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Perspective

the journal of mount
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Perspective is a monthly journal with articles and book reviews. It is part of the "equipping" ministry of Mount Vernon Baptist Church, where we exist to KNOW, EQUIP, and SEND one another for the worship and glory of God.

SERMON SCHEDULE

December 7

He Promises a Friendship

John 15:1-17

December 14

He Promises a Hardship

John 15:18 - 16:4

December 21

The Christmas Sermon

Luke 2:1-20

December 28

The Assurance of Eternal Life

1 John 3:11-24

Guest Preacher: Jeffrey Timmons

For a full list of past sermons,
visit www.mvbchurch.org.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ARTICLES

10 Questions to Help Us Think About Christmas 1

An article on thinking rightly about Christmas during this busy holiday season.

by Aaron Menikoff

Soup's On! 5

The story of one family's efforts to reach their neighbors using hospitality and soup.

by Suzanne Millen

BOOK REVIEW

***Be Still, My Soul* and** 7

O Love That Will Not Let Me Go

edited by Nancy Guthrie

A book review on two books dealing with suffering and loss in light of the Gospel.

by Andrea Lee

FIGHTER VERSE

Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise,
but the companion of fools will suffer harm.

Proverbs 13:20 (ESV)

10 Questions to Help Us Think About Christmas

Aaron Menikoff

When I was much younger, my father gave me a boxed set of C. S. Lewis's now-classic, *Chronicles of Narnia* series. I digested each book with childish delight. The pages were worn by the time I was an adult, and now that I've re-read them many times over with my own children, the books are practically falling apart. If you've ever spent time in Narnia, you know why.

The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe is the first book in the series. Young Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy Pevensie find themselves in the strange land of Narnia. It's a realm ruled by the White Witch, a woman wicked to the core. There is no love in her soul. She likes to be served. She worships herself and expects every creature in the land to do the same. And if they don't she simply turns them into a statue of stone—as villains in children's books are prone to do!

Narnia under the lordship of the White Witch is smothered by a cold tarp of snow. The land is as frosty as the witch's heart. It's not the kind of snow one can enjoy—think sledding, snowball fights, and hot chocolate. No, this snow pierces with dread. It's a hopeless, joyless cold. It is, as Mr. Beaver put it, "Always winter and never Christmas."

"Always winter and never Christmas." That line meant something to Lewis. Most people remember Lewis as the author of fanciful, even spiritual, science fiction. He had a fertile imagination, ripe with interesting characters and even more remarkable places. (My favorite may be the land of Bism, a land so far below the earth that the gems are still alive. Rubies melt in your mouth and diamonds can be juiced!) But Lewis was more than an author. He was first and foremost a Christian. When he described Narnia as a Christmas-less, frozen tundra, he didn't just mean it was a land without decorations and presents, eggnog, and sales—he meant it as a land without hope, and that is far, far worse.

And yet, not long after the Pevensie children arrive, something tremendous happens. Christmas returns with a most familiar character:

It was a sledge, and it was reindeer with bells on their harness. But they were far bigger than the Witch's reindeer, and they were not white but

brown. And on the sledge sat a person whom everyone knew the moment they set eyes on him. He was a huge man in a bright red robe (bright as holly-berries) with a hood that had fur inside and a great white beard that fell like a foamy waterfall over his chest. Everyone knew him because, though you see people of his sort only in Narnia, you see pictures of them and hear them talked about even in our world—the world on this side of the wardrobe door. But when you really see them in Narnia, it is rather different. Some of the pictures of Father Christmas in our world make him look only funny and jolly. But now that the children actually stood looking at him they didn't find it quite like that. He was so big, so glad, and so real, that they all became quite still. They felt very glad, but also solemn. "I've come at last," said he. "She has kept me out for a long time, but I have come at last. Aslan is on the move. The Witch's magic is weakening."

