

A Life Well-Lived for God

“I knew you well.”

Jimmy Carter Dies at the Age of 100

Atlanta, GA, Dec. 29, 2024



James Earl *Jimmy* Carter, Jr., the longest-lived president in the history of the United States, died at his home in Plains, Georgia after nearly two years of hospice care. He was the 39th president of the United States from 1977 to 1981.

President Joe Biden stated that “America and the world lost an extraordinary leader, statesman and humanitarian” and ordered U.S. flags to be lowered half-mast for 30 days of morning in accordance with federal law. President-elect Donald Trump said Carter, “Did everything in his power to improve the lives of all Americans.” Former presidents Barack Obama, George W. Bush, and Bill Clinton paid tribute to Carter, as did former vice president Al Gore. Senator Bernie Sanders, for whom Carter voted during the 2016 Democratic Party presidential primaries, stated that “Jimmy Carter, both for what he did as president and in his later years, will be remembered as a decent, honest and down-to-earth man.” Across Georgia’s political landscape, his death was also mourned by Governor Brian Kemp and many others, both Republicans and Democrats.



**Carter Volunteering with
Habitat for Humanity**

He Was a Christian First

Former President Carter had a strong belief and devotion to God and it showed in all his actions

The author of this article, Larry McDowell, studied history at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, decades before becoming a minister and Dean of MBC. He offers a unique perspective on the times of Carter’s presidency. Larry covered the Carter presidential campaign in Birmingham for Independent Press and debated Senator John Sparkman on the Panama Canal Treaty as a graduate student. He supported the ideal of a treaty eventually due to the strong-handed gunboat diplomacy we used get the Canal Zone, but did not want to give it to a dictator. Larry resided in Panama for 3 years in the early 70’s.

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Jimmy Carter Teaching Sunday School at Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, GA



**Carter in the Navy with
Love Note to Roselyn**

throughout life, before, during and after the presidency. His secret service nickname was "Deacon". He constantly sought peace in his term in office and his successful Camp David Accords brought peace between Egypt and Israel which still exists today. In his post-presidency, he is known for his efforts at diplomacy for peace sent by presidents to areas around the world, his work to help the poor get housing through Habitat for Humanity, and his decades of teaching Sunday School at Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, GA.

He was the most honest, ethical, forthright and moral president in the history of the United States. While this was refreshing in the early years after Watergate and the Vietnam war, it did get him in trouble on several occasions. As a Democratic nominee for president in 1976, he was interviewed by Playboy magazine, where he stated, "I've committed adultery in my heart many times." Although the article included other remarks related to Carter's faith, such as the separation of church and state, a conviction of his Southern Baptist upbringing, the adultery comment opened a rift with other Christians. Rev. Jerry Falwell told the Washington Post at the time, "I am quite disillusioned."

America was not accustomed to such honesty. It was probably the first time that a man running for president publicly admitted his sins. Even though they were sins of thought rather than deed, compared to the adultery, alleged rape, use of multiple bankruptcies to steal from others, felonious conviction, incitement of insurrection, and constant lies of the current holder of the office. We all know that his love of Roselyn was above reproach and we have no doubt that he was faithful.

Also rejected by the American people in the ensuing years was his honesty and moral stance to hold the United States to a higher moral standard in foreign relations and conduct throughout the world. With a history of "dirty tricks", cold war assassinations, gunboat diplomacy, "Manifest Destiny", etc., Carter sought to right some wrongs. From a strategic and national security viewpoint, some of these actions were seen as detrimental to American interests. Yet, he continued to take the moral high ground, resolving decades of animosity between the United States and the people of Panama with the Panama Canal Treaty and seeking elsewhere to have better relations with countries that we had looked down upon in the past.



Governor Carter

Diplomacy and Legacy

Jimmy Carter sought to do the right thing, removing troops from Taiwan and had a desire to phase down the troop presence in South Korea as well. Former President Carter felt he had an obligation to stop supporting dictators just because they would support us against the Iron Curtain powers. At that time, the governments of Taiwan and South Korea were ruled by strong men who were little more than dictators. Carter felt that troop presence gave the impression of propping up these strong men while giving only a wink at democracy which was fragile at best in these countries. Carter felt that troop presence gave the impression of propping up these strong men while giving only a wink at democracy. He also continued to enforce Former President Ford's 1976 executive order that prohibited government employees from engaging in "political assassination", which was a real practice during the previous era.

He did successfully draw down Taiwan. However, he met strong headwinds from congress, the national security apparatus and the Pentagon concerning Korea. However, Carter new these dictators for who they were at the time.

In Taiwan, democracy was almost non-existent and mostly one-party. Chiang Ching-kuo, was son of Chiang Kai-shek, the iron ruler from 1950 to 1975. President Ching-kuo (1978-1988) was in charge during the White Terror era, Martial Law era, the Kaohsiung Incident trials, the murders of former Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) chairman Lin I-hsiung's (林義雄) family members and the death of democracy advocate Chen Wen-chen (陳文成). At the same time, he maintained a staunch opposition to Chinese communists, later on he declared that the Chiang family would renounce hereditary succession, worked to "Taiwanize" the government by launching democratic re-

forms, brought the dangwai (黨外, "outside the party") movement in from the cold and allowed the founding of the DPP in 1986. His ending of U.S. diplomatic relations with the Republic of China still haunt us to this day as mainland China becomes bolder in their threats to take the island nation.

Meanwhile, the strong ruler of South Korea during that era was Park Chung Hee. Many of his activities caused uprisings, especially amongst university students. He supported harsh work hours and repression and called martial law numerous times, including a long-term national curfew. His Emergency Measure No. 9 in May 1975 included prohibition of any criticism of him. There was little freedom under his regime and no real democracy. He fell from grace due to his declining relations with the United States, especially under Carter who demanded better human rights policies. Eventually, in October 1979, Park was assassinated by his KCIA director Kim Chae-gyu.

While what Carter did can seem naïve and against our best national interest, he did it in his incessant need to promote peace and to do the right thing. It was the Iran hostage crisis and his seeming inability to bring it to a close, the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan, and the oil crisis as a result of the Iran embargo that caused the downfall of his presidency by Ronald Reagan.

A Life Well-Lived Early Years

Jimmy Carter was born on October 1st of 1924, in Plains, Georgia at the Wise Sanitarium where his mother worked as a registered nurse. He became the first American president born in a hospital. His father was a successful local businessman who ran a general store and invested in farmland. His father moved to a nearby farm when he was an infant and his family benefitted during the depression from the New Deal farm-



Portrait of the 39th President

ing subsidies getting them through the hard times. He played basketball and was a member of future Farmers of America. One anecdote has it that he would have been valedictorian had not the been an incident of truancy.

Carter's father was in the Army reserves during World War I, so it is not surprising that Carter wanted to follow with military service. He had long dreamed of attending the United States Naval Academy. First, however, he began coursework in engineering at Georgia Southwestern College, to later transfer to Georgia Tech. He took part in ROTC at Georgia Institute of Technology and the president at Georgia Tech encouraged him to join the Naval Academy, so in 1943, he received an appointment to the Naval Academy from U. S. Representative Stephen Pace. He graduate with a Bachelor of Science in 1946. He then married his long love Rosalynn Smith on July 7, 1946.

