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WHEN DISASTERS STRIKE

Dr. Derek Thomas and his church
respond to the flooding in
South Carolina.

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Christians tend to be encouraged about their justification (if they understand it), but sometimes discouraged about their sanctification (or seeming lack thereof). Consequently, they miss out on something intended to be a blessing from God for them for their good and His glory. Sometimes preaching on sanctification ends up sounding like “be good, do better, try harder,” or like “stop trying to do what you can’t do and rest in His grace.” Both approaches are wrong and unbiblical. In sanctification, it’s neither “try harder” nor “stop trying,” but “by grace, grow,” or “by grace, become who God created/redeemed you to be.”

By His grace, as we continue to celebrate 50 years as a seminary, RTS is becoming more of what He created us to be. Even as we do, we see reminders all around us that we live in a fallen world corrupted by sin, even in the natural order. We saw this on full display this past October when 20 inches of rain descended on Columbia, South Carolina, causing rivers and lakes to overflow, and (more devastatingly) dams to fail, leading to the worst flooding that area had seen in more than a century.

As RTS-Atlanta professor Dr. Derek Thomas and his First Presbyterian Church congregation observed (see “When Disaster Strikes” on page 10), the floodwaters engulfed believer and nonbeliever alike. For believers,

though, disasters like the Columbia flooding become opportunities to, by God’s grace, become more of what He created them to be. In addition, they become opportunities to testify of His grace to the hurting world around them. In other words, natural disasters often become a means of sanctifying those who belong to the family of God and justifying those who previously had been His enemies.

In preparing the next generation of gospel ministers for a lifetime of faithful, fruitful service, we at RTS do not endeavor to “be good, do better, try harder,” nor do we “stop trying to do what we can’t do and rest in His grace.” Our students and graduates, whether current enrollees like Tony Wang (see “A Fisher of Men” on page 14) or seasoned veterans like Ron McKinney (see “Creating a Masterpiece” on page 8), demonstrate “A Mind for Truth, a Heart for God” as they apply the gospel to their own lives and those of others.

God is faithful to sanctify His own, as I was reminded of in a fresh way at the recent Together for the Gospel gathering in Louisville, Kentucky (see page 16). May we at RTS, in partnership with like-minded and like-hearted organizations like those we linked arms with at T4G, be faithful to cooperate with our Lord in His sanctification process. **M**

WHO WE ARE

Reformed Theological Seminary exists to serve the church by preparing its leaders through a globally accessible program of theological education based on the authority of the inerrant Word of God and committed to the Reformed faith. This program promotes biblical fidelity, confessional integrity and academic excellence, and seeks to prepare students marked by “A mind for truth. A heart for God.”

As such, Ministry & Leadership exists to show how God is working through the ministries of its graduates, faculty members and students.

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Ministry & Leadership promotes RTS through articles designed to edify its readers through solid biblical instruction, and through reports that focus primarily on the national and global impact of RTS students, faculty and alumni. Our goal is that readers will become partners with RTS through prayer, financial giving, educational experience and student referral, as well as providing placement opportunities.

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TRAVEL

Dr. Chuck Hill gave five lectures on the Canon of the New Testament at the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology, Grand Rapids, Mich., April 15-17.

Dr. Jim Hurley conducted a marriage conference, *Healing Wounds – Maintaining Unity*, at Westminster Church, Atlanta, April 15-16.

Dr. Michael Kruger spoke at the T4G pre-conference for The Council on Biblical Manhood & Womanhood, April 11-12, Louisville, Ky., and will be a plenary speaker at the 2016 Philadelphia (Pa.) Conference on Reformed Theology, April 29-May 1.

Dr. Don Sweeting will speak at Hawthorne (N.J.) Gospel Church's Summer Bible Conference, Aug. 21.

Dr. Chad Van Dixhoorn gave the lecture "Post-Reformation Trinitarian Perspectives" at Westminster Seminary California, March 17.

TRAVEL (INTERNATIONAL)

Dr. Miles Van Pelt taught the D.Min course "The Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament" in Brazil, March 7-11.

Dr. Guy Waters will lecture at the New Zealand Chinese Methodist Churches' Mission Conference, May 20-21, and at the Reformed Pastors Fellowship, May 24, both in Auckland.

PUBLICATIONS



RTS faculty members have contributed to two new volumes on biblical theology. Dr. Miles Van Pelt has edited *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised* and Dr. Michael J. Kruger has edited *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament: The Gospel Realized*. Both volumes, containing submissions by other RTS faculty, are set to be released by Crossway in May.



Dr. Michael Allen and **Dr. Scott Swain** have co-edited the book *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic* (Baker Academic, May), a systematic theology textbook with contributions from 12 theologians in the Reformed world. Dr. Allen has also contributed the essay "Confessions" to *The Cambridge Companion to Reformed Theology* (Cambridge University Press), edited by David Fergusson and Paul Nimmo.

Dr. James Anderson contributed the article "Islam Today" to the April issue of *Tabletalk*.

Dr. John Frame wrote the book *Selected Shorter Writings, Vol. 3* (P&R Publishers, March) and a forthcoming review of Anthony Thiselton's book *Systematic Theology* for the *Westminster Theological Journal*.



Dr. Benjamin Gladd has co-authored a book with Dr. Matthew Harmon, *Making All Things New: Eschatology in the Daily Life of the Church* (Baker, March).



Dr. Howard Griffith has published the book *Spreading the Feast: Instruction and Meditations for Ministry at the Lord's Table* (P&R) and has reviewed Dr. Gregg Allison's book *Roman Catholic Theology and Practice: An Evangelical Assessment* (Crossway) for the May issue of the *Westminster Theological Journal*.

Dr. Donald Fortson and Rollin Grams have co-authored the now-available book *Unchanging Witness: The Consistent Christian Teaching on Homosexuality in Scripture and Tradition* (B&H Academic).

Dr. Chuck Hill has contributed the chapter "Rightly Dividing the Word: Uncovering an Early Template for Textual Division in John's Gospel" to *Studies on the Text of the New Testament and Early Christianity in Honor of Michael W. Holmes* (Brill Academic Publications) and wrote a review of John Behr's book *Irenaeus of Lyons: Identifying Christianity* for the *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*.

