

FEBRUARY 2021

Christian Health Care Newsletter

A call to Christ in the midst of national turmoil

by Rob Waldo, Vice President of Member Services

AS WE CONSIDER the events of the past month and year, it can be difficult to find words to process and express the far-reaching emotions and thoughts we all have. We do not recall a time in recent history where anger and anxieties have been so inflamed, not only within society but within the Church. Partisan passions are high, racial wounds are raw, and trust is low. It seems as if each month brings us a new challenge. Calming voices of reason and reconciliation are drowned out amidst the shouting.

Scripture reminds us that there is divine purpose in difficult times. You are not living in this hour of history by accident (Acts 17:26-28)! We are called to faithfully live for Jesus Christ during "such a time as this," not shrinking back in fear but holding steadfast in faith, hope, and love (Esther 4:14; Hebrews 10:38-39; 1 Corinthians 13:13).

So how do we remain in love in such trying times? We begin by reminding ourselves of our Savior and His Gospel. Rightly placed faith sets us on the path to love (2 Peter 1:3-11).

A call to Christ and the Gospel

More than ever, the Church needs to offer the redeeming, healing, reconciling power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a nation facing ever-increasing turmoil. However, we can only offer to others what we ourselves have received. Hope for the world begins with the Church looking first and continually to Christ and the Gospel before political and social solutions.

We also must recognize where we have misplaced our hope, whether in individuals, political solutions, or idealized expectations of human justice. One sign that we've placed undue hope in something is whether it feels as though our world is coming apart when events unfold in ways that counter our expectations, leading to unusually strong discouragement, loss, or disillusionment. Those emotions are often directed somewhere — toward political leaders and parties, religious leaders and organiza-

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Member Letter:

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY
IS ALWAYS UPLIFTING

We were very encouraged by the notes that accompanied most of the checks. It is always uplifting to be reminded of God's sovereignty and love during a trial, especially a large, unexpected, financial one. The generosity of the members was also a huge blessing, not just because it helped lower our portion of the hospital bills, but it showed us what kind of people we want to be. We want to be able to give to people when needs arise.

Daniel & Katryna
IDAHO



Sharing Summary* | January 2021

NEEDS

\$24,246,143

MEMBER HOUSEHOLDS

78,367

SHARES

\$28,207,645

*Classic and Basic

Due to the Lord providing more Shares than Needs, we were not only able to share some January bills ahead of schedule but we also took a rare opportunity to offer a share reduction of 19 percent. Praise God for His continued provision!

Contact Us | 877-764-2426 | Dash.SamaritanMinistries.org

QUESTIONS ABOUT?

Your medical need
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Have a Need? Use the Health Resources App on Dash



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- Email a medical professional or call a nurse (*free*), or call a doctor who can write a prescription (\$25).
- Access discount tools for prescriptions and lab tests.

Send a note. Pay your share. Always stay alert in prayer.

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Ethnic diversity in the Church

Studying the Bible more seriously changed this author's understanding of how diverse the Church has been and should be



by J. Daniel Hays,
Ouachita Baptist
University

LIKE MANY CHRISTIANS, I grew up thinking the Bible was a story about people who looked a lot like me. This natural assumption was strengthened by my pictorial Bible (with Renaissance-era paintings of European-looking characters), Sunday school material, and Hollywood movies like *The Ten Commandments* (with Charlton Heston playing Moses). Perhaps you grew up with this same impression.

As I grew older and began to study the Bible more seriously, however, I realized this was a rather naïve and immature perspective. I discovered that the Bible's storyline reflects quite a bit of fascinating ethnic diversity. And this diversity appears to be an important part of the storyline.

Here are six brief observations that changed my understanding of ethnic diversity in the Bible—and thus my perspective on ethnic diversity in the church.

1. All people are created in God's image

Interestingly, the Bible doesn't begin with the creation of a special

race of people. In Genesis 1 and 2, the first human is simply identified as *ādām*, which means "human-kind." Adam and Eve are not Hebrews or Egyptians or Canaanites. Their "race" or "ethnicity" is not identified. And they become the mother and father of all peoples and all ethnicities. The beginning of the Biblical story, then, is not about white people or black people or brown people. It is a story about all people.

Further, Genesis 1:26–27 tells us that God created them ("human-kind") in His image. This truth has profound implications, for it insists that people of all races and ethnicities are created in the image of God. And, since all bear His image, all deserve to be treated with special dignity and respect.

2. Israel was ethnically diverse

The composition of ancient Israel reflected the multiethnic makeup of the Biblical world. The Old Testament world was multiethnic, and the ethnicities of the Biblical characters reflected that.