During his military career that spanned 1946 to 1953, the Carters lived in Virginia, Hawaii, Connecticut, New York and California during his deployments as a submariner officer in the Atlantic and Pacific fleets. He was part of the original officers to be part of the nuclear submarine program under then Captain Hyman G. Rickover, for whom Carter had much regard. He had intended to make a career

of the Navy, but after his father died of cancer, he decided to leave the service to take over the family peanut farm. He left the service in October 9, 1953 and served in the inactive Navy Reserve until 1961. His awards included the American Campaign Medal, World War II Victory Medal, China Service Medal and National Defense Service Medal, as well as his submarine officer "Dolphin" badge.

Political Career

As racial tension increased in Plains by the 1954 decision on Brown v. Board of Education, Carter favored racial tolerance and integration but often kept those feelings to himself to avoid making enemies. He grew up with many black children of farm workers in a mostly black area near Plains. He began to speak up more of integration as a member of his church and as chairman of the Sumter County school board. He served as state senator from 1963 to 1967. He ran for Governor in 1966, but came in third, forcing a runoff. He succeeded in 1970 and served from 1971 to 1975. However, in his run for governor he courted segregationist support from the likes of George Wallace and others. While he did go against busing to enforce segregation, he did add black state employees and the portraits of three prominent black Georgians to the capitol building: Martin Luther King Jr., Lucy Craft Laney, and Henry McNeal Turner, angering the KKK.

Unable to succeed himself as Governor under the Georgia constitution, he became active in national politics, attending as a delegate to the convention in 1972. With David Rockefeller's endorsement, he became chairman of the Democratic National Committee's congressional and gubernatorial campaigns. He announced his presidential campaign in 1974, being a long-shot and little known at the time. In answer to his lack of recognition, he was fond of saying, "My name is Jimmy Carter, and I'm running for president." The strate-

gy worked and he was ahead in the polls, as the Watergate scandal was still fresh in voters' minds. He became a Democratic front-runner early on by winning the Iowa caucuses. He appealed mostly to conservative Christian and rural voters who could relate to him. Despite the setback with the Playboy interview, it came late enough not to have any affect on his success in the election.

Carter's presidency had a troubled economic circumstances with stagflation and high unemployment in the first two years followed by high inflation due to high interest rates, oil shortages and slow economic growth. His Public Works Employment Act of 1977 brought an increase in median income. But the energy crisis, both real due to Iran and artificial due to the doubling of crude oil prices by OPEC made the problem worse. His mandated 55 mph national speed limit to conserve energy, though of a little help, was greatly unpopular with professional drivers and the American population as a whole.

This was what Carter was plagued with in his reelection campaign of 1980, along with the Iran hostage situation that dragged on. The latter was also somewhat artificial. According to the *Intelligencer*, A former Texas lawmaker, compelled by the news of former president Jimmy Carter entering hospice care, came forward to reveal that there was, in fact, a secret GOP effort in 1980 to prevent Iran from releasing more than 50 Americans hostages until after that year's presidential election. Former Texas lieutenant governor Ben Barnes, 85, told the New York Times that in the summer of 1980, he accompanied his mentor and one-time business partner, former Texas governor John Connally, on a trip to the Middle East during which Connally asked Arab leaders to communicate to Iranian officials that they should not release the hostages before Election Day because if they waited, Ronald Reagan would offer them a better deal. dd all of these problems with

a serious challenge by Teddy Kennedy during the Democratic primary, and the total impact was insurmountable. Carter would become a one-term president.

Major Achievements

On the environment, Carter signed the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 which regulated strip mining. He declared a federal emergency in

Connally asked Arab leaders to communicate to Iranian officials that they should not release the hostages before Election Day because if they waited, Ronald Reagan would offer them a better deal.

the Love Canal neighborhood of Niagara Falls, New York whose neighborhood was evacuated because it was on top of a toxic waste landfill.

Carter had poor relations with Congress. He avoided phone calls from members and often was accused of insulting them. His integrity would not allow him to return political favors or give even the slightest hint of favoritism for political gain.

He was able to deregulate the airlines and made it legal to sell malt, hops and yeast to American home brewers for the first time since the beginning of prohibition. He bailed out Chrysler, saving one of the big-three auto manufactures for the first time (Obama would do that once again all auto manufacturers after the G.W. Bush recession).

He elevated Education to a cabinet post through the Department of Education Organization Act and expanded Head Start program, both of which have become targets of the current administration. Certainly they frown on the Carter extension of Head Start to Mexican migrants.

Again, in foreign policy, his peace accords brought peace be-

tween Israel and Egypt that has held. They were in conflict since not only the inception of the modern state of Israel, but since biblical times and millennia. He also signed the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty II with Leonid Brezhnev in June of 1979

Supporters of Jimmy Carter chalked his 1980 loss as a person who served during turbulent times and did the best he could. His detractors called his a failed leadership and a president who would not do what was necessary to keep America strong, regardless of how dirty we have to be to do so. However, his real legacy came after he left office.

Post-Presidency

Diplomacy was a large part of Carter's post-presidency. It began with a meeting with prime minister of Israel Menachem Begin in 1981 and a tour of Egypt that included meeting with members of the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1983. Official files revealed that in January 1993, Carter have been suggested for a role in the Northern Ireland peace process. However, Clinton did request Carter's assistance in a North Korea peace mission. Carter negotiated an understanding with Kim Il Sung.

In 1982, Carter founded the Carter Center, a non-profit organization that worked with the World Health Organization to eradicate dracunculiasis, guinea worm disease which helped to lower the cases from 3.5 million in the mid-1960's to 25 cases in 2016. The center also worked to promote human rights around the world.

Carter worked regularly with Habitat for Humanity and taught Sunday school at Maranata Baptist Church in Plains. As president, he popularized the term "Born Again". He was influenced by a sermon as a young man that asked, "If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" He was a great role-model for American Christians when it came to faith and moral

values. He may have failed as a leader in some respects and history seems to bare this out. However, he was a president that never embarrassed us with issues of morality, integrity, honesty or a pretension of faith in God simply for political purposes. We can only pray that the current president might learn from his example. We have lost a good and Godly man who is now with the Lord.

Commentary

While I may not have agreed on everything Jimmy Carter did as President, nor some of his opinions given post-presidency, I did respect his love and devotion to the Lord and his honesty, integrity and moral values. We have lost a moral compass for our nation at a time when it seems to be pointing towards evil in our government..

