

SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – JANUARY 23 EDITION

Valdosta Street Feed takes ministry to the streets of Lowndes County

By Allison Lindsey

Henri Nouwen once said, “Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into the places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion, and anguish. Compassion challenges us to cry out with those in misery, to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep with those in tears. Compassion requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless. Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human.”

Sandy Bonner experienced this depth of compassion for the homeless and vulnerable population living in her community in Valdosta, Georgia (Lowndes County). She gravitated to those she felt were overlooked and not seen right in her own backyard.

“So many of our homeless friends feel unloved and abandoned,” Bonner shared. “They have their own story, as we do, and our homeless friends need to be given the chance to tell their story.”

What began as a simple, organic desire in which Bonner was seeking a way to serve both God and the vulnerable population in her community has flourished into a vibrant ministry in a very short period of time called the “Valdosta Street Feed.”

Early last Fall, Bonner began following the group “Thomasville Street Feed,” which is located less than an hour away. She then began asking friends and family about similar resources currently available in her community. She found support in place for the homeless on the east side of town, but surprisingly lacking on the west side of Valdosta.

One morning after the worship service at Bemiss United Methodist Church, Bonner mentioned the concept of Street Feed to her pastor, Rev. Jerry Hudson.

“(Rev. Hudson) joined me in pursuing a meeting with the organizer, Chad Thomas, of the Thomasville Street Feed,” said Bonner. “We then met with the organizers and other interested people from Valdosta and scheduled our first Street Feed for October 30, 2023.”

Bonner and others then put plans into motion.

“God has worked tremendously through Sandy, and she has done an incredible job from the get-go,” said Rev. Hudson. “She genuinely has a heart for ‘the least of these’ in our community, and it shows in her dedication to this ministry and, especially, to those who participate. She's not there just giving out food. She's conversing with people, learning their stories, connecting, and praying with them.”

The African Proverb says, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

Since the launch of this ministry, Bonner will be the first to tell you she has not been alone. For the first feeding event, the Thomasville Street Feed group came alongside to serve, also offering donations of tables and camp chairs. There were also 6-7 volunteers from Valdosta providing hot food, snacks, fruit, drinks, ice and all the serving supplies. The Valdosta Street Feed has been supported by community organizations that work with the area’s homeless population as well.

Since the end of October, the Valdosta Street Feed has gathered every Monday - including Christmas Day and New Year's Day - from 4pm - 6pm to serve food to their guests along with lots of love, hugs, and sharing the love of God. The donations continue to roll in from individuals, and the very diverse group of volunteers continues to grow weekly.

"I can honestly say this is one of the coolest and most meaningful ministries I've been fortunate enough to be a part of," said Rev. Hudson. "It's one thing to host a food pantry at church - which is great - but it's a whole other ballgame to intentionally go out to the people where they are, on their turf so to speak.

"Getting to know folks by their first names, watching volunteers be moved and motivated by nothing but pure compassion, taking the love of Christ beyond the walls of the church - that's what we're seeing at these street feeds. A number of individuals in our Bemiss UMC family routinely participate in the ministry, and every one of them will tell you they've never experienced anything like it," shared Rev. Hudson.

Relationships with the weekly guests of the street feed and the volunteers serving are a blessing for all involved. One volunteer purchased a bicycle for a homeless friend to have transportation to and from work. Another weekly guest was provided with a tent and sleeping bag. As relationships are built and stories are being shared, volunteers are learning of real needs and are able to meet their new friends where they are with what they actually need most.

With temperatures dropping to dangerous lows during the month of January, Bonner and the Valdosta Street Food volunteers have found it even more important to continue these feeding events.

"This afternoon's street feed left me without words and an overflowing river of gratitude," said Bonner of the recent feeding event on the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday. "Our amazing volunteers showed up with plenty of delicious food and lots of clothes, jackets, shoes, and blankets - and a new tent for our Mr. Elton. Our guests showed us so much gratitude and appreciation. What a wonderful trip we're on with our amazing God!"

If you are interested in information on starting a Street Feed in your community, you can reach the Valdosta Street Feed group by email at valdostastreetfeed@gmail.com.

Allison Lindsey is a member of St. Mark UMC in Douglas, Ga. and chairs the Conference Nurture Team.



Spring Enrollment at its highest in 21 years at Andrew College, South Georgia UMM provides scholarships to students

[Andrew College's](#) Spring 2024 enrollment figure of 288 shows a 37% increase in enrollment from last Spring when there were 211 students. The increase is due to strong retention and a robust incoming class of new students to the Cuthbert, Ga. campus. This is the highest Spring enrollment since 2003 at the Southwest Georgia Methodist institution.

"At Andrew College, we strive to put our students first," said Dr. William R. Kennedy, Andrew College President. "We are here to help them attain a quality education that will benefit them and enable them to give back to their communities.

“I want to thank the hard work and dedication of Mrs. Heather Bradley, our Executive Director of Admissions & Marketing, along with the enrollment staff, student affairs, faculty, and coaches. This accomplishment was a team effort.”

In addition, the South Georgia Conference United Methodist Men celebrated over 30 years of support for Andrew College by again providing significant donations towards United Methodist Student Scholarships.

In 2023 alone, the UMM's fund - known as the Roy Lifsey Memorial Scholarship Fund for Students at Andrew College - had given \$102,368.47 to benefit South Georgia Methodist Students.

The endowment fund was originally a result of the vision of the late Roy Lifsey, a past Conference President of the South Georgia Conference United Methodist Men. Lifsey was instrumental in the creation of the General Commission of United Methodist Men.

An annual gift award was made back in June of \$7,500 and before the end of 2023, the remaining corpus of the Roy Lifsey Memorial Endowment was transferred to Andrew College under the condition that it's proceeds would continue to be used under the same guidelines.

"I want to thank the South Georgia Conference United Methodist Men for their over three decades of support of UMC student scholarships at Andrew College," said Dr. Kennedy. "We are honored that they have entrusted us to house the corpus of the Roy Lifsey Memorial Endowment Fund and look forward to using future earnings to help educate deserving Methodist students from south Georgia in Mr. Lifsey's honor for many years to come."

Mr. Don Barnes, current president of the South Georgia Conference United Methodist Men, echoes this thanks.

“I want to thank the men and local units within the South Georgia Conference that made these scholarships possible over the previous 3 decades and will continue on into the future,” said Don Barnes, current president of the South Georgia Conference United Methodist Men. “I also want to invite each local church to share with me what your local men are doing. This will be helpful as we recognize how men play a vital role in the Body of Christ.”

Barnes can be reached don.barnes56@gmail.com.

Article compiled by Kelly Roberson. Contributions for this article came from Andrew College Staff and Don Barnes.



Pre- and Post-General Conference Gatherings set for 2024

Bishop David Graves, along with the South Georgia Conference Cabinet and Conference Leadership, has announced dates for pre- and post-General Conference clergy lunch gatherings as well as a post-General Conference informational webinar for laity.

Pre-General Conference clergy lunch gatherings

The pre-General Conference clergy lunch gatherings are set for the following dates. These gatherings will be a time for Bishop Graves to check in with clergy, offer pastoral support, talk about the timeline for 2024, and

provide General Conference and Jurisdictional updates to take back to share with local churches. Registration is now open for these gatherings.