While many of the characters in the Bible are Semitic (and thus looked like modern-day Israelis or Arabs), the story frequently includes individuals and groups from a wide spectrum of ethnicities. Abraham, for example, was from Mesopotamia, and ethnically

he was probably an Aramean/Amorite. He and his family migrated to Canaan, where two of his descendants (Judah and Simeon) married Canaanites, while their brother Joseph married an Egyptian.

Later, when God delivered Abraham's descendants from Egypt, a "mixed multitude" went with them as they left Egypt (Exodus 12:38), implying that people from other ethnic groups accompanied them and thus became part of Israel. Indeed, throughout the Old Testament there is a frequent influx of persons from other ethnicities into the people of God, including the Cushite wife of Moses (Numbers 12), Rahab the Canaanite (Joshua 2–6), Ruth the Moabite (Ruth 1–4), Ebedmelech the Cushite (Jeremiah 38–39), and so on.

3. Black Africans were involved in God's plan of redemption

One distinctive ethnic group that shows up repeatedly in Scripture is the Cushites. The terms "Cush" or "Cushite" occur in the Hebrew Bible more than 50 times. In English Bibles it's often translated as "Cush," but sometimes as "Nubia" or "Ethiopia."

Cush was a powerful black African kingdom located along

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the Nile River just to the south of Egypt.

Black Cushites were active players in the geopolitics and economics of the ancient Near East throughout most of the Old Testament period. The Cushites even controlled Egypt for a short while (during the time of Isaiah) and allied themselves with Jerusalem against the Assyrians. Later, the black African Ebedmelech played a crucial role in Judah's theological history, saving the prophet Jeremiah and symbolizing the inclusion of future Gentiles who will come to God by faith (Jeremiah 38–39).

The first non-Jewish believer in the New Testament was an African.

In the New Testament, this region is usually referred to as "Ethiopia," even though it differs from modern Ethiopia. The "Ethiopian Eunuch" in Acts 8 was a black African from this region along the Nile River, south of Egypt. He was the first non-Jewish believer in the New Testament and, like Ebedmelech in the book of Jeremiah, he seems to symbolize or foreshadow the approaching Gentile inclusion in the rest of Acts.

4. Moses married a Cushite (black African) woman

In Numbers 12, Moses, while walking faithfully with the Lord and in the power of the Lord, marries a woman from Cush. There is little doubt that this woman was a black African. And in the story, God seems to give his total approval to this marriage.

This is a strong statement on the Biblical acceptability of interracial marriage. In other Old Testament texts there are prohibitions

against marrying Canaanites and other inhabitants of Canaan, but these prohibitions weren't due to ethnic differences but theological differences, since the Canaanites worshiped pagan gods. The prohibition was against marrying outside of the faith.

5. People from all ethnic groups are united in Christ

In the New Testament, Paul demands active unity in the Church, a unity that explicitly joins together differing ethnic groups because of their common identity in Christ. Paul proclaims that, in Christ, believers form a brand-new humanity. The old barrier of hostility and division between ethnic groups has been demolished by the cross; and now, all peoples are to be one in Christ (Romans 4; Galatians 3–4; Colossians 3; Ephesians 2).

Paul insists that the primary identity of Christians is to be based on their union with Christ—not on traditional sociological, geographical, and ethnic connections. Again, the implications are profound. Christians of other races aren't just equal to us; they are joined to us. As Christians, we're all part of the same body, united by the presence of the same Holy Spirit who indwells us all. We're not just friends or fellow worshipers in the same religion, but brothers and sisters in the same family.

6. The Book of Revelation portrays a multiethnic congregation

John gives us a glimpse of the people of God at the consummation of history, describing them as people from every tribe and

language and people and nation (Revelation 5:9, 7:9, 10:11, 11:9, 13:7, 14:6, and 17:15). This fourfold formula of tribe, language, people, and nation stresses the ethnic diversity of the people of God who will worship around the throne. It's a picture of the climactic Kingdom of Christ, and, as such, provides a model for us to strive toward. John clearly sees the Kingdom of Christ as a multi-ethnic congregation.

These six brief observations are far from exhaustive, but hopefully they will help you get started on rereading and rethinking what the Scriptures really say about ethnic diversity. ♦♦♦

Author's note: For further discussion of these themes, see *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*, in the *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (NSBT) series edited by D.A. Carson.

This article was originally published at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/6-ways-bible-changed-perspective-ethnic-diversity/>. Reprinted by permission.

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What's it like to be a black executive in America?