I first took an interest as I covered the Carter campaign in Birmingham, Alabama for Independent Press. I was there in the press conference in the airport terminal, being almost knocked over by an NBC cameraman. He was met by Governor George Wallace who was in a wheel chair. They had good relations when he was a governor. I went on to take pictures of them both at a meeting room press conference in the Hyatt Hotel (now the Sheraton) at the Birmingham Civic Center. It was there that my 70's fashion of long hair and a goatee caught the eye of the secret service and I was forcefully removed, despite my city of Birmingham press credentials. I was impressed with the candidate and found his smile infectious. It was different from the stalworth looks of previous presidents and the tricky Nixon look or which I had become accustomed. Having voted for Nixon I happily voted for the optimism of this newcomer, as did many of my fellow Southerners. I think it will take time, but when put into historical perspective, I have always wondered how presidents in better times and circumstances would have faired in the turmoil and economic times of the late seventies. We know that Obama and Biden took downturns in the economy and made them better, but could some of the Republican presidents have done any better than Carter? As Jimmy went to meet our Lord, I am certain he was met with, "I knew you well".

The Potluck

Church Social Recipes

Macaroni and Cheese Casserole



by Hong Tan

This is a tried and true potluck comfort food that graces many of the tables at church potluck dinners. This is a version that has served generations of family and several of the church socials we have attended.
Hong

Ingredients:

1 ½ cups elbow macaroni
¼ cup butter
3 tbs butter
1 ½ tbs flour
1 ½ cups milk
1 tsp salt
¼ tsp black pepper
½ tsp garlic salt
1 cup shredded mild cheddar cheese
1 cup breadcrumbs

Preheat oven to 350° F. Cook the macaroni al dente and drain.

Melt 3 tbs butter in a wok or skillet, then quickly stir breadcrumbs in the pan while sprinkling the garlic salt into the mix until thoroughly mixed, then remove. In a saucepan, melt ¼ cup butter, stir in the flour until there are no lumps, then add the milk, black pepper, and salt. Slowly add the shredded cheese until melted thoroughly, then remove.

Put macaroni into a 9-inch square baking pan, then add milk and cheese mixture evenly over the noodles. Sprinkle bread mixture evenly over the top. Bake uncovered for 25 to 30 minutes until browned, or milk and cheese mixture is firm. You can double recipe using a 9x13 baking dish for more servings.

Option: Sprinkle ½ cup of mozzarella cheese before breadcrumbs.



Pulpit Humor

A new monk arrives at the monastery. He is assigned to help the other monks in copying the old texts by hand. He notices, however, that they are copying from copies, not the original manuscripts. So, the new monk goes to the head monk to ask him about this, pointing out that if there were an error in the first copy, that error would be continued in all of the subsequent copies.

The head monk says, "We have been copying from the copies for centuries, but you make a good point, my son."

So, he goes down into the cellar with one of the copies to check it against the original. Hours go by and nobody sees him. So, one of the monks goes downstairs to look for him. Hearing sobbing coming from the back of the cellar, he finds the old monk leaning over one of the original books crying. He asks the old monk what's wrong, and in a choked voice came the reply, "The word is celebrate."

* ~ *

His wife's graveside service was just barely finished, when there was a massive clap of thunder, followed by a tremendous bolt of lightning, accompanied by even more thunder rumbling in the distance. The little, old man looked at the pastor and calmly said, "Well, she's there."

* ~ *

When down in the mouth, remember Jonah. He came out all right.

* ~ *

"Here lies an atheist. All dressed up and no place to go." — a tombstone in Thurmont, Maryland



Trump Is Back

Washington, D.C., Jan. 20, 2025 -

On this date, Donald Trump returned to power as the 47th president of the United States. In his inaugural address he promised that, "the golden age of America begins right now." and "From this day forward, our country will flourish and be respected again all over the world." The 30-minute speech, held indoors in the Capitol Rotunda, was also full of disrespect for his predecessors and the promise of reversal of many of Biden's policies that took us out of the pandemic recession.

His promises included terminating spending on the Green New Deal, referring to Biden's Inflation Reduction Act, which included spending to address climate change. He would declare a national emergency at the southern border. He stated that there would be only two genders, in a slam against trans people. He promised to bring back free speech and end government censorship, referring what government employees stating, "here are the things government employees will be no longer allowed to say about sex, gender, and race." He promised an end to DEI policies. He stated that the U.S. would unilaterally change the name of the Gulf of Mexico to the "Gulf of America". He also promised tariffs on many countries who do not tow his line on immigration and China, just because. Buckle up Americans, the wild man is back in power and it's going to be a rough ride!

Commentary

Trump promises to bring back an emphasis on fossil fuels and quit alternate energy programs at a time when for years we have seen an increase in the oceans' temperature due to global warming caused in great measure do to those same fossil fuels. Trillions in damages due to hurricanes, droughts and fires, and flooding can trace their cause to the same global warming that

our president refuses to address for the short-term millions his finance campaign supporters will gain from profits and to the expense of putting the lives of billions around the world at harm. The crack down on aliens in our country will cost trillions in implementation and the loss to national industries unable to find labor for their workforce. We addressed this last month. However, facts and figures, logic and reason, have no place in the current administration that have in the first 11 days of his administration began to fire many of the competent and experienced people in our government capable of actually governing and providing what the American people need. He began to remove the inspector generals who are the responsible in preventing fraud, waste and abuse in the government, allowing him and his cronies a blank check, taking us back to the days of nineteenth and twentieth century graft and corruption. He has already had to reverse some of his decisions as he realized it would greatly harm the actual functions of government that make the country go.

However, he keeps filling the government with unqualified individuals whose main qualification is that they will say "Yes!" to him regardless of how illegal, immoral and corrupt the demand. We will get a director of National Intelligence in Tulsi Gabbard who admired the former dictator of Syria, Bashad Assad and made other controversial comments about Ukraine and Russia. Already, our allies have stated that with her in charge, they will refuse to share intelligence with us as they consider her a security risk. We already have a Defense Department head whose administrative experience in the DOD is actually much less than my own as former senior systems controller of the army in Europe working for the DCOPS 5th Signal Command for three years. I led more men (up to 400 soldiers and 8 noncommissioned officers at one time), spent 20 years in active military service, and was responsible for the operational overlook of billions in assets, unlike the alcoholic and misogynist Hegseth who ran his Veteran organizations into the ground, I helped to keep our communications assets in Europe toing strong. As an Equal Opportunity NCO in two units, I

Moreover, look for able men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe, and place such men over the people...Exodus 18:21

trained others against sexual harassment and assault, while Hegseth paid settlements for those very crimes. Yet, I do not consider myself to be qualified to be the Secretary of Defense! How in the world is he, as a glorified pencil pusher in public affairs? Oh yeah, I was also in public affairs as an additional duty in Okinawa—can I be DOD head? No, I forgot the most important qualification in the Trump administration, a fealty to Trump, not the Constitution.

Then, there is the slap in the face to the over 140 police officers assaulted and four for whose deaths were associated with the January 6th, 2020 attack. There 1000+ rioters pardoned or given commuted sentences by Trump for their crimes. How dare you? Bad enough you will not be seeing justice for inciting that insurrection against the Congress of the United States.

Born in the United States of non-U.S. citizens? Don't worry, you are protected by the 14th amendment to the Constitution, as Trump found out when his executive order was blocked by a federal judge.

Ever walk through the capitol building? Every time I walked through those hallowed halls, I felt an almost reverence, much like I feel when walking into a church. How dare you?