Your house may not make much of Santa Claus, but keep in mind that Lewis wrote for a wide audience. He had a clear message: Christmas is coming because "Aslan is on the move." Aslan is the True King of Narnia. Narnia wouldn't be saved by Father Christmas. He was simply the evidence that Aslan had arrived. And with Aslan comes hope. Christmas isn't fundamentally about the arrival of a large man bearing gifts—even in Narnia. Christmas is about the coming of God Most High bearing salvation. Christmas is about God being on the move. So we can rightly say that with Christ on our side it is always Christmas and never winter.

In light of all this, it's good for us to pause and spend a few moments thinking about Christmas: what it is, why it happened, why it's important, how we should celebrate it, and how it should change our lives. After all, God is on the move. Here are 10 questions to get you thinking about the meaning of Christmas.

1. What does the word "Christmas" actually mean?

We will think theologically about what Christmas means in a moment. But the actual word, "Christmas" is a compound word. "Christ" is a title and it corresponds to the Hebrew word Messiah or Anointed One. To say that Jesus is the

Christ is to say he is the Anointed One, the King. “Mass” is a word most often associated with the commemoration of Christ’s death by the taking of the bread and the cup (i.e., the Lord’s Supper). But mass simple means feast day—a religious day of celebration. So Christ-mass or Christmas is a day to celebrate Christ.

2. Why is Christmas celebrated on the 25th of December?

The earliest Christians didn’t make much of special days, other than Sunday. Every Sunday was set aside to recall the resurrection of the Savior. In a smaller way, every Friday was an opportunity to fast and mourn the death of the Lord. When Christians began setting aside days for annual celebrations, Resurrection Day was the most important celebration added to the calendar. But Christmas soon followed.

The exact date of Jesus’ birth is unknown, but Christians eventually celebrated it nonetheless. Virtually every month has been put forward as the possible month of Jesus’ birth. Starting in the third century the incarnation was commemorated on January 6, the feast of Epiphany. However, churches in the fourth century adopted December 25, probably to replace several Roman, pagan holidays held at this time.

3. How did Christmas get so commercialized?

Three names stand out. It’s not that these men deserve the blame for the blatant commercialism of Christmas, but their creativity caught the imagination of a generation that found a way to reinvent Christmas in the popular forms we find today.

The first is Washington Irving. Most of us know this nineteenth-century writer for his famous works, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* and *Rip van Winkle*. However his lesser-known work arguably had an even greater impact. In 1809 Irving wrote *Knickerbocker’s History of New York*. In this book he made fun of colonial America, including the Dutch settlers who called Nicholas, their patron saint, Sancte Claus. Irving describes St. Nicholas riding over treetops, smoking a pipe, and putting presents in stockings hung in front of chimneys.

It’s important to keep in mind that Christians in America at this time weren’t sure what to do with Christmas. Many refrained from making one day more sacred lest the other days be considered less sacred. But Irving’s portrayal of families singing carols around a holiday feast was charming and compelling.

The second is Clement Clarke Moore, a religion professor who, in 1823, wrote a little poem, “A Visit from St. Nicholas,” for his children. It begins with the famous line,

“’Twas the night before Christmas,” and goes on to discuss children with “visions of sugar-plums” dancing in their heads, jolly St. Nick calling out to Dasher, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Doner, and Blitzen, and toys delivered by a merry man with a “nose like a cherry.” Moore’s imaginative words spread like wildfire. From then on, it was hard to think about Christmas without mention of the gift-giving St. Nick.

Fast-forward to 1931 and we encounter our third name, Haddon Sundblom. The Coca-Cola company commissioned Sundblom to create a vision of Santa Claus to help market all things Coke. The Michigan-born artist conjured up his memory of Moore’s poem and for over thirty years Sundblom painted images of St. Nick that have been seared onto the American consciousness. Close your eyes and think of Santa and it more than likely one of Sundblom’s pictures will appear in your head. It shouldn’t be a surprise to learn that Coca-Cola’s Santa was the first to be dressed in a bright, red suit.

Between the satirical history of Irving, the poetry of Moore, and the pictures of Sundblom a holiday narrative was created that appealed to every American girl and boy and provided a secular foundation upon which to build many of the Christmas traditions we still practice today.