A Q&A with Samaritan Ministries' Chief Information Officer, Will Cooper, about dealing with racism in the corporate world

Editor's Note: As a Christian community with numerous ethnicities, cultures, and denominations represented, Samaritan Ministries celebrates the diversity of the Body of Christ, while embracing the unity of our shared faith in Jesus. In this month's newsletter we recognize Black History Month and the blessing our Black brothers and sisters are to the Body of Christ and Samaritan Ministries. We are incredibly grateful for our CIO, Will Cooper, and his leadership in our IT department, and we asked him to help us understand his experiences as a black Christian executive and our role as Christians in honoring and representing the dignity of every person.

Samaritan Ministries: Will, having worked in the business world for three decades while also serving as a pastor for many of those years, you brought a lot of experience to your role at Samaritan Ministries. Can you tell us about your experiences, particularly in the business world?

Will Cooper: God has shown me tremendous favor by blessing me with a successful career as a corporate executive for major Fortune 100/500 companies, like Bell Labs, AT&T, Verizon, Unisys, Comcast,



Will Cooper (Samaritan photo)

Amdocs, Digex, Intermedia, and even running my own company. In my roles I have operated and managed large service delivery organizations and led teams in developing some of the most

innovative products and services in technology and telecommunications. I sold over \$1 billion of products and services, developed

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corporate strategies, and worked on major mergers and acquisitions. My work has taken me around the world, allowing me to meet countless warm-hearted people I now call friends.

I consider all of this to be God's grace and kindness in ordering my steps.

Samaritan: Corporate America has its challenges for any follower of Christ. It also has common challenges for those of specific demographics, whether Latinos, women, or African Americans. Can you speak to some of the challenges you faced as a black executive?

Will: While I am incredibly grateful for the many friends I've made and opportunities I've received, it's not been an easy journey. In many of my positions, I would be only one of two black executives in the entire company, so there wasn't much sense of shared experience with my colleagues. Plus, I was a Christian. But I knew I was called to serve and lead in these roles and sought to benefit and prosper my companies and colleagues.

This may seem strong, but, as a black executive in corporate America, I could not be myself. I'm a big black man, 6 feet, 4 inches, 285 pounds, and that alone was regularly perceived as threatening. Some days could be more stressful than others, when you have to carefully manage and be mindful of your emotions in ways that reflected the racial landscapes that you work in. I was told by one of my bosses that I was too blunt, aggressive, and scary because of my stature as a big black guy—not

because I was actually too blunt, aggressive, or scary.

While working on various assignments, clients initially would confuse me, the head executive, with my subordinates because of our color. The client would introduce himself and extend a handshake to the other person but only say "Glad to meet you, Will," to me. The other guy was my deputy. He was white.

Unfortunately, I have been excluded from meetings relative to my job and passed over for growth opportunities when I have been the highest performing candidate based on exceeding goals and objectives. One manager would meet one on one with others on my team who were not black but would not meet with me. My colleagues would use racially insensitive language around me.

At one point in my career, I was "white" enough that people in my group were comfortable with me as long as I didn't call too much attention to my blackness, but

While I am incredibly grateful for the many friends I've made and opportunities I've received, it's not been an easy journey.

I was seen as black when they needed me to shed light on the black experience.

But you need to understand, I am not unique. All African-Americans face some type of racism, no matter what their socioeconomic level or denominational affiliation. In all things, I seek to "believe the best" in why others say what they do, but it's

hard to describe how it feels when my identity itself as a black man is perceived as threatening.

Samaritan: What were some of your experiences when you would travel or conduct business outside of the office?

Will: Because of my size and stature, I would get dirty looks and be treated with disrespect at airports or passed over to catch a cab. I have to be very cognizant of what I wear. I typically wear suits when I travel or conduct business outside of the office so that I do not appear as a threat. One manager told me never to wear black suits, because it made me look intimidating.

If I went to the gym or headed out for a walk during a business trip, I would typically pick an outfit that would have the name of my alma mater, Johns Hopkins, on it and wear some type of workout shoe that was different and not

seen as a fad type of sneaker so people would know I wasn't a threat. I've been pulled over multiple times without any cause in my own neighborhood, and the officers would treat me more respectfully if I was wearing a suit. When I would be in casual clothes, they would be more suspicious—even in my own neighborhood.

Samaritan: As a Christian and pastor facing these challenges, you have had a source of strength and perspective to respond to these circumstances. What role has the Lord played in all of this?

Will: Even though things were unfair to me in some situations, they made me stronger. God's love for me made me stronger. My faith made me stronger. Keeping God first in my life made me stronger.

Through all of my experiences, it was my God, my faith, my family, and my network of people who cared, and my willingness to never give up that kept me on my path to success.

