for unto us a Child is born
In the late 1970s while I was a college student at GBS, I remember making holiday trips back home to West Virginia and to Pennsylvania to visit my fiancée’s family. To occupy my time during those respites, I would indulge in my favorite. I usually just read and dreamed. Another top choice was the perusal of magazines. Popular Photography was a favorite. I also read and dreamed. Another top choice was The Computer Shopper. I could spend hours with those thick, tabloid-size publications that mostly contained ads for computers, kits, parts, and software. As my eyes scanned the pictures, I fashioned myself as a person on the cusp of the personal computing boom. I never purchased a thing.

I also have fond memories of picking up those free copies of The Plain Truth at rest stops. Now don’t judge me. I was fully aware that it was a highly questionable periodical published by the Worldwide Church of God and edited by Herbert W. Armstrong. I knew that many of Armstrong’s doctrines were not biblical long before his successors came to that same conclusion. But The Plain Truth did contain some provocative opinion pieces that I found interesting.

I also remember reading articles rejecting various traditional holidays due to their pagan origins. I was on board with the arguments opposing Halloween, but the cases against Easter and Christmas were more difficult to accept. I read exposés on Easter eggs, Christmas trees, and, yes, even the date designated for Christmas. Imagine that! Pause a moment….

While your imagination is still engaged, picture me in Professor Ken Stetler’s class during the month of December in the 1970s. He had just instructed us to take out a sheet of paper and write something about Christmas. What do you think the good professor thought when he read my account of how that date could be tied to pagan Zoroastrianism? December 25 was the date the Earth was furthest from the sun, therefore, the time when the sun began its “return to Earth.”

Now, I am aware that the actual date of the winter solstice varies. I am also aware of other rationales for celebrating Christmas on December 25. For example, some posit that the world was created on the spring equinox and that the creation of light on day four (March 25) was the date of Jesus’ conception. Therefore, nine months later—December 25—became the date of Jesus’ birth.

No matter the date or the rationale, let us all rejoice that the Son indeed did come to Earth. Hallelujah!—KF
How do you respond when you think about Christmas? Reading through the Christmas story, one can identify the different reactions of the various participants in this historical account. I would like to focus on five. As we examine each, I think you will realize that you fit into at least one of them, and maybe even more.

RESPONSE OF THE INNKEEPER

Do you know how many times the innkeeper is mentioned in the Bible? Sorry, that was actually a trick question—the innkeeper is never mentioned. However, since we are told that there was no room in the inn, we can safely assume there indeed was an inn, and, in all likelihood, an innkeeper. But who was he, and what was he like? Down through the centuries, some have pictured him as a villain while others see him as a hero. So, he could be a mean-spirited, grumpy, old man who slams the door in the face of Mary and Joseph, or a kind-hearted, gentle man who is a victim of circumstances beyond his control.

Whichever seems to be the case, let us simply say that the innkeeper represents those who allow busyness to overwhelm. That is what happens to too many people today. The malls open early and stay open late, and the parking lots are filled with cars as people search for the perfect gift. Christmas is such a busy time. It’s so easy to fall into the trap of the innkeeper, where we’re
so busy and so out of focus that we allow other things
to take God’s rightful place.

Consider this illustration: While running furiously
from store to store doing last minute shopping, a
mother suddenly realized that the pudgy little hand
of her three-year-old son was no longer clutched in hers.
In a panic she retraced her steps and found him, little
nose pressed flatly against a frosty window, gazing at a
manger scene. Hearing his mother’s near hysterical call,
he turned and shouted with innocent glee, “Look,
Mommy! It’s Jesus—baby Jesus in the hay!” With obvi-
ous indifference to his joy and wonder, she scolded,
“Come on, we don’t have time for that!”

RESPONSE OF THE SHEPHERDS

Shepherds were part of the lower class in Israel. It
was a dirty job which necessitated being away from
home for weeks—living out in the wilderness, living
with sheep. And yet, God reached across all the barriers
of society, and the shepherds were the first to know that
a Savior had been born. It wasn’t because they had fig-
ured out the prophecies. They were privileged to be in
the right place at the right time. God gave them the first
opportunity to see and worship Jesus.

Now if we’re honest with ourselves, we have to
admit that we’re privileged people, too. The reason we
have had spiritual opportunities is because we were
born in a great country, were privileged to hear the
gospel preached, and had the opportunity to learn
about Jesus through our parents or friends. We are a
privileged people, just like the shepherds.

RESPONSE OF HEROD

Herod was a king possessed by the fear of losing his
throne. History informs us that this fear led him to mur-
der his favorite wife and three of his sons. So when wise
men came asking, “Where is the newborn king?”
Herod immediately summoned the religious leaders
and asked, “Do you know anything about a new king?”
They answered, “The prophets say that He is to be born
in Bethlehem.” Herod instructed the wise men to find
this king and report back to him, saying that he wanted
to worship him, too. When the wise men failed to do
that, Herod ordered the killing of all children two-years
old and under who were living in Bethlehem. Herod’s
response was paranoia. He was afraid that this new king
would cause him to lose the power and authority to
which he had grown accustomed.

I believe many people respond to Jesus this way. If
Jesus becomes the Lord of their lives, what would that
mean? If they really crown Him King of Kings and Lord
of Lords—really put Him first—what kind of difference
would that make in their lives? Too many respond like
Herod. They are fearful of losing the familiar. Being
comfortable with things as they are and loving the feel-
ing of control does not allow Jesus to make a difference
in their lives.

RESPONSE OF THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES

When asked if they had heard anything about a
new king, the scribes and Pharisees instantly answered,
“Yes. One is going to be born in Bethlehem.” They
knew the right answer, but they didn’t go to Bethlehem.
Why not? I think that it was because of pride.