- **January 30** - St. Paul UMC in Columbus at 10 am | [Register now](#)
- **February 1** - Tifton First UMC in Tifton at 10 am | [Register now](#)
- **March 5** - Richmond Hill UMC in Richmond Hill at 10 am | [Register now](#)

The 2024 General Conference will take place April 23 - May 3 in Charlotte, North Carolina. A live stream link will be made available for clergy and laity to view the conference. Regular updates will be made by Bishop Graves and the delegation before, during, and after General Conference.

Post-General Conference clergy lunch gatherings

The post-General Conference clergy lunch gatherings are set for the following dates. These gatherings will be a time for Bishop Graves and members of the delegation to report factual information around any decisions made at General Conference. Registration will be available closer to the dates.

- **May 13** - Tifton First UMC in Tifton at 10 am
- **May 14** - St. Paul UMC in Columbus at 10 am
- **May 23** - Goshen UMC in Rincon at 10 am

Post-General Conference Laity Webinar

A laity webinar has also been scheduled to provide local church lay members with information following General Conference. The date for this webinar is **May 14, 2024**, at 6 pm. Registration information will be available closer to the date.

In addition, Bishop Graves has scheduled the following clergy gatherings and laity webinar in the Alabama West-Florida Conference. These are also open to South Georgia clergy (lunch gatherings) and laity (webinar) if the dates are a better fit for an individual's schedule.

Alabama West-Florida Clergy Gatherings

- February 8 - Providence UMC, Mobile, AL at 10:00 am CST
- February 22 - St. Luke UMC, Enterprise, AL at 10:00 am CST
- February 27 - Montgomery First UMC, Montgomery, AL at 10:00 am CST
- February 29 - Trinity UMC, Ft. Walton, FL at 10:00 am CST
- May 15 - Dothan First UMC, Dothan, AL at 10:00 am CST
- May 16 – Gulf Breeze UMC, Gulf Breeze, FL at 10:00 am CST
- May 20 – Montgomery First UMC, Montgomery, AL at 10:00 am CST
- May 21 – Dauphin Way UMC. Mobile, AL at 10:00 am CST

Alabama West-Florida Laity Webinar

- May 20 - 6 pm CST

“As we continue to focus on making disciples in our local churches, we are also mindful of the important work that will take place in Charlotte this Spring,” said Bishop Graves. “I invite all South Georgia clergy and laity to join me in prayer for our United Methodist Church and for our delegation as they prepare for General Conference 2024. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, may those things of God and each other connect us so we can lean into all God is calling the South Georgia Conference to be today and in the days to come.”



Registration for Summer Camp now open!

Camp Connect, the camping ministry of the South Georgia Conference, gives children and youth from rising 4th grade through rising seniors in high school the opportunity to spend a week away from normal everyday life in the beauty of God’s creation. Diving into scripture and sharing life stories will show campers they are created in God’s image and for a purpose.

Five camps are scheduled for the summer: one week for high school students, two weeks for middle school students, and two weeks for elementary students. Held at Epworth By The Sea on St. Simons Island, the week-long camps run from June 10 through July 19.

Our prayer is that every camper will have the opportunity to encounter Christ in a powerful, life-changing way during their week at camp! For more information, visit www.campconnectumc.org.



United Methodist Dollars for Scholars Scholarship Applications now open

The Georgia United Methodist Foundation partners with donors who establish endowments, a student's church, participating United Methodist-related schools, and the United Methodist Higher Education Foundation (UMHEF) to award matching United Methodist Dollars for Scholars (UMDFS) scholarships valued at up to \$4,000 per year to Georgia Methodist students. UMDFS scholarship applications for the 2024-2025 academic year will be open from January 1 - through March 1, 2024 on UMHEF's website. [Read more](#)



January 28 Lesson: Faith and Transformation

Winter Quarter 2023-2024: Faith That Pleases God
Unit 2: Learning About Faith

Sunday School Lesson for the week of January 28, 2024
By Jay Harris

Lesson Scripture: Romans 12:3-8

Key Verse: *“We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us.”* (Romans 12:6a)

Lesson Aims

- To introduce our scripture and the relationship between faith and transformation
- To explore the value of a life where we do not think too highly of ourselves
- To connect sober judgment, obligations, and the gift of our faith story
- To lift up how each of us matters and how others matter
- To ponder how unity is achieved in the Body and how we become members of one another
- To reflect on the nature of the gifts given to us according to God’s grace
- To put these thoughts together understanding that using our gifts in the Body transforms us

Faith and Transformation

In this last lesson of the January unit, we are pairing faith and transformation together to further shed light on our Winter Quarter Theme, “Faith that Pleases God.” We are leaning into the idea that faith transforms people. Throughout January, we have paired faith with righteousness, then with trust, and then with encouragement. How fitting it is at this stage to reflect on the way that faith changes us as we live deeper and deeper into faith.

No doubt, many people started the month of January thinking about personal transformation. That is what most New Year’s resolutions are all about. The end of January is a good time reassess our desire and commitment toward the transformation we perhaps envisioned at the beginning of the month. It is good to get a biblical perspective on how transformation happens in the life of a believer.

Romans 12:3-8 is an interesting passage for us to study in this lesson on transformation. It is the two verses that begin this chapter (Romans 12:1-2) that we usually associate with transformation: *“I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, on the basis of God’s mercy, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable act of worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*

Verses 1 and 2 present a turning point in Paul’s letter to the Romans. Up until Chapter 12, Paul has been describing how we are justified by faith and how faith continues to work in us through the Holy Spirit. Verse one presents a really big “therefore” that sums up what Paul has been saying. It is the “so what” of the letter. All that we read in Chapters 1-11 has built up to the invitation in verse two to “be transformed” into a believer who discerns and does “the will of God” and ceases to “be conformed to the world.”

We are transformed into a new way of thinking, believing, and living by the *renewing of our mind*. Because of the way I am wired, my mind has always gone straight to Christian study as the means for transformation. If Christian study was the only way that the mind is renewed, don’t you think that Paul would have talked about Christian study in the verses that immediately follow? Paul does not talk about Christian study. He talks about the way God transforms us by developing and using the gifts God has given us.

As you reflect on our culture, in what ways do you see the need to live differently than the culture? How does the culture pressure us to conform? What priority have you given to your own transformation as a follower of Christ? What is the most difficult part of transformation?

What If It’s Not All About Me (or You)?

If we are to be transformed into the image of Jesus and not conformed to this world, we need to make a break with the narcissistic culture that surrounds us.

³ For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

Paul felt that he had an important word that was relevant to “everyone” in the church. He felt that this word of instruction was revealed by the grace given to him by the Lord. In other words, Paul felt divinely inspired to tell them not to think more highly of themselves than they ought to think. Paul hoped that they would receive this message in the spirit of that grace, love, and authority.

How do you judge the point that you begin thinking more highly of yourself than you ought to think? Paul addresses this subject in another of his letters: *“Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus...”* (Philippians 2:3-5) Paul went on to describe the mind of Christ as demonstrated in the way Jesus emptied himself, became a servant, and gave his life for the world. The mind of Christ is different from the culture.

Paul is calling us to think. The emphasis is on how we “ought” to think of ourselves. The word “ought” recalls the fact that we live within a network of obligations. How are we obligated to think of ourselves? As believers, our obligations include moral obligations, obligations to our neighbor, obligations to the downtrodden, obligations to God’s creation, and obligations to God. We are not meant individually to be an island unto ourselves.

We are to think with sober judgment. Sober judgment means judgment that is not clouded by the influence of an unrestrained ego. It means to be clearheaded. If we are not to be conformed to this world, it means that we must learn to notice how the world thinks and then decide to think differently according to the mind of Christ.