4. Why did Christmas get so commercialized?

This is not the fault of Irving, Moore, and Sundblom. It’s the problem of the human heart. It has been our inclination, our bent, to take good gifts from God (i.e., the birth of a Savior) and trivialize them (i.e., “Have a holly, jolly Christmas”). We do this all year long, not just at Christmas. Long ago, through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord said about Israel, “This people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me” (Isa 29:13). In other words, we are quite able to give the impression that we are worshipping God while, in reality, he means nothing to us. The commercialization of Christmas is living proof of the ability of the human heart to twist God’s good gifts. Satan is pleased when people sing of the incarnation with their lips while in their hearts they reject the Savior King.

5. Does this mean that it’s wrong to celebrate Christmas the traditional way?

It is wrong to make light of the incarnation. Our God is not to be trivialized. He is holy, just, and good. He is strong, righteous, and powerful. In Christ, God took on flesh and dwelt among us that we might know him, and so that he might one-day die for sinners like us. If you can’t honor that message while decorating trees, putting up holly, and singing Bing Crosby then, by all means, throw out the tree, discard the holly, and put Bing Crosby to rest! There is nothing inherently Christian about any of this, and that’s something every true Christian has to keep in mind.

6. How should I celebrate Christmas, then?

I'm glad you asked. It is crucial that we think biblically about Jesus' birth. To do that, we need to read the Bible. It's only as we immerse ourselves in the Word of God that Christmas can have any redemptive meaning in our lives. Take some time over the course of the next few weeks, and read through some passage that speak of the incarnation: Isaiah 7:19-25; 9:1-7; 42:1-9; Jeremiah 23:1-8; Malachi 3:1-5; Matthew 1:18-2:12; Luke 1:26-2:21; John 1:1-34; Philippians 2:1-11; Hebrews 4:14-5:10; 1 John 1:1.

7. What's the earliest mention of Christmas in the Bible?

The word, "Christmas," can't be found in the Bible. But remember, at Christmas we celebrate the incarnation of God. We commemorate the fact that God took on flesh in Christ and dwelt among us. We have hints and promises of this great fact throughout the Bible long before the pages of the New Testament.

The earliest hint is Genesis 3:15. You may recall that Genesis 3 is a record of the fall—the moment humanity rebelled against God and fell from a state of perfect fellowship with Him. This fall brought God's curse upon Adam and Eve. Not only would the pair experience death, but the woman was told childbearing would now be painful, and the man was warned that work would now be harsh. It's not just Adam and Eve who were cursed, but the horrible tempter, Satan was cursed, too. Satan had entered the Garden of Eden and encouraged them to reject God's good commands. God judged Satan for it. Notice carefully the word of judgment: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Gen 3:15).

In these words of judgment against Satan there is also a word of hope for us. Satan is told that he will one day bruise the heel of the woman's offspring. But notice what her offspring will do: he will bruise Satan's head! Christians have called this verse the *protoevangelion*—the first sharing of the gospel! What is described in blurry terms in Genesis 3:15 took place in HD clarity on the cross. Jesus was bruised; he was crucified. And Satan rejoiced over this. But on that cross something Satan should have expected took place: the Son of God bruised Satan's head. In other words, the power of Satan was destroyed. As Paul put it in Colossians 2:15, Jesus "disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him."

There is a promise of a Savior in Genesis 3:15—a man will one day conquer Satan. That's what we celebrate at Christmas: the birth of the Son of God, the God-man, who would one day bruise the head of Satan for the sake of our salvation.

8. How can God take on flesh?

Before I even address the question of "how," it is important to recognize that this is the plain teaching of Scripture. John 1:14, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." John testifies that the Word became flesh. And in John 1:1, John makes it clear who exactly this Word is. He is none other than God himself: "and the Word was God." So before we even try to wrap our puny minds around *how* this is possible, it is crucial to admit that this is clearly what the Bible teaches.

How is this possible? Certainly it pushes against what we consider to be reasonable! Still, is it any less reasonable than an eternal God creating all things out of nothing (Gen 1:1)? Is it any harder to believe in the incarnation than it is to believe that a dead man was brought to life (Jn 11:44; 20:1-10)?