I also knew that I was part of Jesus' Church, and so I had a calling to make a real difference in this world. By my words and actions, I could display a better way to others.

Samaritan: What's your prayer for the Church, Will? What is our role as Christians in such circumstances?

Will: I pray that the Church would show that same love to brothers and sisters of all colors. We are one body! The Church has been important throughout the civil rights movement, which was actually born out of the Church. That's what made it so effective—by responding to injustice like Christ did, they showed a better way, and racism was clearly seen as repulsive.

But today, the Church has lost some of its prophetic voice and fervor. I want us to get that back—and we can't turn the Gospel into politics, like so many are doing.

Like everyone else, I'm tired and fed up with the hatred and division in our nation. I know sin is the core problem and the Gospel is the answer, but everything can be exhausting. Recently the Holy Spirit reminded me that Christians have the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). In Acts, God brought together Hebrews, Italians, and Greeks. African men were being baptized by Hebrew men! In Christ all the racial hostility and prejudice can be torn down. God has done it before, and He continues to do it today.

I give God thanks because He called me—and you—to be ministers of reconciliation. So, as fed up and frustrated as I am about what is going on in this nation politically and racially, I must stay in this space as a witness to the unbelieving world and as one with the Body of Christ.

Samaritan: How can we do that?

Will: The answer is love: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, love one another" (John 13:34). I said it last summer (samaritanministries.org/blog/when-one-suffers-we-all-suffer-together), and I'll say it again,

"Everything we do needs to be done in love. We need to love our neighbor and understand our neighbor's perspective. Remember, we don't all have the same experiences. However, all of us deserve to be treated with fairness, dignity and respect."

Let's keep lifting up Christ and be part of that reconciliation. ♦♦♦

Through all of my experiences, it was my God, my faith, my family, and my network of people who cared, and my willingness to never give up that kept me on my path to success.

Member Spotlight

Brian Lowe: Church planter with Acts 29

by Michael Miller

Brian Lowe

theexoduschurch.org
Email info@theexoduschurch.org

BRIAN LOWE IS using his church-planting experience to help other church planters.

He and his wife, Cheryl, planted Exodus Church in Belmont, North Carolina, in 2009 after they were assessed and guided by Acts 29 (acts29.com), a church-planting ministry, in 2008. Brian has been pastor there ever since.

Now he and Exodus support other church plants, and Brian is Acts 29's Southeast regional director.

Brian wanted to make sure he was qualified to plant a church.

"I wanted someone who did assessment well to look into our life and see objectively, 'Yes, you have the competencies to do this' or 'No, you're not really put together to do this.' It wasn't a 'looking for man's approval' issue," Brian says.

"It was really more, 'Am I qualified to do it?'"

Two other reasons for working through Acts 29 attracted Brian: the network's five doctrinal distinctives, especially regarding the sovereignty of God and the salvation of sinners; and being able to connect with "a group of guys" doing the same thing or going in the same direction.

Acts 29

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Brian and Cheryl Lowe and their four children.
(Photo by Rachel Welch.)

The Lowes and the rest of the team that planted Exodus have learned a lot over the past 12 years.

"First, that God is more trustworthy than we knew," Brian says. "He has taken care of us. He's protected us. He's provided for us. He's just been so trustworthy. Not that I didn't know that, but I've learned it in a deeper way."

They also learned that the "Church is a beautiful broken people."

"I tell our church all the time that we're a mess, but we're a beauti-

ful mess. There's just something beautiful and broken about the people of God that reminds us of the goodness of the Gospel."

Finally, Brian has been reminded "over and over that it's not about me."

"No church gets planted simply by a lead pastor," he says. "I've been reminded that Exodus Church would not be what it is without the people who call it home, serving and giving, and pouring their lives into what God has planted here."

Church planters need to understand their limits.

"If somebody is not prepared to be reminded that they can't do what they're trying to accomplish, they're going to have a really hard time planting a church," Brian says. "We need to be broken regularly over our sin but also in the reality that we're not sufficient for this apart from God's grace."

He also advises slow going.

"Church planters are some of the most impatient people that I know," Brian says. "Some of that is because of that go-getter, entrepreneurial bent that we tend to have. A primary illustration that the Lord uses of His leaders in the Bible are shepherds and farmers, not tech startups."

There are typical reasons a church plant fails.

"A church plant that doesn't work out is a church that loses its focus on the Gospel, community, or mission," Brian says. "It's usually

obvious too late. It's a gradual, slow drift and decline."

Church-planting should be a natural goal of churches.