We are to think about ourselves according to the measure of faith that God has “assigned” to us. In the New Testament, faith is not just our human response to the action of God. Faith is also God’s action. It all begins with God’s action. Faith is assigned or given to us in terms of God’s action in our faith story. You have a unique faith story that includes how you came to faith, who your primary influences have been, and how your faith has melded with other aspects of your personal history. God shaped your life of faith as it was being formed. If faith is a gift, then we cannot brag about our faith. Knowing that faith is God’s gift to us humbles us.

The Christian ethic tells us that it’s not all about me or about you. There is a sense in which we need to break with the aspects of our culture that tell us that it is about me or about you. This is but one of the ways that God seeks to transform our lives by faith.

When are you tempted to think more highly of yourself than you ought to think? How do you check that tendency? What thoughts in verse 3 call out to you the most to curb the tendency to think too highly of yourself? How does it help to think of your faith as not just a human response, but also a gift of God?

What If I Matter, But Not the Only One Who Matters?

Keep in mind that Paul is usually building one point upon another. We are not to think too highly of ourselves, and we are to think with sober judgment and keep in mind that our faith is God’s gift to us. We are uniquely shaped by our faith for something bigger than ourselves.

⁴ For as in one body we have many members and not all the members have the same function, ⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.

The members of the Body of Christ are like the parts of the body which are all so wonderfully different from one another, but they are made to work together. No wonder that the human body serves as one of the most important biblical metaphors for the Church.

For this reason, the Church is called the Body of Christ. Collectively, we are meant to serve as the hands and feet of Jesus. You have no doubt heard this phrase before, but this should prompt us to think of more body parts than just hands and feet. We are also the legs, arms, eyes, ears, heart, voice, feelings, face, and

countenance of Jesus. Through the Holy Spirit living in us collectively as the Body of Christ, we are meant to convey the physical presence of Jesus in the world.

Jesus told his disciples about this on the night he handed himself over to the authorities to be tried and crucified on the next day. In John's gospel, Jesus began to help the disciples understand how they were to proceed when Jesus' physical presence would no longer be with them in the world as it had been. He told his disciples that it was better for him to go to the Father, so he could send the Holy Spirit to believers. Jesus told them that after he sent the Holy Spirit, they would be able to do greater works than he did. (John 14:12)

Imagine you were a disciple and you were being told that you would be able to do greater works than Jesus. It would be difficult to believe. Jesus envisioned being reunited in heaven with the Father to reign together with him, so that the righteous rule of God would be lovingly planted across the world and made to grow and spread. To make real the reign of God on earth, Jesus envisioned the sending of the Holy Spirit to fill and empower believers, which happened on the Day of Pentecost, 50 days after Jesus' resurrection, and 10 days after his ascension. Jesus envisioned believers all across the world being brought together and animated by the Holy Spirit to be the physical presence of Christ through the Church.

In all this, we are to imagine all the members of the Body of Christ being brought together. We each matter, but we also understand that we are not the only ones who matter. Each member matters. If you do not believe you matter, something is wrong with your faith. If you do not believe others matter equally, something is also wrong with your faith.

Paul also insisted that we are individually members of one another. In the body of Christ, where I end and another person begins overlaps in a sense. There must be an interconnectedness and interdependence. There is a give and take, like the give and take that exists between spouses in a healthy marriage. We are better together. It takes all of us, with our different functions, to be Christ's Body in the world.

Why do you think the message gets lost that every member matters in the Body of Christ? What keeps the Church from living up to this ideal? Why do church members sit back and say that ministry is what we pay the preacher to do? What could you do reclaim the message that every member matters?

What If I Am Gifted in Ways that Are Activated by Grace?

What makes us so different from each other? How am I to make a difference? How can I become a living vessel of the Holy Spirit's desire and miraculous power to transform lives and circumstances?

6 We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us:

God intends that we make an impact on the world and in our community and church through the gifting that God imparts to us through the Holy Spirit living in us. It is through our gifting from God that we are empowered, equipped, and directed in our service to Christ and his mission through the Body of Christ.

When I was first introduced to the subject of spiritual gifts, I latched onto the idea that a gifting from God is always a supernatural gifting, and that there is a difference between a gift and a talent. Through the years, I have moved away from this idea. I still believe that God accomplishes the miraculous through our giftings, but who am I to call something supernatural or natural? To God, all that we call supernatural is natural. Talents are just as God-given as spiritual gifts.

It is common nowadays in speaking about our strengths to call them our superpowers. Our strengths feel like our superpowers when we are working through our strengths, and our work is aligned with our strengths, and

our fellow team members know what our strengths are. When we can work within our strengths, we feel so much more empowered than trying to work through our weaknesses. I truly believe that God has wired us to have certain strengths. I am no longer bold enough to try to sort out what is natural and supernatural. It is all both natural and supernatural at the same time. God is able to work his miraculous power in us as God's living vessels through our talents, gifts, and strengths.

What is necessary is that we live our lives according to the will of God and with a desire to please God. It is also very helpful to understand that our gifts come from the grace of God given to us. A gift, whether you call it a talent, strength, or spiritual gift, is gift of God's grace. In other words, we do not deserve the gift, nor are we worthy of the gift God give us. Therefore, a gift from God should never be something we brag about or boast about. God deserves all the credit, and that humbles us and keeps us from thinking too highly of ourselves than we ought to think. In the original New Testament Greek, the word for grace is "charis" and the word for gifts is "charismata." The grace of God, the undeserved favor of God, activates the gifts God gives us.

What do you think about the nature of the gifts God gives us? How would you describe to another person how gifts, talents, and strengths are to be manifested in a person's life and the life of the Church? How have you seen your service in the Church improve when you discovered what you are supposed to do?

What If the Living Out of my Gifts Is What Transforms Me?

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he writes, "Now there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit, and there are varieties of services but the same Lord, and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." (1 Corinthians 12:4-7) If you multiply the varieties of gifts by the varieties of services, and multiply the varieties of services by the variety of activities, and you multiply that by the differences between us due to the grace given us, the total number of unique expressions of service and witness become limitless. All of these expressions are brought together through the Holy Spirit to contribute to the common good.

In these scriptures, we are being made to see how these gifts come together to form believers into Christ's Body on earth. For the purpose of this lesson, however, we are also looking at all this with an eye toward the way we, ourselves, are being *transformed*. We are transformed when we allow these gifts to be developed in our lives and then used in our service and our witness through the Body of Christ.

The development and deployment of our gifts is a part of our discipleship. Discipleship is central to our life as Christians. Discipleship is about how we become disciples of Jesus and how we become more Christ-like. Discipleship is also a holistic venture. It involves more than just study, meditation, and reflection, although these are essential means of grace to practice. There is much more "doing" involved in discipleship, in the development of our faith, and in the transformation of our lives. It is through the development and deployment of our gifts that we conform less and less with the world, and we are instead transformed into a believer who discerns and does the will of God.

In Romans 12:6-8, Paul begins to name some of the gifts that believers are given. Please know that this list is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to be suggestive. This partial list is meant to tease the imagination into active thought. As we consider the gifts mentioned in Romans 12:6-8, try to imagine how the operations of these gifts in believers' lives would contribute to their transformation as disciples of Jesus Christ. "*We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, ...*

^{6b} prophecy, in proportion to faith;

Prophecy is the ability to speak for God. Remember that, on the Day of Pentecost, it is recorded in the Book of Acts (chapter 2) that the Holy Spirit was poured out and the vision of the prophet Joel was fulfilled, in which God said: “I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.” The gift that was once reserved for a few was to be poured out upon many. Thank God for those who have gifts in the ministry of proclamation and witness, including both clergy and laity. Imagine how internalizing the Word of God and sharing that with others helps transform a believer into a more whole-hearted follower of Jesus Christ.