Again, buckle up America! It is going to be a wild ride with tariffs aimed to score the highest inflation in the history of the United States. I'll be here for the ride with you and will help get you past the propaganda of the right wing media that has heretofore informed many of my fellow evangelicals with their misinformation and lies. I know some of you find my writing repulsive, but the truth can be hard to swallow, especially when you have either not been paying attention or getting your only news from sources known for paying millions or even billions all together for lying.

Thousands Return to Northern Gaza as Part of Ceasefire

Deir Al-Balah, Gaza Strip, Jan. 24, 2025 -

There is a cease-fire deal which has concluded with the return of Gaza residents to the north for the first time since the beginning of the 15-mone war between Israel and Hamas.

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Feature Article

Modern Church Counseling Ministry

By Larry McDowell

Initially and historically, counseling in the church was accomplished by the pastor or pastors of a church. If needs grew to the point where the pastor needed assistance, it was usually the role of the deacons or elders to provide such guidance to members as needed. Biblical and spiritual guidance from these ordained ministers, deacons and elders resolved a number of issues spiritual, behavioral and personal in nature.

As the twentieth century advanced and church members began using external counseling sources, such as professional counselors, group therapists, psychologists or psychiatrists, larger churches sought to install their own professional counselors and eventually counseling centers that were biblically based in nature. As modern stress and factors increased the number of hurting people, lay counselors were trained and added to the mix. Even smaller churches with limited resources have added lay counselors. This article addresses the makeup and requirements of such a church counseling center.

As for the need for such a center, conservative Christians are more and more demanding a biblical and Christian approach to counseling. Stephen Greggo wrote in an article in *Trinity Journal*, "Is a medical or ministry context the most appropriate setting for the treatment, correction, or care called for in these illustrative examples? Theories of etiology and intervention associated with psychiatric and psychological treatment are based upon models of pathology and anthropology that may not be consistent with human beings created in the image of God (Gen 1:26-28). Secular models that utilize evolutionary, deterministic,

disease, or environmental assumptions are prominent. Thus, evangelicals seeking to be faithful to the authority of Scripture may react and resist assistance from MHPs."

Defining Biblical Counseling for the Local Church and Community

1 Thessalonians 5:14 states, "And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all." (ESV) Admonish also means to counsel, in this context, about something negative. Nevertheless, we are encouraged in scripture to seek wise counsel. James 3:17 states "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere." (ESV) Therefore, counseling should be biblically based as God's Word is the source of His wisdom and can help many to achieve a good life. As Psalm 73:24 states, "You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory."

Mature Christians have the experience of the gifts of the Spirit and have few hurts that require counseling. It will usually be newer members and attenders, some who have experienced grief or hurt and those who have been referred to the church from the community. The need for counseling has increased significantly over the past several decades in the stresses of modern society and the harmful affects of the world in sin. We can not only serve our membership, but we should serve others in the community. Spiritual guidance may encourage them to seek the fellowship of the church to continue their healing process.

In addition to this, it is important that the church meet these needs, as there are some in the

community who may not be as scrupulous. They are as Richard Hall wrote in *Foundations of Exchanges Life Counseling*: "unscrupulous people who are ready to prey on these hurting people for their own personal benefit. Because there are no government licensing procedures for religious counseling, some of these people will set themselves up as Religious, or Christian counselors." Charles Solomon in the *Handbook for Christ-Centered Counseling* sums up the need for biblically based counseling from the church:

Since the 1970's there has been a resurgence of approaches to counseling based on the Word of God. It will become increasingly the case as the world situation continues to darken and the various approaches to therapy are forcibly stripped of their veneer, revealing their lack of foundation in Truth. Given a situation where only committed Christians who can transcend this world system are able to stand, the best therapists are bound to fall as their foundations crumble.

Goals of the Biblical Counseling Ministry

The goals of the biblical counseling ministry are as follows:

- Assist the pastor in some of the load from the pastoral counseling.
- Create a place where hurting people in the church can find relief.
- Create a place where hurting people in the community can get access to spiritual and biblical counseling not found in outside the church.
- Encourage members and community members to seek God's Word and spiritual help for their problems.
- Disciple people that they may become mature Christians.

Developing Guidelines

The following procedures need to be developed to implement biblical counseling solutions in a manner that will be efficient, safe, more professional and cause the least risk to the church. Once these are in place, the counseling center will operate more efficiently and within parameters that will provide the best services to hurting people.

A. Develop A Procedural Manual for Biblical Counseling

A procedural manual for biblical counseling needs to be developed for the counseling center. It should address the following concerns.

Intake and assessment procedures: A standard intake form needs to be developed to obtain basic information about the client and their presenting problem. Procedures and requirements need to be developed concerning intake and assessment so that they will be consistent in nature and essential information is received.

Ethical guidelines for counseling: Local and state requirements need to be listed and ethical guidelines developed for counselors, both professional and lay counselors in the center. Of most importance is the emphasis on client confidentiality. The seven virtues by Clinton and Ohschlager as stated on page 448 of *Competent Christian Counseling: Foundations and Practice of Compassionate Soul Care, Volume One* would be a good guide where not specified.

Diagnosis and treatment procedures: Diagnosis and treatment procedures should be developed and maintained as changes occur. It is important that diagnosis is only conducted by the professional counselors in the center. Lay helpers and counselors must refer to the professionals for any needed diagnosis. Treatment should be significantly biblically based from lay helpers and counselors or left up to the professionals on staff. Lay counselors and helpers should not be part of a long-term counseling process, but if further counseling is needed after three or four sessions, they should refer to the professional counselors.

Follow-up procedures: All counselors, lay counselors and lay helpers should follow-up on each an every client within a month of the last counseling session. At that time, they should determine if further follow-up is needed. If long-term counseling is needed, a referral to a professional should be considered.

External referral procedures: The professional counselors are the last internal referral. If they determine that a client needs extensive help or that the problem

is not within the scope of their knowledge and resources, they should maintain an external referral list for the clients. The list should not be too limited as to indicate bias towards a specific counselor, psychologist, psychiatrist, etc.

Develop a hierarchy for internal advice and referral: Internally, minor problems or spiritual problems should be assigned to lay helpers. Problems may be sent to counselors who specialize, such as one who specializes in Marriage and Family counseling. Lay counselors may take more difficult problems or screen for problems at the intake that may need referral to the professional counselors.

B. Develop a Risk Management Guide for the Counseling Program

The director of the counseling center is responsible for maintaining a risk management guide and maintain the ethical guidelines for the counseling center. It is important that these guidelines be up to date to include the latest local laws and state requirements.

Resources

Salaried Resources Available for Counseling

Pastors - The senior pastor and associate pastors should be available for counseling or referral of clients as they are the front line to the congregation. The associate pastors who have a segment of the congregation under their responsibility, should be the first line of counseling for their constituency. For example, the Children's Pastor and Youth Pastor would make themselves available for their age groups.