"The primary missionary plan of the New Testament is the planting of local churches," Brian says. "You can't read the book of Acts or really the rest of the New Testament without seeing the planting of churches. Now, certainly, that flows out of the preaching of the Gospel, the making of disciples, and then those disciples get formed into a community."

There are different ways to be involved in church planting, Brian says, such as praying and giving. "From the beginning of Exodus, we've been giving away at least 10 percent of our dollars to see that happen."

Or a church could develop leaders within itself to send with members and money to plant a new church.

2020 has presented church planting with some unique struggles.

COVID-19 and the resulting economic disruption have required church plants to be "super creative" with holding services. Many church plants rent weekend space at schools, "but a lot of schools are questioning whether they want to have churches in school on the weekends," Brian said.

Church plants typically pull in a combination of new believers and experienced believers.

"Most church plants have no interest in reshuffling the deck," Brian says. "Most of us really do want to reach new people, we want to reach people who are far from Jesus. Having said that, we need people to disciple young believers, so we also want Christians who want to be on that mission to be part of our church."

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Why Samaritan Ministries?

Samaritan Ministries membership offers Brian and Cheryl Lowe and their family "an opportunity to pray for other people who are going through illness and difficult times, and then knowing that that's happening for us as well."

The Lowes joined Samaritan in 2014 when they were looking for a better way to handle health care costs.

"We had a plan through a provider, but the cost kept going up and up exponentially," said

Brian, pastor of Exodus Church in Gastonia, North Carolina. "We looked at some options that we could pursue."

They heard about Samaritan and chose it out of several options.

"There are a lot of ways to handle health care," he said. "This is one way. We've had a great experience. We haven't had a single concern about getting our Shares from other members for our Needs." ◆◆◆

The immune system needs balance

Exercise, rest, sound GI tract contribute to our bodies' immunity



by Dr. Eric Potter,
Sanctuary Functional
Medicine

Second in a series.

EVERY STRUCTURE AND system require a foundation on which to stand.

The immune system requires a balance of exertion, rest, GI function, and emotional stability as a foundation to both train it and maintain it.

Science supports and guides this foundational approach, resulting in a better path than simply piling reinforcements without building a foundation first.

Exercise

The immune system, as one of the fascinating portions of our physiology, operates like all our systems, working optimally only when many factors are balanced.

Exercise bolsters immune function through its effects on inflammation, similarly to the other foundations. As we walk through the studies demonstrating protective effects against infection, besides being encouraged to get moving and leave our sedentary lifestyles, we will see it is almost always inflammation that plays the role of mediator between exercise

and infection prevention.

Medical research has shown that the right amount of exercise decreases a variety of infection risks both in animal and human studies.

Lowder, for instance, showed that mice that had a pre-emptive exercise program fared better in terms of death rates when they contracted the influenza virus. Even back in 1993, Nieman demonstrated that elderly women who went through a 12- to 15-week exercise program experienced lower rates of upper respiratory tract infections.

But before you turn up the treadmill to full speed or sign up for that cycling class, take heed that even with exercise you can get too much of a good thing. Moreira examined the widely recognized phenomenon that excessively intense exertion, even in well-trained athletes, can temporarily increase susceptibility to viral infections. Apparently, we should aim for an optimal dose to strengthen our immune defenses. Common sense tells us that the optimal level varies for individuals based on their prior fitness level.

Rest

After exercise or other exertion, our bodies need rest. The immune system, just like our brain, muscles, and other systems, needs some downtime, particularly sleep, to

continue optimal function. This fact has been demonstrated by several studies. Patel evaluated over 56,000 middle-aged female nurses with similar health characteristics over two years to determine if self-reported sleep duration affected the risk of pneumonia occurrence. They found that those who reported less than five hours per night on average had higher rates of pneumonia if the person also reported that they felt they were getting too little sleep.

Interestingly, in the study, prolonged sleepers (over nine hours per night) also demonstrated increased pneumonia risks.

Among others, studies by Cohen and Prather went beyond just observing subjects for a period of time after self-reports of sleep patterns.

Both studies actively gave adolescents in the study a nasal wash with actual rhinovirus, the primary cause of the common cold, and counted how many of them developed symptoms. Those with shorter sleep patterns demonstrated higher rates of common cold symptoms.

With a little internet searching, the list of studies linking adequate sleep with optimal immune health leaves little room to deny the importance of being wellrested for immune health in an age of COVID-19. Other studies showing that

sleep helps to keep inflammation under control further drive home this point.

Gut health

While the connections between exercise and sleep with immune function may be more obvious, the connection with gut health is not quite as intuitive.

