The state of preaching today

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity…” With those famous words, Charles Dickens introduced his great novel A Tale of Two Cities.

In some sense, that remains true as we consider the state of preaching today. On the one hand, there are signs of great promise and encouragement. On the other hand, several ominous trends point toward dangerous directions for preaching in the future. The last few decades have been a period of wanton experimentation in many pulpits and preaching has often been redefined and reconceived as something other than the exposition and application of the biblical text.

A loss of confidence in the power of the Word

Several years ago, the photographer Richard Avedon declared that “Images are fast replacing words as our primary language.” This certainly appears to be the case. In The Rise of the Image, the Fall of the Word, author Mitchell Stephens argues that “the image is replacing the word as the predominant means of mental transport.”

Since preaching is itself a form of “mental transport,” any loss of confidence in the word leads to a loss of confidence in preaching. Preaching will cease to be Christian preaching if the preacher loses confidence in the authority of the Bible as the Word of God and in the power of the spoken word. The audacious claim of Christian preaching is that the faithful declaration of God and in the power of the spoken word leads to a loss of confidence in the authority of the Bible as the Word of God and in the power of the spoken word. The audacious claim of Christian preaching is that the faithful declaration of God’s purpose to glorify Himself through the redemption of sinners. Taken out of context, and without clear attention to biblical theology, preaching becomes a series of disconnected talks on disconnected texts. This falls far short of the glory of true biblical preaching.

An evacuation of biblical content

Another problem that leads to an evacuation of biblical content is a loss of the “big picture” of Scripture. Far too many preachers give inadequate attention to the canonical context of the passage to be preached and of its place in the overarching story of God’s purpose to glorify Himself through the redemption of sinners. Taken out of context, and without clear attention to biblical theology, preaching becomes a series of disconnected talks on disconnected texts. This falls far short of the glory of true biblical preaching.

An infatuation with technology

We live in a day of technological hubris and the ubiquity of technological assistance. For most of us, the use of these technologies comes with little attentiveness to how the technology reshapes the task and the experience. The same is true for preachers who have rushed to incorporate visual technology and media in the preaching event.

The danger of this approach is seen in the fact that the visual very quickly overcomes the verbal. Beyond this, the visual is often directed towards a very narrow slice of human experience, particularly focused on the affective and emotional aspects of our perception.

This is exactly where the preacher must not go. The power of the Word of God, spoken through the human voice, is seen in the Bible’s unique power to penetrate all dimensions of the human personality. As God made clear, even in the Ten Commandments, He has chosen to be heard and not seen.

An embarrassment before the biblical text

Through the experience of hearing innumerable sermons from evangelical preachers, I note the tendency of some to appear rather embarrassed before the biblical text. Many preachers simply disregard and ignore vast sections of Scripture, focusing instead on texts that are more comfortable, palatable and non-confrontational to the modern mind. This is a form of pastoral neglect and malpractice, corrected only by a comprehensive embrace of the Bible — all of it — as the inspired, inerrant and authoritative Word of God. All of it is for our good.

An absence of the Gospel

The preaching of the apostles always presented the kerygma — the heart of the Gospel. The clear presentation of the Gospel must be a part of the sermon, no matter the text. As Charles Spurgeon expressed this so eloquently, “The Word that pierces us like a sword. The evangelical preacher must set his aim at letting the sword loose, neither hiding it nor dulling its edge.”

The approach of many churches — and preachers — has been to present helpful and practical messages, often with generalized Christian content, but without any clear presentation of the Gospel or call to decision and accountability to the text or to the claims of Christ. The apostles should be our model here, consistently preaching the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

These are indeed the best of times and the worst of times. I am thankful for a renaissance of expository preaching, especially among many young preachers. At the same time, I am concerned that dangerous trends and many popular examples threaten to undermine the centrality of biblical exposition in evangelical pulpits.

In the end, the Christian preacher simply must confront the congregation with the Word of God. That confrontation will be at times awkward, challenging and difficult. After all, this is the Word that pierces us like a sword. The evangelical preacher must set his aim at letting the sword loose, neither hiding it nor dulling its edge.

R. Albert Mohler Jr.
President, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
Under the lordship of Jesus Christ, the mission of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary is to be totally committed to the Bible as the Word of God, to the Great Commission as our mandate, and to be a servant of the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention by training, educating, and preparing ministers of the gospel for more faithful service.

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“BUT WHO ARE YOU?”

Churches that threaten the enemy

by Chuck Lawless
Perhaps you've heard the frightening statistics about churches in America. On average, it takes 86 church members to reach one person for Christ in a given year. As many as four out of five churches are plateaued or declining in membership. Baptisms in churches in the Southern Baptist Convention declined by more than four percent in 2005. According to one study, only 41 percent of adult church members believe in the total accuracy of the Bible. The world simply sees little in the lives of church members that suggests that the Gospel is life-changing.

Compare the typical church today to the early church. The church in the book of Acts saw nonbelievers become Christians “day by day” (Acts 2:47). Indeed, thousands were saved in single settings (2:41; 4:4). The early church saw pagans converted, bodies healed, believers discipled, demons removed, healthy churches planted and kings confronted with the Gospel. How powerless the church today seems in comparison. Many churches today are like the sons of Sceva who attempted to exorcise a demon, but whose threat to the enemy was non-existent (Acts 19:11-16). These exorcists sought to drive out an evil spirit, but the demon-possessed man instead drove them out! The parallels to the church are not exact, but we can only wonder if the enemy says to the church what the demon said to Sceva’s sons: “I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?” (19:15).

The church that threatens the enemy by fulfilling the Great Commission must be decidedly different from the sons of Sceva — that is, we must be genuinely converted believers who wear the full armor of God (Eph 6:11) and operate in His power alone. Only then will the enemy take note of our congregations.

**Churches that threaten the enemy focus on God**

Perhaps you remember the book, *This Present Darkness*, written by Frank Peretti and first published in 1986. So popular was this fictional account of spiritual warfare that it remained on the bestseller list for some time and captured an interest in warfare that continues today.

Regrettably, this interest has often resulted in one of the extremes that C. S. Lewis warned against in his work, *Screwtape Letters*, many years ago — some have become fascinated with the demonic. Many contemporary writings about warfare give the devil much more attention than he deserves.

Consider, on the other hand, Matthew’s account of Jesus’ battle with Satan in the wilderness (Matt 4:1-11). Clearly, Jesus recognized Satan as a literal enemy who was the source of the temptations. Satan is not, however, the focus of the temptation story. The focus of the narrative — indeed, of the Bible — is God. It was the Son of God who fought and won the battle on the mountain. It was the Word of God that served as the primary weapon of battle. It was the angels of God who ministered to Jesus (Matt 4:11). In fact, it was the Spirit of God who led Jesus to the place of temptation in the first place (Matt 4:1).

From the first step that Jesus took toward the wilderness through the final ministry of the angels after the temptations, God was in control. He had divine purposes for leading Jesus to the place where the enemy would tempt Him — and Jesus intentionally chose to focus on God’s will rather than the devil’s offerings. The sovereignty of God in the temptation thus establishes the proper focus of spiritual warfare: God the victor rather than Satan the tempter.

To know God and to recognize His sovereignty in the battle is to understand that we gain spiritual victory only through Him. God is the warrior who led His people across the Red Sea (Exod 15:3). David fought the Philistine giant not with a sword and a javelin, but in the name of the Lord whose battle it was (1 Sam 17:45-47). Jehu likewise assured Jehoshaphat of God’s presence in the midst of battle with these words: “Do not fear or be dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours but God’s” (2 Chron 20:15). Moreover, Paul challenged believers to put on God’s armor, not ours (Eph 6:11).

The church that threatens the enemy knows the reality of the battle, but it does not focus on the one who stands against it. Instead, it focuses on the God in Whom its members find victory.

**Churches that threaten the enemy believe and teach the Word**

Think again about Jesus’ battle with the devil. Three times, the devil tempted Him, and three times Jesus responded by quoting God’s Word (Matt 4:1-11). In fact, He quoted the book of Deuteronomy each time. The simple phrase, “It is written” was enough to cause Satan ultimately to back down from the battle, at least for a while.

In research projects on evangelistic churches conducted by our Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth, preaching the Word has been a primary factor in the churches’ effectiveness in evangelism and assimilation. For example, pastors of effective evangelistic churches spend an average of 22 hours per week in sermon preparation, while pastors of non-growing churches average four hours per week preparing messages. Spending devoted time in the Word makes a difference...
when leading a church that seeks to threaten the enemy. That finding should not surprise us, though. The Word is alive and powerful (Heb 4:12), converting the soul (Ps 19:7) and protecting us from sin (Ps 119:11). It is through the preached Word that we hear and respond to the Good News (Rom 10:8-10, 14-17). That Gospel is the power of God unto salvation (1 Cor 1:18), and Satan is no match for the Word.

Biblical counselor David Powlison reminds us of the power of the Word to change lives:

We must know the stunning wisdom of the Word of God. God speaks profoundly and comprehensively to the concrete condition of every person’s life. He speaks with intent and power to change us. . . . We affirm that the Bible teaches, invites, warns, commands, sings, and tells the solution for what troubles humankind. In the good news of Jesus Christ, God acts personally. In word and deed, He redeems us from sin and misery through the various operations of His past, present, and future grace.7

When the enemy attacks your church members, do they know the Word well enough to counter the enemy’s lies? Do your church’s Bible study leaders so love, know, live and teach the Word that group members long to know the Scriptures better? Are your church members challenged to memorize the Word and apply it properly? If you seek to grow a church that overcomes the enemy, believe and teach the Word.