⁷ ministry, in ministering;

Thank God for those who have gifts for service and the ability to translate love and faith into action on behalf of others. These are able to serve within the Body of Christ and beyond the walls of the church into the community and world. These people demonstrate and model a true servant spirit for the whole church. These people are taking the lead in the “Matthew 25 ministries” of feeding the hungry, digging wells and providing water to the thirsty, welcoming and caring for the stranger, clothing and sheltering the naked and homeless, providing healing ministry to the sick, and visiting prisoners. Imagine how these ministries not only transform the lives of the people on the receiving end of these ministries—these ministries also transform the lives of the ones who are doing the ministering.

the teacher, in teaching;

Thank God for teachers who help the Body connect with God’s Word. These are the ones who dedicate themselves first to study and then sharing the fruit of their labor on behalf of God’s people. They follow Paul’s admonition to “do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15) Those with the gift of teaching are always seeking the best ways to present the truth of God to believers. Teachers engage in study and teaching for the benefit of those who are seeking to grow in their faith. Any teacher of biblical truth knows, however, that the ones who get the most out of all this are the teachers themselves. They are transformed by the development and deployment of their gift.

⁸ the encourager, in encouragement;

Thank God for encouragers. My role in the Church is to help shepherd men and women through the process of responding to God’s call to full-time and part-time ministry. I hear all the time about the encouragers who helped people realize that God was calling them into ministry. In a world of discouragers and people who only want to tear down, encouragers stand out. Encouragers help believers persevere in their journey of faith. They raise the morale of the Church. Being an encourager cannot but help the encourager stayed encouraged. Being one whose spiritual gift is to be an encourager will transform that person’s life in immeasurable ways as he or she develops and uses that gift on behalf of others.

the giver, in sincerity;

Thank God for those who have the gift of generosity. Givers help resource the Church’s mission. They have learned how to manage money well and how to invest in sustainable ways in ministry. Often, very few people know the impact they make on a regular basis, and that is by design. To give in sincerity means to give without thought of what one will get in return. Giving is an essential part of discipleship for every believer. For those for whom giving is a spiritual gift, their acts of generosity and joyful sacrifice transform and deepen their lives.

the leader, in diligence;

Thank God for leaders who have gifts for organization and promoting ministry so that the services people render are maximized and brought into focus. Leaders are often out in front leading people, but they are also stepping back and supporting others so others get to step out and make a difference. Leaders make sure the mission is moving forward which requires a winsome character and requires diligence. Those who have the gift of leadership will necessarily be servant leaders. Being a servant leader transforms the life of the servant leader.

the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Thank God for those who have the ministry of compassion, justice, and mercy. They help alleviate suffering, lift burdens, and address injustices. They must often enter the misery of others, but they do so while remaining cheerful with an eye toward bringing people into a state of peace and joy. Those who have the spiritual gift of compassion and mercy contribute on a regular basis to the redemption of lives and circumstances. They are in the life-transformation business. The development and deployment of their gift also transforms their own lives because they get an inside view of the heart of Jesus.

I think we would all agree that Paul provided good examples for how gifts are to be used for the building up of the Body of Christ. We should keep in mind, however, that this list is by no means exhaustive. Yet, it gives us an idea of what discovering, developing, and using our gifts looks like in the Body of Christ.

How do you see the development and deployment of your gifts contributing to the development of your faith? How do you see this way of developing your faith leading to transformation? How are you looking at discipleship differently as a result of this lesson? What goals might you set for your transformation as a person of faith? How do you see this contributing to a faith that pleases God?

Prayer

Gracious and loving God, You distribute your gifts among us through the Holy Spirit for service in the Body of Christ. Help us discover, develop, and deploy these gifts, so that we might become a more fully devoted disciple of Jesus and experience the transformation that conforms us to the image of your Son instead of the culture, through our Savior, Jesus Christ, who reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever, Amen.

Dr. Jay Harris serves as the Superintendent of Clergy and District Services for the South Georgia Conference. Email him at jharris@sgaumc.com. Find his plot-driven guide to reading the Bible, the "Layered Bible Journey," at www.layeredbiblejourney.com.

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February 4 Lesson: Faith in the Power of God

**Winter Quarter 2023-2024: Faith That Pleases God
Unit 3: The Righteous Live by Faith**

**Sunday School Lesson for the week of February 4, 2024
By Jay Harris**

Lesson Scripture: Isaiah 40:12-13, 25-31

Key Verse: *“He gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless.”* (Isaiah 40:29)

Lesson Aims

- To introduce the February Unit and the 40th chapter of Isaiah as well as its context
- To ponder the bigness and transcendent nature of God so that we understand that God is able
- To reflect on the surpassing love of God, who knows our name and understands our troubles
- To understand the enduring pattern of how God’s power bends down to the faint and powerless
- To learn what waiting on the Lord involves and how God renews our strength and lifts us

Introduction to the February Unit and Our Scripture

With this lesson we begin the February Unit (and last unit) of our Winter Study: “Faith that Pleases God.” The title of the unit is “The Righteous Live by Faith.” We are exploring faith as it is lived out in the life of the believer. We might ask whether we are talking about the everyday life of the believer or the extraordinary times that occasionally come in the believer’s life. We will see examples that perhaps lean one way or the other, but in all the examples we can apply the lessons both to daily life and the occasions that require an abundance of faith.

The 40th chapter of Isaiah is huge in terms of its importance. It signals a new section in this book of sixty-six chapters. The first 39 chapters contains words of warning peppered with beautiful visions of hope. In the words of warning, God (through the fertile mind of the prophet) is seeking to wake God’s people up from their complacency. It is a call to repentance while there is still time. The timeline for these 39 chapters of warning is the Eighth Century B.C., which ended in the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel. What remained of God’s people were those left in the southern kingdom of Judah.

The 40th chapter jumps forward in time to the Babylonian exile in the Sixth Century B.C. (remember the numbers go down the later you get in the years before the Christian era). The focus is the people of Judah who were taken to Babylon by the Babylonian army and held captive there with their homeland destroyed. The city of Jerusalem, including the temple, had been reduced to rubble.

The 40th chapter addresses this dire situation with these astounding words: “Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.” (Isaiah 40:1) God speaks tenderly to Jerusalem that her term has been served, her debt has been paid, and her sins have been forgiven. God will provide through the desert a highway for her people to return home. This means that God’s people will be liberated from their captivity. In all this, “the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” (Isaiah 40:5)

In this chapter and those that follow, the prophet’s task given by God is, again, to wake up God’s people. In this instance, it is not to wake them from apathy, it is rather to wake them up from their despair and lead them to a renewal of their lives in hope. This message is meant to energize God’s people.

Keep in mind also that prophets give announcements of future events well before they come to pass. The purpose is to prepare God’s people for what comes ahead. It is a level of preparation that must go deep and wide in the life of a believer. God is creating faith in the believer, and we get to see how God, through the prophet, does this. The creation of faith and hope in the hearts of God’s people is as important as their future liberation. The purpose is to build a faith that pleases God and draws the believer into a relationship with God.

Building Up Faith in a God Who Is Able

How would the exiles get their minds around the astounding announcement of their liberation? Everything in their experience would tell them that freedom from their captivity was not possible. That's how formidable their captor was. Their situation would have appeared completely hopeless. The prophet will get around to giving God's people the details of how it will be done, but first they need to be reminded what kind of God they served.