The first connection becomes obvious when one considers that proper nutrition for immune function requires feeding a nutritious diet to a healthy GI tract (Childs). The second connection between gut bacteria and inflammation requires a little more thought and research support.

Beyond simple nutrition, widespread research supports the need for balance in inflammation for immune optimization. Consider research by Santiago-Lopez which demonstrated that probiotics given to infants could reduce proinflammatory Th1 and Th17 cytokines such as IL-17 and IFN- γ while raising "production of inflammation resolving cytokine IL-10."

This report is just the tip of the iceberg in research into ameliorating inflammation through dietary intervention into the GI function.

Besides the connection with inflammation, a growing amount of research has shed light on the importance of gut barrier function at the microscopic level. A study by McKeen describes how increased amounts of prebiotics, fiber, and other nutrients that enhance gut bacteria contribute to stronger gut wall barriers. These barriers are critical for immune function across the entire body.

Emotional levels

The final foundation for immune health is our emotional state, especially our level of stress. As early as the 1980s, pioneering research by psychologist Janice Kiecolt-Glaser, Ph.D., and immunologist Ronald Glaser, Ph.D., of The Ohio State University College of Medicine demonstrated that medical students were immune-suppressed during their three-day final exam period. They found lower levels of natural killer cells, lower levels of T cells, and very low levels of interferon-gamma, an immune system booster, meaning at least three important parts of the immune system were temporarily suppressed by the increased stress of final exams.

Our emotional stress response can modify how much cortisol is produced by our adrenal glands. Cortisol rises in response to physical or psychological stressors, and this higher cortisol can lower immune function while opening GI barriers to further inflammation. Spiritual health and a calm response to stress can prevent harmful effects.

While many will continue to search for that magic supplement or pharmaceutical which, if taken religiously, will provide immune protection from viruses like COVID-19 or the common cold, foundations are critical. The time and financial investment in a supplement are of little value until we balance our exercise, sleep, GI function, and emotional health. With these foundations, we as individuals and as a society can proceed into the new year aware and prepared for 2021 and beyond without undue fear.

In our next installment, we'll move to what comes after foundations are laid.◆◆◆

Dr. Eric Potter, Internal Medicine and Pediatrics, founder of Sanctuary Functional Medicine DBA (SanctuaryFunctionalMedicine.com), offers functional medicine care to patients and the public in his Franklin, Tennessee, office and online with SFMEmpower.com.

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tions, our friends, our co-workers, our spouse, even ourselves.

Grief is often behind such discouragement. We're processing the loss of something we've held closely. But can there sometimes be more involved? The human heart is prone to idolatry, and sometimes our deep-seated loss and grief can be an expression of an idol letting us down, whether that idol is an individual, group, or ourselves.

It is here that the Gospel speaks so clearly, reminding us that everyone and everything apart from Jesus Christ will ultimately fail to meet deep-seated, God-designed human longings. Nothing and no one other than Jesus Christ can carry the burden of being Savior. All else will ultimately crumble under that pressure.

The Gospel calls us to transfer our hope from the temporary to the eternal, from created beings and human institutions to the uncreated God and His divine kingdom. First Peter 1:13 commands us to "set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

In these hyper-political days, it is increasingly important that the Church recognizes that its hope is not in a political party or even in this wonderful nation of America, where we have experienced profound blessings. Our greater citizenship is in the "holy nation" of the Church (1 Peter 2:9), and our allegiance is first and foremost to our sovereign King, Jesus Christ.

Our faith is in Him.

The Bible is clear: When we see disorder and vile practices, then we can be confident that sin is at work, regardless of anyone's claims to know or represent God's will. When we see traits like purity, gentleness, reasonableness, and mercy, then we can be confident that God is at work, even through imperfect human beings.

A call to seek societal transformation

Biblical hope increases our commitment to seek societal transformation.

As a prophetic witness to the future of Israel, God told Jeremiah to buy a field in Israel despite the impending Babylonian invasion (Jeremiah 32:6-15). Though the fullness of God's promises would tarry, Jeremiah's purchase was a witness that there was a future for Israel.

Similarly, we "buy a field" when we labor for societal change. In our case it's not humans who invade the "field," it is sin. Sin will try to destroy everything good, leaving suffering and loss in its wake. In our efforts to redeem and restore, the Church becomes a prophetic witness of God's promise of a new heaven and new earth—a promise of a day with no more tears and suffering in this land. Sin will be fully and completely removed. Christ will rule.

We join Christ, who "bought the field" of this world through His death on the cross. As the darkness of society vividly reminds us every day, Jesus has yet to receive

the fullness of His purchase.