Churches that threaten the enemy pray


The early church — dependent on God as they were for all things — prayed fervently (Acts 1:14; 3:1; 4:31; 6:4; 10:9; 12:5; 13:3; 14:23; 16:25; 20:36; 28:8). The apostle Paul prayed for believers (e.g., Rom 1:8; 1 Cor 1:4), and he expected them to pray for him (Eph 6:18-20; Col 4:2-4). Jesus, of course, modeled a life of prayer for all of us (e.g., Matt 26:36-46; Mark 1:35; Luke 4:42; 5:16; 6:12; 11:1; John 17). Here’s the point: prayer matters, and praying believers threaten the enemy.

Over 25 years ago, I became the pastor of a small church in southwestern Ohio. I had little formal education and no pastoral experience, nor had I ever baptized a convert, officiated a wedding or led a funeral. What I did have, though, was a church family that knew how to pray. I think of Sonney and Christie, Paul and Edna and Red and Gloria — all who understood that God alone could grow their little church. They knew they were powerless without Him. In fact, I’m convinced they trusted me as a pastor simply because they knew that they were not dependent on me.

Does your church threaten the enemy? If so, it will do so only from its knees.

Churches that threaten the enemy pray and evangelize

The apostle Paul told the Corinthian believers that unbelievers are “blinded by the god of this age” (2 Cor 4:3-4). The “god of this age” is Satan, who is also called the “prince of this world” (John 16:11) and the “ruler of the kingdom of the air” (Eph 2:2). Nonbelievers are held under his dominion (Acts 26:18) in the “domain of darkness” (Col 1:13). No matter how we may try to ignore this reality, nonbelievers are bound in darkness.

What does this truth mean for us as we try to reach lost people? Obviously, we do not have the power in ourselves to reach people blinded by the enemy. Nothing we can do in our own strength is sufficient to open blinded minds. No program that our denominations produce can change this situation. The enemy will do everything he can do to keep nonbelievers in his darkness, and only God is powerful enough to overcome that darkness.

For this reason, evangelism and prayer must go together. Evangelism is the task, but prayer is the power behind the task. If only God can open blinded minds, does it not make sense to seek His guidance and intervention as we evangelize lost people? In fact, we will recognize the significance of prayer if we understand that evangelism is itself warfare. We are called to the task of evangelism, and the enemy will always fight back against the evangelist.

Additional research done by the Graham School has shown that churches that grow evangelistically intercede for lost persons by name. They pray passionately for God to move in the lives of their co-workers, neighbors, friends and family.9 Church prayer rooms are common, and many of these churches have a lay prayer leader. More specifically, these congregations are most often led by pastors who have a personal passion for prayer. They set the example, and the church follows.9

These same leaders intentionally set aside time for doing personal evangelism. In fact, they on average commit five hours per week to evangelism. These pastors give less time to committee/board meetings and more time to evangelism and mentoring others (five hours per week as well). In contrast, pastors of non-growing churches allot less than one hour per week to evangelism and two hours per week to mentoring.10 Which of these church leaders do you think most alarms the enemy?

Churches that threaten the enemy pray, evangelize and disciple

In my book, Discipled Warriors, I tell the story of Tim, a young believer whose church did not disciple him.11 Church leaders told him what he needed to do (like read the Bible, pray and witness), but they did not show him how. Nobody taught him how to walk in truth, righteousness and faith (see Eph 6:11-17). As a result, he lived a defeated Christian life — even while his church placed him in leadership and teaching positions.

The enemy aims his arrows at young believers like Tim who have not been discipled. He strikes them with doubt and discouragement. Sometimes he hits them with loneliness, as they move away from their non-Christian friends and try to fit into a church that is also unfamiliar to them. At other times, he lures them with the same temptations they faced as nonbelievers.  

Does your church threaten the enemy? If so, it will do so only from its knees.
Whatever his strategy may be, he wants to strike at new believers before they get solidly planted in the church.

As we have studied growing churches, we have learned that there are four essential elements to effective assimilation: stated expectations, ministry involvement, healthy relationships and convictional teaching and preaching. These same components that keep a new member active also are vital to discipleship:

- Stated expectations help the new believer understand up front what God and the church expects; the growing believer is then held accountable to these expectations.
- Ministry involvement — even if only in an “entry” position — gives the new believer purpose in the church; the maturing believer simply increases responsibility as he grows.
- Healthy relationships help form the “glue” that draws new members back to church; discipled members then turn around and reach out to others.
- Convictional teaching and preaching meet the needs of new believers who long for Christian growth; these same believers then mature and grow under that preaching.

The effective churches we have studied are striving to counter Satan’s attacks on new believers simply by having an intentional discipleship strategy in place.

**Conclusion**

I doubt I have presented anything revolutionary here — and that’s the point. If you want to grow a church that overcomes the enemy, focus on God and preach the Word. As you do so, evangelize and pray. Then disciple new believers toward maturity in Christ. In essence, be the New Testament church, and the enemy will begin to know your congregation by name.

Surviving spiritual warfare:
A life lesson from Job
by T.J. Betts
It was six years ago. My wife and I were getting ready to take our sons to their first baseball and t-ball practice. It was my four-year-old’s first time to play t-ball, and we were all very excited.

As we were getting ready, I told my boys to get in our van as I moved our other vehicle that was blocking it. When I began backing up the car, I felt something dragging under it. I stopped and heard a voice coming from underneath saying, “Daddy, Daddy.” My first thought was, “There is no way I have run over my son,” but that is exactly what had happened.

My four-year-old had gone to get a ball behind the car, and the next thing I knew I was looking at his bloodied, disfigured body under the car. He could only move one arm, and he had it extended to me as he cried out for me. The paramedics came quickly and rushed him to the hospital.

Both legs and an arm were broken, and he had several gashes on his face and head. As they were attending to him in the middle of the night, I slipped away to an empty room, overwrought with guilt, even though it was an accident, and began weeping before the Lord, saying repeatedly, “What have I done to my son? Look at what I have done to my son.”

As I was weeping, I did not hear any audible voice but it was as if the Lord spoke to me and said, “Look at what I did to my Son.” There was no way I would have willingly done such harm to my son, yet because of God’s love, God willingly sent His Son to die on the cross. It was at that point I realized that I really had little understanding of the depths of God’s love, though I had heard of it all of my life and preached and taught about it several times.

Reading the Book of Job we read of a man who found himself in the middle of a war — a spiritual war — when, without warning, he experienced an attack from Satan. Job had no idea why the catastrophic events of his life were happening. He was unaware that God was demonstrating His glory to Satan and teaching Job, and later readers, a valuable lesson.

Though Scripture does not tell us whether or not Job was aware of the spiritual battle raging, we have God’s Word and believers today should realize that they are in the midst of a spiritual war. Paul speaks of this war when he writes,

> “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:11-12).

While most believers acknowledge the reality of spiritual warfare, they are taken aback when the battle becomes intensely personal as it did in Job’s life. Through Job’s experience, God reveals three glorious aspects of Himself that are essential for every believer’s faith: (1) His sovereignty, (2) His wisdom and (3) His love.

**God’s sovereignty**

As one reads the book of Job one cannot help but see how God is in control of the events that happened to Job. Note how God initiated the discussion with Satan by asking two questions.

The first question reveals that God knows what Satan schemes. Job 1:7 says, “The LORD said to Satan, ‘From where have you come?’ Satan answered the LORD and said, ‘From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.’” Satan’s response was true but incomplete. The Bible reveals what Satan is actually doing as he goes “to and fro on the earth.” First Peter 5:8 says, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

The second question draws attention to Job. God leads the adversary into the challenge. In fact, God draws Satan’s attention to Job twice, and it is God who lays out the parameters for the challenge. Satan can do nothing apart from God’s permission. Satan has power, but his power is limited. While he may rule on the earth, his rule is incomplete. However, one may witness the limited rule of Satan on earth most profoundly in the lives of those who love and fear God. Job’s friends could not get over a naïve understanding of the “retribution principle” that God always punishes sin and blesses righteousness.

The retribution principle is true. God will always ultimately punish sin and reward righteousness. However, that does not mean that whenever someone suffers it is always the result of sin anywhere other than whenever someone is blessed it is the result of one’s righteousness. Jesus’ disciples thought that if someone suffered it had to be the result of that person’s sin or the sin of their parents, but Jesus corrected this error saying, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him” (Jn 9:3).

In the Old Testament, the children of Israel often experienced God’s grace even when they were disobedient to God. Hence, God’s blessing often came in spite of their sin, not necessarily as a result of their righteousness. As Mark Dever observes, the irony in Job is that Job’s friends thought that he lacked virtue. Therefore, he was suffering God’s retribution. They were wrong. The truth is that Job was virtuous, and if Job’s friends had as much virtue as Job, they might have experienced the suffering Job experienced. Job became a battlefield in this spiritual war because of his virtue.

When we look at this battle in Job’s life we can see some of the means Satan uses as opportunities to “lead our thoughts astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ” (2 Cor 11:3).

First, Satan employed the loss of financial and material possessions (Job 1:13-17). As with Job, our response in like circumstances will indicate whether our security and joy is in the Lord or in what He has given us.

Second, the attack may come when we suffer the loss of loved ones (1:18-20). Satan would like for us to become so disillusioned over the loss of loved ones that we blame God for the loss or at least quit serving the Lord. Are we able to say with Job, “The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (1:21)?

Third, Job experienced the loss of his health (2:4-8). A number of believers have become spiritually sidetracked when their
focus shifted from serving the Lord to becoming self-serving because of health issues.

Fourth, Job experienced the loss of support from others (2:9; 3:31-31:40). His wife’s advice was to “curse God and die,” exactly what Satan wanted Job to do (2:9). Job’s friends may have truly desired to comfort him, but all they really accomplished was to add to Job’s suffering. If Job’s ultimate hope had been in his spouse or his friends, he would have fallen. The only way we can truly stand in the midst of these attacks is to keep our focus on God and have such a trust in Him that, like Job, we can say of the Lord, “Though He slay me, I will hope in Him” (13:15).