If they had traveled with the wise men to Bethlehem,
they would have had to admit that these wise men knew
more about their Messiah than they did. They would
have had to confess that God didn’t reveal the news to
them but to someone else. They had such spiritual pride
that they honestly believed that if anything new were
going to happen, they would be among the first to know.

The truth is that Christians today, especially those in
the U.S., have so many possessions that it is hard for
them to admit that they need God for anything. Why
bother Him? They feel like they are handling matters
pretty well “on their own.” When you have food to eat,
a house in which to live, and money in the bank, it can
be hard to admit you need God to take care of you.
The Bible warns that pride goes before a fall. As long as
we stand in our pride and think that we can handle all
the events of life, we’ll never know the miracle of
Christmas—being filled with God’s love.

RESPONSE OF THE WISE MEN

The final response is the best. The wise men re-
sponded with perception. They lived hundreds of miles
away, and they were not visited by any angels. But they
studied the stars. When they saw a new star, a special
star, they properly perceived its importance. It signified
that a new world ruler had been born. So they started
their long journey to find Him. And once they found
Mary, Joseph, and the baby, the Bible says that they
worshiped Him and gave Him gifts of gold, frankinc-
cense, and myrrh.

I pray that your response to Christmas this year will
be the same. Worship Him. Give Him gifts. Express your
adoration, love, and thankfulness for what He has done.

One writer said, “Christmas is love tugging men’s
hearts back to God with the powerful grip of a tiny
hand reaching out from a bed of straw.”

Have you ever placed your finger inside the hand of
a little baby and felt its grip? It is actually powerful. And
when a baby grips your finger, you also feel a tug at
your heart. Well, at Christmas, Jesus reaches out with
the tiny hand of an infant to grab hold of our hearts and
pull us back to God.

What is your response to Christmas?
When I began this series on spiritual formation, I did so by noting that the Bible assumes it to be self-evident that we can know God intimately, and that it carefully illustrates how that intimacy is developed. This truth was enthusiastically embraced by the early Church Fathers and later by the Reformers. Each taught that Christian spirituality involves a deepening trust and developing friendship with God. More specifically, they taught that true spirituality is an ever-growing, experientially dynamic relationship with our Trinitarian God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—through the agency of His Word and the indwelling of His Spirit.

John Wesley, more so than any other Reformer, took an explicitly systematic approach to spiritual formation that proved to be remarkably successful. Scholars and historians believe that the reason his vision for spiritual formation was so highly effective was due to the fact that he defined Christianity itself as a way of life and not just a creed or doctrine. Wesley believed that a transformed heart ultimately resulted in a transformed life (holiness or Christlikeness). He even defined “Genuine Christianity” by describing it in terms of a heart that is shaped or formed by the Spirit. This paradigm for spiritual growth frames progress as not only what God expects from me, but also what He allows and provides for me through the means of grace.

However, Wesley’s genius for observation and analysis coupled with his long life and ministry gave him a unique perspective on how this played out in the individual lives of his Methodist converts. He wrote,

*From long experience and observation I am inclined to think that whoever finds redemption in the blood*

The path of the righteous is like the morning sun, shining ever brighter till the full light of day. —Proverbs 4:18

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. —2 Corinthians 3:18
of Jesus, whoever is justified, has then the choice of walking in the higher or the lower path. I believe the Holy Spirit at that time sets before him “the more excellent way,” and incites him to walk therein, to choose the narrowest path in the narrow way, to aspire after the heights and depths of holiness—after the entire image of God. But if he does not accept this offer, he insensibly declines into the lower order of Christians. He still goes on in what may be called a good way, serving God in his degree, and finds mercy in the close of life, through the blood of the covenant.

I have written this series of articles for those who seek the “higher path,” the “more excellent way,” the “heights and depths of holiness.” Yet I, too, like Wesley, know that not everyone will develop the capacity, nor even the desire, for this level of spiritual intimacy and growth. Some will never believe it is even possible to live in the joy of Christ’s presence or be conformed to His image. Others will see holiness or Christlikeness as a “goal” of the Christian life, but one that is not truly attainable. Either way, both are like a man born with a bad foot—they will just learn to “live with a limp” and assume that is the best that can be done for them until they are glorified in heaven.

Whatever path one ultimately follows, we are still confronted with this very important question,

“What is the level of grace that God has provided for us and will ultimately require of us as a condition of final salvation?”

The biblical doctrine of salvation demands that we answer such a question. The answer given by prominent Wesleyan theologian Richard Taylor is that “the minimum measure of grace acceptable to God would be an intense desire for the maximum measure of grace available.” Taylor’s statement hints at an irreducible minimum—one that is tied to both the revealed will of God in Scripture, as well as God’s enabling grace in man and man’s capacity to respond to that grace.

I believe there is a path all Christians can follow that might be called the “irreducible minimum” of Biblical followership. I call it the “Path of the Righteous.” It requires that we:

1. Pursue Holiness. “Pursue peace with all people, and [pursue] holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God” (Heb. 12:14-15a). To pursue means to go after it with all my heart. It is like a hunter pursuing a catch. It means to pursue with all haste, earnestly desiring to apprehend.

2. Walk in the Light. “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Walking in the light is a figurative way of saying that we respond positively and obediently to all truth. The key idea here is obedience. God clearly expects us to obey His Word and will.

3. Maintain a good conscience. “This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith” (1 Tim. 1:18-19). People who grow, pursue holy living, and become mature believers keep a good conscience! The conscience is our internal rational capacity that bears witness to our value system. It prods us to do the right thing and pricks us when we have done the wrong thing! However, it is only a trustworthy guide when it is informed by and in submission to the Word of God. This is why it is so important that we allow the Word of God both to inform and to transform our minds (Rom.12:2).

