

The Good News

Newsletter - December 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)



Advent: A time to reflect and a time to turn.

As advent comes around each year I am reminded of a seasonal change in Nature. Right now leaves are falling, trees and plants are becoming dormant, some animals go into hibernation (around here, I guess it is mostly snakes and other reptiles); yet, also acorns and other seeds have dropped and Nature is preparing for the future. With the shortened daylight hours and the temperatures becoming colder, I tend to migrate from outdoor activities to more indoor sedentary activities. So when I reflect on that, the realization is that I am part of and partial of the same thing going on around me: God's creation of seasonal change.

I now have many more opportunities to turn inward: more time to eat, watch television, and read. Now, it is true that a lot of that time is self directed and is selfish, but that is where change begins. I can reflect on my connection with those people who surround me: neighbors, friends, church, family and literally the world and all that is going on in it.

I sense Creation itself is the Body of Christ, which makes "the Christ" a mystery of matter and spirit operating as one. In the first chapter of Genesis it states we are created in the image and likeness of God. I have often wondered where God's DNA, Nature's DNA, and my DNA and hence all of our DNA cross paths. Because it seems to me only natural that if God is in his creation, then everything bears his Divine DNA and therefore everything reveals the Creator in some unique way.

It would make sense to me that all things are connected to God and so that holiness is revealed in our ability to make positive connections: the more I can connect, the holier I am. If I believe that God is Love, it is through Jesus and the stories of his way of living and his way of loving. So I wonder if Love is the spiritual DNA that connects everything in the universe and is love what we were made for? Maybe love is what we are that really counts, that really lasts, that really connects.

Can Advent become a time of inward turning, inward reflecting, inward growing close to God and like a seed or acorn open up to fulfill a purpose of growth and new life and connectedness to all of God's creation?

My hope is that this Advent Season, I can connect in better ways to "the mind of Christ" and therefore to all the world and become more the change that is needed and less caught up in my story, my hurts, and my agenda. It takes a lot of confidence in God, especially when I am hurting; I want to make things right and do it now immediately. I can easily obsess and go into my mind about a problem. As a friend once said "life is a river and we are in it, if you don't swim you will drown." I prefer to see a river of God's providential love which is always flowing connecting everything. With God's love and support, I can face the uncertainty, the tension, the inability to be in control. It is in looking towards Jesus' birth, I can prepare to see anew the wonder, love and grace that God makes possible for us all.

Jim Bishop, UBC

Let it Rain (Psalms 24&29)

What a world we live in. There seems to be nothing but chaos on every news channel that you turn on across every country and nation. Aren't we glad that our God is a God of honor and of integrity to have made a covenant with Noah? He has stood by that covenant despite all the atrocity in this world (Gen 9:11).

With all of that, God has shed many tears with each rain for his children, and he has also smiled with each sunny day. Some days though, I just like to sit and watch the rain falling as it washes away all the muck that permeates across this beautiful earth that we were left to be guardians of. I can't help but love how the rains come and there's only the sound of pitter patter. After the rains, the sweetest sounds of birds chirping and other animals coming out of their hiding places to greet the warm, shining sun make it a moment of everlasting beauty to treasure.

God sees everything and knows everything. So, why not open up the floodgates of heaven and let his tears soothe our souls and wash our spirits with his goodness? Let it rain upon the earth and let us pray that all the turmoil around the world has a peaceful outcome. God Bless everyone!

Open the floodgates of heaven and kiss me
with your tears,
Wash away all of my sins and all of my
dreaded fears.

Let thunder be your voice and let lightning
mark your path
To warn us all of our iniquity and of
your firm wrath.

Push me forward with your gust and let the
wind hold me back,
So that I won't move too fast and get
threwed off track.

Soak me with your compassion and hug
me with each raindrop,
Let it rain upon my soul and let your spirit sooth me non-stop.

By: Justin H. Underwood

Recommended Song: "Let it Rain" by Bishop Paul S. Morton, Sr.

God's Will?

How do we know if we are doing the will of God when we make life decisions? If we pray and pray but nothing becomes clear, what are we to do? Stephen P. recently shared a devotional message with me that said most people begin a task and then ask God to bless the endeavor instead of first asking him if the task is his will. Since I am guilty of this mistake, I began thinking about projects and decisions I have made in the past. I was not surprised to find that I've had mixed results since I rarely went into my plans with God's initial guidance. I always asked for his blessings later.

I decided to change that way of doing things. Moving forward, I will inquire of our Lord whether I should do this or that. So here I write with my first obstacle: my will. I have an important decision that I must make regarding my role on Death Row for the rest of my stay. In my mind I have plotted out the course of action "I" want to take. As I have been praying over this decision I can't hear God's response over my own will. This is a tricky situation because God often responds to my prayers during my prayers by putting his will or a revelation in my mind. I literally hear him, and I am always amazed when that happens. However, this time I went into prayer with my plan already formed in my mind so I don't know for sure if it is the voice of my own desires or if it is God's voice. I must make a decision very soon. If I choose incorrectly then I will be praying for God to bless my actions after the fact. He may bless them because they are not contrary to his plan, but the path I choose may not have been the best one possible. Only he can tell me which way to go, but I can't hear his voice over my own. What do I do? If anyone can relate to this please let me know.