So what is at the heart of this battle? While it appears that Job was the focus of Satan’s attacks, it was really God who was under attack, and it was an attack God was ready to handle through Job. Satan’s attack on God may be expressed by a couple of questions.

Can God’s work of redemption resurrect one who is dead in sin, living for self, into one who is spiritually alive and living for God?

Can a person really love God apart from the gifts he receives from God? It is through Job’s suffering, virtue and faithfulness that the questions are answered and Satan is silenced. God uses His servants to display His glory. Second Corinthians 4:7-11 says, “But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us ... so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.”

This idea brings us to the second aspect of God’s revelation of Himself in the book of Job that is essential for believers to remember as we engage in spiritual warfare.

Since God is concerned about every aspect of our lives, every aspect of our lives ought to reflect a concern for God.

God’s wisdom

Not only is God sovereign, He is also wise. He knows what He is doing. Our problem is that we do not always know what He is doing (Isa 55:8-9). Both Job and his friends recognized the wisdom of God. Ironically, Job’s friends attested to God’s transcendent wisdom, yet they spoke as if they completely understood God.

Proverbs 28 indicates God alone knows about wisdom and is the only source of wisdom; “the fear of the Lord” is wisdom (28:28). The fear of the Lord is a way of living before the Lord, acknowledging Him in every way and depending upon His grace. It recognizes that while the Creator is above us in every way, He also is intimately involved in the lives of His servants.

Therefore, since God is concerned about every aspect of our lives, every aspect of our lives ought to reflect a concern for God. The fear of the Lord recognizes God’s work of glorifying Himself even in the midst of trials and suffering. The idea of God’s wisdom is that He knows what He is doing and those who fear Him understand and submit to His will and ways.
through the suffering of His servants. This concept was at the heart of what Jesus taught His disciples in John 9:3. Furthermore, the Lord Jesus Christ demonstrated this concept Himself in His self-giving sacrifice on the cross. At Calvary, Christ revealed Himself as the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24), and it is through His suffering and by His grace that we may come to know Him personally. Like Job, we rarely know what God is doing as we are engaged in spiritual warfare, but we must remember that He knows what He is doing and that it is ultimately for His glory and our good (cf. Eph 1:11-14; Rom 8:28-29).

This notion leads us to the last aspect God revealed of Himself that is essential for us to remember as we are engaged in spiritual warfare.

God’s love

When engaged in the heat of spiritual combat, difficulties may become so great that we are tempted to doubt God’s goodness and love for us. Even righteous Job came to the point where he said, “It profits a man nothing that he should take delight in God” (34:9). In the beginning and end of the book, one may see God’s goodness to His servant Job by how He blessed Job materially and with a wonderful family.

Also, Elihu recognized that it was God who gives songs in the night and that one of the reasons God directs creation as He does is because of His love (35:10; 37:13).

However, the greatest display of God’s goodness and love was the revelation of Himself to Job (42:1-6). God did not give Job an explanation but something much better, a revelation. I believe God still reveals Himself to us when we look to Him amid suffering and the temptation to doubt His goodness and love.

Six years later, with the exception of some scars on his legs and indistinguishable scars elsewhere, you would never know my son had been run over by a car. Nevertheless, God used that time to give me a glimpse of Himself and His love.

Whenever one is tempted to doubt God’s goodness and love, one should remember the cross. As the apostle Paul says, “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?” Paul continues, saying nothing can “separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:31-39).

When we find ourselves locked in the heat of spiritual warfare, we need to recall what God revealed of Himself to Job. Remember God’s sovereignty — He is in control. Remember God’s wisdom — He knows what he is doing even when we do not. Remember God’s love — He is committed to His glory and our good more than we are ourselves. Therefore, we can trust Him as we fight the good fight.

T.J. Betts is assistant professor of Old Testament interpretation at Southern Seminary.
Wielding the Sword of the Spirit

by Robert L. Plummer
When people hear the term “spiritual warfare,” they are inclined to think of Frank Peretti-style angels roaming the landscape with dramatic, Hollywood visual effects.

In reality, spiritual warfare for the Christian will rarely involve visual manifestations of angelic or demonic creatures. It is not with supernatural lights swirling over Logres that we engage in battle (see C.S. Lewis’ novel, That Hideous Strength), but in our daily interactions with our family, neighbors and co-workers that we must wield the Sword of the Spirit — which is the Word of God (Eph 6:17).

It is in the trenches of daily life that we regularly face the temptation to disbelieve or disobey God. What we discount as negative thought patterns or minor failures are often in actuality acts of high spiritual treason. Just as a faithful soldier in the military would never betray his country by acting like the enemy, we must make sure that our lives are lived in conformity to Christ and not to the ongoing, worldwide, Satanic rebellion against Christ.

Scripture speaks of temptation or sin as having three possible origins — the world, the flesh and the devil. “The world” is the fallen created order that is now aligned systemically in anti-God thought and activity. “The flesh” is our weak, sin-stained persons (including mind, body, reason, will and emotion) that, apart from the Spirit’s ongoing empowerment and renewal, is naturally inclined towards sin. We are “prone to wander” and will continue to do battle with our sin-stained human nature until it is completely renewed and glorified at the second coming of Christ.

The devil, while also the spiritual ruler of “the world” and midwife of humanity’s descent into its fleshly state, remains a distinct, active, personal spiritual opponent. Scripture depicts a host of demonic minions under the command of the devil who go throughout the world causing temptation, spiritual bondage, disease, death and destruction. Through sinful choices, Christians can give the devil a “foothold” — allowing ongoing demonic influence over their thinking and behavior (Eph 4:27).

Regardless of whether we can determine the source (or main source) of temptations and spiritual battles we are facing, our response is to be the same. We are to replace the lie (whether coming from the flesh, world or devil) with the truth of God’s Word. That is, we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom 12:2). For example, if I am impatient and unloving toward my wife, I am implicitly saying that my sinful desires are to be followed rather than God’s command to love my wife.

My behavior and thinking are conformed to rebellion against Christ rather than the advancing kingdom of God. Also, because marriage is to be a visual picture of Christ’s love for the church, when I treat my wife harshly, I am declaring a lie about the way Christ treats His church.

What is to be done in the case of such spiritual treason? The sinful inclination of my flesh must be submitted to the truth of God’s Word. I must be kind and compassionate to my wife, lavishing grace on her, as God has lavished grace on me in Christ (Eph 4:32). As Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, I must love my wife and sacrifice for her (Eph 5:25). We are called to bear with one another in love (“Put up with each other,” NIV) because we know how Christ has loved and forgiven us (Col 3:13). As the Spirit brings such Scriptures to our mind, conviction and repentance ensue, followed by a renewed willingness and ability to have thoughts and lives that are conformed to the truth of God.

We see that God’s Word is not simply an accurate record of divine activities and propositional revelations (though it is that), but it is also a powerful, conviction-bringing, life-changing entity. The author of Hebrews says, “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (4:12).

The prophet Jeremiah records this statement, “‘Is not my word like fire,’ declares the LORD, ‘and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?’” (Jer 1:11).

In Isaiah 55:10-11, the Lord speaks through His prophet, “As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is My word that goes out from My mouth: It will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”

When we as humans speak, our words are a means of communication. God’s Word, however, not only communicates, but actually accomplishes something. Just as God spoke the created universe into existence, His Word now re-creates and renews the fallen universe.

This Word’s focal point is the declaration of what God has done to save an undeserving, rebellious humanity through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus. As God’s Word — the Gospel — is proclaimed, it not only announces, but effects reconciliation and healing of this broken world. As Paul says in Colossians 1:6, “All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing.”

If one is going to lift up a sword to parry an enemy’s strike, he must be holding a sword. Similarly, if we are to experience the convicting and transforming work of the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, in our lives, we must be holding to it tightly.

We are “prone to wander” and will continue to do battle with our sin-stained human nature until it is completely renewed and glorified at the second coming of Christ.
We are instructed by Scripture to remain in the message we have heard (1 John 2:24). Through hearing the Bible declared, singing the Bible, praying the Bible, memorizing the Bible and meditating on the Bible, we become a people convicted and cleansed by the transforming Word of God.

Most Christians know Psalm 119 as the longest psalm in the canon (176 verses) and as a psalm that focuses on the Word of God. Many persons have not noticed, however, that three prominent themes are repeated in the psalm — prayer, meditation and trials. Nearly 500 years ago, the famous reformer Martin Luther presented this psalm as a picture of how the Word of God is to operate in our lives and transform us.

First, Luther points out how frequently the psalmist calls out to God in prayer for understanding, redirecting his heart’s focus toward God. For example, in verse 10, the psalmist pleads, “Do not let me stray from your commands.” In verse 18, he prays, “Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.” In verses 36-37, the psalmist requests, “Turn my heart toward your statutes and not towards selfish gain. Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word.”

These petitions and similar statements made throughout the psalm are a recognition of our fleshly nature and our need for the illuminating work of God’s Holy Spirit. We are inclined to stray from God’s commands, to not see wonderful things in God’s law, to pursue selfish gain, to focus on worthless things. We must pray for God to redirect our hearts, minds and eyes towards the beauty and truth of His Word.

This is a prominent motif in Psalm 119. The psalm instructs us that we must seek and depend upon God’s supernatural, gracious intervention to enable us to hear, see, believe and obey His Word. In our fallen, unaided state, we neither want to nor are able to believe and obey.

Second, Luther points out that the psalmist does not have a superficial allegiance to the Word, but it, in fact, soaks down into the core of his being. Luther writes:

Thus you see in this same Psalm how David constantly boasts that he will talk, meditate, speak, sing, hear, read, by day and night and always, nothing except God’s Word and commandments. For God will not give you His Spirit without the external Word; so take your cue from that. His command to write, preach, read, hear, sing, speak, etc., outwardly was not given in vain.2

Most of us are not going to live in a hermitage and meditate in silence and solitude on the Scriptures. But, as we go through the mundane and thoughtless tasks of daily life (for example, taking a shower, mowing the grass, chopping vegetables, changing a diaper), where do our minds settle? Are we allowing the truth of God’s Word to cleanse, direct and change our thoughts and behavior?