Mr. Greg Lanier contributed "The Curious Case of tsemach and anotate: An Inquiry Into Septuagint Translation Patterns" to the December 2015 volume of the *Journal of Biblical Literature*.

Dr. Guy Waters has written the article "Why I Love My Book of Church Order" for *9Marks*.

Dr. Douglas Kelly has contributed the chapter "Creation, Mankind and the Image of God" to *Reformation Theology*, ed. Matthew Barrett (Crossway) and the chapter "Calvin as Pastor, Seen Through the Consistory Minutes of Geneva" to *Evangelical Calvinism*, eds. Myk Habets and Bobby Grow (Wipf and Stock).

ANNOUNCEMENTS



Dr. Douglas Kelly Retiring
With deep appreciation for his labors in training ministers of the gospel, his many

years of faithful teaching and preaching, and his invaluable commitments to the advancement of Reformed theology in the world today, RTS announces that Dr. Douglas Kelly will retire from his position as the Richard Jordan professor of theology, effective May 31. Dr. Kelly began teaching systematic theology at RTS in 1983 at the Jackson campus, and has taught at the Charlotte campus since 1991. In addition to teaching all the core theology courses, Dr. Kelly has taught electives on a wide range of subjects such as Puritan theology, Scottish theology, medieval theology, and the doctrine of the Trinity.

Rev. Blair Smith has been appointed as professor of systematic theology at RTS-Charlotte as of June 1. He is an ordained minister in the PCA and served over seven years as the pastor of adult education at Fourth Presbyterian Church, Bethesda, Md. Currently he is the associate pastor at Michiana Covenant Presbyterian Church near South Bend, Ind.

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THE DARKNESS DOES NOT WIN

When the new *Star Wars* movie came out a few months ago, everyone who didn't wait in line for the first midnight showing seemed agitated that some friend or acquaintance on social media would ruin the movie by telling them all the plot twists and turns. I understand that when people are looking forward to a movie, they don't want any spoilers. Got it — you won't hear me talk about the Ewoks' shocking turn to the Dark Side. You'll have to see the movie for yourself.

But Christianity is not like the movies. We are meant to know how the story ends. We are supposed to read the Bible for spoilers. So let me give you one that God won't let us forget:

The darkness does not win.

It's hard to believe that sometimes, isn't it? Doesn't it seem like every week we hear about terrorism or mass shootings or genocide in some part of the world? Can't you look back on this past year and think about loved ones who've died or people who've been diagnosed with cancer? Aren't there hurricanes and earthquakes and tornados? Don't we know people gripped by addiction or saddled with chronic pain or mired in a depression that will not lift? Can't you look in your own life and see too many dead ends, too many tears, too many hurts, too many unknowns, too many closed doors, and too little time to get everything done? Haven't Christians been beheaded and forced to flee from their homes? Isn't sexual immorality more accepted and Christian conviction increasingly ridiculed (or worse)? It's not hard to be discouraged.

And yet, the spoiler is true: the darkness does not win. Listen to John 1:1-5:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

JOHN 1:1-5 ILLUMINATES THE RESOLUTION OF THE GOSPEL STORY.

The symbolism of "light" in John's Gospel has many layers. Light can refer to Christ (as in John 8:12, "I am the light of the world"), or to obeying the will of God (as in John 3:20, "everyone who does wicked things hates the light"), or to eternal life and the abundant life that can be found only in Christ (which is what verse 4 means by "In him was life, and the light was the life of men"). I think John is being deliberately ambiguous in verse 5, so that we are to understand that the entire Light Side is victorious over the Dark Side. We will not be overcome by the darkness — ei-

ther in our lifetime struggle with sin or in the life to come of eternal bliss — because we belong to the one who is the light of the world.

Darkness, which is John's way of talking about the fallen world of sin and Satan, will not prove victorious in its long, protracted fight against the light. Light is more powerful, even when darkness is more pervasive.

Recently I got my kids cheap LED flashlights. They're four inches long and take three tiny AAA batteries (the flashlights, not my kids). And you know what happens if someone shines those little suckers in your eyes at 6:30 in the morning? Your whole face melts right off. It's that bright. And the darker it is in the room, the brighter it seems.

I can sleep at night with noise, but I like it to be dark, which means my wife and I sometimes go back and forth on the issue. She might, for example, want to keep a night light on in case the children stumble into our room in the middle of the night. And then I might, for example, say something reasonable like: "What is that in the bathroom burning with brightness of ten thousand suns?" A little teeny light shining in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it.

That's the good news of Christmas, the good news of Easter, the good news of the gospel. But why? Why can we be confident that the darkness will not win? It's not because of pleasant religious sentiment. It's not because of the triumph of the human spirit. It's not because dreams come true when



RECOMMENDED BOOKS BY KEVIN DEYOUNG

we believe (no matter what we actually believe). Our confidence as Christians is rooted in history, because our faith is based on fact. The whole messy story of a virgin, a betrayal, a bloody death and hell-shaking resurrection actually happened.

Christ was born. He lived. He died. He rose from the dead on the third day. He is coming again. We know that the darkness will not, in the end, be victorious, because it was not victorious over Him.

The Pharisees despised Him, the scribes debated Him, the Sadducees loathed Him, and the chief priests accused Him. Yet, the darkness did not win.

The Devil tempted Him, the disciples doubted Him, Judas betrayed Him, and Peter denied Him. Yet, the darkness did not win.

Herod harassed Him, Pilate washed his hands of Him, the soldiers beat Him, and the Romans crucified Him. Yet, the darkness did not win.

How could it?

For this child, this Messiah, this light of the world, was the Word made flesh. Can you hear the Genesis-John connection? In the beginning, Genesis tells us, God created the heavens and the earth. He spoke the words “Let there be light,” and there was light. In the beginning, John tells us, was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. From creation to redemption to our final glorification, God sends forth the word of light to pierce the darkness.

If God can summon light into existence when there was only darkness, surely he can send His light into the world with assurance of complete success — no matter how impossible the odds. For this is the miracle and the wonder of the Christian story: The light of the world was born in the darkness of night, as the Word of God lay in the manger unable to speak a syllable.

The story is true, all of it — the angels, the shepherds, the manger, the star, the wise men, the walking on water, the water into the wine, the wine and the bread, the cross, and the empty tomb. All true.

