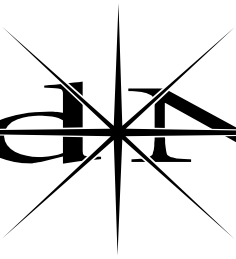


The Good News



Newsletter - April 2014

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)

Mark E. Thibodeaux, S.J. writes, *Like the Baby Jesus, I need a ‘holy family’ to belong to. I need to belong to something bigger than myself. If I don’t, then I run the risk of developing a sort of God-and-me spirituality with no support systems to hold me up when I am weak, no prophets to challenge me when I am wrong and no party-mates with whom I may celebrate the Lord’s goodness in my life.* (Armchair Mystic: Easing into Contemplative Prayer)

Today I give thanks to God for community. I give thanks for sisters and brothers to pray with, sit with, weep with and celebrate with. I give thanks for the words of encouragement and wisdom, and I give thanks for the ways we all can think and wonder together as we search through this life. I am thankful for the *Good News* and the work of Christ that continues through it.

May God be with us as we work together to learn to love in the way of Jesus. May God lead us as we work towards peace and reconciliation. May God offer us understanding as we work to live and have community with one another. May we be transformed, restored and renewed by the love, grace and peace of Christ.

Kat Spangler

One in Jesus

JONATHAN SANDS WISE

SOUTHERN HARMONY (1835)

1. Come, Lord, heal my nar - row vis - ion:
 2. Come, Lord, steal our greed - sick vis - ion:
 3. Lord, for - give our fear - ful vis - ion,
 4. Bid us come, Lord, to your ban - quet,

fear - ful, self - ish, dim rich and weak.
 make us one with our hearts poor.
 set our cap - tive, scarred hearts free.
 there to feast for - ev - er more!

Nev - er can I find sal - va - tion
 By your grace re - form our striv - ings
 Blind and heal us in shared wor - ship
 Mem - bers of God's heaven - ly chor - us,

when loosed it's by things, my self I seek.
 of from the ho we'll love you more.
 with the one voice ly we One who's Three.
 a - dore.

We are made to be one in Je - sus, made one bod - y by his blood;

formed and found in his com - mun - ion, most our - selves when lost in love.

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 Baylor University, Waco, TX

Tune: RESTORATION
 8.7.8.7.D

To all our friends and contributors of the Good News Newsletter,

We are so grateful for your willingness to share your experiences, faith and self discovery with us as you take part in the writing of this newsletter each month. There are many positive letters that encourage us and bless us as we read. We are happy to offer a space for people to connect and be heard and valued by one another, even as we are physically separated. We also believe that we need to have some guidelines as we publish this Newsletter each month and recognize that there are words and experiences that need to be heard even if they are not appropriate for a published Newsletter. In light of this, UBC's Prison Ministry Team is committing to reading and praying over those letters that we are unable to publish in the Good News editions but continue to find of great worth as we all work to grow and find hope in this life, even in our struggles.

Please note the types of letters we will accept for publishing:

- Letters that tell your faith journey. This could include stories of how God is working in your life, how you may have found hope in some scriptures or experiences, how God may have worked through someone to remind you of God's love for you, how you are showing others God's love, or how God is transforming your life as you learn and grow.
- Letters that offer encouragement to others. This could include stories of people coming together to do good works or hopes for that. This could include a story of something good you have seen happen to someone else or your hopes for the readers as we all journey through this life together.
- Letters offering words of prayer for our world, poems, or art that hold a good message.

Please note the types of letters we will read and offer prayers over:

- Letters where you need to get something off your chest, vent frustrations, tell about a specific incident where you messed up and aren't ready to say you're sorry, anything you need to write as a sort of therapy that could use some prayer.
- Letters that condone acts of violence or hurtful actions.
- Letters of judgment upon others or letters that force certain beliefs upon others.
- Letters that are argumentative.
- Letters that need direct interaction. *In this case, we will read your letter and respond as best we know how.*

Thank you for the writings that you offer each month. Thank you for the time and thought that you put into them, for your willingness to share your life and faith with us. It is good to be in community together.

In the peace of Christ,

UBC's Prison Ministry Team

Response to Bible Questions...

To the *Good News* readers,

The knowledge of the Bible is important, but God desires us to be saturated with his word and to internalize it so we can grow in our relationship with him! The Holy Spirit uses the word to make us more like Christ.