**12 Who has measured the waters of the sea in the hollow of his hand
and marked off the heavens with a span,
enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure
and weighed the mountains in scales
and the hills in a balance?**

The prophet asked a rhetorical question. The answer to the question is "no one but God." The prophet wants his audience to contemplate the bigness of God. The God who created the vast universe could hold the waters of the sea in the hollow of his hand and measure them. The Creator of it all is bigger than the universe itself, marking off the heavens with a span, then enclosing the dust of the earth in a measure, and so on. No one but God is big enough and powerful enough in the creating, renewing, and sustaining activity that brought the earth and the larger universe into being.

Have you ever felt your spirits lifted just by standing in the sand and gazing across the ocean, or standing on a mountain top and looking across mountains as far as the eye can see, or peering into the Grand Canyon? These experiences take on a spiritual quality because they make us think of the Creator. You can also get the same experience from looking at your newborn child or relative.

These experiences give us perspective. As big as our problems are in our own minds, God is bigger. To contemplate the bigness of God helps us put our problems in perspective.

**13 Who has directed the spirit of the LORD
or as his counselor has instructed him?**

The answer to this question is also "no one." No one has directed the spirit of the Lord or counseled or instructed God. No one has and no one could. Every human who has ever directed anything, or counseled anyone, or instructed anyone must have also been directed, or counseled, or instructed by some source outside of himself or herself at some point. All direction and instruction can be traced back to the Ultimate Source, who is God. God is the only One who has no source outside of himself because God is himself the Source.

Philosophers call God the Unmoved Mover. Every movement is created by some force outside of itself, but at the beginning of it all, there is the One who is the Mover of all, who was himself not moved by any other. The Unmoved Mover is God.

God is the Source not only because God is the First, but also because God's ways and understanding are higher than our ways and understanding. No one has directed the spirit of the Lord because no one is capable of that. No one has counseled or instructed God because no one has the ability. No one's understanding matches God's understanding. No one even comes close.

God delights in giving us direction, in counseling us, and instructing us, but there will always exist that inability to understand all that God understands. This is why we look to God when there are problems that perplex us and situations that overwhelm us. The prophet continues to press this point in verse 14.

Then, in verses 15 through 17, the prophet says that the nations are “like a drop from a bucket and are accounted as dust on the scales.” In other words, no nation presents a barrier to what God wants to do. So, when God says he has a way of liberating God’s people from the clutches of the mighty Babylonian army, then God’s people must trust that God knows what he is talking about. God’s ways are higher than our ways, because God is big. “All the nations are as nothing before him” (Isaiah 40:17), and that includes the Babylonian empire. God influences events on the world’s stage and on a grand scale and in ways that are not even remotely accessible to our understanding until God reveals it.

This is the good news! This is great news! All this says God is able! God’s wisdom, counsel, and direction transcends our own understanding, so that the situations that perplex us do not perplex God. God is greater than our problems.

How has God reminded you of God’s bigness or transcendent nature? How did that reminder give you a different perspective, a needed perspective, on something you were experiencing? How would you help someone who is missing that in their faith?

A God Whose Love Is As Great As God’s Power

In verses 18 through 20, the prophet describes the absolute folly of idols. A workman fashions a tiny representation of a false deity out of corruptible materials, and people are gullible enough to compare the idol to God and worship it. The prophet rightly asks, “*To whom, then, will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?*” (Isaiah 40:18)

In the years before the Exile, God’s people had sought to blend the worship of idols with the worship of the one true God—the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David. It was like a Disney movie title gone horribly wrong: “Honey, I Shrunk the Lord.”

Through the work of the prophets during the exile, God was teaching them that God had not died when the Babylonian army destroyed the temple. God was with them in the Exile. The knowledge that God could be with them in a foreign land, and be present in their trials and hardships, had already begun to expand their concept of God. Now, God was bringing the message to a culmination.

**²⁵ To whom, then, will you compare me,
or who is my equal? says the Holy One.**

Yet again, the prophet was reminding God’s people of the Lord’s transcendent quality. Because of God’s transcendent nature, as we have said, we understand that God is able. God is incomparable. God is “Other” in the most profound and wonderful ways.

How can a God who is so totally “Other” also be relatable? How would such a God not be remote in terms of our experience? Can such a God come down to our level and relate to us? We can even wonder if God even knows us and our problems.

**²⁶ Lift up your eyes on high and see:
Who created these?
He who brings out their host and numbers them,
calling them all by name;
because he is great in strength,**

**mighty in power,
not one is missing.**

Here is a picture of God as One who created the “starry” host (see New International Version translation). God knows each and every star and has a name for each one! God, in his mighty power and omnipresence, keeps count of the stars so that not one could be said to ever be missing. His knowledge of his creation is infinite in its detail.

How does this translate in God’s concern for people? Isaiah has already spoken to this in verse 11, where God’s people are compared to sheep and God is the shepherd, who feeds his flock, and gathers his lambs in his arms, and carries them in his bosom, and gently leads the mother sheep. When God gathers the exiles, and leads them home, not one will be missing.

**²⁷ Why do you say, O Jacob,
and assert, O Israel,
“My way is hidden from the LORD,
and my right is disregarded by my God”?**

We sometimes wonder if God knows what we are going through. Our way is not hidden from God. God’s intimate knowledge of us and God’s claim upon us tells us that God is nearer to us than we can perceive and grasp. Because God knows us better than we know ourselves, it can be said that God is closer to us than we are to ourselves. God is not as remote from our problems as we may suppose.

All this tells us that God is able to love as no One loves. God’s incomparable power and wisdom is matched by God’s incomparable love. Because of God’s incomparable love, because God knows us by name, and “because he is great in strength, mighty in power”—“not one is missing.”

When we forget God’s nature—that God is both the transcendent One and the One who is closer to us than we are to ourselves—we too can think our circumstances are hidden from the Lord, and we are thus disregarded by God. We are not disregarded by God.

In this reflection on God’s nature, we are combining what might seem to be two seemingly opposing theological concepts: 1) God’s transcendence—God’s *otherness*, and 2) God’s immanence—God’s *nearness and immersion in our lives*. In practice, these are not opposing concepts at all. God holds both qualities within God’s nature. This is who God is, who God has always been, and will always be.

This is nowhere expressed more clearly and beautifully than in the Incarnation—when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14) No wonder that John says that we have seen his glory, glory as of a Father’s only Son. What Jesus revealed so perfectly was always there in the dual nature of God. Truly, Jesus was and is our Emanuel—God with us.

Would you say you were more acquainted with the “otherness” of God or the “nearness” of God? What value do you see in holding these two qualities within God’s nature together in balance? How might you bring more balance in your own faith? On what would you need to focus?

Strengthened with God Power

The God we have just described is the One who is with us in our situations and circumstances. When such a God is with us, we should be prepared to be open, be receptive, and even willing to be surprised. We should also be prepared to be empowered.

28 Have you not known? Have you not heard?

**The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.**

God is not only the Unmoved Mover, who provided the initial spark to the vast universe of God's creation, God is also the Creator to the ends of the earth, who sustains the universe's creative engine. God does not faint or grow weary. No wonder that God's understanding is unsearchable. God's strength is inexhaustible. It is boundless.