So now what? Repent. Believe. Trust. Obey. Worship and rejoice. The true light, which gives light to everyone, has come into the world.

And the darkness does not win. **M**

Kevin serves as chancellor’s professor of systematic and historical theology at RTS while continuing as senior pastor at University Reformed Church in East Lansing, Michigan. Visit his blog at blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/kevindeyoung.

Kevin is a prolific author, having written or co-written more than 10 books and numerous articles, as well as maintaining a blog for The Gospel Coalition. Here are several of his titles, available for purchase at the RTS online bookstore at mindandheart.com:

- **What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality?**
- **Crazy Busy: A (Mercifully) Short Book About a (Really) Big Problem**
- **Taking God At His Word: Why the Bible Is Knowable, Necessary and Enough, and What That Means for You and Me**
- **Just Do Something: A Liberating Approach to Finding God’s Will**
- **The Hole in Our Holiness**
- **The Good News We Almost Forgot: Rediscovering the Gospel in a 16th Century Catechism**
- **What Is the Mission of the Church?: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom and the Great Commission**
- **Why We Love the Church: In Praise of Institutions and Organized Religion**
- **The Biggest Story: How the Snake Crusher Brings Us Back to the Garden**
- **Don’t Call It a Comeback: The Old Faith for a New Day**



Why Bother With Church History?

Looking to the past teaches us lessons for today.

I'll never forget the class in which I fell in love with history.

It was my freshman year of college; my professor taught his world history class using an amazing number of photographs and slides (on an old slide projector). As he taught the class and showed how understanding the past shaped the present, he made history come alive in ways that have never left me.

But many people don't have that experience. They had history classes in high school and college that were nothing more than a recitation of names, dates and places, taught by faculty members who had lost their passion for how the past relates to the present and shapes the future. And so, suggesting to them that they should read history and, especially as Christians, church history seems to be a waste of time.

As a church history professor who also serves as a pastor in a local congregation, I regularly make the case for laypeople understanding something of the past. There are good reasons to study church history, but they may not be the ones that seem obvious to us. In fact, some of the reasons people give for studying the past are actually less than helpful or even less than Christian.

Why Not to Study Church History

Perhaps the most common reason that people give for studying the past and especially church history is a desire for inspiration. I'll never forget talking to one pastor about a biography series I was editing. He was congratulating me for taking this series on, because "we need more lives of great

men to inspire our people." But not only is that not the reason we were producing the biography series, it is also not the best way of doing or thinking about history.

To be sure, there are inspirational moments in church history. Who isn't thrilled by Luther's words at the Diet of Worms in 1521? And who can't find great courage to advance in mission when we hear William Carey in 1792 rebuke the hyper-Calvinism of his day and boldly articulate a rationale for mission? Or be sustained in doctrinal battles by Charles Spurgeon's example in the 1887-88 "Down-grade Controversy," when he castigated his fellow Baptists for forsaking the truth of biblical inspiration?

The problem with an inspirational approach to church history, though, is that it inevitably requires us to truncate the truth

about historical actors. Yes, there are times when Luther, Carey and Spurgeon were heroic, but there were undoubtedly times when they were less than heroic. And any truthful telling of the past for the purpose of present edification and future direction must take into account both the good and the bad of real men and women, sinners redeemed by grace.

Bringing up "the bad" suggests another reason not to study church history: the claim that we need to study the past because history repeats itself. The philosopher George Santayana observed in 1905, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Sometimes my students will use this on a final exam: there is nothing new to understand because history seems to repeat itself.

However, I'd suggest that underlying this idea is an unbiblical view of history — that it is cyclical, that we are con-

Learning about the larger motivations and actions of human actors in real time actually can shape us in significant ways.



stantly repeating the past whether wittingly or unwittingly. The Greeks held this view, but it is not biblical. Rather, we believe that history has purpose and direction, that we are moving to the new heavens and new earth, where God will redeem all things.

We could say that there is a pattern to history, that those who fail to operate in accordance with God's ordinances revealed in creation and His laws revealed in Scripture invite God's rebuke, that God sovereignly raises up kings and kingdoms and deposes them in accordance with His divine plan and pleasure, that God is directing all things for His ultimate purpose of uniting all things in Christ. But that is a far different perspective than saying that history repeats itself.

Why to Study Church History

So, if those are less-than-worthy reasons to study history and especially church history, then why should we bother? Or to put it differently, why should you add some church history books to your bedside reading table?

One reason is that there is value in learning history for its own sake. Again, not simply learning names, dates and places, but learning about the larger motivations and actions of human actors in real time actually can shape us in significant ways. Especially as we consider various figures from the church's history, we come to understand what drove Augustine in his battles with Pelagius, how motivated John Calvin was to plant churches in France, or why J. Gresham Machen was willing to secede from a church he saw as apostate. And learning these stories shapes our own understanding of Christianity in our present day and for its future; understanding the past affects the present and shapes the future.

Along that line, then, we can say that studying church history helps us understand our Christian identity. After all, identity is formed through the confluence of beliefs and practices. Beliefs are those core understandings that are vital for motivating an approach to life; practices are those activities that flow from and reinforce those beliefs. But our stories are those narratives that help all this make sense to us.

And so, when we learn about church history, when we dive into the stories, we gain a window into why we are the way we are as Christians — how the various means of



grace have developed over time, why particular confessions and creeds are more highly valued than others, and ways in which theological commitments play out for the good of the church. We learn about the way we Christians are and what God has called us to be.

In order for us to be more faithful, then, we need to study church history so that we might have wisdom and insight into our present age. It is not enough simply to understand the past; rather, we also want to use the past. And the way we use the past is to pay attention to the larger patterns of God's providence revealed in His general revelation of history. As God has dealt with His church in the past, as Christians have either proven faithful or unfaithful, we come to live more wisely in this present age. And that is something that we as Christians should all want — to live for God's glory alone. **M**

Dr. Lucas joined the RTS-Jackson faculty in 2014 as associate professor of church history while continuing on as senior minister of First Presbyterian Church in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

Recommended Reading

The Story of Christianity (two volumes),
Justo Gonzalez

Augustine of Hippo: A Biography,
Peter Brown

Luther: A Man Between God and the Devil,
Heiko Oberman

Calvin,
Bruce Gordon

Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America,
D.G. Hart

Search for these titles at the
RTS online bookstore at mindandheart.com.