Ephesians 4:20-24, "That is not the way you learned Christ! For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus. You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness." 1 Corinthians 1:30, "He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption."

Learning about the Bible just to increase our knowledge can lead to Spiritual Pride! 1 Corinthians 8:1-3, "Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that 'all of us possess knowledge.' Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge, but anyone who loves God is known by him."

But allowing the Holy Spirit to transform us by the Word, help us navigate through life's twists and turns, and respond in love to God and to each other. "Many books can inform, but only the Bible can transform." Dennis Fisher.

We can read from the holy word of God: 2 Timothy 3:15-16, "and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness..."

To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure.

Our works: 1 Corinthians 3: 13-17, "the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, the fire will test what sort of work each has done. If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire. Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? ... God's temple is holy, and you are that temple."

We must remember this truth: Ephesians 1:4-7, 11-13, "Just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace... In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit.

So, back to the knowledge of everything above written as much to and for myself as those reading it!

Problem solving wisdom—we learn the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Proverbs 1:2-5,7: "To know wisdom and instruction. To perceive the words of wisdom. To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment and equity; To give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion. And a man of understanding will obtain wise counsel. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction."

In closing, will you ask and answer this question as I will do likewise: Am I willing to accept the fear of the Lord and His Holy Word to "attain" wisdom and knowledge with correction for the instructions in righteousness for my life?

God Bless. Praying Always to be within His love and fellowship,

Roger T.

It is often a big step when people begin to see the difference between spirituality and religion. Some people never get that far. It is easier for them to blindly follow one set of religious beliefs and rules without questioning. Then they can feel they have the "truth"; they are "saved" and everybody else is wrong. They can spend their time feeling better than everyone else and arguing to make people agree with them. And at the end of the day it leads nowhere.

And what bothers me is that too often these kind of people, whether they are Christian, Muslim, Catholic, or Jehovah's Witness, use the Bible or Quran as if every word were literal, when the divine message is conveyed in metaphors, analogies, poetry, and story telling as well. It gives these people a lifetime of things to argue about. Too many people--even ministers and priests and others--stay locked in this closed in mentality that tries to make everything fit in a set of ideas. Everything is either right or wrong, good or bad, black or white, and that is not real life.

Some people ask me what is my religion and religious belief and I tell them I am all of the above. I think that a lot of people are pressured to stay locked in a box of one religious belief, when all of them are the same. I think God, Allah, Jesus, Jehovah is so much bigger than that!

When it comes to understanding God, people don't realize we have the exact same problem as a blind man, trying to know and understand the color green. What can you say about green if you have never seen it? You say, "It's like fresh air! Or it's like a cool breeze." Okay, It might be something like that. The same is true of every statement that can be made about God, but in a lot of ways God is nothing like that.

The Divine Mystery is so much more than any one word can describe. When an innocent child dies, it doesn't mean that God isn't real, or that God is no good. It just means He is mystery. And we don't understand the mystery. When my mother died in 2005, I prayed everyday that God would take me first because I knew it was going to be hard for me and I was mad at God for a long time. I felt that God wasn't listening to my cries for help to save my mother. But I have come to understand that "He" took her to a better place, wherever that is, because God is a mystery.

The Divine is so far beyond our ideas that no human will ever describe, contain, or understand it. What we can do is discover the spiritual path that leads to the Divine.

We are very much like the thirsty fish who is swimming around crazy looking for the ocean. All we have to do is stop, wake up, and recognize that we are surrounded by what we looked for and couldn't get out of even if we wanted to. To me the Divine (or God) is a whole lot more like the ocean is to that fish than what some religions try to convince us God is.

Faith is not so much "belief" in something as it is "trust" in that Light (that Divine Mystery) that you see with your heart. I much prefer to live on a path of spirituality where I can experience and grow each day, where I can find myself more and more drawn into the Mystery of which my life is already a part. I just don't believe that the "words" of any religion are the final answer to the mystery of our life in God's creation.

"Speak without accusing" (James 1:1-19).

Sunday Mornings

Read Psalms 107

A family that prays together is a family that stays together. That's a true statement, but there is more to it than prayer. You have to walk the walk, and you have to truly believe in God's Word. (1 Samuel 12: 23-24)

I remember Sunday mornings when I was a kid and my parents, my siblings and myself awoke to eat breakfast. We would put on our Sunday's best, pile into the car, and then go to worship Almighty God.