When we say that God took on flesh, we are saying that the sovereign God chose to reveal himself in humanity. Jesus is fully God and fully man. We are not saying that Jesus gave up his divinity when he took on flesh. We are saying that he took on our humanity. Jesus "made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men" (Phil 2:7).

9. Why did God take on flesh?

This was the question posed by the eleventh-century archbishop of Canterbury, Anselm, who in 1098 wrote his most famous work, *Cur Deus Homo or, Why Did God Become Man?* Anselm disagreed with those who insisted that on the cross Jesus paid a ransom to Satan. To say such a thing would be to assert that somehow humanity owed a debt to Satan, as if Satan needed to be paid back for our sin.

Anselm found this idea thoroughly unbiblical. God, not Satan, is the offended party in our sin. The ransom must be paid to God. Anselm described sin as robbing God of the honor due him. It's the failure to give God what he deserves.

God can't allow our rebellion to go unpunished, Anselm said. But how can we be forgiven? If God is infinite, the debt we owe him is infinite too. How can a finite, sinful human being pay back an infinite debt to an infinitely holy God? Anselm recognized this as the dilemma we all face.

Anselm saw God as the only answer: "There is no one, therefore, who can make satisfaction except God himself." God is the only one who can solve our problem. Yet the problem is ours. It is our responsibility to make satisfaction for our sins. God may be the only one who can make satisfaction, "But no one ought to make it except man."

Do you see the problem? We have sinned against an infinitely holy God. But the debt we owe him is so great we could never pay it. Only God can make a payment so big. What is to be done?

God provided the answer. God became man; he took on flesh. But God remained fully God. So when Jesus Christ, the sinless God-man, went to the cross and died, he did so in our place (because he is fully man) and his death paid the infinite debt we owe (because he is fully God).

Do you have a headache yet? This is serious theology! But it's so important. It explains why God had to take on flesh. It explains the incarnation. We were in a horrible state: we needed salvation. We couldn't bring salvation ourselves; only God could do that. And he did it! Christ is God our Redeemer. The poet Mary Macdonald put it well:

Child in the manger, infant of Mary;	Once the most holy Child of salvation,
Outcast and stranger, Lord of all!	Gently and lowly Lived below;
Child who inherits, All our transgressions,	Now as our glorious Mighty Redeemer,
All our demerits On Him fall.	See Him victorious O'er each foe.

10. How should this change how we celebrate Christmas?

You may already celebrate Christmas very well. My point in bringing all this up is to teach you that the gospel is really at the heart of Christmas. Millions and millions of people today live as if it is always winter and never Christmas. They wake up, scrounge a living, go to bed, and do it all over again. They'll do anything to distract themselves from the mundane reality of their daily lives.

These distractions differ from person to person. For some it's entertainment, for others travel, for others drugs, for others sex, for still others its personal glory. But the distractions are always temporary. The entertainment will never last. The travel will one day stop. Drugs will cripple the body as they do the soul. Sex can never fulfill. Personal glory is fleeting. You see, for people like this it is always winter and never Christmas.

Christmas means there is hope. Christmas means God cares. Christmas means God can and did do something about the hopeless world in which we live. Christmas means God attacked the hopeless winter into which we were born. How did God do this? He did it by doing what we could not do for ourselves. He entered this world and lived a perfect life. Jesus

never sinned. He never fell. He never failed. He perfectly obeyed his heavenly Father every single day of his life. But that is not all. Jesus Christ went to the cross. The one man who did not deserve death faced death for each and everyone one of us who would repent and believe. He died for those who would turn from their sins and trust in him. Jesus took on flesh so that he could die in our place, taking the wrath of God that we so rightly deserved. Peter put it this way: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness" (1 Pet 2:24). Jesus did not just bring hope; he wrapped it up, placed a bow on top, and delivered it right to our doorstep.

How should you celebrate Christmas? Simple: make much of Christ. Don't let the tree, the presents, and the feast overshadow the King. After all, it is because of him that for all those in Christ, it's always Christmas and never winter.

~Aaron Menikoff

Soup's On!