Creating a

by Paul Schwarz

Ron McKinney is an artist at heart. His artistic expression began more than a half-century ago when he took a watercolor class as a freshman at Belhaven College in Jackson, Mississippi. “I wasn’t very good and I almost quit, but I loved it,” he admits, now that he leads art classes in the public schools in Dalton, Georgia, where Ron has pastored Kinsey Road Baptist Church for 26 years.

As much as Ron loves art, though, he loves preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ even more. In doing so, he fulfills a calling to pastoral ministry that was fueled in the early days of RTS. Now in his early 70s, Ron has enjoyed a ministerial career that has also encompassed basketball coaching, leading a Christian school and hosting a television program.

The son of a pastor, Ron showed up at Belhaven in the mid-1960s aspiring to become a basketball coach or a commercial artist. “To be honest, my goals were far more to make money and succeed in the world,” he acknowledges. But in his sophomore year, a crisis led him to seek the Lord for direction, “and there was a tremendous yearning to become more like Christ and to please Him. I came to understand how important it was to put God first in my life.”

After several years of various church service roles while at Belhaven, including directing music and being a youth pastor, Ron became an associate pastor at a large church in Memphis. “It was a place where I thought I had ‘arrived,’” he recalls. But Ron went through some changes in his theological positions that led him away from that church and toward a desire to attend seminary.

“I knew about RTS because I had been in Jackson when the school began,” says Ron, who attended Belhaven with some of the very first RTS students. “You have to understand that there were only maybe a dozen men on campus at the time, and by the time I got there in 1970 there might have been 25 or 30.”

When Ron attended RTS, he was impressed by how God was drawing people to faith in Christ. During his studies he pastored a small church in the Mississippi Delta, and he remembers how on Sundays he would preach on what he was studying during the week at RTS. “It was amazing how God began to work,” Ron reports. “People began to see concern about their souls. One young man, a farmer, came to me one Sunday and told me, ‘Preacher, I was out on my tractor, and the Lord spoke to my heart,’ and with tears rolling down his face, he professed faith in Christ. One by one people came to the saving knowledge of Jesus.”

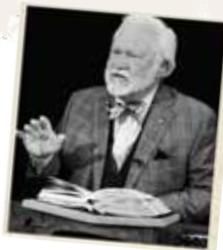
The stories of people coming to faith in Christ through Ron’s preaching today may not sound quite as dramatic as the young man on his tractor, but Ron’s gospel proclamation continues to bear fruit. His evangelistic ministry includes a weekly television program, *Majesty*, that reaches nearly half a million cable subscribers in northwest Georgia and surrounding states. “Oftentimes the people who watch do not have a church home and are not associated with any particular church,” Ron explains. “I don’t know how many funerals I’ve done for people who were not members of our church but who watched the program, and I was the only contact they had in that way.”

The heart of Ron’s ministry, though, has been his now more than a quarter century as pastor at Kinsey Road Baptist in Dalton, known as “the carpet capital of the world” for its many carpet manufacturing plants. “When I left Dallas to move here, I told everybody I was leaving ‘Big D’ for ‘Little D,’” he says, laughing. “I came here not because this was a big church, but because I had people who desired to be shepherded. To me it’s vital that you live with a people and love them. As the Bible says, I’ve wept with them and rejoiced with them, and buried them and married them, and their children. All



I want
to die
preaching
the gospel.

Ron McKinney



An early RTS graduate continues to

Masterpiece

the things taking place in their lives are a part of me.”

Undergirding Ron's 40-plus years of pastoral ministry is the theological foundation that RTS helped build. “The thing that has set RTS apart is the affirmation that Scripture alone, the authority of the word of God, is the most important thing,” declares Ron, who maintains a close relationship with the seminary through his proximity to RTS-Atlanta, having sent students to that campus. “If you do not have an infallible, inerrant Word, then you don't have any basis for faith whatsoever. It's the objective standard by which we are ruled.”

That standard informs ministry initiatives such as Christian Heritage School, which Ron and Kinsey Road Baptist helped found, with Ron serving in a variety of roles including coaching basketball (his wife, Bonnie, teaches there). Now retired from the school, he devotes attention to the public school art classes. “We paint scenery and different things, and we teach them how to use paintbrushes and so forth, and it has been a wonderful success,” Ron reports. “I couldn't have asked for a more wonderful opportunity to meet people who need to hear the gospel.

At 71 years young, he is “still excited, thrilled with the gospel and what God is doing. My father preached until three weeks before he died at the age of 89, and I want to die preaching the gospel as well.”

The world is Ron McKinney's canvas, and his work of art is nearly complete. **M.**

To watch an episode of Ron's television program, search for Majesty 1 Ron McKinney on YouTube.

Ron feels as much at home teaching art classes to public school students (right) as he does at the pulpit at Kinsey Road Baptist Church (above).

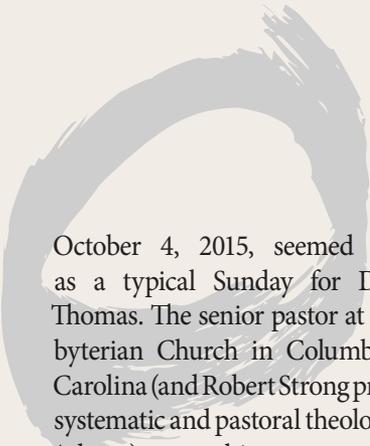


fulfill his calling to preach the gospel.

WHEN DISASTERS STRIKE

"It's specifically true that in times of adversity, Christians show up to do things, and not just for fellow Christians."

— Dr. Derek Thomas



Dr. Derek Thomas and his church respond to the flooding in South Carolina.

October 4, 2015, seemed to begin as a typical Sunday for Dr. Derek Thomas. The senior pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Columbia, South Carolina (and Robert Strong professor of systematic and pastoral theology at RTS-Atlanta) was on his way to preach to his congregation. But an estimated 13 trillion gallons of water kept him from even leaving his street, a flood having sent shockwaves through the city and state that still reverberate today.