In need of Christian advice,

Roger Gillett

Parcham, MS

Letter from the Free World

I don't really know how to start this, but all I can do is speak from my heart. A friend of mine asked me, why did you choose to start writing inmates? It only took me a second to know the answer. So many years have come and gone, and with each passing year, I can feel myself pulling away from others, and losing sight of the important things in this life. One night I was thinking, who in this whole world could possibly feel as alone as I do? So I pulled out my laptop and started doing searches for pen pals, and sure enough, I found several sites for prison pen pals. Could there possibly be someone who needs a friend as much as I do? I took a chance and introduced myself to a few of them, and I can honestly say, that it was one of the smartest things I've ever done in my life. No man is an island, and taking that first step has opened up a whole new world. The friendships and bonds that have been made, can never be broken. Learning about each other and growing in trust and friendship has changed my life. I have friends now that I could never replace. We share stories and talk about things going on in our lives. Making jokes that only the other will smile at, sometimes good, and sometimes not so good. When my father passed away, it was my friends that picked me up and dusted me off, saying, *you are stronger than you know. You can do it. Keep going.* Not only are they my friends, but they are my family, and I love each and every one of them.

So, if you're still on the fence about writing an inmate, I hope this helps. No one is perfect. Not a single one of us. Open your minds, and open your hearts, your best friend could be out there waiting for you right now. Just one letter away. My family has grown so much, and so has my heart. I can't speak for them, but they seem to be pretty happy too. Love can come in many forms, you just have to be willing to reach out and take a chance.

Gayle H.
Georgetown, KY

Dealing and prevailing during conflict, we sometimes try to do it on our own strength. That is, if we're being honest with ourselves. What we fail to realize is that it doesn't work without God. We must step back and value long term decisions over our immediate decisions no matter how struggling or painful it can be. Our human nature sometimes disallows us that opportunity because of the situation at the time.

Conflicts are part of every person's life and a common problem today is that most people don't know how to deal with conflict nor do they understand the source of real peace. As a result, we've become somewhat ignorant and we see issues around us but we often choose to ignore them. It seems that most people have a common goal of avoiding conflict at all cost. The Greek word, *eirene*, means: to bind together. Peace has the sense of wholeness or inner completeness that brings stability to a person's work regardless of what is happening in his or her life.

We'll find the key to lasting peace in a relationship we build in tranquility with Jesus Christ. If we focus our attention on the Son of God, then he'll give us a perfect peace. That doesn't mean we're immune to sudden shocks or occasional times when we are thrown off balance by circumstances (John 14:27). What does the Lord want? I see and read in Micah 6:8—"But to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God." Justice, kindness and humility—that doesn't sound so difficult does it? Try it for a while and tell yourself that you'll respond to each situation from this moment on with a just, kind and humble manner.

The good news: God never intended for you to do all of this by your own strength. From the moment he breathed life into you, he has wanted to give you his spirit and the grace you need. His spirit isn't just a reserve tank that we can switch on when we reach the end of our resources. No, he is meant to be the source of all our efforts at mercy, justice, and love.

God richly bless each and everyone—may we all strive to love as Jesus Christ so loves us and commands.

With love and fellowship,
Roger T.

Let the Old Things Pass Away (2 Cor 5:17)

As followers of Jesus, we know that letting old things go and looking forward to those things that are new to come into our lives is important. We need to be examples for others to see just how much it means to let go of the old things that someone has done to us or the people that we love in the past and look forward to the present and the future. But to keep us away from Jesus, our adversary is going to try and keep the old things that we have done or are supposed to have done in our lives. For we will have to tell everyone who will listen to us that when their past mistakes come back to cause them great problems; that Jesus will deliver them so that they can look forward to the new things in this life and the life to come. If we want forgiveness, we will have to forgive others for their mistakes as well. If we continue to let our hearts, souls and minds dwell on the old things that we have done in the past, then we will stay in the past. So let's look forward to new things. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Brother in Christ,
Stephen P

*This piece was written by Stephen P. on 6/30/2001. He has since suffered multiple strokes and currently has a bleeding aneurysm. He continues to remain strong with the Lord and an inspiration to many as he deals with the everyday woes of Death Row.

Hope

Hope sees sunshine through the clouds
And rainbows in the rain.
Hope gives us strength to travel on when
The struggle seems vain.
Hope looks ahead to better things when
The dream we had is gone.
Hope is faith that on the darkest night
There will be a better
Dawn.

Sherwood B.

A Caring Heart

Walk through life with a caring heart
You'll always find someone in need.
go out of your way to help
And you will be blessed by the deed.

For all life's blessings are born
From a heart that's filled with love
And all your good acts are seen
By the eyes of God above.

So as you travel through life
Always find some time to spare
To give someone a helping hand
With a heart that is full of Care.

Sherwood B and Anthony D.

Emmanuel

120

Unison

Em-man - u - el, Em-man - u - el,

His name is called Em-man - u - el;

God with us, re-vealed in us;

His name is called Em-man - u - el.

WORDS: Bob McGee, 1975

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McGEE
Irregular



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.