited with our hearts and minds (Romans 8:28).

We are assured of God's sovereignty (1 Cor 10:13).

Paul didn't quit because he drew on God's grace and found it sufficient for every circumstance (Hebrews 13).

May God richly bless each and everyone. May we all strive to love as Jesus Christ loves us.

With love and fellowship,
Roger T.

*There will come a time when you believe
everything is finished.
That will be the beginning.
-Louis L'Amour*



Some suggested topics for the Newsletter

Thank you for the continued letters, thoughts, and poems you send in to us each month. We want to know more about who you all are. Story seems to be one of the best ways to get to know who someone really is and so we encourage you all to look at some of these suggested topics to see if any inspiration comes as we seek community with one another. Please know that these are not to restrict your writing; you are certainly welcome to choose to write on another topic or in another form. They are simply some ideas as all writers need somewhere to start. Thank you for your continued contributions to this newsletter and happy writing!

- Choose a story or a character from the Bible and tell us how it speaks to your life or how you connect to it.
- Make up a short story.
- Tell us about a character you've read in a book or watched in a movie that inspires you and why.
- Tell us your favorite song. What is it about this song that draws you to it?
- Write a song or send in a piece of original artwork.