That fateful weekend, 20 inches of rain poured down on Columbia in 24 hours, causing multiple rivers and lakes to overflow, and more disastrously, causing two dams to break. The resulting deluge cascaded down into the lowest point, the Forest Acres section of Columbia. By the time the flooding abated, about 20 people had died, with many more injured and thousands displaced from their homes and other earthly possessions.

Forest Acres just so happens to be where nearly 100 First Presbyterian member families have made their homes. The emphasis should be on “have made,” because even today, more than six months after the flooding, not only are many of those families not back in their homes, but it also remains to be seen whether they will ever return.

“Some of them will not be back in their homes until next year,” Dr. Thomas says. “In some instances it means rebuilding the house, in others it means raising the house six or seven feet in the air, and in others it means selling the house as is, just for the price of the real estate and walking away from it.”

Faced with the loss of their earthly homes, though, the First Presbyterian family, led by Dr. Thomas, has turned the tragedy into an opportunity to demonstrate the love of Christ to the watching world around them.

The Christ-like response began in the midst of the maelstrom itself, as church members climbed into boats and rescued neighbors from rooftops. “One of our families woke up in the middle of the night with water in their house and could only escape through the bedroom window,” Dr. Thomas reports. “In the moment of panic, not sure how

much more water was going to come in, they put on life vests and swam to higher ground.”

On Monday, one day after the rain finally stopped and floodwaters began to recede, Dr. Thomas called a meeting of whatever elders, deacons and ministers could get to the church, in order to formulate a response. “At that point it was a state of emergency,” he says. “For example, we had a family

with a two-week-old baby, and they lost everything — the water was up to their roof. They needed basic things like clothes, diapers and food. In the first few days we arranged 250 to 300 people into 20 or so teams to send to various locations to see what we could do.”

Dr. Thomas himself rolled up his sleeves to serve on the response teams: “We had to carry out everything, I mean the entire contents of houses, and put them in piles of things that might be rescuable and things that were beyond recovery.”

The work of helping people evacuate their homes continued every day for the first week, and then tapered down to two or three times a week, and then down to Saturdays. Even still, even now, teams of people from First Presbyterian continue to go out on Saturdays to serve their neighbors as they recover from the physical damage of the flood.

“We’ve seen extraordinary acts of kindness and sacrifice by folks in our church who just went and helped people,” Dr. Thomas observes. “It was quite breathtaking, really. It’s specifically true that in times of adversity, Christians show up to do things, and not just for fellow Christians. People went up and down the streets to offer help — it didn’t matter who they were.”

While the physical recovery from the flooding shows outward signs of slow but steady progress, the emotional and spiritual wounds remain open. “Nobody died from our church, but some of them continue to demonstrate symptoms of bereavement,” Dr. Thomas notes. “They lost stuff, they lost memories, they lost photographs, they lost things of senti-

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mental value, and it's an issue that they couldn't just walk away from. There were things left behind, but fixing it is long term and difficult. So, there's the need for addressing these issues, for providing ministry in how to cope with the loss.

"It has been particularly gratifying to see how important the church is in a community experience of loss — ministering to one another, grieving with one another, helping one another, and how the gospel shapes that. My guess is that ministry will continue for a very long time."

Leading the response to the flooding has also shaped Dr. Thomas on a personal level. "It's reminded me of the gift that the church is," he says. "The church does many things — it worships on the Lord's Day, it's the place where the gospel is preached and studied, and it's a lot of other things. But it's also a body in a community, and a family that has responsibilities to one another. When trouble comes on a communal scale, you need the help of your brothers and sisters, those who will weep with you, pray with you, feed you, clothe you and help you. It's a real reminder that Christianity is not 'me' and 'mine,' but a communal experience."

The church as a community, he notes, will have a lasting impact on the advancement of the kingdom of God: "Whatever the church does or doesn't do, or whatever suspicions people may have or not have about churches, when there's a community need of that magnitude, and the church shows up in large numbers, it's a testimony to the gospel, and it gives opportunity for the gospel to be preached and proclaimed."

With the floodwaters having receded in Columbia, the ongoing response of churches like First Presbyterian are giving rise to a new level of gospel proclamation to a drowning world. **M**

For more information about First Presbyterian Church, visit www.firstprescolumbia.org.

PHOTO BY SEAN RAYFORD





DISASTER COUNSELING

Dr. Coffield is passionate about training counselors to respond to natural disasters. A professor of counseling and the clinical director of the Master of Arts in Counseling degree program at RTS-Orlando, Dr. Coffield has helped train the counselors who responded to the flooding in South Carolina through the Presbyterian Church in America's Disaster Response organization, part of the PCA's Mission to North America. Here he outlines some distinctive elements of disaster response counseling and how churches can prepare for disasters.

It's wise for churches to be prepared for a crisis in a community, because there's always going to be one, and in those times, people look to the church. The two questions people always ask in a crisis are "Is God good?" and "Is God going to show up?" And the church is in a position to answer those questions.

There seems to be predictable phases to a crisis. First there is usually a heroic phase, when people come together to help each other. That's usually immediate, after the shock wears off. Very few disaster relief people show up at that point.

Then there's a "honeymoon" phase that lasts, depending on the size of a crisis, for less than a week or for a few months. That's usually when crisis intervention people show up, and when people say things like "We're going to make it," or "We're going to rebuild," or "This won't destroy us."

The next stage would be disillusionment, where community sharing is not as common, where people think more about themselves, and disappointment, anger and resentment take over. That's when the church can really make a difference through a consistent, faithful presence.

by Dr. James Coffield

The last phase is the reconstruction phase, which can last several years after a big disaster. That's when things get back to whatever "normal" is.

In preparing to respond to crises, churches need to think about where they have been placed. If a church is in a flood zone, it might be wise to think about how to respond by having resources available when the community is in trouble. If you're on a coast, you probably should think about how to be a place where people could go in a hurricane.

Disaster response ministry can be very messy. Proverbs 14:4 says, "Where there are no oxen, the manger is clean, but abundant crops come by the strength of the ox." In other words, you can have a church that's not messy, but you also won't have much of a harvest. I think the church should take that Old Testament image seriously and be mobilized when there's a crisis, because if the church can be seen as a part of that process, it would be a great way to both evangelize and serve our communities. **M**

For more information about the PCA MNA Disaster Response ministry, visit pcamna.org/disaster-response.