Professional Counselors – As case load requires, professional counselors would be used for the more difficult cases. They would require degrees in counseling or psychology, as well as possess a strong biblical knowledge and knowledge of biblical counseling. One of these counselors will be appointed as director of the counseling center. It is important when employing internal and external professional counselors, that they understand the basic needs of our church members. As Jennifer Bornsheuer wrote in *Counseling & Values*, "Counselors seeking to work with conservative Christian clients who want their values and beliefs incorporated in counseling sessions should attempt to establish relationships with pastors from conservative Christian churches in an effort to gain additional information concerning the beliefs and to develop collaborative relationships so that counselors could consult with these pastors and vice versa."

Lay/Volunteer Resources Available for Counseling

Deacons - The deacons would be our first line of

lay helpers and should be apportioned members from the membership roll for whom they make themselves known as “their deacon”. They should contact their assigned members periodically, preferably once a month, but at least quarterly. Their primary focus would be spiritual counseling and possible referral of personal problems to the counseling center.

Lay Helpers – Lay helpers would be minimally trained counselors who can provide people with discipleship, spiritual guidance and biblical resources for their problems. They would be a friend and a mentor to hurting members.

Lay Counselors – Lay counselors would receive significantly more training than lay helpers and be trained in handling a wider array of problems from hurting people. They would also be the first line of assignment and screening for the more difficult problems that are referred to the counseling department.

Training Lay/Volunteer Resources for Counseling

Lay counselors and lay helpers should receive training in counseling conducted through the counseling center. The primary responsibility of the training of Deacons in spiritual counseling and requirements for lay helping resides in the Senior Pastor. The Senior Pastor is also the person responsible for developing and training the associate pastors for counseling.

Develop a training program – The Director of the counseling center is responsible for developing training for lay counselors and lay helpers. The lay counselor will receive a significant number of hours of training compared to the lay helpers. Both will receive significant training in counseling ethics. The Senior Pastor will ensure that associate pastors and deacons receive sufficient training and guidance as counselors. I would incorporate the five points given by Tan in *Lay Counseling, Equipping Christians for a Helping Ministry* for the training as a guideline:

1. The need for security (love), significance (meaning or impact), and hope (forgiveness) are among the basic psychological and spiritual needs or longings of human beings.
2. The basic problem of human beings is sin; however, not all emotional suffering is due to personal sin. Suffering may be due to the effects of other people’s sins on us, or it may come simply because we live in a fallen world. Paradoxically, it may also be due to obedience to God’s will (such as the sufferings of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and eventually on the cross).
3. The ultimate purpose of humanity is to know God and to enjoy him forever (i.e. to enjoy spiritual health).
4. Problem feelings are usually due to problem be-



- havior and, more fundamentally, problem thinking.
5. A holistic view of people must include the physical, mental-emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions (see Luke 2:52).

Recruiting and background checks of people to train

– The church administrator is responsible to ensure that all counselors, lay counselors and lay helpers are screened with background checks. Recruiting requirements for lay counselors and lay helpers will be developed by the Director of the counseling center so that important aspects needed in a counselor are met, such as personality, biblical background, Christian maturity and patience. All candidates should be interviewed by professional counselor at the center.

Conducting the training program – All training of lay counselors and lay helpers should be conducted by professional counselors. The supervision of such counseling is the responsibility of the Director of the counseling center.

Deploying Resources for Best Effect

Assigning clients to counseling personnel is the responsibility of the Counseling center administrative assistant based on availability of counseling personnel and initial assessment. There should be guidelines for the administrative assistant in assignment. Lay counselors will be the first line of screening to determine if referral to a professional counselor is needed. The administrative assistant will seek the advice of the Director of the counseling center or a professional counselor should emergency referral seem to be needed.

The bibliography in this article contains a number of books and other references that can facilitate training and provide the source material for building the counseling program. One important reference that

outlines programs and helpful guides to a number of issues that would be useful for the counseling center. is the “Counseling Assistance Tool Kit” contained in Chapter 9 of *Christ Centered Therapy* by Anderson et.al.

Biblical Counseling Programs

Biblical counseling programs essential to the needs of the church are as follows:

Spiritual Counseling

Spiritual counseling is that counseling primarily focused on discipleship and building mature Christians within the church. These needs can be met as follows:

Pastoral counseling – The Senior Pastor is the primary source of pastoral counseling; however, the associate pastors would assist him and be the first line of screening. They would determine if the problem needs to be elevated to the Senior Pastor. Unfortunately, many pastors are undertrained or uninterested in the area of pastoral counseling. Paul David Tripp ran into this problem when teaching the one required counseling course in the MDiv program in a seminary. He wrote in *Dangerous Calling* that his solution was to shock them into taking an interest:

“I wanted my students to understand that they are called not just to preach exegetically correct and theologically precise sermons but also to pastor people, to walk, live, support and suffer with them.”
Tripp

“I decided that I would come to each semester armed with a catalog of pastoral horror stories- you know, the kinds of things no pastor really wants to deal with but which all pastors do. I told my students stories of late-night calls from wives who have just been slugged by their husbands, of the grief of the mother who has discovered her fifteen-year-old daughter is pregnant, of standing with a mom and dad before the casket of their four-year-old son, of the hours with the severely depressed person or with the man who has spent his family into financial disaster... I wanted my students to understand that they are called not just to preach exegetically correct and theologically precise sermons but also to pastor people, to walk live, support and suffer with them.”

It is the Senior Pastor who needs to shock the associate pastors into meeting this responsibility. This will facilitate the sharing of the load in this area. The counseling center is established to help with this load, but the pastors are sometimes the first call made in many instances and they need to be prepared to deal with these problems before any referral can be made to the counseling center.

However, pastors are cautioned from becoming professional counselors with a world or scientific view of counseling. Fitch wrote in an article in *Pastoral Psychology*, “Preachers must become descriptors, skilled in displaying the realities of the world, under the Cross and the lordship of Christ, that expose our sin and call us to a higher way of living. They can learn from the human sciences, but they must interpret their lives, the life of their congregation, and the human sciences from the lens of Scripture, recognizing that psychology is another sometimes foreign narrative understanding of how to live life.”

Lay counseling – Deacons and lay helpers are the primary source and front-line of spiritual counseling, referring those that are beyond their abilities to one of the associate pastors.

Marriage and Family Counseling

While lay helpers may be a friend and help those unsure of their problems in marital family counseling, offering biblical advice on the subject, serious problems should immediately be referred to the better trained lay counselors. Lay counselors are cautioned against counseling that may require multiple sessions or assessments that determine a number of irreconcilable problems. In those cases, it is best to refer this type of counseling to the professionals.

Marriage counseling – Marriage counseling should be biblical based and address sin as a common contribution to marital problems. Worthington wrote in *Christian Marital Counseling* that “Marriage is held in highest esteem by Jesus as a metaphor for Israel’s relationship with God, our spiritual relationship with Jesus, and the church’s spiritual relationship with Jesus.” Therefore, it is biblically important that marital problems be address biblically. As for specifics, there is an example:

Ephesians 5, verses 22-23, seem to be the most referred to, most quoted passage by those trying to understand God’s plan for marriage. But it is necessary to include verses 18-21 in order to get at the heart of God’s marriage plan. For a long time, these seemed like disconnected passages. Verses 18-21 seemed so spiritual, because they are about being filled with the Spirit. Paul began the teaching on family relationships with the command to “be filled with the Spirit.” And the reason he did so is because of how deeply *the curse* has infiltrated husband-wife... relationships.