Suzanne Millen



This is the recipe we used to host “Soup’s On” last year, just a few weeks before Christmas. I got the idea from a friend who did this in her neighborhood a couple of years ago, and I wanted to try it for our little street. We live at the top of a dead end that finishes in a cul-de-sac—about twenty small houses that were built by the local General Motors plant during the 1950’s. They were built as housing for the GM plant employees, and come to find out, many of our neighbors are still living here as a result.

On half sheets of red paper with a little clip art of a candle and Christmas holly, we printed the following invitation:

*Drop in Anytime Between
5pm – 7pm*

The hustle and bustle of the Christmas season always finds everyone busy shopping, wrapping, baking, and making lots of preparations. We’d love for you to come have a bowl of soup with us, meet some of your neighbors, and take a much needed break! So stop by after work, on your way to the mall, or just walk on over because the....

Soup’s On!

The boys and I took a walk one day and I let them take turns carefully placing an invitation in each of our neighbors’ mailboxes. We knew the neighbors beside us and across from us a little bit, and waved to the man who lives catty-corner to us, but really didn’t know anyone else. I knew that we gave

away invitations to 24 houses, but we had no idea of how many people to expect. Our prayer was that somehow, it would be a Christian witness.

Next, we went to a Christian bookstore and found “Christmas-y” gospel tracts, and to the Dollar Store to get the little holiday cellophane bags. We tried to keep it simple. I made two different soups in as large of quantities as I could handle. The rest of our menu was simply store bought french bread with butter and mini carrot sticks with ranch dressing dip. I made three different kinds of drop cookies, and the boys helped me put one of each cookie and a Gospel tract into the cellophane bags. We put them in a basket and the idea was for everyone to take one as a parting gift when they left.

On the day of the party, we dressed in casual Christmas attire, had our Christmas music playing, and even our “fake fire” going on the TV screen. I got the carrot tray ready and put out a loaf of bread on a cutting board. We had soup on the front burners, soup on the back burners, and soup in our two crock pots! The cookies were by the door.

At about 5:02pm, we had our first guest! It was Miss Doris, in her late seventies, who lives two doors down. She handed me a little pound cake and kept thanking us for doing something like this. In a few minutes some more neighbors came: . . . a mother and daughter, a husband and wife, the man who lives catty-corner to us, a lady originally from Mexico. The friends we knew better, our friends from across the street, came over too. Each one had something to bring – little candy canes for the boys, a poinsettia, and a jar of jam. I was delightfully surprised! Our neighbors made introductions with each other, they reacquainted themselves, and they ate soup. We heard stories of days gone by on our street. People laughed. Some got a second bowl of soup and lingered. It was really wonderful!

Our boys were the only children there, but they didn’t seem to mind. Andrew was so excited that he grabbed the basket of cookies and started passing them out to each person before I knew it. So some started eating their cookies, and I prayed and tried not to worry about it.

In all, we had people from 10 households for our party! A Jewish couple came, even with our “Happy Birthday Jesus” sign

in the yard. One lady said that people on our street used to do this kind of thing all of the time but slowly it had just stopped. Everyone kept thanking us and really seemed to enjoy themselves.

When it was all over, a few of the tracts were left on the tables; one was in the trash can. We ate leftover soup for the next day or two. I froze the rest.

What can we say were the results of our “Soup’s On?” Afterwards, as our neighbors would pass by, the waves were bigger and the smiles broader. Sometimes someone still toots their horn! The lady from Mexico had us over for her daughter’s graduation party, and we were honored to attend. A single lady asked if her niece could come and play with our boys when she was visiting. Last Spring, as I was finishing up a study on the book of Matthew and focusing on the Great Commission, I felt the Lord’s prompting to try something else on our street—a summer Bible study just for ladies. I made another flyer that listed six meeting times and said we would be reading and discussing the book of Mark together, through a study called *Christianity Explained*.

The boys and I took another walk down our street and they carefully placed those invitations in each of the mailboxes. Then we waited to see what would happen . . . and Miss Doris was the first one to arrive again.

Pastoral Note:

Would you consider doing something like this during this Christmas season? It doesn’t have to be the way the Millens did it of course. Still, it would be wonderful if each of us took the time to get to know our neighbors, let them into our lives, and shared with them the gospel. For most of us this means stepping out of our comfort zone. But it’s worth it. We have great news to deliver.