**29 He gives power to the faint
and strengthens the powerless.**

Notice how the strength and power of the Lord bends down to the level of the faint and the powerless. In the belief systems of much of the ancient Near East, it was often assumed that the conquering powers were favored by the gods. God's people, however, possessed a unique counter-story in which the Creator of the universe, the One true God, looks out for the welfare of the weak, the faint, the powerless, and oppressed. The story that the captives in Babylon had in their spiritual memory was that God had delivered their ancestors from state sponsored slavery in Egypt. What God had done before, God could do again.

The prophet was announcing a liberation for the captives that would amount to a Second Exodus. Truly, it is the business of the Creator of the Universe to bring release to captives. When you think of God giving power to the faint and the powerless, think of God arranging the affairs of nations, including the most powerful nations, to favor the weak and those in bondage.

Isaiah will proclaim a few chapters later God's decree and plan to use a ruler named Cyrus, the king of the Persian Empire, to be God's instrument. God will enable him and the Persian army to subdue nations, including the Babylonian Empire. A cylinder survives today where the benevolent policy of Cyrus is inscribed. The official policy was to allow the captive peoples of the former Babylonian empire to return to their native lands and their religious institutions to be rebuilt.

The captives in Babylon could have never imagined how a juggernaut like the Babylonian army could have been made to release the captives. Only a big, transcendent God, like the God of Abraham and Jacob and David, could influence world affairs and cause a nation to rise up and defeat another empire. Only our God would choose to be a God for the powerless and lend his strength to create the means for their liberation.

Do you believe that more people believe that God helps those who help themselves or more believe that God helps those who cannot help themselves? Do you think the stories of God giving power to the powerless resonates like it should in society and in the Church? How does God favor for the powerless speak to all of us?

Waiting for the Lord

Notice how the prophet did not jump immediately to the part about using Cyrus and the Persian Empire to secure the freedom of God's people. It was important to get them to think first of the character and nature of

God. It is God's business not only to liberate God's people, but also to create faith in them. It would take some time for God to work out the means for their liberation, but God intended to strengthen their faith in the meantime.

Some might not live to see their liberation, but they would live to have their faith and hope reignited and fanned into flame. They would live to be strengthened in their daily living. They would be strengthened to be formed into a worshipping, serving, and witnessing community of faith right where they were planted. They would live into the story God had for them.

**³⁰ Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted,
³¹ but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint.**

All of us, even the teenagers and young adults among us, can be dragged down by life. All can faint, grow weary, fall exhausted, experience breakdown, suffer from despair, or experience anxiety or dread. All of us can experience life events that bring us down.

You can pick up a small handful of gravel and toss it lightly into a crowd of people, and you will not avoid sprinkling some of it on more than one person whose strength and fortitude have been exhausted at some point in their lives. Among the members of that same group, however, will be found those who have waited for the Lord and found their strength renewed.

What does it mean to wait for the Lord? It means to avoid bailing out in terms of our faith when trouble comes. It means that when we ask "why" in the face of trials and want to accuse God, that we also ask "why" in the face of blessings and thank God. It means we persevere in waiting for the answers when we have questions. It means not abandoning our relationship with the Lord, but instead leaning into a deeper relationship with our Maker, Redeemer, and Sustainer in the tough times.

One key to resilience in life is to cultivate resilience in our faith. A book that I have gotten a lot from is a book entitled, *Tempered Resilience*, by Tod Bolsinger. The illustration used throughout the book has to do with the process of forging metal.

The forging of metal happens by subjecting metal to various kinds of stresses. There is the anvil, the hammer, and high heat. You can see this process illustrated in a History Channel program called, "Forged in Fire." Each show is a competition between a handful of participants. They are challenged to create one or more implements that test their ability. At the end, they must subject their implement to a real-world test.

We know about the various stresses that our lives undergo. It is how we meet these stresses that determines whether we are brought low or undone by them or whether we persevere in the end. According to Tod Bolsinger, we should be looking to strengthen and temper our faith, so that our faith is strong when the stresses of life come. "Temper" is a good word because we know that tempered steel is steel that is equal parts strong and equal parts flexible so that we bend instead of break in the face of crises and stress.

How is our faith tempered? It is tempered by subjecting our faith to controlled stresses that resemble the way the forger uses the anvil, the hammer, and heat in a controlled way to temper steel. What does this look like in terms of tempering our faith to make it more resilient? According to Bolsinger, it means subjecting our faith to a way of life that includes spiritual disciplines, devotional habits, and healthy church practices. These activities must be entered into deliberately and with discipline. The discipline we apply is part of the point. If

all this sounds a bit demanding, remember that the goal in this activity is a deeper, more satisfying, more joyful relationship with the Lord.

They say that when tough times come, you do not rise to the occasion, you fall back on your training. Waiting for the Lord means we are not running ahead of the Lord, rushing from one crisis to another, nor are we sitting idly by with nothing to do. Waiting for the Lord means we stay in step with the Lord. In the spirit of Lamentations 3:22-23, we live eagerly expecting to experience daily the “faithfulness” and “steadfast love” of the Lord. We live with the belief that the “mercies” of the Lord “never come to an end” and “are new every morning.” Every morning is an opportunity to wait for the Lord to meet us and lead us through the day.

Those who wait for the Lord in this way shall renew their strength. Their spiritual preparation throughout life enables them to be uplifted and carried on the wind of God’s care, like an eagle’s wings allow the eagle to be carried on the wind. Those who stay in step with the Lord shall run the marathon of life and not be weary and walk through the hills, valleys, and rocky places of life and not faint.

How have you waited for the Lord or seen others wait for the Lord in a way that inspires you? How does the illustration of a faith forged through spiritual habits and disciplines speak to you? Why do you think people tend to live from one crisis to another, and how could they live more intentionally? What is one thing you can do to wait for the Lord that you are not presently doing? What would it look like in your life for your strength to be renewed and to mount up with wings like eagles?

Prayer

God, the Creator of the universe, and the One who knows us by name, You are the liberator of captives who utterly surprises us with how You can change the fortunes of the powerless, and You want us to know Your Strength. Call us to a life of waiting for You, show us the way, and strengthen us for life’s journey, that we might run and not be weary and remain faithful, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God forever, Amen.

Dr. Jay Harris serves as the Superintendent of Clergy and District Services for the South Georgia Conference. Email him at jharris@sgaumc.com. Find his plot-driven guide to reading the Bible, the “Layered Bible Journey,” at www.layeredbiblejourney.com.



Confirmation Retreat set for March 1-3

Registration for the 23rd annual South Georgia Conference Confirmation Retreat is now open. The 2024 retreat will take place March 1-3 at Epworth By The Sea on St. Simons Island.

Designed for students in the fifth grade and above, the “Join the Journey” Confirmation Retreat will provide churches of ALL sizes an opportunity to connect with others through worship, study, and fellowship. Bishop Graves will be joining us for the entire event!

For more information and to register your group, [click here](#).



Conference Updates & Happenings

Lay Servant Ministry: [Lay Servant Ministries & Certified Lay Ministry dates & registration](#)

- Online Advanced Lay Servant Ministries: February 13, 15, 20, 22
- Online Basic Lay Servant Ministries: August 13, 15, 20, 22
- Online Advanced Lay Servant Ministries: Sept 10, 12, 17, 19

3Practice Circle Conversations - Jan. 25: There are 3 practices that - when named - help us cross the “difference divide” and create space for real conversation. These 3 practices help and inform our interactions with others, ourselves, and God. Revs. Teresa Edwards, Meg Procopio, and Jared Wilson are going to set the stage for us on how to use 3Practice Circles. Learn more: www.sgaumc.org/3practice-circles.