Marriage counseling can be a difficult area of counseling fraught with many problems. Those who

do extensive marriage counseling should have or obtain specific training in this area.

Family counseling – Family and child counseling should be conducted, once again, by those with specific training in the field. While lay counselors may take assessments and make initial contact, serious problems should be referred to the professional.

1. Family group counseling. The family counseling should be addressed initially as a group, although parents may insist leaving out a child if the child is at issue. Similarly, one parent may wish a private session if the other parent is considered at issue in the presenting problem. If it is determined that there are problems requiring one on one with specific family members, such as child abuse, this should be taken into account.

2. Parenting counseling. Parents may be counseled together or separately as needed in parenting problems. Problems may also require an interview of the child and possible child counseling. Köstenberger in *god, Marriage, and Family* wrote, “The challenging task of raising and disciplining children requires great wisdom from Christian parents. In the end, parents are God’s instruments in the lives of their children, and God’s temporary agents in training their sons and daughters in the way they should go so that when then are old, they will not depart from it (Prov. 22:6).”

3. Child counseling. As child counseling is many times requested by parents, nevertheless, interviews with parents should determine if there is a problem with parenting skills and training as well. As with all counseling, it should be biblically based, but put at a level where the child can understand. One of the more common problems being dealt with is the diagnosis and treatment of the ADHD child. This should be dealt with by the professional counselor. Often medication will need to be prescribed and if there is no one on staff who can do that, a referral will need to be made. A helpful reference is chapter 11, “Dealing with the ADHD Child”, in the book *The New Strong-Willed Child* by Dobson.

Substance Abuse and Small Group Counseling – If the needs are great enough, small groups may be put together at the direction of the Director of the coun-

seling center and led by professional counselor or a lay counselor who has experienced the problems the group is addressing.

Summary

These are minimal guidelines and more specific direction will come from the counseling manual. This is more of a proposal for planning a counseling center. Scope of personnel and needs may begin with a much more modest effort. For example, small churches may simply train their deacons to provide lay counseling that complements the Senior pastor’s pastoral training. Medium churches may begin by training lay counselors and lay helpers, if funds are unavailable for a professional counseling staff and admin-

Another example is a parent who comes to a counselor about the extramarital sex of an adolescent. Some lay counselors would once again approach this as a problem on behalf of the parent, suggesting that premarital sex is normal from a world view. Therefore, it is important that the parent have a counselor they can go to that can offer them advice that fits the Christian world view. It is hoped that the counselor can also provide biblical support for their advice.

istration.

The most important concept concerning the center is the emphasis on biblical based counseling. Our members and evangelical Christians in general, are becoming more demanding in seeking out solutions to their problems. They are wary of worldview counselors, psychologists and psychiatrists who may or may not understand their own Christian view. The world view of Christians is indeed biblical and a professional without a Christian background will not understand the needs of Christians. That is why it is so important for churches to fill this need.

Then we must also look as the historical perspective of counseling. Counseling was originally within the purview of the church. It is only in little over a century that outside persons have adopted this role. Traditionally, Christians went to their pastors for counseling and advice concerning their personal and emotional problems. Historically, this is the natural manner in which a member of the church sought out help and should continue to be the norm, even in modern society.

Things scientific and lay beliefs sometimes run contrary to our root beliefs and some counseling methods consist of solutions that are totally against our own beliefs. For example, a parent may come to a lay counselor complaining about a child who has gay tendencies. A typical lay solution to this might be that the parent has the problem and must adjust themselves to the gender choice of that child. This is totally against the biblical upbringing of most Christians and an abomination under our own beliefs. Only a Christian approach to the problem will a help re-

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solve such a problem for a Christian parent.

Another example is a parent who comes to a counselor about the extramarital sex of an adolescent. Some lay counselors would once again approach this as a problem on behalf of the parent, suggesting that premarital sex is normal from a world view. Therefore, it is important that the parent have a counselor they can go to that can offer them advice that fits the Christian world view. It is hoped that the counselor can also provide biblical support for their advice. This is simply beyond the ability of most lay counselors, psychologists and psychiatrists.

In summary, we need the counseling center to meet the needs of our church members and as a possible outreach to community member outside the church as well. We need this center because it is a safe approach to counseling for Christian members who will not accept lay counseling that runs contrary to their own beliefs. And finally, we need this center because it provides a biblical approach to counseling that is also safe, because it is not being abused by charlatans pretending to be biblical or Christian counselors, who might prey on Christians, yet not have the background or expertise and understanding to indeed do biblical counseling. Great harm can come from bad counseling, and great harm can be done to our members if lay counselors insist on counseling solutions and world views contrary to their beliefs.

Therefore, I offer this as a solution to our needs. A guideline for a Christian counseling center for our church is the best solution. The bible is the best source of solutions to the personal and emotional problems of Christians. It is a

guide to the holy spirit which is the best source of healing for Christians. The Word of God is a comfort and the Holy Spirit of God is a power than can heal the most trouble Christians. The bible is the best guide for Christian advice and counsel and the church is the best place for Christians to go with their problems. Following the guidelines in this work, it is hope that the church can become a beacon for hope in our community.

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There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings Healing

Proverbs 12:18 ESV

CP Sermon Series

The Churches of Revelation—Smyrna

Satan's Persecution of the Church—Smyrna

Revelation 2 (ESV)

8 “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.

9 “‘I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.

According to history, the church at Smyrna was a prosperous city, however the Christians there were poor. The Greek word for poor in this context actually meant abject poverty. They were in poverty because they were persecuted for being Christians, were robbed and lost their jobs.

Hebrews 10:34 tells these early Christians to “joyfully accept the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven”.

Theologian William Barclay writes, “Smyrna was a great trade city... Smyrna stood at the end of the road which served the valley of the river Hermus, and all the trade of that valley flowed into its markets and found an outlet through its harbor. It had an specially rich trade in wines. Smyrna, like Ephesus, was a city of wealth and commercial greatness.”

We also know from history that it was a city deeply committed to idolatry and the worship of the Roman Emperor. On one famous street in Smyrna, called the “Golden Street,” stood magnificent temples to Cybele, Apollo, Asklepios, Aphrodite, and a great temple to Zeus – but the worship of those pagan gods was dying out. The real focus was on the worship of the Roman Emperor.

The early church was warned by Jesus through John that they would suffer for ten days of persecution. There are various interpretations of this, but a commentary by Clarke interpreted it much like the days in Daniel. As the days in this book are what is commonly called prophetic days, each answering to a year, the ten years of tribulation may denote ten years of persecution; and this was precisely the duration of the persecution under Diocletian, during which all the Asiatic churches were grievously afflicted. You

see, even then, the devil stirred up forces against the church.