Psalm 119 challenges us to use whatever intellectual and creative energies God has given us to focus on His revelation in thought, action, speech and image. This is the life of biblical meditation which is, in essence, the wielding of the Sword of the Spirit.

Our approach to the Scriptures should not be like ice skating — skimming over the surface quickly and moving on. Rather, a more appropriate analogy for studying the Scrip-
ories would be scuba diving — thoughtfully lingering, sinking, exploring the depths of God’s Word.

Finally, Luther points out that the third repeated motif in Psalm 119 is the theme of trials or temptations. Luther notes how frequently the psalmist is harassed by enemies or uncertainties and how God’s Word provides the strength and antidote for all such spiritual challenges.

For example, in verses 23-24, we read, “Though rulers sit together and slander me, Your servant will meditate on Your decrees. Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors.” Similarly, in verse 95, we read, “The wicked are waiting to destroy me, but I will ponder Your statutes.” Likewise, verse 143 says, “Trouble and distress have come upon me, but Your commands are my delight.”

Luther remarks that, under the sovereignty of God, such trials are allowed in our lives to drive us to the Word of God and allow our theoretical knowledge of truth to become for us a deep and experiential reality. He writes,

[A trial is] the touchstone which teaches you not only to know and understand, but also to experience how right, how true, how sweet, how lovely, how mighty, how comforting God’s Word is, wisdom beyond all wisdoms.  

In discussing the interaction of trials and the Word, Luther later adds:

. . . as soon as God’s Word takes root and grows in you, the devil will harry you, and will make a real doctor of you, and by his assaults will teach you to seek and love God’s Word. I myself (if you will permit me, mere mouse-dirt, to be mingled with pepper) am deeply indebted to my papists that through the devil’s raging they have beaten, oppressed, and distressed me so much, That is to say, they have made a fairly good theologian of me, which I would not have been otherwise.

Thus, Luther is saying that under God’s providential allowance of trial and enemies in his life, the Word became to him so real and loved, that he became a “fairly good theologian.” That is, Luther became someone who truly knew God and spoke and lived in accord with that knowledge. That, indeed, is spiritual victory over the world, the flesh and the devil. As the apostle John reminds us in 1 John 5:4-5, “Everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.”

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Spiritual Warfare and the Christian Home

by Stuart W. Scott
With the war on terrorism in the news daily, we need to be reminded of another war going on — the war we face every day concerning our families.

Though some Christians may wrongly place blame on the evil one for their own choice to sin or wrongly attribute certain events to his direct intention, there is a real spiritual battle raging (Eph 6:12; 6:16). This battle is between righteousness and evil, between wicked and holy spiritual beings, and it involves you, me and our Christian homes (1 Pet 5:8; Mark 4:15; Rev 12:9).

Since Satan and his demons are against God and all that God calls good, they must also be working against the God-ordained institution of marriage and the family (Gen 3:1-19; 1 Cor 7:5). Satan is very cunning and strategic in his efforts to accomplish his personal goals (2 Cor 2:11; 2 Cor 11:3). He has a “purpose-driven” existence! He desires to rule and be worshipped like God (Is 14:12-14; Luke 4:7).

Satan is seeking to lift up himself and evil, degrade the name of God, righteousness and thwart the advancement of God’s kingdom (Matt 16:18). He uses a myriad of tactics to draw and keep individuals away from the true Gospel and also to distract, relax, discourage, entice, ensnare, discredit and/or stunt the growth of believers (Eph 6:11; 1 Thess 2:18). In keeping with his objectives, he is also seeking to reproduce his own primary characteristics of pride, anger, selfishness, cruelty and deceit.

Now, consider how the home can be an effective instrument for the forces of evil to work their woe. The home is made up of individual souls and lives that play an integral role in each other’s lives, local churches and our society. The morality of society is dependent upon the foundation of the family unit. Thus, the evil one targets the homes of Christians who are effective instruments in the church and the world.

The evil one is actively working outside and inside the home

Christian parents seem more attuned to outside attacks on the home than inside ones. Certainly, we must be vigilant concerning assaults that stem from our society and other outside influences.

Conscientious Christian parents are often watchful about these things. Therefore, mothers and fathers may understand the need to assist their children with things like friends, the media, entertainment, computers or cell phones. While this is commendable and needed, it is also important to realize that full-scale isolation and silence concerning what is “out there” can create an effective ignorance, weakness and curiosity that Satan can capitalize on (Matt 10:16; 2 Cor 2:11).

Many families seem far less aware and on guard concerning the attack that comes from within. It is crucial to realize that the enemy easily infiltrates behind what we think of as the enemy lines through the hearts, minds and fleshy bents of those living in the home (2 Cor 11:3; Jas 1:14-15).

Often, parents are blown away when the very children or young people they have worked and prayed so hard to protect come up with the same evil doctrines, philosophies and behaviors they have sought to keep out. They are also sometimes mystified at the spiritual struggles of their own lives (Gal 5:17; 1 Cor 10:12). These things are realities because every heart left to itself is desperately wicked and Satan seeks to make the most of it (Jer 17:9; Eph 4:27; 1 Tim 5:14).

The home is often a place where people let down or let go, creating a prime environment for Satan’s schemes to work in concert with our flesh (Gal 5:16-17; Jas 1:14-15). Home also consists of interpersonal relationships that are fraught with opportunities for God’s good or the devil’s evil.

By supposing that our greatest duty is to barricade the home against evil or by assuming that anyone in the family is exempt from Satan’s ploys, we make ourselves even more susceptible. The ranting father, the neglectful mother or the lying child has played right into the enemy’s plans. When parents are discouraged and not hopeful, when a child or teen is disrespectful, when a family member has unrighteous anger, evil forces of darkness are there to make the most of it, or perhaps have even designed it. The devil will use whatever he can to immobilize Christians in the home.

Hope and help for the battle

Amidst these harsh realities there is very good news! Though the battle and the world of darkness are very real, we as believers need not live in fear or hopelessness! We learn from the Bible that our God is far greater than the evil one (1 John 4:4; Jude 24-25). He is fully in control and intimately involved in protecting His children (2 Thess 3:3; 1 Jn 5:18). God is so great He even uses Satan and his demons to accomplish His sovereign will (2 Cor 12:7-10). We know from the example of Job that Satan must actually ask permission to trouble one of God’s children (Job 1:9-12; 2:4-7). Only that which can be used for great good in the believer’s life and for His Kingdom purposes is allowed (Gen 50:20; Rom 8:28-29).

Along with any trial, temptation or battle, God has promised that all His children need is available in Him through His means of grace (prayer, meditating on the Word, worship, service and the body of Christ [1 Cor 10:13; 1 Pet 1:3]).

He also provides forgiveness and restoration when we repent of sin (1 John 1:9). In addition, we can take courage that the world of darkness is doomed (Rev 20:1-10). Even more amazing is the fact that Christ is praying for us (Heb 7:25; 9:24).

On top of all this good news, God has told us that we can look forward to a sinless, battle-free heavenly existence with Christ eternally (John 14:3; 1 Cor 15:42-43; Rev 21:4). All this hope should lead to a dependent confidence in facing the spiritual battle against the home.

Winning the outside and inside battles

Though we will win the war through Christ’s victory, God wants us to be vigilant about the daily battle in our homes for His glory and our good (1 Pet 5:8; 1 Tim 4:7). In our instant and hedonistic society, it is easy for believers to expect the Christian life and our family life to be a walk in the park.

The Puritan pastor Thomas Brooks wrote to his flock, “It is my work as a Christian, but much more as a watchman, to...
do my best to discover the fullness of Christ, the emptiness of the creature, and the snares of the great deceiver...”

Brooks understood what it takes to win in the everyday trenches. God is not looking for perfection but he is expecting diligence and a life of faithfulness.

There are several ways we can be faithful amidst the home-front battle:

**Be mindful of the ongoing battle**

**Watchfully depend on God**

We must be alert and prayerful in the battle (Eph 6:18). For each unsaved member of the family, pray that God, in His grace, would open the eyes of the heart and extend His restraining grace. For each member, pray for God’s protection, the ability to recognize the lies of the evil one and the ability to see things God’s way. Remind yourself and others in the family about the big picture of what is really going on in the world and in the home. To be ignorant or lazy about the spiritual battle going on means we have already surrendered to the enemy on a practical level.

**Prepare yourself and the other true soldiers (believers) in the family for battle**

Work at and encourage spiritual fitness through the spiritual disciplines as a way of life (personal meditation and memorization of God’s Word, personal worship and delight in God, personal involvement with the body of Christ and a personal focus on evangelism). Create an awareness of typical tactics of the evil one like isolation (from one another and the body), time wasters and self-servers (TV, movies, computers, games), discord and other endeavors that can distract from our walk with God and the goals of serving God and others.

Scripture speaks directly about anger and the neglect of marital intimacy being specific opportunities for the devil (Eph 4:26-27; 1 Cor 7:5). We must be aware that at any given time we are either walking in the Spirit (focusing on Christ and God’s eternal interests) or walking in the flesh (focusing on self and the temporal [Gal 5:16-26]). We must also be attuned to specific personal weaknesses that Satan would love to capitalize on, much like a boxer pummels an opponent’s weaknesses in order to gain the victory.

**Be ready to accept difficulty and trials this side of Heaven**

In our personal lives and our homes, we must guard against what Satan and his demons are seeking to do through difficult circumstances. One of his most effective schemes is to discourage believers. This will always affect others in the home as well. We know that Satan also desires that we distrust, judge and give up on serving God (Job 1:9-11).