Basic ERT Training & Chainsaw Safety Class – Jan. 27: An ERT training is set for Saturday, January 27 at 8 am at Cordele First UMC. This training is a collaborative effort of the United Methodist Committee on Relief and United Methodist Volunteers in Mission. [Learn more](#)

Small Church Focus: Revisioning and Remissioning for Small Churches – Feb. 8 & Feb. 9: "The way we've always done things" isn't working anymore, yet it is still the way many churches continue to do things. What is needed to reach people in this day and time and move from a mindset of survive to thrive is a fresh wind of vision and mission. While this is necessary for churches of all sizes, small churches present some unique challenges and advantages when it comes to revisioning and remissioning. Join Anne Bosarge and Jeremy Alexander for a conversation about how to leverage the uniqueness of small churches and begin the journey of reimagining what missional impact will look like for your congregation. Two days/times are being offered to give you flexibility and with the hope one will meet your schedule: Thursday, February 8, 6:30pm-8pm or Friday, February 9, noon-1:30pm. If you have questions or need more information, please contact Anne Bosarge at abosarge@sgaumc.com.

Confirmation Retreat – March 1-3: The 23rd annual South Georgia Conference Confirmation Retreat will take place March 1-3 at Epworth By The Sea on St. Simons Island. Designed for students in the fifth grade and above, the “Join the Journey” Confirmation Retreat will provide churches of ALL sizes an opportunity to connect with others through worship, study, and fellowship. Bishop Graves will be joining us for the entire event! For more information and to register your group, [click here](#).

United Women in Faith Retreat – March 8-10: The South Georgia Conference United Methodist Women will host their annual Spiritual Growth Retreat March 8-10, 2024, at Epworth By The Sea on St. Simons Island. This year's theme is "Becoming More Loving." Retreat speaker will be Anne Bosarge, and Sara Fullerton will be the worship leader. [Learn more](#)

Clergy Spouses Retreat – March 15-17: The 2024 Clergy Spouses Retreat is set for March 15-17, 2024, at Epworth By The Sea. The retreat theme will be, "Embracing Christian Friendships," with the Scripture focus being from 1 Thessalonians 5:11: "Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing." This will be a gathering with spouses from South Georgia, North Georgia, and the Alabama West-Florida conference. [Download the brochure for all the details](#) | [Register here](#)

Leading Through Trauma - March 21: This one-day retreat for South Georgia clergy will be held at Camp Tygart Pipkin Center in Ray City on March 21, 2024, from 9 am - 3 pm. Led by Cameron Bishop, we will talk about the trauma pastors experience in ministry and learn strategies for processing it so we can continue to lead well and thrive personally. The cost for this event is \$25 (lunch is included). [Click here to learn more and register](#).

Summer Camp 2024: Registration is now open for Camp Connect! There is 1 week of senior high camp, 2 weeks of junior high camp, and 2 weeks of elementary camp. [Find out more information and sign up today!](#)

Summer Camp Connect Leadership Team: Now hiring for Summer 2024! Do you know a college student who loves Jesus and has a heart to serve kids? If you know of any in your circle or local church, let them know about this opportunity to serve! [Learn more.](#)

Annual Conference – June 2-5: Hotel Room blocks are now open for the 2024 Annual Conference Session set for June 2-5 in Tifton. [View list here](#)

[View Full Conference Calendar](#)



Do Not Disturb

A John Wesley Moment
By Rev. Dave Hanson

Susanna Wesley had her hands full raising so many children. She taught them to obey, to cry softly, and to behave. But there were times when things became hectic. At such times Susanna would simply pull her apron over her head. When she pulled that apron over her head the children knew it meant “Do Not Disturb!”

The Rev. Dave Hanson is a retired South Georgia pastor and John Wesley scholar. He has written a book entitled "This is a John Wesley Moment." You can purchase the book at the Moore Methodist Museum at Epworth By The Sea or by contacting Dave at jdavehanson@bellsouth.net.



The OG Circuit-Riding Bishop

What’s Old Is New Again
by Anne Packard

There are 103 historical markers that mention Bishop Francis Asbury along the east coast of the United States. The northernmost marker can be found in upper New York state near Lyons where Bishop Francis Asbury presided over the first session of the Genesee Conference Methodist Church on July 20, 1810. William McKendree was also present at this meeting. The southernmost historical marker can be found in our very own South Georgia Conference. It commemorates the creation of Wesley Chapel Trinity in downtown Savannah in 1812 which Bishop Francis Asbury dedicated in 1813. The westernmost historical marker is located in Brentwood, Tennessee, along what was known as the western frontier. Bishop Francis Asbury and the newly elected Bishop William McKendree attended the Western Conference meeting of 1808 in Green Hill’s home at this location. A traveling bishop with too many miles and too many churches...what’s old is new again!

Saturday, April 22, 1794 – Francis Asbury’s Journal: “My soul enjoys peace; but Oh! for more of God! This campaign has made me “groan, being burthened.” But news on my coming to the mountains; neither preachers nor elders have visited Swapino since last October; poor people – poor preachers that are not more stable; but all flesh is grass, and I am grass. I have provided brother G and L for the westward. I wrote a plan

for stationing; and desired the dear preachers to be as I am in the work; I have no interest, no passions, in their appointments; my only aim is to care and provide for the flock of Christ. I see I must not leave Charleston till the third or fourth week in March; then the rains will subside, and the creeks and rivers be passable; and so shall we escape the danger of drowning ourselves and horses. I feel that my sufferings have been good preaching to me – especially in crossing the waters. I am solemnly moved, in not visiting my Holstein and Kentucky brethren. It may be their interest to desire the preservation of my life: while living I may supply them with preachers, and with men and money. I feel resolved to be wholly the Lord’s; wear as I am, I have done nothing. I am nothing, only for Christ! or I had long since been cut off as an unfaithful servant; Christ is all, and in all I do, or it had not been done; or when done, had, by no means, been acceptable.

Monday, December 4, 1797 – Francis Asbury’s Journal: “We stopped one night at Matthew Davis’s; and the next at Ira Ellie’s. Our time was taken up in journalizing; I came off twenty-five miles to Edward Drumgold’s: once or twice I felt on my way thither as if the blood would rise into my mouth. I resolved to give up traveling this winter. Dr. Sims bled me; and there appeared an inflammatory buff on the top. Oh! to rest – to be idle and dependent – is painful: but if this is to make me perfect, the will of the Lord be done. I sent my papers to brother Lee, who proceeds to Charleston; also my plan and directions how to station the preachers, to brother Jackson. I believed that my going to Charleston this season, would end my life; yet, could I be persuaded it was the will of the Lord, I would go and preach. I cannot bear the fatigue of riding thirty miles a day. I am much pressed to make my will, lest I should be surprised by death my mind is greatly calmed and centered in God. I have well considered all the solemnities of death.”

Thursday, October 6, 1800 – Francis Asbury’s Journal: “Crossed Nolachucky at Querton’s ferry and came to Major Cragg’s, eighteen miles. I next day pursued my journey and arrived at the Warm Spring, not however without an ugly accident. After we crossed the Small and Great Paint mountain, and had passed about thirty yards, beyond the paint rock, my roan horse, led by Mr. O’Haven, reeled and fell over, taking the chaise with him; I was called back, when I beheld the poor beast and the carriage, bottom up, lodged and wedged against a sapling, which alone prevented them both being precipitated into the river. After a pretty heavy lift all was righted again, and we were pleased to find there was little damage done. Our feelings were excited more for others than ourselves. Not far off we saw clothing spread out, part of the loading of household furniture of a wagon which had overset and was thrown into the stream, and bedcloths, bedding, etc. were so wet that the poor people found it necessary to dry them on the spot. We passed the side fords of French Break and came to Mr. Nelson’s; our mountain march of twelve miles calmed us down for this day. My company was not agreeable here – there were many subjects of the two great potentates of this western world – whisky-brandy. My mind was greatly distressed.”