Today, Satan continues to persecute the church. He does this in many ways. First, the government, who pretty much stayed separate from the church and even supported many Christian concepts since our founding as a “nation under God”, now does not allow us to distribute bibles or pray in public schools. Second, he uses our own people against each other, stirring up petty squabbles and promoting schisms and hard feelings until we shrink to almost nothing. Third, he has turned public opinion against the church through the media, both broadcast and internet, so that we are made out to be hypocrites, hard-hearted and angry.

Even today, evil men are moved to vandalize churches, burn churches, and shoot up churches. Churches are under siege, yet we should remember the words of Jesus through the writing of John, “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.” (*Revelation 2:10*)

I know your works: Jesus knew the works of the church in Ephesus also in Revelation 2:2. In Smyrna, Jesus also knew their works, tribulation, and poverty. He knows these hardships both in the sense that He saw what happened to them, and in the sense that He knew their hardships by His personal experience.

Historically, we are told there was a large and hostile community of Jews in Smyrna, but this tells us that a true Jew is one who trusts God and believes in Jesus Christ as Paul wrote to the Philippians, chapter 3, verse 3). Others may be Jews ethnically – which still has its place before God – but they are not Jews spiritually before God. I know: In midst of this kind of affliction, it is easy to think God has forgotten – but Jesus knows.

Jesus knows of our affliction today. He knows of church problems, He knows of the unchurched in the community, He knows of conflicts between Christians within churches and conflicts from without. He knows the enemy. Remember, Jesus has fought with the Devil before. Satan tried to tempt Him as he has tempted Christians of our own time. He turned the devil away, yet some fall to the guile of Satan. Every time a conflict is left unresolved between two church members, Satan has won. Ephesians 4:26 states, “Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger”. In other words, do not let the day pass without reconciliation with your brother or sister in Christ. Do not walk away from conflict, but resolve your differences.

James writes in chapter 1, verses 19-20 “Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of

Continued on pg. 15...

January news highlights continued from page 6...

This fragile ceasefire has resulted in the return of several hostages, with more to be released in the future if the ceasefire holds.

Israel began their attack on the Gaza Strip as a result of the attack by Hamas on Israel, killing and kidnapping over a thousand. The reason for the fragility of the ceasefire agreement is that the second phase will require the Gaza Strip to be taken over by authorities from Palestine. It is uncertain whether the conservative leadership in Israel will allow this.

American Airlines Fight Collides with Helicopter in Washington

Washington, DC, Jan. 29, 2025 -

Added at press time, we have the collision of a U.S. Army Sikorsky H-60 helicopter with American Eagle Flight No. 5342 carrying 50 passengers and four crew members on a flight from Wichita, Kansas. There were no survivors. Adding to the tragedy were top figure skating champions from Russia and the United States along with skaters from the National Development Camp, which was held in connection with the recent U.S. figure Skating Championships in Wichita. Our prayers go out to their families. This was the first major U.S. commercial crash in almost 16 years.

Commentary

To add to the tragedy, before any reason has been decided by the NTSB, Trump blamed it on the diversity policies implemented by the Obama administration in an attempt to increase badly needed air traffic controllers. The sad part of this is that his first administration continued those policies. Why didn't he do something then if he felt it was a threat. But, it is often that our current president tries to make political hay out of tragedy.

Tik-Tok Saved by Trump One Day after Going Dark

Washington, DC, Jan. 20, 2025 -

Trump gave a reprieve by executive order to TikTok after it was already shut down. He gave it 75 more days to sell the app to an American company. Security concerns in re-

gards to Chinese access to the information about Americans through this service caused the law to be passed.

Deadly Los Angeles Fire Toll Rises to 29

Los Angeles, CA., Jan. 27, 2025 -

At least 29 people died as a result of wild fires that were fueled by severe drought and strong winds. Thousands of firefighters fought the infernal across 45 square miles of densely populated Los Angeles County. Rains at the end of the month offered some relief.

Passed On

January, 2025 -

Chris Surratt, pastor who consulted and promoted small group ministry.

Arthur Blessitt, pastor who traveled with a cross.

William McCarty, pastor of Helaing Waters Worship Center on Isle of Wight, VA

Brian Weeks, pastor Spindle City Church, Fall River, Mass.

Terry McBeath, Church of God pastor and state evangelist of Ohio.

Jefferey Kee, pastor New Faith Baptist Church, Columbus, Oh., and civil rights advocate.

Marianne Faithful, singer song writer and actress.

Dick Button, winner of two Olympic gold medals, entrepreneur and broadcaster.

Garth Hudson, last surviving member of The Band.

Bob Uecker, voice of the Milwaukee Brewers and announcer in the movie trilogy Major League.

Sam Moore of Sam & Dave.

Peter Yarrow of Peter, Paul and Mary.

Shigemi Fukahori, Nagasaki atomic bombing victim and advocate against nuclear weapons.

Deadly Attacks in New Orleans and Las Vegas

Los Angeles, CA., Jan. 1, 2025

On January 1st, Shamsud-Din Jabbar, an American-born resident of Houston Texas, drove a pickup truck into a crowd on Bourbon Street, in New Orleans. Fifteen people were killed, including the perpetrator. Fortunately, Police shot the attacker and prevented further deaths. Explosive was found and the death toll could have been greater. Although Jabbar was radicalized, it was considered a domestic attack, because there was no evidence of any foreign direction for the attack.

On the same day, Matthew Livelsberger, an American born active duty soldier with Army special forces, exploded a Tesla Cybertruck at Trump International Hotel in Las Vegas. Livelsberger wrote two letters, recovered by the FBI from his burnt phone, in which he denied being a terrorist but admitted using explosives to convey a political message and ease his mental burdens.

Commentary Looking Ahead in 2025

Many evangelicals are hopeful, but worried, about the year ahead. They voted for a man who does not fit our vision of what a role-leader of a Christian nation should be. However, their motives were pure, if misguided. Here is what we may look forward to in the new year.

1. A few Christians are reassessing their relationship with **Israel** as a result of the atrocities committed in Gaza. However, as a nation, we must continue to support Israel in their defense. We must remember they were attacked. The Lord knows, we started conflicts in two nations that did not attack us after 9-11, so we do not have the moral high ground when it comes to overreaction. It took the next president to finally kill the instigator of 9-11, and he as not in either country we attacked.

2. **Disaster** is becoming the norm now and it has taken a lot of drain on faith-based relief organizations. We need to be better prepared and we need to pray.

3. **Ukraine** invasion by Russia is nearing its third year in February. Although Trump promised peace on day one, he can no more force Russia and Ukraine to peace, than I could. Let us pray.

These are my top button issues for 2025, what are yours? Lets pray that the Lord will guide and direct our nation.

man does not produce the righteousness of God.” I say anger is a tool of the Devil. Satan uses it as he uses all his tools of deceit to lure Christians down the wrong path.

According to early Christian legend, the year after Polycarp returned from Rome, a great persecution came upon the Christians of Smyrna. His congregation urged him to leave the city until the threat blew over. So, believing that God wanted him to be around a few more years, Polycarp left the city and hid out on a farm belonging to some Christian friends. One day on the farm, as he prayed in his room, Polycarp had a vision of his pillow engulfed in flames. He knew what God said to him, and calmly told his companions, “I see that I must be burnt at the stake.”