Book Review

Be Still, My Soul and *O Love That Will Not Let Me Go*

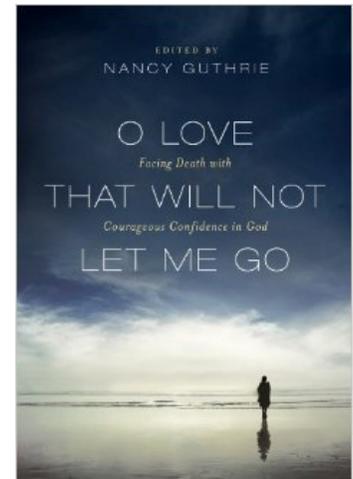
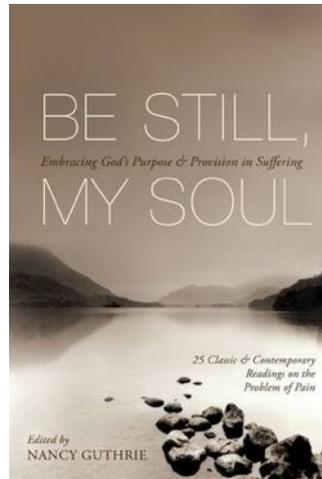
Edited by Nancy Guthrie
Reviewed by Andrea Lee

Suffering and pain draw out of our hearts some of the deepest questions we will ever ask about God and his character. Nancy Guthrie knows how unhinging the winds of hardship and trial can be: “When the winds of suffering blow in our lives, what we need most is something secure to tether ourselves to, something strong and unmovable that will keep us from being swept away in a storm of questions, fear, discouragement, and disillusionment.” Guthrie has masterfully compiled short essays and excerpts about suffering and facing death in her two books *Be Still, My Soul* and *O Love That Will Not Let Me Go*. These books provide biblical hope and steadfast purpose to those who are hurting.

Guthrie’s own journey of losing two children gave her the motivation for her work and the sensitivity to recognize the words that would strike the right chord of gentle hope and bedrock truth. The testimony of the many well-known authors and theologians in these books resound with the mysterious truth that God uses suffering to accomplish his sovereign, gracious purposes in the lives of his children.

Guthrie has done a wonderful job culling classic and contemporary voices about suffering and death. The real power of these books, however, is in the biblical content delivered in short, digestible chapters. Sustained concentration on theological arguments is difficult for those who are suffering. These books provide real help without overwhelming. Some of the authors use their own suffering to explore these topics while others focus exclusively on Scripture. In both approaches, helpful themes emerge: facing death and suffering helps us develop a deeper awareness of our hearts, a more profound worship of God in his sovereignty, a biblically-based hope, and a greater appreciation of the beauty of the gospel.

Gaining a better understanding of our hearts and God’s sovereignty are two sides of the same coin. Death and suffering prompt us to look at both. We are often tempted to think that “we are the center of things, and God is there to make us



happy.” Furthermore, when hardships appear, we wonder if God is real and whether he is really good. But using our experiences to interpret God’s ways and character often leads us to the wrong conclusion. Os Guinness, one of the contributors, puts it this way: “[The question] ‘How may I be sure that God is there and that God is good?’ is answered satisfactorily only in Jesus Christ. Any ‘proof’ of God’s existence or argument in favor of his goodness that ends elsewhere is bound to be inconclusive or wrong.”

Another contemporary writer adds his wisdom derived from a key passage in Habakkuk. As we demand to know, “Why, why, why?” along with the prophet (Hab. 1:2-3), God reminds us of His infinite grandeur. “Even if [God] chose to reveal to you his all-inclusive plan for the entire universe, you could not understand it. But you can believe that He understands how it all fits together. You can believe that He understands how He is using all of this for your good. The just shall live by faith (Hab. 2:4).”