4. Embrace difficult circumstances and suffering. “And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you” (1 Pet. 5:10). God uses problems and their subsequent pain to mature and develop us into the kind of men and women He wants us to be. The very trials which may appear to be the means Satan employs for our destruction are the means God employs for our deliverance and development. Behind the opposition of unbelievers stands Satan seeking to devour us, and behind Satan stands God, sure to perfect and purify us. God is working through our struggles to produce strength of character.

5. Maintain the fullness of the Holy Spirit. “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18). This may be one of the most important verses in the New Testament for the Christian. It is foundational to everything else. There is nothing we need more. It is a command for all Christians and is the key to living an authentic, empowered life. Let me stress again, this is a command and not a suggestion. It’s an urgent imperative and not a casual opinion. “Be filled” means I play a part in it. For example, I cannot be filled with the Spirit while at the same time harboring sin or conducting my life in the energy of the
TOO BIG TO EXAGGERATE

That you...may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. —Ephesians 3:17b-19a ESV

Have you ever been tempted to exaggerate? I have. As someone who loves a good story and enjoys spinning a yarn, I find that exaggeration and a flair for the dramatic are usually nearby. At times I’ve had to retrace my steps to clear up a misunderstanding or apologize for a misstatement.

Some time ago, I spoke with someone struggling to view God as loving. I reminded her of the ways God showed His love throughout Scripture. God loved enough to trade His glorified form for human flesh, to suffer everything we suffer, to invest in followers who rarely understood Him, to serve the fickle crowds who alternated between praising Him and crying out for His blood. But He kept loving—all the way to the cross. Near the end of our conversation, I was struck by a beautiful truth: There was nothing I could say to exaggerate the love of God! It can be misrepresented but never exaggerated. As big as I try to convey God’s love, it is bigger still. As high or as wide or as deep as I try to communicate it, it is higher, wider, and deeper still. Our finite minds cannot comprehend its vastness. Our limited imaginations cannot capture its magnitude. This immense Love put on a form that we could understand in order to reconcile us to Himself, and the import of that moment defies exaggeration. May the glory of that truth fill you with awe and gratitude this season!

Sonja Vernon is Director of Student Affairs at GBS.

Michael Avery is the former president of God’s Bible School and College (1995-2017) and its current chancellor. This is the ninth and final article in a series.

With just nine letters and two syllables, this simple word conjures up a million images and twice as many emotions. Children who grow up in a secure, loving environment often find Christmas to be a most magical season. Twinkling lights, familiar carols, delectable treats, and seasonal activities relentlessly tantalize the senses, and the excitement just seems to keep building.

When I was a kid, the excitement would usually come to a crashing halt sometime toward the end of our largest holiday gathering, as I would inevitably end up with a fever or a stomach virus. I’m smiling as I visualize those memories. Christmas was the best, and most years it was more than my little body could handle.

Once we transition from childhood to adulthood, the magic tends to fade a little. We are more realistic. We see the world through a different set of eyes. The twinkling lights may be distorted or dimmed through lenses clouded with hurt and pain. Joyful tunes can be muffled by inner voices of rejection and self-deprecation that seem to be on repeat. Festive activities threaten to brim with fear of social failure or dread of familial conflict. Sometimes disappointment is due to unrealistic expectations, but often there is a stark reality that seeks to rob us of experiencing the joy that is meant for us at Christmas.

The Reality of Financial Difficulty

Let’s face it. Christmas is expensive. Or is it? Our culture has turned Christmas into one gigantic budget buster. Choosing to reject the pressure to live outside one’s means this time of year can be especially difficult. If circumstances have created an even tighter financial environment, choosing to focus on what one has rather than what one hasn’t can be even more challenging.

Are you confronted with financial reverses this Christmas? Let me encourage you to count your blessings. Begin to list them. As you do, you’ll find your mood lightened and your spirit centered. You’ll find boldness to guide your family into a Christmas that is bubbling with creativity and love. And that sounds like a gift that money can’t buy.
The Reality of Damaged Relationships

If you have never experienced the painful rub of misunderstanding, the sharp prick of retaliation, or the dull ache of bitterness, hold on. Chances are high that you will be handed one of these at some point. Some of you are walking this road today, and the thought of being in certain social circles or family gatherings this holiday season has your emotions wavering between mild anxiety and full-blown panic. If this is your situation, please know that you are not alone. Take some time to study the sufferings of Christ. He was misunderstood, maligned, and mocked. His approach was love, humility, and forgiveness. I am confident that as we seek to imitate Him consistently and be at peace with others, He will work in ways that we cannot. We have to relinquish control of timing and methods and trust Him with the outcome. His plan may not be to change others, but to change us. That is often a benefit unseen except in retrospect. Hold on. He’s there, and if it concerns us, it concerns Him.

The Reality of Grief

I have attended funeral visitations for four acquaintances in the last thirteen days, three of them in the last three days. Two of these passed away on Thanksgiving Day. Four deaths, four different sets of circumstances, and many, many more touched with grief due to the loss. Death is a cruel thief. But death isn’t the only cause of grief. Some are grieving the loss of a marriage. Others are grieving infertility. There is grief due to wayward children, illness, job loss, and a host of other reverses that life may bring. Whatever your grief, it will threaten to suffocate any glimmer of joy in your life this season. Can you still celebrate the coming of the Messiah even as you are in the throes of personal darkness? Praise Him through your pain. The purest praise is birthed in the midst of the deepest agony. Look up, reach out, and tightly grasp His promise to be the healing balm for your grieving heart.

If none of these realities are yours, maybe it would be good for you to look for those who are struggling, put your arm around them, and share their burden. Your strength may be what lifts them above their circumstances and into the realm of hope this Christmas.