Meanwhile, the chief of police issued a warrant for his arrest. They seized one of Polycarp’s servants and tortured him until he told them where his master was. Towards evening, the police chief and a band of soldiers came to the old farmhouse. When the soldiers found him, they were embarrassed to see that they had come to arrest such an old, frail man. They reluctantly put him on a donkey and walked him back to the city of Smyrna.

On the way to the city, the police chief and other government officials tried to persuade Polycarp to offer a pinch of incense before a statue of Caesar and simply say “Caesar is Lord.” That’s all he had to do, and he would be off the hook. They pleaded with him to do it and escape the dreadful penalties. At first Polycarp was silent, but then he calmly gave them his firm answer: “No.” The police chief was now angry. Annoyed with the old man, he pushed him out of his carriage and onto the hard ground. Polycarp, bruised but resolute, got up and walked the rest of the way to the arena.

The horrid games at the arena had already begun in earnest and a large, blood-thirsty mob gathered to see Christians tortured and killed. One Christian named Quintis boldly proclaimed himself a follower of Jesus and said he was willing to be martyred, but when he saw the vicious animals in the arena, he lost courage and agreed to burn the pinch of incense to Caesar as Lord. Another young man named Germanicus didn’t back down. He marched out and faced the lions and died an agonizing death for his Lord Jesus. Ten other Christians gave their lives that day, but the mob was unsatisfied.

They cried out, “Away with the atheists who do not worship our gods!” To them, Christians were atheists because they did not recognize the traditional gods of Rome and Greece. Finally, the crowd started chanting “Bring out Polycarp.”

When Polycarp brought his tired body into the arena, he and the other Christians heard a voice from heaven. It said, “Be strong, Polycarp, play the man.” As he stood before the proconsul, they tried one more time to get him to renounce Jesus. The proconsul told Polycarp to agree with the crowd and shout out

“Away with the atheists!” Polycarp looked sternly at the bloodthirsty mob, waved his hand towards them and said, “Away with those atheists!” The proconsul persisted. “

Take the oath and revile Christ and I’ll set you free!” Polycarp answered,

“For eighty-six years I’ve served Jesus; how dare I now revile my King?”

The proconsul finally gave up and announced to the crowd the crime of the accused: “Polycarp has confessed that he is a Christian.”

The crowd shouted, “Let the lions loose!” but the animals had already been put away. The crowd then demanded that Polycarp be burnt. The old man remembered the dream about the burning pillow and took courage in God. He said to his executioners, “It is well. I fear not the fire that burns for a season and after a while is quenched. Why do you delay? Come, do your will.”

They arranged a great pile of wood and set up a pole in the middle. As they tied Polycarp to the pole, he prayed: “I thank You that You have graciously thought me worthy of this day and of this hour, that I may receive a portion in the number of the martyrs, in the cup of Your Christ.” After he prayed and gave thanks to God, they set the wood ablaze. A great wall of flame shot up to the sky, but it never touched Polycarp. God set a hedge of protection between him and the fire. Seeing that he would not burn, the executioner, in a furious rage, stabbed the old man with a long spear. Immediately, streams of blood gushed from his body and seemed to extinguish the fire. When this happened, witnesses said they saw a dove fly up from the smoke into heaven. At the very same moment, a church leader in Rome named Iraenus, said he heard God say to him, “Polycarp is dead.” God called his servant home.

Nevertheless, the day of martyrs is definitely not past. All over the world, Christians face persecution, especially in Asia, Eastern Europe, Africa and in the Muslim world. Some people estimate that more Christians have suffered and died for their faith in the 20th Century than in all previous centuries combined. Satan still takes a toll on the church of Jesus Christ.

A news item in the National and International Religion Report, May 2, 1994, illustrates this with a prime example. The article was entitled: “THE GRUESOME MARTYRDOM of a pastor in central India led to several hundred conversions to Christianity”. A former Hindu who had changed his name to Paul James was murdered by a crowd of extremists as he spoke in a field prior to a Feb. 20 church service in the Phulabani district.

“Jesus, forgive them,” eyewitnesses said James called out as his assailants cut off his hands and legs, and severed his torso. The attackers also decapitated James, an outspoken believer who had planted 27 churches. The murder has drawn heavy media attention in the area, which is charged with Hindu-Muslim

The Good News

tensions. Some, but not all, of James' assailants reportedly have been caught.

The attackers' hatred and violence have left many Indians wanting to emulate the love shown by the victim, said K. Anand Paul, head of Gospel to the Unreached Millions. "The gospel is spreading because of persecution," said Paul, who has been beaten seven times and kidnapped once by fanatical religious groups. "We are risking our lives to do this. People need to pray for us."

Many right here in the U.S. have the ability to worship without persecution, yet do not do so. Do we need to have our worship threatened before we appreciate the religious freedom we have? Does it take people shooting down our church members before we start to take an interest in the church?

But Jesus tells the church of Smyrna about the promise of a reward. "He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death".

He who overcomes: This was a promise for overcomers. This promise is for those who overcome the threat of persecution, and the presence of persecution. Some hearing this sermon today from around the world are overcoming even today, as they face persecution. Yet, some of us cannot even overcome just showing up to church when we need to.

We might say that we overcome by our close association with Jesus, who is the ultimate overcomer. As Jesus said, "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (*John 16:33*) You see, He is our secret we depend upon. Satan can never win as long as we believe in the power and everlasting Life promised by Jesus. Remember the disciples came back two by two and said the name of Jesus was all powerful in removing demons.

As we close with the invitational song and you sing along, please think on these things. Jesus is our hope and our salvation. Look to him for everything you need to overcome evil that tries to affect your own life.

Rev. Larry Joe McDowell

If you are reading this now and want to learn of the hope that is within all Christians, please visit the Good News page from TheWordChapel.org.
<https://www.thewordchapel.org/default.aspx?page=GoodNews>

Have you ever felt lonely in your life or felt like you needed something? Some go as far as to say they are depressed. That feeling is as natural as anything. You see, when Adam and Eve were in the garden, they were always in the presence of God. God gave them the light and they did not know sin. However, when they were tempted to eat of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they were removed from the presence of God. We as humans have been removed from God's presence since that day. However, God sent His Son so that we might once again have a relationship with Him. All we need to do is accept Jesus Christ as our Savior. Let me show you with actual scripture from God's Word in a way that can help you understand. We call it the G.O.S.P.E.L.

G – God loves you and created us to be with Him.

John 3:16 – For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

O – Our sins separate us from God.

Romans 3:23 – For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

S – Sins cannot be removed by good deeds.

Romans 6:23 – For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

P – Paying the price for sin, Jesus died and rose again.

Romans 5:8 – But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

E – Everyone who trusts in Him alone has eternal life.

Romans 10:13 – For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

L – Life with Jesus starts now and lasts forever.

Romans 10:9 – That if thou shalt confess with thy

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