"Every rule and every authority and power" is not yet subjected to Christ (1 Corinthians 15:24-25; Hebrews 10:12-13).

But it will be. And, by demonstrating Christ's character and willingness to speak truth in sacrificial love, we join His work.

Indeed, we have a divinely given responsibility to advance God's purposes in every sphere of society. We are called to "do justice" while we "walk humbly" with our God (Micah 6:8), discipling nations in the ways of Jesus' Kingdom (Matthew 28:16-20).

Therefore, we can be grateful for every effort made toward racial reconciliation, God-honoring education, media, and legislation, and effective, accountable government that represents all Americans. Such efforts are a vital part of the "good works" Christians are called to do (Ephesians 2:10).

Jesus Christ cares about these topics and is working toward establishing His government on this earth with justice and righteousness (Isaiah 9:7), and we earnestly pray that more individuals would join His work.

Yet, our expectations need to be moderated.

A call for Kingdom expectations

It was at the cross where sin, death, and evil gave their very worst blow and Christ emerged triumphant (Colossians 2:13-15). Sin, death, and the devil were defeated! However, in the years after that triumph, if you looked at the political and religious power centers throughout the Roman empire and Israel, you would notice ... surprisingly little had changed.

While individual lives were being transformed daily, societal and systemic change would take decades and generations. In fact, as the Church's witness for Christ became more vibrant, the cultural challenges got worse with relentless political and religious persecution, leading to countless martyrs. Jesus taught that God's Kingdom is likewise unrelenting—and ultimately victorious—but its growth is gradual. It's like leaven working its way into bread or a mustard seed steadily growing.

There will be moments in which the Church seems unstoppable (Luke 10:17-20) and moments of crushing, apparent defeat. Once we understand God's eternal perspective, we realize that even the defeats are disguised victories. History's most heart-wrenching defeat was when Jesus was crucified, yet at that moment He was disarming the rulers and authorities and putting them to open shame (Colossians 2:15)!

While some people may interpret recent U.S. political events as indications of a victory or defeat of the Church or God's will, we must

not. While the Church's *earthly* welfare is closely tied to political powers, that has never been the hope the Church has to offer to the world. We have something far better and more enduring (Hebrews 11:16).

We measure "victory" not by circumstances but by faithfulness. God will bring the results He wants in His timing and His way.

This in no way means Christians become doormats. It does mean that someone needs to be the mature adult in the conversation. That someone is you. We're neither passive nor aggressive but rather assertive and courageous, speaking the truth in love.

A call for Kingdom methods

God's Kingdom is resisted. Real people cause real suffering for other human beings, with the best example once again being the cross. Even so, Scripture is clear that "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood" but "against the spiritual forces of evil" (Ephesians 6:12).

So how do we respond to humans who cause us pain?

First, we take comfort that God sees us, God is with us, and God will reward our faithfulness when we suffer unjustly (Matthew 5:11-12; 1 Peter 4:14). We are never alone, and God always has the last word.

We also recognize our common sinfulness and our common need for grace. The Gospel humbles every one of us, telling each of us directly: "*you ... were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds*" (Colossians 1:21, italics mine). We can only say what the Apostle Paul said: "... by the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Corinthians 15:10). We have no cause to think we're better than others.

We treat others with respect, regardless of whether they deserve it. Anyone claiming to be "the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone ... patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness" (2 Timothy 2:24-25). Some may say that certain people don't deserve such gentleness. The Gospel reminds us: Of course they don't deserve it. None of us do.

Indeed, we are usually misled when we take up the sword—whether that of our tongue in maligning others or that of steel in our hands—against our fellow human being, thinking we can accomplish God's work. "Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing" (1 Peter 3:9).

This in no way means Christians become doormats. It does mean

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that someone needs to be the mature adult in the conversation. That someone is you. We're neither passive nor aggressive but rather assertive and courageous, speaking the truth in love.

A call to wisdom from above

Finally, how do we sort through the noise? What is God's will? What's the "right side" of history? James 3:13-18 can shed some insight:

Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but

is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

The Bible is clear: When we see disorder and vile practices, then we can be confident that sin is at work, regardless of anyone's claims to know or represent God's will. When we see traits like purity, gentleness, reasonableness, and mercy, then we can be confident that God is at work, even through imperfect human beings.

Ultimately, those indicators of "wisdom from above" will lead to "a harvest of righteousness," which is a deeper faith and trust in Jesus Christ. If we're following wisdom from above, our lives will more clearly reflect Jesus and His Word, and we'll be able to make a more eternal impact in society.

Mordecai told Esther, "who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14). Mordecai believed in divine providence through national and ethnic turmoil. So do we.