That day was always so peaceful and serene and there was a different aura on Sundays than any other day of the week. It was a day that families all over the world were at their best and on their best behavior. (Psalms 22: 22-27)

Even as a kid, I knew that Sunday was not the day to do anything stupid or goof around, because my parents had a no-tolerance policy for Sundays.

When my parents divorced, I was too young to understand any of it. All I knew was that my dad was no longer around and those days when we had worshipped together, prayed together, and ate dinner together were no more.

I excluded myself from everything and I wanted no part of anything. That situation – that split in my family – changed me as a person to this very day. I can't assign blame to either of my parents, and I never will. (Ezekiel 34:16)

To have gone through that ordeal strengthened me as I grew older and prepared for the world, and it also helped my faith. I know where I belong in regards to my relationship with God and I hold those precious days in my heart, and I'll treasure those memories every day of my life for the rest of my life.

Everybody has dreams and everybody aspires to be something or somebody in life. I've never wanted to be rich, famous, or anything of that nature.

I've only wanted to be a proud son, brother, father, husband, relative and friend my whole life and to have those precious Sunday mornings with my family, as I did when I was a kid

I want to love peacefully and comfortably in God's eyes and by His will. Sunday mornings are special, and I truly hope that others are enjoying such a blessing.

If not, then you are missing out on one of the purest qualities of life and a moment when Almighty God looks down from Heaven to watch His children with a gracious smile. (Psalms 118:24, Act 11:23)

God bless you all!
Justin

Sunday Morning

Sunday morning – a beautiful day with
sunny skies,
Jubilee and awe clearly in all of
our eyes.
There's a peaceful calm surrounding
our home.
Mom is merrily and delightfully scurrying
us along.

Sunday morning – getting ready to give
God praise,
A special day treasured in so many
precious ways.
The choir is singing with joy as the day
just lingers.
There's clapping of hands and wagging
of fingers.

Sunday morning – every word of the Lord
preached crisp and clear.
Every eye is focused and every ear
peaked to hear.
All of God's children gathered together for
a divine purpose,
Growing as a family; triumphing in God's
will and trust.

By: Justin

Too often we pray out of routine and too often this routine is a reflection of our daily lives. Truth is most of us spend far too much time talking. Some of the questions we ask aren't necessary. If we will only stop talking and listen for a little while, most of the time our questions will be answered. It's very difficult to listen, pay attention, if we never stop talking. This is also true in prayer. King Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 5:2, "Never be rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be quick to utter a word before God, for God Is in heaven, and you upon earth; therefore let your words be few." When we go before God we must think about what we are doing, who we are and, most importantly, who God is. Far too often we don't listen to God during prayer, and we don't listen because we are too busy talking, bombarding Him with our multitude of requests. At the end of verse 2, Solomon says, "let your words be few." That one line sums up all of verse 2.

One of the most amazing experiences in prayer I ever had was when I drew near to God by seeking Him in silence. When I took the time to clear the clutter from my mind and truly focus my mind, body and soul on God, imagining who He is, was I able to really pay attention to what He had to share with me, rather than focusing on what I wanted to share with Him. Through deep breaths and silence of mind and mouth was I able to release all the pressures and excess of my daily routine. Images began to enter my mind about what God the Father may look like. After several moments of different images, one particular image seemed to be very still. It was the image of open arms drawing me near to safety. This was one of the most intense spiritual experiences of my life. I have had many spiritual experiences during prayer but none like that one.

It is amazing what can happen in prayer when we make it about Him. Proverbs 8:34 is a reminder of this, "Happy is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors." Just like words can cause us to miss out in our daily lives, they can also get in the way of our spiritual unity with God. Only when we are truly silent and still, can we hear the Lord's whispers of comfort or challenge, peace or purpose, forgiveness and faith. I encourage you to listen more when you pray. I promise you will discover that by paying attention, God has something He wants to say to you.

Through all the pain and hatred in this world that burdens my heart, it is with You in prayer that I receive a fresh start. Through all the confusion and problems of this world beside me, it is through prayer that He will find me. Above all the joy and happiness in this life to share, the ultimate joy is hearing You in prayer.

Song of the Month: Lecrae, "Praying for You."

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 piece 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.