Stephanie (Nichols) Burley earned a BA in Education (GBS ’90) and an MA in Human Relations/Marriage and Family (Liberty University ’08). She has taught at Pilgrim Christian School in Lima, OH, for the past 21 years. She and her husband Greg have four children. This article first appeared in Pilgrim News & Notes, December 1, 2017, and is used with permission.
On these pages, we feature items about GBS alumni, significant events scheduled throughout the “Revivalist Family,” and brief news notes from across the Holiness Movement.

BIRTH

To Faith (McManaman) (2003-05) and Joshua Avery (AA ’02), a daughter, Char- lotte Ruth, born August 8, 2018. Both parents were previously employed at GBS— Josh as Director of Library Services (2010-17) and Faith as Director of Institutional Advancement (2010-16). Josh is Assistant Professor of Library Science at Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL. Charlotte is welcomed by two sisters, Clara (5), and Catherine (3). The Averys live in Wheaton, IL.

ALDERSGATE FORUM

The Aldersgate Forum is a continuing fellowship group that promotes informed dialogue and scholarly analysis of the vital theological and practical issues confronting Christians today with the goal of fostering renewed commitment to intellectual growth and holy living. It meets once a year to discuss a specific topic. This year’s theme was “The Pastoral Epistles and the Church.” Approximately 30 participants met October 23-25 at Higher Ground Conference and Retreat Center, Harrison, IN.

DEATH

Eugene Peterson, 85, Presbyterian pastor and author of more than 30 books on spirituality as well as The Message Bible paraphrase, died October 22. Mr. Peterson’s family released the following statement: “During the previous days, it was apparent that he was navigating the thin and sacred space between earth and heaven. We overheard him speaking to people we can only presume were welcoming him into paradise.”

HITHER AND THITHER AMONG US

KCC President Retiring. The board of trustees of the Kansas Christian College announced the retire-
ary leaders during Missionary Convention, October 28-30. Focusing on the theme “The World at Your Door,” plenary speaker Eric Kuhns delivered timely, challenging reminders that missions is the work of the whole church, not just those who serve abroad. A panel discussion, featuring Harold Martin, Eric Himelick, Steve Stetler, and Galen Currah, addressed questions posed by students and faculty regarding contemporary missions. Tim and Becky Keep, our current Visiting Professors of Missions (see page 12), played an active role in the services and workshops.

Prayer meetings, led by missions students, were refreshing times of lifting up needy fields, active missionaries, and current students. During morning workshops, visiting speakers addressed a variety of topics, including the role of missions at home, such as evangelism, urban ministry, ministry to immigrants, and church multiplication. Other workshops drew attention to traditional missions by focusing on missionary roles, contextualization, indigenization, and humanitarian missions.

Throughout the convention, faculty, staff, and students enjoyed meeting with visiting missionaries and missions representatives from All Tribes Lighthouse Mission, Bible Methodist Missions, Church of God (Holiness) World Missions, English Language Institute China, Evangelism Mission, Evangelistic Faith Missions, Holiness Pilgrim Missions, Hope International Missions, and One Plus God Ministries. Most importantly, God’s presence was felt at the convention, blessing our fellowship, challenging our hearts, and leading us to service in the kingdom. —Lyle Witt, Chair, Division of Professional Studies

GBS HONORS AREA PASTORS

On Friday, November 2, more than two dozen area pastors gathered in the GBS chapel for a special program honoring their service to the kingdom of God on the frontline of pastoral ministry. Longtime pastor and church leader Ben Durr, Sr. was speaker for this special celebration. Staff and students participated with tributes to their pastors, and the two GBS Church Relations vocal groups provided special music. Afterwards, the pastors were escorted by ministerial students to the Martin Dining Room where they were served a meal and presented with a gift, A Classic Soul Winner’s New Testament. Many positive comments were received from the pastors expressing their appreciation for this special occasion honoring their ministry.

KEN HAM SPEAKS IN CHAPEL

Occasionally we are privileged to have Ken Ham speak in chapel, which occurred most recently on October 19. An Australian-born, Christian fundamentalist and young-Earth creationist, Ken is CEO of Answers in Genesis (AiG), an apologetics organization that operates the nearby Creation Museum and Ark Encounter. He has authored a number of books and DVDs, which were displayed for purchase at a generous discount during his visit. His talk emphasized the necessity of being prepared to give a defense for why we believe what we believe (1 Pet. 3:15) and making sure the foundations we are building on are solid (Psa. 11:3).
ACADEMIC NEWS

Missions Program

After spending a year learning from Steve Stetler, our Visiting Professor of Missions for 2017–18, missions students on campus have the opportunity to learn from the experiences of an active missions team, Tim and Becky Keep, who are serving as our Visiting Professors of Missions for 2018–19. Rev. and Mrs. Keep will be teaching a variety of missions courses, including Current Issues and Methods in Missions, Cultural Diversity, Cross-Cultural Communication, and World Religions. In addition to their missions field work, the Keeps provide leadership for Bible Methodist Missions and are published authors.

Along with the privilege of learning from veteran missionaries such as Steve Stetler and Tim and Becky Keep, missions students also enjoy fellowship with other mission-minded students in an active missions student organization and meet regularly during the year in divisional interest groups with Marc and Melodie Sankey, who served as missionaries in Mexico and worked with Evangelistic Faith Missions prior to joining the GBS staff.

To strengthen the missions program, the Division of Professional Studies has revised the existing AAS in Intercultural Studies and World Missions to include additional missions courses while adding an option to study church planting, urban ministry, and discipleship. The division has also created a minor in missions, allowing students in other degree programs to prepare for cross-cultural service. Those studying missions within the division continue to train in other fields, such as education, counseling, or business, which equips them with practical skills useful for service at home and abroad.

CAEP Accreditation

All education degrees offered at GBS are regionally and nationally accredited through the Higher Learning Commission and the Association for Biblical Higher Education. Currently, graduates from all baccalaureate programs in teacher education and music education are eligible to apply for teacher certification through the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI), a qualification expected by many Christian schools.