We must be watchful how we respond to difficult circumstances coming from outside the home. When things don’t go as we desire or plan, we will either trust God’s sovereignty, wisdom and love or we will eclipse His glory, good purposes, help and even His blessings (Prov 16:9; Rom 8:28-29; Jas 1:2-18; Gen 50:20; Jas 4:6). If we distrust God, grumble or complain, we are also helping the evil one accomplish His own purposes. Our enemy uses the God-ordained trials in our lives as a temptation and an avenue to work his evil. So what must we be sure to do in our trials if we do not want the evil one to use them in our home? We must purpose to stand strong in thankfulness and gratefulness by rehearsing God’s grace, blessings, character and promises, especially heaven (2 Thess 5:18; Rom 8:18).

**Be confronting the enemy with God’s truth**

Use the weapon and armor God has given against Satan and self

The most important thing to remember and impress upon our families is that God has given us all we need for the battle against and in our homes (2 Cor 10:3-4; 2 Pet 1:1-3). To fight the evil one, the
In our personal lives and our homes, we must guard against what Satan and his demons are seeking to do through difficult circumstances.

Bible tells us to pray, to use the Word of God and stand firm by putting on faith, righteousness, hope and submission to God (Eph 6:10-20; Jas 4:7a). From these the forces of darkness flee (Jas 4:7b)!  

Do you want to lessen the opportunities you provide the evil one in your home? Then deal aggressively with your own personal temptations and sin. Be confessing and repenting (Ps 50:1-4; Eph 4:21-24). Profusely use the Word of God and prayer to weaken the flesh (Ps 1:1-3; 119:6-11; Gal 5:16). Turn to the body of Christ for encouragement and accountability (Heb 10:24-25). Work to make no provision (opportunity) for the flesh (Rom 13:14). Take radical steps because sin is serious (Mt 5:29-30). It is an affront to God. It helps accomplish the goals of the evil one and is destructive to us, our intimacy with Christ and relationships in the home (Rom 6:12-13; Ps 25:14; Eph 4:25-32).

Keep (maintain, guard) your own heart with all diligence (Prov 4:23)

Turn from thoughts and desires that are void or the opposite of what God says. Replace such thoughts and desires with the truth (Phil 4:8). One by one, work to recognize and change self-focused, selfish, fearful, angry, vengeful, proud, insecure, hopeless and unprofitable thought patterns. Repent of desires that have become idolatrous lusts (must haves). Replace them with the pursuit of God alone (Deut 4:9; Jn 5:21; Col 3:1-3).

The enemy is counting on lazy minds (hearts) and selfish pursuits. Parents need to be most vigilant about their own hearts and lives and then be faithful about praying for, seeking to influence and addressing the hearts of their children.

Bring Scripture to bear on any false doctrines and philosophies that come from sources within or without

Be watchful of persons, the media, literature, etc. Without isolating the family, minimize evil influences, especially those that are not accompanied or followed by God’s commentary and your input (2 Cor 10:5). Richard Mayhue is correct when he says, “Satan’s chief activity in the lives of Christians is to cause them to think contrary to God’s Word and thus act disobediently to God’s will.”

It’s time to stop sleepwalking at home

When we consider the battle that is raging on a spiritual level, we must realize that it is raging against and in the home. With a humble confidence, we need to get with God’s program and utilize His all-sufficient means of grace to fight the good fight (Eph 6:10).

Husbands, wives, fathers, mothers and children, there is a lion on the prowl. We must awaken out of our slumber, be alert and walk in the light. And this do, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. (Romans 13:11-12)

Endnotes

Seminary couple takes Gospel to East Asia
Will Brooks recently served as a missionary in a country in which practicing Christianity in a church not regulated by the government is illegal and could be punishable by imprisonment.

This volatile reality caused Brooks to pose a difficult question to himself each day.

"Being a believer in a place like this, or any closed country, I would look in the mirror and say, 'Is it worth following Christ today if I will be sent home?'" Brooks remembers.

"The nationals don’t have that luxury. For them, getting caught means going to jail. Are you willing to give up everything else and follow Christ,’ is their question. Most days their answer is ‘yes.’ That is a challenge to American believers.”

Brooks is a master of divinity student in the Billy Graham School for Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Before coming to Southern, Brooks served two years in the Trail Blazers program with the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention in an East Asian country that is closed to the Gospel. As a Trail Blazer, Brooks did a range of ministry work.

“I was doing regular church planting, evangelism and discipleship,” he said. “From the basic ground level of trying to start churches among non-believers to trying to help churches develop leaders.”

Working in East Asia from the summer of 2002 to the summer of 2004, Brooks said he regularly found comfort in Scripture verses that spoke of God’s sovereignty over missions.

“Every day, I read verses like Psalm 86:9-10, which says that God is sovereign to bring the nations to Himself,” he said. “There is security, peace and comfort in knowing that we have to work as hard as we can to lead people to Christ, but God is the one who really works to change people’s hearts.”

One heart that God changed during Brooks’ stint in East Asia was that of Winnie Huang, Brooks’ future wife. In addition to doing missions work, Brooks taught English at a prestigious high school where Huang also worked. After working together for a few months, Brooks shared the Gospel with Huang and she professed faith in Christ. A week later, Brooks became convinced the profession was genuine.

“She came back after a week and I asked her what God had been teaching her,” he said. “She said she realized that God reveals Himself to us so that we can share about Him with others. That was when I realized that the Gospel had completely changed her life.”

Brooks was working with four Bible study groups in the city, and he began to take Huang along with him to the different groups. In the midst of a culture where she could have lost her job by sharing the Gospel, Brooks said she boldly shared her faith.

“It is hard not to fall in love with somebody who is beautiful and is so gifted spiritually and so committed to serving God,” he said.

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“It is hard not to fall in love with somebody who is beautiful and is so gifted spiritually and so committed to serving God,” he said.

The couple married in June 2004, at the end of Brooks’ second year of missions work. After completing this term, Brooks and his wife started working with an IMB team of partners in the area.

For six months, the Brookses trained house church leaders.

“I worked in 50 different church training leaders,” Brooks said. “In some cases, the leaders had only been Christians for six months and I was training them how to lead a church.”

During his first year in East Asia, Brooks contracted a stomach illness local doctors were not able to identify. Over the next year and a half the sickness worsened, and six months into his marriage Brooks had to return to America for further examination. Winnie remained in East Asia because she did not have a visa.

Brooks expected to take a month to heal, but doctors in America could not identify his sickness; one even told him he was dying. He went to the Mayo Clinic in Minneapolis for further treatment, but doctors there couldn’t find anything wrong with him and the sickness eventually subsided. Brooks said he has to monitor his stress level closely to keep from getting sick, but otherwise he feels healthy.

During this time, Winnie obtained a visa quickly and joined her husband in the United States. Though Brooks obtained clearance to return to East Asia, he decided to begin taking classes at Southern, and he began online classes in the spring of 2005. In the fall, he and Winnie moved to Louisville.

“Basically, the training in East Asia is to give people a Bible and tell them to read it and do what it says,” he said. “Because of that, I want to get as much education as possible to best be able to equip the believers there.”

Brooks plans to graduate in May of 2008 and he would like to enter the doctoral program in the Graham school with an emphasis in church planting or leadership training. He serves as the student leader for the Intercultural Student Fellowship on campus, which he has done for one year.

This past summer, Brooks returned to East Asia for a three-week mission trip in the area where he served with the IMB. Winnie remained in Louisville and in August gave birth to the couple’s first child, Randolph Hudson Brooks.

In East Asia, Brooks taught principles of hermeneutics to house leaders as he walked them through the book of 1 Peter. Brooks said he and Winnie sense God’s call to return to East Asia because of the need for discipleship.

“‘There is a need in East Asia for people to do leadership training,” he said. “They [believers in this country] have no resources at all, so my wife and I both feel like God has equipped us to go back to pour ourselves into church leaders in East Asia.”

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“God has given me a heart for seeing Him rejoiced in throughout all the earth,” he said. “The burning desire of my heart is to see God understood and rejoiced in for who He is.”

By Garrett E. Wisball
Confidence in the saving mercy of God
The man in the black ski mask lifted his pistol and aimed the barrel squarely between David Sills’ eyes.

From three feet away, the cursing, shrieking bandit could not possibly miss. He fired the handgun and the bullet sizzled past Sills’ head, passing close enough to his left ear to leave behind a powder mark.

Enraged by his poor marksmanship, the masked man strong-armed Sills to a nearby lobby and placed him face down on the floor. Sills knew the gun-toting robber would not miss again.

Seconds crawled by and Sills breathed a few syllables to a God he was certain to be standing before at any moment: “God, you’ve got to show me how to die. I do not know how to die.”

Without warning, the man then whirled around, faced away from Sills and brayed to no one in particular, “Where’s my money?” The criminal fired the gun repeatedly toward an area where the secretaries worked. None were hit, but the walls and equipment of the Jackson, Mississippi real estate office where Sills worked as a broker resembled the surface of a waffle ball.

Sills reluctantly stood up and pointed the gunman to the office cash register. His appetite for money and murder at least temporarily satiated, the masked man emptied the cash register and fled the building. The 26-year-old Sills survived the incident without a scratch, but his rebellion against God did not.

The near-death experience that morning was the first of three trials that summer of 1983 which God used to intensify His call on the heart of Sills, who today serves as associate professor of missions and cultural anthropology and director of the Great Commission Center at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

The second major stroke against Sills’ spiritual stubbornness fell a few weeks later when his son, Christopher, nearly died during birth when the umbilical cord became wrapped around his neck. Sills looked out across the parking lot of the hospital as doctors rushed his wife Mary to an emergency Caesarean section. Again, he prayed for God’s intervention.

“In just a few minutes, a nurse came out and said, ‘Mr. Sills, would you like to hold your son?’” Sills said. “Both my wife and son came through it well. I knew then that this God answers prayer.”