May God give us grace to faithfully live for Him in this hour of history, laboring for societal change for the Kingdom of God and offering the hope and healing of Jesus Christ and His Gospel. ♦♦♦

There are sometimes obvious signs that an area needs a church plant.

"Obviously, one is if there is no healthy church in an area," Brian says. "Another sign would be increased population. If an area is growing, new churches are needed to keep up with that growth."

How do you know if you're being called to be a church planter?

"It's important in my mind for the church planter to have some sort of external call coupled with the person's internal call," Brian says. "The best organizations have something in both columns where an individual who is submitted to

a local church says, 'I think this is what the Lord's doing' and that local church says, 'Yes, we agree.' And an organization like Acts 29 comes alongside that person and says, 'Here are 11 competencies that we believe are important in the planting of churches.'

"Those competencies include spiritual vitality, theological clarity, a solid marriage and family, entrepreneurial aptitude, and leadership and development skills. Acts 29 can do a good job of assessing those competencies, but it cannot and should not create either the internal or external call. That's got to come from the follower of Jesus and the church."

How you can pray for Brian Lowe:

- "That I would be faithful in the roles God has called me to: follower of Jesus, faithful to my family, faithful in my ministry."
- "That Exodus Church would declare and demonstrate the Gospel well."
- "That Acts 29 would be a church-multiplication movement."♦♦♦

Prayer for the Persecuted Church

30 Christians killed in Congo for refusing Islam

Thirty Christians were killed in attacks by an Islamist rebel group on Congo villages in November and December, Voice of the Martyrs-Canada reported. Also, 10 women and girls were raped and 15 were abducted. Among the victims were a pastor's family in Mayitike. *Pray for those mourning the loss of loved ones and for those who were injured and traumatized. Pray also that there would be peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo.*

Iranian courts overturn sentences for 2 Christians

Praise God that prison sentences of two Christians in Iran have been overturned, according to Mission Network News. The two, whose names are not being publicized, were arrested during a 2018 raid of a house church in Tehran. It is not clear why these two were singled out for release. *Thank God that these two have been released, and pray for those believers still languishing in Iranian prisons.*

Indian pastor reunited with family

Hindu extremists reportedly locked an Indian pastor in a dark room for several days in October without food or water, VOM-C says. Pastor Shelton Vishwanathan was confronted in the village of Tiryani on October 5 and told to stop sharing his faith. He agreed but was then beaten unconscious and placed in the room. A nearby elderly woman heard his cries and released him. Pastor Shelton's family, who had fled, were able to return home on November 28. *Praise God for the pastor's recovery and reunion with his family. Pray for their healing and restoration and for the ministries of all courageous preachers of the Gospel in India.*

South Korea bans balloon launches into North Korea

South Korea is banning balloon launches into North Korea, which is often used as a way to get Gospel leaflets and other literature into the Communist state, MNN reports. The law's language can even be constructed to ban the "intent to launch balloons." Eric Foley of Voice of the Martyrs-Korea is apparently even being charged for launches performed before the law was passed. *Pray that Christian evangelists trying to reach North Koreans would find other ways to send literature and encouragement.* ♦♦♦



Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.

HEBREWS 13:3

Our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world are being persecuted for the sake of the Gospel. We need to remember them in prayer.

Each month, we will provide updates and offer prayer points gleaned from a variety of sources. Please use them in your personal or group prayer time.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE PERSECUTED CHURCH:

International Christian Concern
persecution.org
800-422-5441

World Watch Monitor
worldwatchmonitor.org

But the wisdom from above is first pure,
then peaceable, gentle, open to reason,
full of mercy and good fruits, impartial
and sincere. **James 3:17**

✂ Detach and use as bookmark or on your refrigerator

THE DOORPOST

DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9; 11:18-21



"Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear My word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me."

JOHN 8:43-45

OUR ADVERSARY THE DEVIL is a liar and the father of lies. There is no truth in him. We should carefully investigate whether things we hear are actually true. When we discover lies, we can know the father of lies must be involved.

Jesus told the religious leaders of His day that they could not understand what He was saying and couldn't bear to hear His word because they were of their father, the devil. Those who do not trust God do not understand truth and may even be repulsed by it—sometimes violently.

James 3:15-17 tells us that earthly wisdom is unspiritual and demonic and leads to disorder and every vile practice.

However, there is wisdom from above that James tells us is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. By intentionally embracing God's wisdom, we can protect ourselves from being deceived deliberately rejecting lies and actively yet peacefully resisting those who practice and promote earthly wisdom.



For the Kingdom,
Ray King