However, in an ongoing effort to secure state teacher licensure, the Division of Professional Studies and the Division of Music have been working to secure additional accreditation through the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), the national accrediting body for educator preparation programs. As GBS has candidate status with CAEP, the next step in the programmatic accreditation process is a site visit, which is scheduled for May 2021.

Additionally, GBS has submitted application materials to the Ohio Department of Higher Education to become an approved program for teacher licensure, which would enable graduates to be licensed to work in Ohio public schools. Currently GBS’s education graduates can receive state licensure in some states, including Indiana and Florida; becoming an approved program in Ohio will significantly increase opportunities for students who are called to minister in public schools.

We thank God for His help in this process. Pray with us for His continued help in this last stretch.
He Sees the Gift in You

by Suzie Eller

“How do you know me?” Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.” John 1:48 (NIV)

When my brothers were small, they’d often tiptoe into my room and climb in bed with me at night. Home was hard at that time for all of us. We found sanctuary as we huddled close, and I told stories.

“Say a word,” I’d prompt.

“Dragon!” one little brother whispered.

“Forest,” said my other little brother.

Off we went on an adventure, as I wove a story about a fierce dragon caught in a forest, with two sweet boys hanging on every word.

I didn’t know it back then, but storytelling was a gift God placed in my heart. It wasn’t just a knack for telling stories, but something He would use for His purpose. On the nights when my little brothers and I snuggled in for a good story, He used my gift to calm their anxious hearts. Little did I know God would continue to use this throughout my life.

Likewise, Jesus knew a thing or two about gifting and purpose.

In John 1, we find Jesus in Galilee. Nathanael is walking toward Him, and Jesus calls out, telling all within hearing distance that Nathanael is a good man.

“How do you know me?” Nathanael asked.

“Jesus answered, ‘I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.’”

Long before they met in person, Jesus knew all about Nathanael. He knew of his character. He knew his gifts. He knew this man had a purpose. Jesus knows us. Isn’t that incredible?

Years ago, when I was telling stories to my brothers in the midst of a chaotic home life, I didn’t know it was a talent God had given me. I didn’t understand—until much later—that Jesus not only recognized those gifts but desired to help me mature them.

Maybe you can point out others’ gifts, but not your own. You don’t always recognize them, or they seem ordinary. Take heart, friend! Jesus recognizes them because His Father put them inside of you.

Nathanael (also known as Bartholomew) went on to become a disciple and friend of Jesus. He traveled across India, Armenia, Ethiopia, and Southern Arabia, sharing the gospel and drawing many to Christ. When he encountered Jesus, he stood under a tree minding his own business. As he trusted that Jesus knew him inside and out, it changed the direction of his life.

What gifts are inside of you?

They may seem ordinary, but not to your Creator. He sees your gift of hospitality. He sees your deep compassion. He listens as you create music or string together words with care. He delights that you are good with kids, a dreamer and planner, or that you have a natural ability to lead others.

Jesus sees those gifts, but we also play a part. I was a storyteller, and I could hide that gift away or hold it up to the One who loves me best.

I want to challenge you today...

• Acknowledge your gifts, even if they are in the beginning stages.

• Hone your gifts, even if there’s a learning curve.

• Then, use your gifts to draw others to a Savior who sees and knows them and loves you as His own.

Jesus sees you right where you are. He knows you and delights in the gifts unique to you. Hold your gifts up to Him today and trust He’ll use them in ways you may not even comprehend.

Dear Jesus, although it seems small or rough-hewn, I will no longer hide this gift. But instead, I’ll hold it up to You, asking You to use it in ways that delight Your heart.

Amen.

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In spite of our best intentions, suffering can create bitterness in our lives. Naomi states, “Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter” (Ruth 1:20 NIV). Jeremiah declares, “The thought of my suffering and homelessness is bitter beyond words. I will never forget this awful time, as I grieve over my loss” (Lam. 3:19-20 NLT). Jacob said to his sons after they returned from Egypt with the demand from the prime minister to see Benjamin, “You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and you would take Benjamin; all these things are against me” (Gen. 42:36 NASB).

Yet, it is entirely possible that such bitterness could quickly turn to sweetness if we could sense behind the scenes what God is doing with our suffering! When it comes to viewing time, God has us at a disadvantage. Time to Him is not restricted to the past, present, or future. He views it all at once. That’s why He calls Himself the “I Am.” Therefore, we find it difficult to diagnose properly the suffering we are in because we cannot effectively investigate our past, interpret our present, or anticipate our future.

**INVESTIGATING OUR PAST**

What if Jacob had prayerfully asked the following questions after receiving Joseph’s apparent death certificate from his jealous sons?
• What really happened to Joseph?
• What really happens between my sons when I am not around? I know I deceived my father, but surely my sons wouldn’t deceive me, would they?
• Is the blood on the jacket really Joseph’s?
• Did God take Joseph from me for a purpose, or was it just random disaster?
• Can I really trust God to answer my prayers?

Are we guilty of assuming like Jacob that God is allowing us to suffer haphazardly and hopelessly?

INTERPRETING OUR PRESENT

What if Jacob had continued to question prayerfully his present circumstances the day his sons told him of the demand by Egypt’s prime minister to see Benjamin?

• Why did God bring such a famine on our land at this time in our lives? Could there really be a purpose for it?
• Who is this prime minister in Egypt? How does he know so much about our family? Is he good or bad?
• Why do I hold on so much to Benjamin?
• Did I really believe in God’s providential care when I told my children, “Let us go up to Bethel, where I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone”? (Gen. 35:3 NIV). If so, then why can’t I trust Him to bring about healing in my family and hope for our future?