The capper came a couple of weeks later when a dentist became convinced that a sore in Sills’ mouth was cancer. After much hand wringing and several visits to specialists, the sore disappeared. Sills had no doubt that God was pursuing him.

Raised by a devout Southern Baptist family, Sills had begun to drift from church at age 15. Sills began to pursue what he now calls “a career of sin,” while presuming that a “sinner’s prayer” was supposed to do [get right with God], but I am just not a Jesus-freak like you.”

The three traumatic incidents in the summer of ’83 came after several months during which God had instilled in Sills — “out of nowhere” — a voracious appetite for the Scriptures and an unquenchable desire to know God. Sills says he now understands much more vividly the darkness-to-light conversion of the apostle Paul.

“I never shy away from sharing the Gospel.”

“God had been drawing me to Himself throughout that whole year,” Sills said. “Then those three incidents came. I tell people that I really understand the apostle Paul’s conversion better now, because that’s how God used those three incidents…God uses means and those incidents and the prayers I prayed were a part of God’s means of saving me. The Lord had used quite a traumatic year to bring me to Himself.”

Following the three providential trials, Sills and his family began to attend a Southern Baptist church in Jackson, their hometown. During that time, the church was under the leadership of an interim pastor named Tom Nettles, a man who would mentor the Sillses and baptize them together on New Year’s Day of 1984.

“Mary and I came every time the doors were open and sat on the second row,” Sills said. “Dr. Nettles is a great, great teacher and we were like sponges soaking in everything he taught from the Bible. We constantly took notes and grew tremendously during those early months.”

Over the ensuing years, Sills obtained a bachelor’s degree from Belhaven College and a master of divinity from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Along the way, the Sillses took several short-term mission trips to Ecuador and Puerto Rico. Following his first trip to Ecuador, Sills had such a negative experience he prayed that if God would allow him to get home, he would never return to Ecuador.

In 1992, the Sillses moved to Ecuador as full-time missionaries to the Highland Quichua people in the Andes Mountains, where they spent four years. During his time there, Sills became a professor at the Ecuadorian Baptist Theological Seminary. Soon, it became clear that God was expanding Sills’ calling to include the academy.

“It was like somebody turned on a light switch,” he said. “I loved teaching at the seminary, and of course I still do.”

Sills returned to the states in the mid-90s and attended Reformed Theological Seminary (RTS), where he completed both a doctor of missiology and a Ph.D. in intercultural studies. Sills also pastored a church while at RTS.

In 2001, the Sillses — now with two children, Christopher and Molly — returned to Ecuador where David served as president of the Baptist seminary. Two years later, Sills began his current ministry at Southern Seminary, where he received an office next door to that of the interim pastor who two decades earlier had pointed him Christ-ward. Nettles has served as professor of historical theology at Southern since 1997.

“It was a remarkable providence when I found out that Tom’s office was next door to mine,” he said. “It felt we had come full circle.”

Sills’ evangelistic fire for the nations in general and Ecuador in particular has not cooled; he returns to the country that has become his family’s “second home” several times each year with teams from the seminary and Ninth and O Baptist Church, where Sills serves as the unofficial missions coordinator.

Sills’ animating principle is the reality that he has never gotten over the fact that God saved a sinner the likes of him. His “Damascus Road” conversion pushes Sills to preach the Gospel to the nations.

“If God could save me, He could save anyone,” he said. “I never shy away from sharing the Gospel.”

By Jeff Robinson
Alum leads church in prayer
What have you done in the last 20 years that can only be explained by the power of God?

That is the question Rob Jackson asked the Central Baptist Church in Decatur, Ala., where he is pastor, when he wanted to challenge its members to trust God for greater things than they could ever accomplish in their own strength.

Many people in the church replied that they hadn’t done anything in the past two decades that could only be explained by God’s power.

But if you pose the question to Jackson, he rattles off many tangible examples of God’s grace at work in both his personal life and in the life of the church.

Jackson, who was among the first group of students to graduate from the Ph.D. program in the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, says walking by faith is a personal priority.

“In everything we’re doing, we’re going to be a church that either walks by faith and not by sight or we’re going to shut the doors and let somebody else do it,” he said. “I believe with all my heart that Hebrews 11:6 is true — without faith it’s impossible to please God.”

Jackson has taught this biblical truth to his family. Five years ago, he taught his daughter, Abigail, about the power of prayer. Abigail soon began to tell her father of specific instances in which God had answered her prayers.

Walking by faith also extends to Jackson’s life in ministry. Until the year 2003, he worked for the evangelism department of the Alabama Baptist Convention and as an adjunct professor at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

But in the summer of 2003 he accepted an invitation to preach in Decatur at Central Baptist Church. After one service, he heard the church’s stated qualifications, they began to speak with him and he started as pastor of the established downtown church within six months.

“I believe God wanted me to come here so the church could walk by faith and not by sight,” Jackson said.

As Jackson began his work at Central, he prepared to teach about the spiritual discipline of fasting. But before he began, God convicted him that he needed to fast and pray that God would show the church His will. During the fasting, Jackson says God made His will clear to him.

“God began to lay on my heart that He wanted our church to relocate,” he said, noting that the church had been in its location since 1892 and voted multiple times not to move.

Fearful of leading the church in a wrong direction, Jackson called two older men in the congregation and asked them to fast and pray until God showed His will for the church. Without any prompting from their pastor, the men told Jackson they believed that God was leading the church to relocate.

Wanting to make sure he was doing the right thing, Jackson made similar requests to the staff, the deacons and the congregation, asking them all to fast and seek God’s will. Like the initial two men, each group sensed God’s leading to relocate.

Each group walked by faith and not by sight, Jackson said.

“The church voted 80 (percent) to 20 (percent) to relocate,” he said. “We didn’t know where we’d get the money. We didn’t know where the land was, and we didn’t know if we could sell our property.”

But as the church prayed, something happened that could only be explained by the power of God, he said. It found a 29-acre location in the middle of Decatur with a 147,000-square-foot building, and the property’s owner was willing to sell the property of the church, but now we’re believing in prayer.”

“We’ve always been a praying church, but now we’re believing in prayer.”

By David Roach
At Southern Seminary we recognize the need for Christians to develop a biblical understanding of aesthetics and artistic expression. For that reason, we are unveiling specialized courses and degrees in theology and the arts as well as a new Center for Theology and the Arts. If you’re ready to appreciate the arts biblically, let Southern Seminary show you the way.
The fact that God has spoken is the only basis for hope in life and the only foundation for theological education, R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, said Aug. 22 during the school’s fall convocation.

The standing-room-only crowd also witnessed the announcement of Randy Stinson as the new dean of the School of Leadership and Church Ministry, the installation of three professors into endowed chairs and the introduction of nine new faculty members.

In addition, the seminary commemorated the 150th anniversary of James P. Boyce’s lecture “Three Changes in Theological Education,” which in 1856 set forth the principles on which Southern was founded three years later. Boyce was Southern’s founding president.

Preaching from Deuteronomy 4, Mohler said the world is experiencing a crisis today because many people do not believe there is any basis for human knowledge. But Christians must counter the world’s confusion by pointing to God’s Word — the Bible — as the basis for knowledge, he said.

“Christianity depends upon … a Christian theory of knowledge that is based in revelation alone,” Mohler said. “My colleagues, there is no greater challenge than this: to make certain as we begin this new academic year that we know on what authority we speak.”

Scripture teaches that obedience to God’s Word results in blessing and disobedience results in curses, he said. Mohler pointed out that humans don’t deserve to hear from God but receive His Word out of God’s mercy.

“Christianity depends upon … a Christian theory of knowledge that is based in revelation alone,” Mohler said. “My colleagues, there is no greater challenge than this: to make certain as we begin this new academic year that we know on what authority we speak.”

Mohler: God’s Word is our authority

Mohler installed three faculty members into endowed professorships: Gary J. Bredfeldt as Gaines S. Dobbins Professor of Leadership and Church Ministry; Thomas R. Schreiner as James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation; and Mark A. Seifrid as Mildred and Ernest Hogan Professor of New Testament Interpretation.

Southern’s president also recognized several new Southern Seminary and Boyce College faculty members, including Steve R. Halla, assistant professor of philosophy and director of the Center for Theology and the Arts; Thom S. Rainer, distinguished professor of evangelism and church growth; Peter J. Richards, associate professor of theology and law and director of the Center for Theology and Law; Kevin L. Smith, assistant professor of church history; Michael S. Wilder, assistant professor of leadership and church ministry; Kurt P. Wise, professor of theology and science and director of the Center for Theology and Science; Robert K. Cheong, assistant professor of biblical counseling; Brian K. Payne, instructor of expository preaching and pastoral leadership; and Jeremy P. Pierre, director of the writing center at Boyce College.

By David Roach
Acknowledging the importance of family ministry, R. Albert Mohler Jr. announced the appointment of Randy Stinson as the new dean of the School of Leadership and Church Ministry at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Mohler, president of Southern Seminary, said Stinson’s experience in family ministry as executive director of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW), has uniquely prepared him to be the leadership school’s next dean.

“Randy Stinson is that rare combination of person and professor, minister and teacher who will give superb leadership to this school for the future with thankfulness for all of the leadership that we have had for so many years, building on what [former deans] Dennis Williams, Brad Waggoner and others have done,” he said.

“Stinson will bring a new dimension by focusing on family ministry as the touchstone structure for educational ministry in the church. We think this is the direction that our churches really need and want and there is a great vacuum in evangelical theological education for such a program.”

Russell D. Moore, senior vice president of academic administration and dean of the School of Theology at Southern, agreed that Stinson’s background in family-related ministry, as well as his character and commitment to the local church make him the natural choice for the position.