Even when the believer settles his heart to trust God and worship his character in the midst of hardship, the question arises how this faith is to be lived out. Guthrie answers concretely: “Holding onto hope has not been a vague, sentimental experience; it has been an ongoing choice to believe God’s word.” Author Jerry Bridges also talks about choosing to trust. “Trust is not a passive state of mind. It is a vigorous act of the soul by which we choose to lay hold onto the promises of God and cling to them despite the adversity that at times seeks to overwhelm us.” This choice, often made contrary to our feelings, leads to true hope. The believer’s hope is not wishful thinking; the hope that God’s word offers is as certain as God himself. Our hope is based on God’s promises, which are Yes and Amen in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 1:20).

God’s promises are sure and true for the very reason that suffering makes sense at all. The various writings Guthrie has collected repeat this refrain: “Out of the worst thing that ever

happened in the world, God brought the greatest triumph ever known in this world - your salvation, the deliverance of all of his people." Because Jesus, the perfect Son of God, suffered and died and rose again, his children can face suffering with trust and hope, knowing that death has been defeated and no longer can hold them (1 Cor. 15:54-55).

As these short chapters show how Jesus meets us in our suffering through his sufficient word, several of the authors address a common misconception in our health and happiness-focused culture. Even in the religious community, many mistakenly think "God always wills physical healing." But the Bible and the testimony of countless faithful believers is that God's gracious answer to our prayer for healing is profoundly better and deeper than physical health. One of the book's contributors, who died of cancer, wrote, "I prayed for healing and God healed me. He didn't heal my body, but he healed my mind and my spirit. He healed me of fear, of resentment, of bitterness, of worry for my family. This is God's answer to my prayer."

Our desire for physical healing and the pain that contemplating death evokes are themselves an apologetic for the gospel. People sense the horror of death because we were never meant to die but to live in dependent, humble communion with our Creator. Death came into the world because of sin (Rom. 5:12). Our sin deserves the death penalty, but there is hope because God became a man to take the penalty on our behalf. This is the good news of Jesus's life and resurrection. Death is not the ultimate power. For the believer, death is now the entryway to joyful communion with our gracious Maker.

Guthrie's books help the believer live with an eternal perspective that imitates Paul's desire to depart and be with Christ, "for that is far better" (Phil. 1:23). It is far better to live in humble trust on our Father who sovereignly oversees every detail of our lives, even our hardships, to make us more into the very image of Christ, who is the perfection of beauty. Guthrie's books help you contemplate these truths alongside modern and historic authors of deep faith, illuminating ways to face suffering and death with the hope and confidence only God can provide.

Although books about suffering and death may seem like heavy reading, learning how to gently "rub hope into the wound of suffering and the reality of death" is a profound act of loving God and serving others. I love Guthrie's words in the preface to her book about dying with courageous faith. She writes, "If someone gave this book to you, they want to believe with you that departing this life to be with Christ is better by far. It does not say, 'I think you are going to die soon.' It says, 'Since we are all going to die soon, let's live now like we believe the gospel is true.'" Living like we believe the gospel is true

when suffering and death are sharply in focus is hard. But Guthrie's books are a great starting point to encourage your faith and bolster your biblical hope in our sovereign God, no matter what difficulties you face.

Mount Vernon Baptist Church 2014 Christmas Schedule

December 14 **7:00 pm** **Christmas at Mount Vernon**

This is Mount Vernon's annual choral and orchestral concert is a time of worship and exaltation to Christ with the theme "The Word Became Flesh." A reception will follow immediately after the concert in the fellowship hall. Childcare is available for children 5 and under.

December 17 **6:15 pm** **Carols and Cocoa**

Everyone, including children, are invited to drink Chef Andy's hot cocoa as we fellowship around the piano and sing Christmas carols. Childcare will not be available, but activities for children will be part of the fun.

December 24 **5:00 pm** **Christmas Eve Service**

Our annual Christmas Eve candle light service is a time of worship and celebration of Jesus' incarnation, death, and resurrection. Childcare is available for children 3 and under.

Office Closed **All Day**

The church office will be closed on the following days:
Wednesday–Friday, December 24–26
Thursday, January 1

No Evening Services

There will be no evening services on:

Sunday, December 21

Sunday, December 28

Wednesday, December 24