Again we make shallow assumptions about life and about God. Why? Because no proper investigation is made. Probing questions concerning our circumstances are never brought to God for honest answers. Doesn’t God expect us to ask, seek, and knock? Isn’t there a “discourse stage” where we ask for spiritual insight? Isn’t there a “discovery stage” where we seek to find the hidden meaning? Isn’t there a “desperation stage” where we knock until the closed door of bitterness opens to the sweetness of God’s sovereign grace?

ANTICIPATING OUR FUTURE

Naomi’s bitter trip back to Bethlehem unfolds into the sweetest love story of redemption found in the Old Testament.

Jacob, by giving up Benjamin, allowed God to strengthen his faith, silence his fears, and secure his future. His wayward sons confessed their crime. His son Joseph, previously presumed dead, truly became God’s providential answer to his prayers. His move to Egypt was the beginning of Israel as a nation.

There is a false conception of suffering that tells us that we just need to be strong and brave within ourselves and face our storms head on. In Scripture, suffering is often metaphorically linked to storms. Storms are explained as to their source, uncertain as to their duration, uncontrollable as to their nature, and unpredictable as to their course of action. Some suffering is like going through a snowstorm where it leaves us feeling numb with an outlook that is bleak. Some suffering is like going through a tornado where we feel torn apart and overwhelmed by its destructive nature. Some suffering is like going through a flood where we feel the sense of “going under,” and there is no one or nothing to hold on to.

Yet, neither the forecast of the storm nor the outcome of the storm are ever based on our feelings or even on our faith. In the storms we go through, faith may waver or weaken. There are questions and maybe even despair. Just ask Naomi, Jacob, and Jeremiah. Sometimes our questions get a response from God similar to His answer to Job: “Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorant words?” (Job 38:2 NLT).

The meteorologist would never ask us to stand in our own strength and face the storm head on. Instead we are encouraged to seek shelter in a place or a person having the proper resources to protect us. Our heavenly Father expects us to run to Him and hide under His shelter. It is not holding on with our faith that gets us through the storm, but hiding within His faithfulness. Note what David said: “Be good to me, God—and now! I’ve run to you for dear life. I’m hiding out under your wings until the hurricane blows over. I call out to High God, the God who holds me together. He sends orders from heaven and saves me...he makes good on his word” (Psa. 57:1-3 MSG).

Again the psalmist writes, “God’s a safe-house for the battered, a sanctuary during bad times. The moment you arrive, you relax; you’re never sorry you knocked” (Psa. 9:9-10 MSG).

May God help us to anticipate our future as Jeremiah did even during his time of bitterness when he said, “Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this: The faithful love of the LORD never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning. I say to myself, ‘The LORD is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in him!’ The LORD is good to those who depend on him, to those who search for him. So it is good to wait quietly for salvation from the LORD” (Lam. 3:21-26 NLT).

Stephen Hickman (BRE ’75) has been pastoring at Park Place Free Methodist Church in New Castle, IN, since 2006. He formerly taught at GBS (1975-82) as well as at Hobe Sound Bible College, Hobe Sound, FL (1989-99), and was academic dean (1984-89) at Union Bible College, Westfield, IN. He and his wife Joann live in Indianapolis, IN, and have two adult sons: Derek and Scott.
Dear Stephen,

Here’s how I approach this challenging question. God owns all persons by virtue of creation (Exod. 19:5; Psa. 24:1). God owns all believers by virtue of redemption (1 Cor. 6:20). The ownership of human persons, therefore, is not inherently immoral. God gives life to all persons (Acts 17:25). God has delegated the right to execute human criminals via capital punishment (Exod. 21:12; Rom. 13:4). If God can delegate the right to take life, then by analogy, God can delegate the right to own persons. The ownership of human persons by other human persons, therefore, is not inherently immoral.

According to Exodus 22:3, if a thief could not make restitution for his theft because he owned nothing, he was to be sold into slavery by the judges to pay his 20% restitution. Since this was a direct command of God, it demonstrates that sale of a person into slavery is not inherently immoral. Further, God permitted Israelites to choose to be lifelong slaves out of love for their master (Exod. 21:5-6). This indicates that God does not think that lifelong slavery is necessarily a worse condition than freedom. Given the educational status and economic opportunities of the time, permanent service to a benevolent master may have provided a much higher quality of life than being free and having to provide for oneself.

On the other hand, God prohibited kidnapping people for the purpose of enslavement (Deut. 24:7). This teaches us that there are immoral ways in which people may be enslaved. (My understanding is that most British and American slave trade was initiated immorally and was thus contrary to God’s will.) God also provided guidance regarding how slaves were to be treated, including a provision for slaves to run away (Deut. 23:15), as well as ways for slaves to gain their freedom if they were mistreated physically. For example, if a master knocked out a tooth or an eye of a slave, he had to let the slave go free (Exod. 21:27). Further, God commanded His people to treat others the way they would want to be treated, including foreigners (Lev. 19:18; Deut. 10:18-19; 27:17; 27:19).

In Leviticus 25:39-46, God distinguishes between the length of time an Israeliite may remain in debt-slavery (until the Jubilee) and the length of time a non-Israelite may remain in slavery (permanently). The distinction between God’s people and foreigners is not limited to slavery. It spans many categories. In Deuteronomy 15, Israelites are released from their debts every 7 years; foreigners are not released from their debts every 7 years. In Deuteronomy 23, Israelites are not to be charged interest; foreigners may be charged interest. The point seems to be that God was giving Israel special favors—grace—that he did not give to other people (cf. Deut. 4:7-8). This has its analogy in the modern world. Not all men receive the same access to information about God and His word. People born in America normally receive more opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel than people born in Pakistan.

God’s giving of favors does not indicate that he does not love those who receive less. Rather, his love ensures that He treats all men justly, but his generosity means some men receive more than justice requires. The parable of the workers illustrates this point (Matt. 20:1-16). Those who started at 6 a.m. got the same payment as those who started at 5 p.m. The owner did not love the 6 a.m. workers less nor treat them unjustly. However, he was generous to the 5 p.m. workers. Jesus argues that this illustrates God is not unjust to be generous (Matt. 20:13-15).