“I am excited about Randy Stinson’s emphasis on family-integrated ministry, his commitment to local church ministry, his leadership experience and his insight into the crucial issues facing Southern Baptists,” Moore said.

Stinson described the appointment as the “opportunity of a lifetime,” and said he looks forward to helping prepare students for local church ministry.

“This position fits with my call as a minister of the Gospel and it fits with my personal commitments to marriage, family, children’s ministry and youth ministry,” he said.

“I am primarily excited about the opportunity to have an impact on the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention at the educational level because I think we can impact the way ministry is done in these churches. I think we can have an influence on the students who will come through this school on their road of ministry.”

Stinson earned his master of divinity from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and his Ph.D. from Southern. He succeeds Brad Waggoner, who served as dean for five years before becoming the director of LifeWay research at LifeWay Christian Resources in July. Stinson said he looks forward to building on Waggoner’s work at Southern.

“I have already met with the faculty of the leadership school as a group and several individually and I am really excited about building on the foundation that Brad Waggoner left,” he said.

“The leadership school at Southern Seminary has the opportunity to help change the way various family ministries are done in Southern Baptist churches.”

Having wise mentors, observing Christian families and leading CBMW have all impacted Stinson and will shape his service as dean of the school of leadership, he said.

“I have had a lot of good mentors and pastors, and at the same time some real heartbreaking observations that I have noticed in Christian families everywhere I have been,” he said.

Stinson began serving as executive director of CBMW in 2001 and said that he will continue to oversee the directional leadership of the organization. However, Stinson said a person will be appointed in the near future to carry out the daily administrative responsibilities of the position.

Mohler said the warm welcome Stinson has already received as dean points to the impact he can have in the school of leadership.

“The enthusiastic support this appointment has received from faculty and students from that school already is one sign, I think, of the potential that lies before Stinson as dean of the school of leadership,” he said.

“Stinson’s experience as executive director of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, his extensive teaching and writing … all of this puts him in an incredible position to give this school the leadership it needs.”

By Garrett E. Wishall
Professor in Israel during attacks

T.J. Betts went to Israel searching for ancient artifacts. Little did he know what he would find.

Betts was part of an archeological team that had to be evacuated from Tel Hazor, Israel, the morning of July 13 during a Lebanese Katyusha rocket attack on the region.

Betts, assistant professor of Old Testament interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, said he was standing on top of a hill when he saw one of the rockets explode.

“IT was really bizarre because we could hear the explosions all around us,” he said. “All of the cities are built on hills and we could see for miles. I was on top of a hill and I saw a huge explosion. At first, the Israelis who were with us said, ‘Oh, it is just artillery practice.’ They didn’t want us to know that it was an attack. But the smoke was as tall as a ten-story building. Not long after that, they said, ‘We need to evacuate you.’”

Betts and his group were moved to Tiberius, a resort town on the Sea of Galilee, where they saw news of the attack for the first time.

“The Israelis didn’t tell us a lot because they didn’t want us to panic,” Betts said. “Then we saw the news in Tiberius and saw that the attacks had circled around where we were.

“To be honest, it is hard to describe. It was so different from anything I had experienced before. I can honestly say for the whole group that no one was frightened until we saw the news. Then we realized that we had been in a somewhat dangerous situation and hadn’t even realized it.”

“I had never seen explosions, except for fun. Having never experienced anything like that, my reaction was more like ‘wow, look at that.’ It didn’t sink in until later how serious the situation was.”

Betts was part of a team led by Amnon Ben-tor, world-renowned archeologist from Israel and head archeologist at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The dig included scholars and students from around the world looking for archives from the middle to late Bronze period. Seth Rodriguez, a doctoral student in archeology at Southern Seminary, was another member of the team.

The group was staying in the region of northern Galilee, five miles from the Lebanese border and less than 15 miles from the Syrian border.

Upon being evacuated, Betts said their Israeli hosts told them they would be able to return to Tel Hazor that night. However, their opinion changed as the attack intensified and the group spent the night in Tiberius. The next morning, the group discovered that around 100 rockets had fallen on northern Israel the day before.

The rocket Betts saw hit only one mile from the dig site, and several others peppered the region within a three-mile radius. The group briefly returned to Tel Hazor to gather their belongings before completely evacuating to Tiberius.

At 8 a.m., Saturday, July 15, the team left on a bus for Jerusalem. Six hours later, another Lebanese attack rocked Tiberius. Fortunately, the group was safely out of range.

Betts said when he first arrived in Jerusalem he was visiting an archeological site near the city when he heard an Israeli F-15 rocket attack on Gaza.

“We thought we would be safe because that was in the far south and our dig was in the far north, so we thought we would be fine,” he said. “I told my family we would be safe, but then the war broke out in the north.”

The Lebanese threatened to damage the airport in Tel Aviv, but as of Sunday night, July 16, nothing had happened. Betts flew out that night, and twelve and a half hours later he arrived safely in Atlanta.

By Garrett E. Wishall

Summer SBJT: Parts of Scripture must be interpreted in light of the whole

Every verse of Scripture must be read in light of the context of the entire Bible if God’s Word is to be accurately understood and applied, essayists assert in the summer edition of The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology (SBJT).

“Evangelicals succeed in teaching moral lessons through the individual stories of the Bible, but often fail to understand where the stories fit within ‘the overall plan of God centered in the Gospel,’” journal editor Stephen J. Wellum writes. “Biblical theology,” the topic of the new SBJT, provides the antidote, Wellum argues.

“Biblical theology seeks to remedy this failure by helping us to think in terms of a ‘whole-Bible’ theology,” Wellum writes. “It seeks to counter the growing biblical illiteracy in our day by returning us to the Scripture in all of its beauty, depth, and breadth. It seeks to help us read all of Scripture in light of the ‘big picture’ in order that we may better preach, teach, and live out God’s Word in our daily lives.”
The apostle Paul was driven by the desire to share the Gospel with all people, and he expected every church to share his passion for evangelism, according to a new book by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary professor Robert L. Plummer.

“Paul envisioned himself as an apostle who conveyed the dynamic Gospel to his hearers, so that the same effective, self-diffusing word that characterized Paul’s apostolic mission also characterized the congregations he began,” Plummer writes in “Paul’s Understanding of the Church’s Mission,” published by Paternoster Biblical Monographs.

“As extensions of the apostles’ ministry, the churches are agents of God’s word, which continues to work in and spread through them. ... By its very nature, the ‘apostolic church’ must be missionary.”

Plummer’s argument counters several major scholarly books, articles and dissertations that have argued recently that Paul’s letters do not show evidence that he expected ordinary Christians to evangelize. Leading New Testament scholars in the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia have commended Plummer’s book.

According to Paul, Christians should feel compelled to witness because of the dynamic and effective character of the Gospel, writes Plummer, who serves as assistant professor of New Testament interpretation.

“The Gospel, as God’s word, is ‘power’ which inevitably progresses through the persons and communities included in its advance,” he writes. “As the Gospel comes to dwell in the churches, Paul is confident that the word will push the boundaries of the communities to include new people. Ultimately, Paul’s confidence in the Gospel to create churches which continue the apostolic mission is a confidence in the Gospel’s author and subject — God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Paul not only expects believers to witness because of the character of the Gospel itself, but he also gives them specific commands to spread the message of Christ, Plummer writes. Paul’s letters contain both commands to proclaim the Gospel actively and instructions to witness passively through a godly life, he argues.

Biblical texts advocating active evangelism include Philippians 2:16 and Ephesians 6:15-17, while the command to witness passively can be found in verses such as Colossians 4:6 and 1 Thessalonians 4:12, Plummer writes.

In addition to examining Paul’s commands to evangelize, Plummer points to “incidental evidence” which demonstrates Paul’s expectation that churches are to spread the Gospel.

“Looking beyond Paul’s explicit imperatives to evangelize, the apostle often makes incidental remarks showing that he expected the Gospel to propel the church in missionary activity that paralleled his own apostolic mission,” he writes.

For example, just as Paul prayed for missions and taught God’s truth, he expected the early church to do the same, Plummer writes. These similar expectations for apostles and churches show that Paul viewed a church’s work as an extension of apostles’ evangelistic work, he argues.

Another factor showing that Paul expected churches to evangelize is his assumption that ordinary believers would suffer for the Gospel just as the apostles suffered, Plummer writes, adding that suffering for the Gospel presumed churches were trumpeteting the Gospel.

“An offensive message spreading spontaneously from the people who hold it will inevitably result in opposition and suffering,” he writes. “Given this situation, Paul consistently presents Christians — apostles included — with two options: (1) being ashamed of the Gospel, and thus denying the faith ... or (2) allowing the Gospel to run its dynamic course through their lives and thus suffering for it.”

Plummer concludes that churches which take the writings of Paul seriously have no choice but to devote themselves to proclaiming the Gospel.

“If we understand the New Testament documents as presenting us with the normative pattern for the church, then the modern church must be a missionary church,” Plummer writes. “The church must not only take on the mantle of the apostolic mission in a general or abstract way; she must carry out the apostolic mission in concrete tasks. Just like the ancient churches that Paul addressed, modern churches should be active in proclaiming the Gospel.”

By David Roach
Love for the lost leads Kuntz to support Southern

It is something of an understatement to say Bob Kuntz has a zeal for world missions.

Over the past decade, Kuntz has been on mission trips to Uganda, China, India and other places that are officially “closed” to the Gospel. These trips helped him realize that merely going on short-term trips is not enough — God also wanted him to help send missionaries out to preach the message of Christ in the darkest corners of the earth.

After seeking God’s guidance, Kuntz and his wife Gwen realized one of the best ways they could help send missionaries was giving to Southern Seminary, where dozens of foreign missionaries are trained and deployed each year.

“There just is such a tremendous, tremendous need for the Gospel,” Kuntz, who owns several businesses in the Denver area, said. “We thought, ‘What’s the best way that we can use God’s resources?’ And we thought God was leading us not only to put God’s Word into their hands but also to help fund individuals to go out around the world to preach and to teach.”