A FISHER OF MEN



BY PAUL SCHWARZ

FOR TONY WANG, A BUSINESS TRIP to Australia launched a life-transforming journey.

In 2002, the corporate executive had been sent Down Under from China with 100 other employees for a weeklong, year-end retreat. In God's providence, Tony had relatives living in Australia, and he arranged a four-day side trip to visit them. The relatives happened to be believers in Christ who shared the gospel with Tony, who says he "was not a believer entering into their home, and I was converted after those four days in their home."

Tony's relatives sent him back to China with a letter instructing him to be taken to one of the many "house churches" found in the capital city of Beijing and throughout China. As he matured in the faith, Tony became a house church leader and eventually sensed a calling to more formal ministry. Today, his journey — which has included corporate stints in Finland and Brazil — has brought him and his family to RTS-Jackson, with the goal of eventually returning to China to bring seminary-level theological education to the Chinese church.

It's a bold vision for a man who grew up in humble beginnings in a rural Chinese fishing village. "As a fishing village boy, I studied nothing," Tony says, alluding to the typical future of someone from his background. "But somehow I scored so well on the national test that I went to a very good high school, where I studied so well

that I entered into one of the top universities in China."

Tony's spiritual background began just as inauspiciously: "When I went to university I had never heard about Jesus." But after graduation Tony went to work for an American company, where he learned English, eventually setting the stage for being sent to Australia, leading to his conversion. "God had a reason for it all," Tony concludes.

Another part of the reason involved the salvation of his mother and other family members. "After I got converted, every week I made a phone call back home," Tony recalls. "When I called my mom, I just talked about the gospel. After a while I asked her if she would believe in Jesus, and she said, 'Yes — why not? My son believes in Jesus!' My mom was converted, and she's a very strong believer — she has spread the gospel to my family and in her neighborhood, and has led many to the Lord."

According to Tony, "that's how gospel work is done in China. Right now we're not allowed to do crusades or bigger meetings — it's all done through the personal relationship network."

That network also led Tony to RTS-Jackson. "My church in Beijing has a Reformed background," he explains, "and my pastor wouldn't let me go to any seminary he doesn't approve of, and he doesn't approve many! He had never heard of RTS, but another pastor friend knew someone who had graduated from the Orlando campus, and he said I should consider RTS."

**"THERE'S A
HUGE
DEMAND
FOR
TEACHING IN
CHINESE
CHURCHES."**

TONY WANG



Tony and his wife, Hannah, have two children: Samuel and Esther (left). In their church in China, Tony sometimes handled preaching duties (above) and served in the choir (right).

Tony included RTS in his plan to visit American seminaries, and after prayer and discussion with his wife, they decided to make the move to Jackson.

Tony's studies at RTS-Jackson have culminated a decade-long process. "For a few years after I was converted I had a plan in my mind to enter into ministry at the age of 45," he explains. "I wanted to serve the church, but I told my wife when we got married in 2004 that I wanted to enter into the ministry in 10 years." The plan more or less held form, as Tony quit his corporate job in May 2015 and enrolled at RTS-Jackson in July.

His pursuit of an RTS degree is intended to equip him to be a seminary-level teacher. "In China we have small, underground seminaries, like the Chinese churches," Tony says. "My pastor and some other pastors have started seminaries across the country, but we need more well-studied professors. Most of the teachers right now are pastors who are very good on practical theology, but in terms of doctrine and biblical tools, not many can do the job." He observes that the biblical languages are not taught at one of the prominent underground seminaries in Beijing, and systematic theology is taught by a Korean for whom a translator is needed.

From Tony's perspective, sound theological education is needed to undergird the Chinese church's missionary zeal. "Chinese churches have a vision to convert the neighboring Muslim countries," says Tony, noting that his church in Chi-

na sent a missionary to Pakistan in the past year, with 14 other young men having quit their jobs to start a one-year dedicated study program to figure out their calling to either be pastors or missionaries.

"My pastor even now asks me, 'Tony, can you come back and teach a class even now?' But I say, 'No, I have nothing to offer yet.' There's a huge demand for teaching in Chinese churches. Because the church congregations are small, you need a lot of preachers, you need people to lead worship, you need Sunday school teachers, you need small-group leaders — lots of teaching needs to be done. I hope I can study well, learn to teach, learn the doctrines, learn special areas. I will not be able to be a professional like the teachers I see here who specialize in one particular area, so I may need to teach a lot of things in the seminaries and the churches."

It's a long road from a Chinese fishing village to RTS-Jackson and, Lord willing, back to China, but the Chinese church stands to benefit from Tony's years of preparation. **M**

The Conference Phenomenon

The biennial Together for the Gospel pastors conference celebrated its 10-year anniversary at the April 12-14 gathering in Louisville, Kentucky. In that decade, T4G has put a prominent face on a burgeoning “conference phenomenon” in the Reformed evangelical church.

M&L managing editor Paul Schwarz asked three of T4G’s founders (Dr. Ligon Duncan, chancellor and CEO of RTS; Dr. Mark Dever, senior pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C.; and Dr. Albert Mohler, president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville) and T4G plenary speaker Kevin DeYoung, RTS chancellor’s professor of systematic and historical theology and senior pastor at University Reformed Church in East Lansing, Michigan, about the impact of T4G and related conferences.

Q How did the Together for the Gospel partnership come about?

Duncan: It started out as a friendship. I met Mark in the fall of 1987 while doing my doctoral work at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, and through Mark I met Al Mohler. Then Al and Mark introduced me to C.J. [Mahaney, senior pastor at Sovereign Grace Church in Louisville and another T4G founder]. The four of us started getting together to pray, read Scripture and encourage one another as friends. Late one night we were talking, and somebody said it was too bad that so many pastors feel lonely in the ministry and don’t have friends like this to encourage them. Then somebody said it would be great to have a conference where we put our friendship out for public display to encourage other pastors to cultivate the same kind of friendships. In 2006 we held a conference in Louisville and 3,500 people showed up.

Dever: We would all speak at the same conferences together, and we’d meet to talk and review the day. I think it was Al who said we should do a conference.