Too many miles. Too many rivers. Too many mountains. Too much weather. Too much need. Too many worldly sins. But, oh, what a difference one man made. Bishop Francis Asbury made history every day with every stop and every interaction. And the only way he could accomplish these tasks can be found with his faith in God, his hope of God, and his love for God.

As the South Georgia Conference approaches the western frontier between what is known and what is unknown, may we remember that others have been in this place and have left paths for us to follow and lights to lead. Like Bishop Francis Asbury, let us be less concerned with appointments and quarterly meetings and wholly consumed with the desire “to care and provide for the flock of Christ.” Thanks be to God.

Anne Packard serves as Conference Historian and director of the Arthur J. Moore Methodist Museum on St. Simons Island. Contact her at apackard@epworthbythesea.org.



Resource Roundup – January 2024

Human Relations Day is January 15

On Human Relations Day, we come together to recognize efforts to become the beloved community. Find resources for worship, promotion, age-level material and more in the pastor and leader kit. Core resources are available in multiple languages. [Find resources to promote](#)

2023: The year in photos

In a world filled with uncertainty, United Methodists found creative ways to live out their faith and serve their communities in 2023. UM News photographers documented a year in the life of United Methodism worldwide. [See photos](#)

GBHEM Scholarship Program now open

Each year GBHEM awards over \$5.5 million in scholarships to students from across the world. The GBHEM scholarship application portal opened Dec. 15. Students can submit one general application which will be screened for all possible eligible programs. Applicant must be an active, full member of The United Methodist Church for at least one year and pursuing a degree program at an accredited institution within the U.S. [Learn more](#)

New preaching resources available

Resources, videos and workshops are coming to help pastors improve their preaching. Discipleship Ministries is launching the new service in 2024. The Rev. Derek C. Weber, director of preaching ministries at Discipleship Ministries, is heading the Hey Preacher project, financed through a grant from the Lilly Endowment. [Read press release](#) | [Register](#)

Seasonal explainer videos for congregations

The church calendar is full of special days and seasons United Methodists observe every year. United Methodist Communications has videos available to help congregations better understand these annual occasions and their significance. [Learn more](#)

Agency unveils 'Journey of a Dollar' video

The General Council on Finance and Administration, the denomination's finance agency, has released its latest video, "UMC: Journey of a Dollar." The video, part of the ongoing Data-Driven Discernment: Charting Hope at General Conference campaign, seeks to shed light on the path a dollar takes once it enters the offering plate and how it supports individual congregations and The United Methodist Church's global reach. [Read press release](#) | [Watch video](#)



Retired Clergy Birthdays - January 2024

- 1/01 – Cindy H. Autry: 2958 Roswell Lane; Columbus, GA 31906
- 1/01 – James Hancock: 4360 Manor Millwood Rd. S; Manor, GA 31550
- 1/01 – Larry Roberts: 12 Foxfire Estates Circle; Waynesville, NC 28785
- 1/01 – Dan Robinson: Cypress Pond Retirement; 15 Kent Rd.; Tifton, GA 31794
- 1/02 – Sharon Loyley: 1544 Harris Ridge Rd.; Young Harris, GA 30582
- 1/03 – John Haney: 165 Beaver Creek Drive; Gray, GA 31032
- 1/03 – Marcus Tripp: 3791 Overlook Dr.; Macon, GA 31204
- 1/06 – Joyce Harris: 111 Ingham St.; St. Simons Island, GA 31522

1/07 – Tommy Martin, III: 606 Chastain Place; Macon, GA 31210
1/08 – Annette Brooks: 114 Sunset Dr.; Fitzgerald, GA 31750
1/08 – Ernie Rogers: 1803 Pineknoll Lane; Albany, GA 31707
1/08 – Gary Starrett: PO Box 113; Bolingbroke, GA 31004
1/21 – Billy Wicker, Jr.: 400 Ridgecrest Rd.; E. Dublin, GA 31021
1/22 – Tom Davis, Jr.: 155 Twin Creek Ct.; Athens, GA 30605
1/24 – Joe Dunagan: 130 Commercial Ave.; East Palatka, FL 32131
1/24 – Debbie Wallace: 1321 Happy Trail; Macon, GA 31220
1/27 – Bill Jones: 106 Hilldale Circle; Vidalia, GA 30474
1/30 – Harold Feightner: 107 Harvest Point; Warner Robins, GA 31088
1/30 – Holland Morgan: 2 E. 62nd Street; Savannah, GA 31405



Obituary: Joanne Ayers Snell

Joanne Ayers Snell, also known as “Ma”, “Modgie”, or “MeMe”, passed away on Saturday, January 6, 2024. She was 91 ½ years young. Joanne is survived by a daughter, her husband, two sons, their wives, six grandsons, their wives, one granddaughter, her husband, one great-granddaughter and one great-grandchild on the way, as well as several cousins, nieces, and nephews. Joanne was preceded in death by her husband, her parents, a brother, two sisters, and a granddaughter.

Joanne was an independent soul coupled with the tenacity to get things done. Possessing a good sense of humor, she could laugh at life’s absurdities. With a quiet spirit, she persevered through life’s trials.

Joanne was a loving and supportive wife, mother, grandmother, and friend. She was devoted to the roles of nurturer, manager, tutor, housekeeper, nurse, cook, and confidant. She loved much and was much loved. Born on July 27, 1932, Joanne grew up in Elbert County, Georgia. Upon graduation from high school, she moved to Atlanta to attend business school. She began visiting Inman Park Methodist Church where she met Jim Snell. They married on April 4, 1954. Shortly thereafter, Jim was ordained as a Methodist minister and Joanne began life as a preacher’s wife.

Together, they raised a family while moving from place to place, spanning approximately 38 years in the ministry, serving twelve church communities. They retired in June 1995.

They purchased a small motor home and travelled most of the “Lower 48”. Sometimes, however, their greatest adventure consisted of parking the RV in the backyard of a grandkid for a few weeks.

After 2 ½ years of life on the road, they settled in Loganville, Georgia and soon joined a Methodist church family in Snellville, Georgia. Before long, the Good News Sunday School Class adopted Jim and Joanne as teacher and friend. The friendships forged during the 22 years of fellowship with this class were treasured. Joanne lost the love of her life on July 21, 2020 during the height of Covid. Her faith was a rock. Her strength was an inspiration. Her independent soul coupled with that tenacity carried her through to the end. Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Joanne was a blessing. To God be the glory!

A funeral service will be held on Wednesday, January 10, 2024 at 11:00 AM at Tom M. Wages Snellville Chapel in Snellville, Georgia. Interment will follow at 1:30 PM at Eternal Hills Memory Gardens in Snellville, Georgia.



Scripture Readings – January 23 edition

January 28

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany, Year B

- [Deuteronomy 18:15-20](#)
- [Psalm 111](#)
- [1 Corinthians 8:1-13](#)
- [Mark 1:21-28](#)

February 4

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, Year B

- [Isaiah 40:21-31](#)
- [Psalm 147:1-11, 20c](#)
- [1 Corinthians 9:16-23](#)
- [Mark 1:29-39](#)