So, why was God generous to the Israelites? He was incentivizing people from other nations to join His covenant people because of the wisdom of their laws and the abundance of their blessings (Deut. 4:6; Isa. 14:1). If foreigners converted, they received the same favor that Hebrews received. He was also demonstrating the greatness and goodness of their God: “He will set you high above all nations which He has made, for praise, fame, and honor” (Deut. 26:19).

Blessings,

Phil

Dr. A. Philip Brown II is the Graduate Program director and a member of the ministerial faculty at God’s Bible School and College.

GOD’S REVIVALIST and BIBLE ADVOCATE

A BIBLICAL RESPONSE

GOD AND SLAVERY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Why does God treat non-Israelite slaves differently than he treats Israelite slaves (Lev. 25:39-46)? —Stephen

Dear Phil

Why does God treat non-Israelite slaves differently than he treats Israelite slaves (Lev. 25:39-46)? —Stephen

Dear Phil

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Pursuing Spirituality, But Not Community

In the 1980s, only 10% of Americans said that they had no religious affiliation. According to the Pew Research Center, that figure has increased to more than 23%. These “nones,” especially the younger ones, tend to believe in the soul, divine energy, mystical realities, ghosts, and other superstitions while disdaining formal social gatherings and regular group activities. In other words, they are adopting one of the least helpful aspects of organized religion (magical thinking) while abandoning one of the most beneficial (social bonding).

Loneliness on the Rise

A recent survey by Cigna of more than 20,000 U.S. adults revealed some alarming findings: 46% reported sometimes or always feeling alone; 43% sometimes or always feel that their relationships are not meaningful; 43% feel isolated from others. Interestingly, Generation Z—ages 18 to 22—were the loneliest group in the survey, while adults 72 and older were the least lonely.

Faith-Based Charities Now Allowed to Help

Family Research Council says that since President Trump signed an executive order promoting free speech and religious liberty in 2017, there has been a “tangible impact on the protection and priority of religious freedom throughout the executive branch.” An analysis shows that some 13.7 million people have been provided with healthcare and other social services through faith-based organizations.

Transgender Study Suppressed

When a Brown University study suggested that “transgender kids” may be a social contagion linked with having friends who identify as LGBT, an identity politics culture, and an increase in internet use, it was quickly pulled from Brown’s news releases after protests from transgender activists. The journal it was published in is now reconsidering the publication. Lost in all the confusion was that the study reinforces what many parents, doctors, and other health experts have been saying—transgenderism looks a lot like a dangerous fad.

“In God We Trust” Upheld

The U.S. Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the inscription “In God We Trust” on the nation’s currency, ruling that America’s founding was full of examples of “official acknowledgements” of religion. In rejecting a lawsuit by 27 atheists and 2 atheist organizations, the court ruled that the motto violates neither the U.S. Constitution’s prohibition of an establishment of religion nor the guarantee of free exercise of it.

Seventy-five percent of our students receive some form of financial aid which enables them to attend GBS. If you would like to support students with financial needs, you may send a gift to:

Student Fund
God’s Bible School and College
1810 Young Street
Cincinnati, OH 45202

or give online anytime at www.gbs.edu/givenow
Because of the generous supporters of God’s Bible School and College, we continue to maintain and improve the properties necessary to further our mission. Projects that we have completed this year include the following:

ALDERSGATE CHRISTIAN ACADEMY

Significant improvements initiated by Principal Tim Makcen make the academy more attractive. The entrance was enlarged, painted, and redecorated (1), and a classroom was expanded (2). New carpet was installed throughout the elementary level.

WOMEN’S RESIDENCE HALL BATHROOMS

Over the last few years, restrooms/showers in the Men’s Residence Hall have been completely renovated. This year we began that process in the Women’s Residence Hall. The fourth floor bathroom has new tile on the walls and floor. After four decades, the yellow glazed ceramic tile is gone and replaced by a contemporary gray, marble-look tile. Further improvements include new ceiling, partitions, sinks, and countertop (3).

STANLEY ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

We repaired deteriorating brick on the Administration Building near the entrance and at the Commons. The front of the building is once again in good condition following repairs to the bay window by Craig McLaughlin (4). This required custom woodwork to match the historic trim. On the other side of the bay window glass, we upgraded office space for our new Dean of Undergraduate Studies, David Hartkopf (5).
EMPLOYEE HOUSING RENOVATIONS AND PROPERTY ACQUISITION

Renovations have been made to several employee houses and apartments. Extensive interior and exterior work was accomplished at 518 and 520 Channing Street (6, 7). Both of these three-story houses were repaired and painted inside and out and had new flooring installed. The bathrooms were renovated, and old, unstable stairs were replaced at the 520 Channing residence.

Due to an astronomical cost projection for repairing the McCracken House (535 and 537 Ringgold Street), it was sold to a developer, and a house at 1926 Young Street was purchased and completely renovated (8). In addition, a house comprising three apartments at 1841 Josephine Street was purchased.

Work was also completed on apartments at 1805 and 1807 Young Street that included renovated bathrooms, new paint, and new carpet.

FOUNDATION WALL AND LANDSCAPING

Our crew, led by President Loper, fixed a persistent leak in the wall of two ground floor classrooms below the Adcock Chapel along the front of the Knapp Memorial Building (9). An excavator was rented in order to dig down to the foundation, and then the wall below ground level was sealed. Afterward, new landscaping completed the project just in time for New Student Orientation at the beginning of fall semester (10).
CLASSROOM HALL

Three of our employees volunteered to paint the classroom hall in the lower level of the Knapp Memorial Building (11,12). Jessica Smith, Charity Frazier, and Sarah McByrant painted the walls, trim, and doors in attractive shades of grey, and the result looks great! Perhaps we should hire them as full-time maintenance workers!