Mohler: The friendship predates any idea of holding a conference together. Ligon, Mark, C.J. and I, through that friendship, developed a conversation about how we could share that friendship and encourage pastors. The T4G conference became the answer to that question.

DeYoung: I’ve been asked to participate as a speaker at

T4G for several years now. Every January the plenary speakers get together for three days for sharing, prayer and laughter. It’s a highlight of the year and continues to serve as a catalyst and the glue for the conference itself.

Q What was the purpose behind organizing T4G — what audience were you looking to reach?

Duncan: One purpose was to encourage ministerial friendships between like-minded brothers who maybe had differences on significant issues, but agreement and commonality on core doctrinal and gospel issues. We realized it would be healthy for people to see the cultivation of relationships with people who have those differences as well as those shared commitments.

Dever: We wanted to reach pastors, particularly those who would benefit from fellowship with other pastors from raising a standard that’s clear, friendly and happy, while acknowledging that the fact that we have clear boundaries doesn’t mean we can’t work together.

DeYoung: Mark has always been adamant that this is a conference for pastors. While we are happy for others to attend — and indeed lots of students and leaders do — we are purposefully trying to equip and edify pastors.

Q What has surprised you the most about the response to T4G and related conferences?

Duncan: We did not know how young the audience was going to be. You have multitudes of people in their 20s and early 30s, and even people in their teens who pastors were already grooming for leadership. I was also surprised by the diversity of people — fundamentalists, charismatics, Pentecostals and all sorts of people who don’t normally get together at a conference.

Dever: The original T4G surprised me by how quickly it sold out and how excited people were about it. We didn’t think we had to have a conference — we just liked the idea of getting together people from different parts of the conservative evangelical Reformed movement in a symbol of cooperation.

Mohler: We discovered an enormous desire among a generation of pastors to gather together to worship, hear preaching, be instructed, be encouraged, build relationships and enjoy fellowship. Frankly, we are all surprised at how many have come over successive years.

Q How would you describe what the Lord is accomplishing through T4G and related conferences?

Duncan: I think T4G is partly responsible for pulling together groups like The Gospel Coalition and for collaboration between Reformed evangelicals who previously had not collaborated. More importantly, I think T4G has encouraged a lot of pastors. Once when leaving T4G, an Episcopal priest from New Jersey approached me. He said that when he came, he had expected to submit his resignation from the ministry, but after T4G had decided to stay in the ministry. I could repeat that story literally hundreds of times from conversations I've had over the past 10 years.

Dever: We get wonderfully encouraging communications from brothers who are helped by particular messages, by friendships developed at the conference or by people they meet there, leading to the start of fellowships in their areas.

Mohler: I think we see evidence of what the Lord is doing through T4G in the fact that so many people have been coming back, and a community is building among those who identify as coming "together for the gospel," bringing people "together for the gospel," and wanting to be a part of an ongoing conversation and nurturing relationships over time.

Q What is conference attendance uniquely positioned to accomplish in people's lives?

Duncan: We deliberately agreed we were not going to do T4G every year, because pastors are busy and have enough going on without having to put a conference on their schedule every year. Frankly, conference



Dr. Ligon Duncan



Dr. Mark Dever



Dr. Albert Mohler



Kevin DeYoung

attendance can be a distraction from local ministry. We tried to create a conference designed specifically to serve pastors, not a general Christian audience.

Dever: The more that conferences are aimed at regular Christians or the regular Christian life, the more I'm uncomfortable with them rivaling the role of the local church. The more a conference has a specific aim, like

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Bonus Digital Content

To read the full-length article containing material that didn't fit the printed page, check out the digital version of M&L at www.rts.edu/site/resources/M-L.aspx.

“Conferences are far, far, far from the most important thing in a Christian’s life — like a thousand miles away.”

Kevin DeYoung



helping equip missionaries, or Bible translators, or Sunday school teachers, or pastors, I’m fine with that.

DeYoung: Conferences are far, far, far from the most important thing in a Christian’s life — like a thousand miles away. But they are one of the means God has seemed pleased to use in the past 100 to 150 years. It can be powerful to sing songs with so many people, and the fellowship and camaraderie across denominational lines is powerful. We always send our pastoral staff to one big conference a year (usually T4G or The Gospel Coalition). The time away together as a team is invaluable, as is the opportunity to buy good books and sit under a steady stream of good teaching.

Mohler: There are things we can learn by watching someone at a distance. We can gain a great deal of information through streaming a video or listening to recorded sermons. But the reality is that all of us can point to a moment when we were sitting in a room and heard something, were in a place and something happened, or were sitting with those hearing the Word of God preached, and that’s just very different.

Q Why else do you think people are drawn to T4G and related conferences?

Duncan: I think people resonate with the theological commitment of T4G. Evangelicalism in the ’70s, ’80s and early ’90s was dominated by a pragmatic spirit, and by the late ’90s there was a generational tiredness of that spirit and a desire for something deeper, richer and more biblically rooted. I think T4G taps into that.

DeYoung: It’s amazing — I would have thought the T4G conference may be in waning mode by now, but clearly it’s not. I think people are hungry for a big picture of God. I think they want a warm orthodoxy with passion, with love and with edges. I think they want to hear God’s Word, sing God’s Word and be with people who love the same things.

Mohler: One dimension is we all want to be a part of something far greater than ourselves. I think that is natural and in many ways is good. By joining together, not only at T4G but at similar conferences, we affirm the fact that we are not alone and that we stand together in the faith once-for-all delivered to the saints.

Q What’s your vision for the future of T4G and related conferences, and with that in mind, what words of caution do you have concerning the “conference phenomenon”?

Duncan: We committed to one another at T4G that we would shut it down the minute we saw it not serving pastors. Conferences don’t build the kingdom, and what’s happening in the local church is far more important than a conference. If a conference serves to recharge pastors’ batteries, get them back in the game and encourage them, that’s good. If people think that conferences are where it’s at, that’s bad.

Dever: I have no vision for it other than I hope that local churches are strengthened, and fellowships between churches encouraged as pastors come together, meet each other, see where they have common gospel interests, and then pray and think together to encourage evangelistic and church planting work in their respective cities and beyond.