Through Calvin Wittman, his pastor at Applewood Baptist Church in Wheat Ridge, Colo., Kuntz was introduced to Southern, which he calls “the greatest seminary in the world.”

“I partnered with Southern, and I’m so grateful that I did because [there is] no better way to invest God’s dollar than to put it into educating people and equipping people to go out around the world and share His Gospel according to His will,” said Kuntz, who serves on the Southern Seminary Foundation Board.

Another theological institution asked Kuntz to serve on its board of trustees, but he declined because he believes God has given him a unique and specific passion for Southern.

“We will continue to not only pray for the seminary but to partner with it financially and in any other way we can be helpful,” he said.

One mission trip in particular solidified Kuntz’s commitment to theological education.

During a trip to an Asian country that is hostile to Christianity, Kuntz visited an underground seminary disguised as a button factory. The school numbers hundreds of graduates who study silently at night and must give back their diplomas immediately upon graduation for security reasons. Some graduates die attempting to spread the Gospel, he said.

“We don’t have a clue what these people go through to study the Word of God,” he said, adding that a seminary like Southern is a blessing from God because of its ability to train and send preachers to closed countries across the world.

Kuntz traveled to Uganda in 2004 and labored in an area where Christianity is anything but well received. Kuntz served in an area devastated by war where he dug wells and shared the Gospel. When he left, Kuntz traveled south to avoid the war-mongering activities of rebels so widespread, it sealed off the other three directions.

“My heart is wanting to go back to Uganda in that area, but we’re not allowed to,” he said. “After we left there were hundreds of people who were killed; dead bodies [were] lying in the street.”

Kuntz is also an active member of The Gideons International. He serves as president of the organization’s Table Mountain Camp in Colorado. His work with the Gideons complements his support of Southern — Gideons distribute God’s Word while Southern equips workers to preach and teach it, Kuntz said.

Every endeavor in the life of a Christian should be a matter of making the best use of God’s resources to accomplish His purposes, Kuntz said, noting that stewardship of God’s resources drives him to continue supporting Southern.

“I’ve always sensed God leading me to use His resources to glorify Him,” he said. “He has blessed my businesses so much — we all know it all belongs to Him anyway — [and] I started to ask Him where He’d like me to use His finances.”

By David Roach
With your help we can continue to build on the legacy of Southern Seminary’s founding fathers. By investing in the work of preparing God-called men and women for ministry, you will play a vital role in advancing the Kingdom of God. You will build a legacy.

You may give to the Annual Fund or through trusts and annuities that offer tax benefits plus a lifetime income. Also you may give through your will so that your investment keeps on working for generations to come.

For more information on giving to Southern Seminary, contact the Office of Institutional Relations at 1-800-626-5525, ext. 4143, or visit online at www.sbts.edu.

Invest in tomorrow’s churches. Build a legacy today.
Robert Pratt ('40) is celebrating his 67th wedding anniversary with his wife, Iva. Mr. Pratt also observed the 70th anniversary of his ordination on May 10, 2006.

John Hazel Knight ('42) died on April 19, 2006 at age 89. His wife, Elizabeth Tate, died April 22, 2006 at the age of 86. During his 41 years of ministry, the Knights served in many churches as pastor, Sunday School teacher and piano player.

W. Howard Ethington ('43) died in February of 2006 at age 88. After graduation, he served several churches in Georgia and the Georgia Baptist Convention.


Edward Laux ('44) retired after 23 years of service from Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Ethel Primm ('45) died Jan. 10, 2006 at the Moses Cone Hospital. Mrs. Primm served with her pastor husband, Gerald, in several churches where she had many responsibilities.

Doris Gibon ('49) died on Nov. 6, 2003.

Earl Peacock ('49) died on April 24, 2006 at age 81. Peacock served as pastor of many churches in Indiana and Georgia. He also served in the evangelism department of the Georgia Baptist Convention as director of Interfaith Witness.

Henry G. West Jr. ('52) died on May 9, 2006.

Homer C. McElvea ('52), a retired chaplain from Atlanta Veterans Hospital, died on Feb. 4, 2006. His wife, Wanda, died in June of 2005.

Laurice M. Burford ('53) died on May 31, 2006 at his home. Burford served in Southern Baptists churches for 32 years.

Norman D. Burgess ('54) died on June 5, 2006 at age 80. He was a retired pastor of East Dayton Baptist Church, but still served the church as their associate pastor. After receiving his bachelor’s degree in theology in 1954 and master’s degree in religious education in 1963, he served many churches as pastor or minister of religious education.

Carlos and Myrtice Taylor Owens ('55) published Hands Reaching out of Darkness, accounts from their 36 years as missionaries in Africa.


R. N. Sanders ('57) would like to be notified if there are any plans made for a 50th class reunion. You may contact the Institutional Relations department at Southern Seminary with the reunion information.

Earl L. Wilson ('57), a retired pastor and former trustee of The Baptist Courier, died June 3, 2006 at age 80. He served many churches in Florida, Georgia and South Carolina.

Doyle Gene Crewe ('58) died on Nov. 29, 2005 in Boise, Idaho. He served in Boise since 1975.

Donald Lee Zuberer ('58) died at Vanderbilt University Medical Center on May 9, 2006. Zuberer served as a minister for more than 50 years in churches in Kentucky and Tennessee.

M. B. Morrow, Jr. ('59) and his wife, Beverly, were honored for 50 years of ministry by Midway Baptist Church, Gaffney, South Carolina. He was serving Midway as their interim pastor when the celebration took place. Morrow was presented with a plaque listing the names of the churches he has pastored. He was also honored with the state’s highest civilian award, The Order of the Palmetto.

Robert C. Powell ('59) died on Feb. 5, 2005, after pastoring Southern Baptist churches for the past 51 years.

J. Harold Reynierson ('59) died on May 7, 2006 in Danville, Ky. Reynierson served as minister of music in Danville, Ky., Murfreesboro, Tenn., Shawnee, Okla., and in Lexington, Ky. He is survived by his wife, Barbara, and three sons.

Paul E. Epps ('61) retired on July 30 after 56 years in the ministry. His longest pastorate was for 11 years at Temple Baptist Church in Madison, Ill.

George Balentine ('61) died on April 28, 2006.

Richard Houston ('62) celebrated his 50th wedding anniversary with his wife, Dorothy, on June 3, 2006.

Robert (Bob) D. Moseley ('62) died on May 29, 2006 at age 75 after a bout with lung cancer. Moseley was a retired clinical chaplain and still actively pastoring.

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David Lee Sandridge ('70) died on May 25, 2006 at age 64. Sandridge served as pastor of many churches during his ministry. Sandridge founded Renewing a Right Spirit Ministries in 1999.

William Carter ('70) and wife Micki are celebrating their 60th wedding anniversary in August. Carter was a trustee at Southern from 1981-1991.

Ben Wiseman ('70) left First Baptist Church of Bowie, Texas in June 2006 and went to Shady Grove Baptist Church in Nocona, Texas.

Glenn E. Schaefer ('70) was named “Professor of the Year” at Simpson University for the 2005-06 school year. He has taught at Simpson for 32 years.

Tom Adcox ('71) and his wife, Linda, have adopted a one-year-old girl from Kazakhstan named Stephanie.

Leonard Markham ('74) has been called as pastor of First Baptist Church, Fairfield. He served as senior pastor of Bluegrass Baptist Church, Hendersonville for 17 years.

Gary W. Beare ('76) was appointed as an associational missionary by the North American Mission Board. Beare along with his wife, Shirley, serve in Wasilla, Alaska.

George Gera ('76) and his wife, Sheryl, after their stateside assignment returned to the field to a church planting movement among an African people group. George and Sheryl have worked with this people group for 17 years.

Miguel De La Torre ('95) has published two new books: *Handbook of Latin American Theologies* co-edited by Edwin Aponte, and *Rethinking Latin American Religion and Identity*, co-edited by Faston Espinosa.

Sun Macupa ('96) is a United States Army chaplain stationed at Fort Wainwright in Alaska.

John Laing ('00) and Stefana Laing ('04), announce the birth of their first child, Sydney Elise Laing. Sydney was born on Oct. 25, 2005. John is currently serving as an Army chaplain in Kosovo.

Darren and Amy Malcolm ('01) are the proud parents of John Paul born on Nov. 20, 2005.

Adam Dooley ('02) has been called as pastor of Red Bank Baptist Church in Chattanooga, Tenn. He was serving as pastor of Red House Baptist Church, Richmond, Va.

Freddy Cardoza ('05) has joined the faculty of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo.

Matthew Ellis ('05) has been called as pastor to the First Baptist Church in Brooksville, Fla. He and his family have moved to Ocala, Fla. from Princeton, Ky., where he was pastor of Donaldson Baptist Church.

Matthew and Kendra Ostertag of Monett, Mo., have been commissioned by the International Mission Board. The couple, along with their two children, will serve in Middle America and the Caribbean.


Byron Simmons ('80) is moving from Europe to become the NETCOM chaplain at Fort Huachuca in Arizona.

Dave Byrd ('85) is currently serving as pastor of First Baptist Church Havana, Ill. If you would like his contact information, contact Institutional Relations at Southern Seminary.

Richard D. Shelton ('86) died on May 21, 2006 at the age of 53. He was employed in Columbia, Md. at Kelly and Associates Insurance Group as an insurance administrator.

Enoc Toby ('89) has been named as a church planting missionary in Jacksonville, Fla. Until his appointment, he worked for the Florida Baptist Convention.

Kristin Grace Kennedy ('92) died in February of 2006.

Mark Johnson ('94) and his wife, Allyson, announce the birth of their son, Christopher.
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— Chuck Lawless, Dean, author of Discipled Warriors

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