IN-HOUSE PROFESSIONAL CARPET CLEANING

We purchased a professional Host Liberator Extractor Vacuum to clean carpet and ceramic tile (13). This will make our campus look better, help our carpets to last longer, and keep us from hiring outside contractors. We are pleased with the results; the Host machine cleans our carpets and tile even better than the companies we have previously hired to do the job.

NEW RAMP AND STEPS TO STUDENT CENTER

To make it easier to navigate the steep ramp from main campus to the Student Center, we replaced the existing ramp with a new one and added steps along the Revivalist Memorial Building (Women’s Residence Hall and Aldersgate Christian Academy) (14,15).
OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE

Without your loyal assistance, we couldn’t accomplish these projects. The “Revivalist Family” is made up of faithful GBS supporters who have stood beside us and made it possible for us to move forward for over a century. Our purpose hasn’t changed and our mission is clear—training students to do the work of ministry. So many of you have been faithful in giving to help us train students—and every gift directly or indirectly supports all students on this campus and impacts every future ministry to which God has called them.

A gift of $25, $50, $100, or $500 would mean a great deal to the school right now. Gifts of any amount would be so much appreciated and go a long way in meeting the needs that are facing us at this time.

Maybe you would like to give a significant year-end gift that not only helps GBS but also could benefit you at tax time.

To make a donation by check, send it to 1810 Young Street, Cincinnati, OH 45202. To donate by credit card or give online, visit www.gbs.edu/givenow; or you may call the school at 1-800-486-4637 and ask for the Advancement Office.

Thank you for standing with us!

President Rodney Loper

FIRE ESCAPES

City code required us to hire an engineer to inspect our eight fire escapes. Three of those were painted, a very tedious and time-consuming task (16,17).

NEW VEHICLES

We have added three vehicles to our fleet (18). We sold our old diesel van and replaced it with a brand new Chevrolet 2017 van, which we secured for an excellent price. It is equipped with a towing package and large enough engine to pull the large trailer necessary for outings by the College Choir and Symphonic Wind and String Ensemble. We also purchased a Chrysler 300 (car) for the use of our Advancement Department, as well as a bus from Franklin Bible Methodist Church for the use of Aldersgate Christian Academy.

—Richard Miles
On October 12-13, alumni gathered on the Hilltop for the annual Homecoming celebration. From the opening meal on Friday through Saturday’s 1810 Street Festival, the festivities provided ample opportunity for alumni to fellowship and reconnect with old friends.

Friday Evening Events

After an evening meal of fried chicken, participants moved to the Adcock Chapel where the Symphonic Wind and String Ensemble treated the gathered crowd to a selection of gospel music.

At 7:00 p.m., “Music and Memories” began with the welcoming of alumni back to campus. The Classes of 1968 (50-year reunion) and 1993 (25-year reunion) were recognized as our honored guests. The evening included video updates from alumni around the world as well as music from various alumni families: Duane and Valorie Quesenberry family, Wentworth sisters (Sherilyn Bozone, Esther Hilling, and Lou Ann Donovan), Steve and Kay Vernon family, and Rob and Stephanie Ryan family.

President Rodney Loper presented Dr. Aaron Profitt, Vice President for Academic Affairs, with the Employee Appreciation Award. GBS Board Chairman Robbie England presented the Distinguished Alumnus Award jointly to Rev. and Mrs. Jack and Jane (Theroff) Hooker.

We enjoyed a beautiful offertory from a string group made up of current students, faculty, and alumni, and were encouraged by campus updates from President Loper. The finale was an alumni choir directed by Music Chair Emeritus Garen Wolf.

Following the service, attendees were treated to a Graeter’s Ice Cream Social and a GBS-themed game hosted by Anthony Webb and Kent Stetler.

Saturday Events

Saturday’s activities featured a breakfast buffet for all guests and a special breakfast reunion for the classes of 1968 and 1993. Reunion class members were treated to a delicious meal, a time of fellowship, and a small gift as a memento from their reunion weekend.

At 10:30 a.m., the 1800 block of Young Street and the main campus area featured various food and activity booths hosted by college and high school organizations. A campus tour, hosted by Eli Albring, allowed guests to visit areas of campus which they may not have seen otherwise, while a Cincinnati bus tour, hosted by Zachary Crater, provided an opportunity to see many of the changes that have taken place around the city. As the afternoon wound down, crowds were treated to live music from brass and bluegrass gospel groups.

Alumni Council Election Results

Rev. Craig Dahler was re-elected as First Member-at-Large, and Mrs. Robyn (Myers) Clemens was elected as Third Member-at-Large. We appreciate each of the alumni who volunteer to serve on the Alumni Executive Council.

Alumni of the Year: Rev. and Mrs. Jack and Jane Hooker

Staff/Faculty Award: VP for Academic Affairs Aaron Profitt

The Quesenberrys, one of several family singing groups
GBS Connection Dinners

On Friday, September 14, we were delighted to host our first GBS Connection Dinner at the Grace Bible Church in Nampa, ID. About two dozen alumni and friends of GBS gathered for a catered meal, time of fellowship, and campus updates from President Rodney Loper and Vice President for Advancement Marc Sankey. Alumni Association President Keith Waggoner, Sr. and First Vice President Maria Stetler were also in attendance and enjoyed getting to know some of the friends of GBS located in the great state of Idaho. We hope that this will be the first of many regional Connection Dinners as we work towards more intentional engagement with our alumni and friends around the country.

Would you like to host a Connection Dinner in your area? Please contact Maria Stetler: mstetler@gbs.edu.
Merry Christmas & Happy New Year
From the GBS Family