DeYoung: Of course, any time you have a big conference, there will be dangers associated with pride, envy, man-pleasing, idolatry and the like. More subtly, we must make sure conferences come alongside the church to encourage it, not supersede it. “Local pastor” is a position instituted and ordained by God — “conference speaker” is not. It is the work of the church to disciple, discipline, carry out the Great Commission, administer the sacraments and safeguard the truth of God’s Word. At best, conferences like T4G encourage pastors in all these aims. When a conference makes these things more difficult, it has outlived its usefulness.

Mohler: One thing that always looms as a danger is that somehow a conference will become an end in itself, and that is something we want to avoid at all costs. We do not want T4G to become an institution or a denomination. Rather, we want to band together, meet together, preach together, sing together, encourage one another and then go back into the local church, which is ground zero for Christian ministry. **M**

Learn more about *Together for the Gospel* at t4g.org.

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Dr. James Newheiser Jr. has been appointed director of the Christian counseling program and associate professor of Christian counseling and practical theology at RTS-Charlotte as of June 1. For the past 25 years, Dr. Newheiser has served as the preaching pastor at Grace Bible Church in Escondido, Calif. He is also the director of the Institute for Biblical Counseling at The Master's College.

The Center for Church Planting RTS-Charlotte will launch the CCP this fall. Its purpose is to become a national and international resource for the planting of Reformed churches committed to the authority of Scripture, the centrality of preaching and the Great Commission. It will specialize in training future pastors for the unique challenges, complexities and opportunities that church planters face.

Dr. Charles Wingard was installed as senior pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Yazoo City, Miss. He will continue to teach practical theology courses at RTS-Jackson while serving as pastor.

CAMPUS EVENTS

Jackson

Come study Hebrew, Greek or Latin through our Summer Institute for Biblical Languages! In only eight weeks, students can earn six hours of language credit. You will come away with a firm grasp of Hebrew or Greek that will help you understand God's Word in a way that transforms your life. Latin will prepare you for further academic study and provide you with important tools for engaging the history of Christian theology. Single housing is available for \$350 per month. SIBL runs June 20–Aug. 12. Come join us! Visit rts.edu/jackson for more information

Save Thursday evening, Oct. 6, and Friday morning, Oct. 7, for special events to celebrate RTS' 50th anniversary — more details to come.



Dr. G.K. Beale, professor of New Testament and biblical theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, was the Biblical Theology Conference speaker March 23-24.

Orlando

Dr. Don Sweeting hosted two sessions of the President's Forum. On April 20, Dr. Sweeting discussed a Christian response to homelessness with Dr. David Swanson, pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Orlando, and Andrae Bailey, CEO of the Central Florida Commission on Homelessness. On April 27 he was joined by Ed Stetzer, executive director of Lifeway Research, to discuss the state of pastors in America.

Charlotte

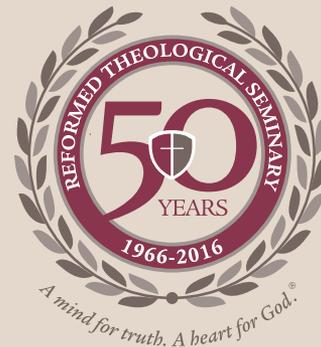
An RTS 50th anniversary celebration took place April 17 on the campus lawn. Students, friends, partners, alumni and other guests enjoyed a casual, catered dinner as they celebrated the anniversary and enjoyed fellowship with one another.

A Faculty Forum on April 5 featured professor of Old Testament Dr. John Currid speaking on "Should I Do a Ph.D.?"

The 2016 Harold O.J. Brown Lecture Series was delivered by Dr. Russell Moore on "Pro-Life and Adoption Ministries in the Local Church." Visit rts.edu/charlotte for the audio recording.

Washington, D.C.

"Spreading the Feast" on April 22 was an evening of fellowship and reflection on the Lord's Supper.



COMMENCEMENTS

Atlanta — Saturday, May 21, 10 a.m., RTS-Atlanta campus. Speaker: Rev. Walter Henegar, senior pastor, Atlanta Westside Presbyterian Church.

Charlotte — Saturday, May 21, 11 a.m., Christ Covenant Church, Matthews, N.C. Speaker: Dr. David Sinclair, senior pastor, Clemson (S.C.) Presbyterian Church.

Houston — Saturday, May 7, 4 p.m., Christ Evangelical Presbyterian Church (RTS-Houston host church), Houston. Speaker: Dr. Robert J. Cara, RTS provost and chief academic officer.

Jackson — Saturday, May 14, 10:30 a.m., First Presbyterian Church, Jackson. Speaker: Dr. Douglas Kelly, retiring Richard Jordan professor of theology at RTS-Charlotte.

Orlando — Friday, May 20, 6 p.m., Saint Andrew's Chapel, Sanford, Fla. Speaker: Dr. Ligon Duncan, RTS chancellor and CEO.

Washington, D.C. — Friday, May 27, 7:30 p.m., McLean (Va.) Presbyterian Church. Speaker: Rev. James Forsyth, senior pastor, McLean Presbyterian.

IN MEMORIAM



Donald Breazeale Sr. of Jackson, who served on the Executive Committee of the RTS Board of Trustees, went

to be with the Lord at home on November 12, 2015, after battling cancer for a season. He was a founder of KTB Wealth Partners, enjoying a decades-long career helping people with their financial planning, and is known for his love of and service to his family, friends and First Presbyterian Church of Jackson, where he served first as a deacon and then as ruling elder.



Granville Dutton of Dallas, a founding member of the RTS Board of Trustees, serving for

49 years, went home to the Lord on January 3 at age 91. He led a remarkable life, holding degrees in military science, mechanical engineering, petroleum engineering and law, making him quite a learned man. What distinguished him most, though, was his love for the Lord. He is survived by his wife of 65 years, Carol Dutton, along with their sons and daughters-in-law, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

Wisdom Wednesday

This weekly series of videos features RTS faculty members addressing relevant matters of the Christian faith with truth, candor and grace.



Here are some of the questions answered:

- ✦ Would Jesus Be a Democrat or a Republican?
- ✦ Is It Important for a Christian to Be Culturally Relevant?
- ✦ What Is the Greatest Issue Facing the American Church?
- ✦ Do Christians and Muslims Worship the Same God?
- ✦ When Is It Right for a Christian to Disobey the Government?

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www.rts.edu/wisdomwednesday