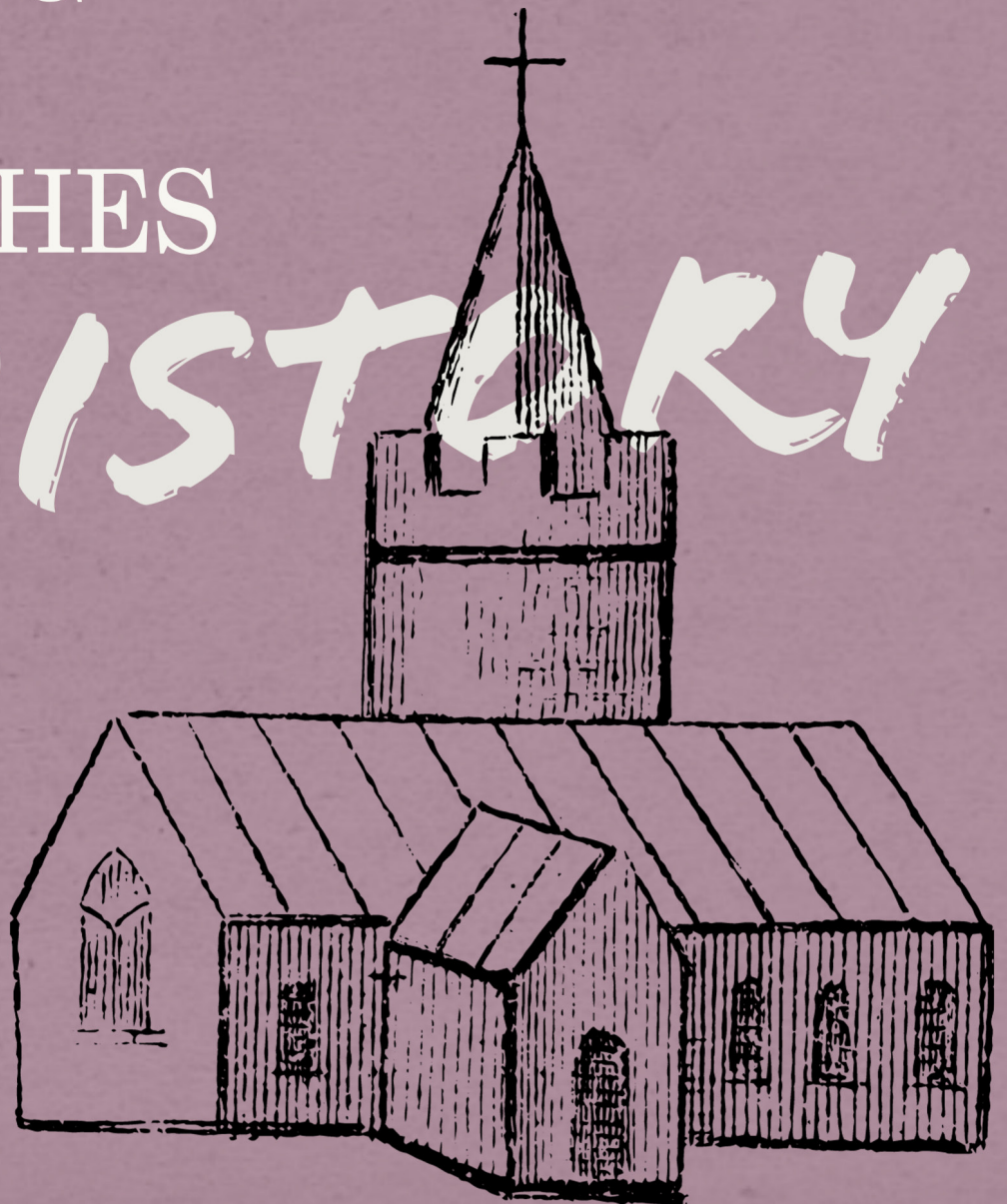


# PERSPECTIVE

APRIL 2021

SERVING  
OTHER  
CHURCHES

A HISTORY



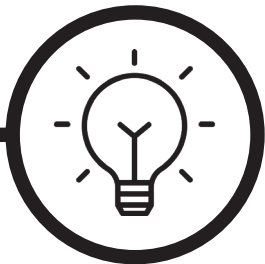
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Aaron Menikoff



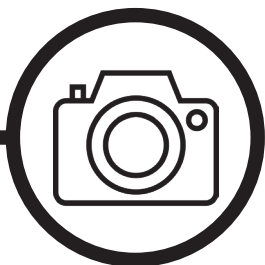
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## Serving Other Churches: A History

Paul Simon wasn't thinking about churches when he wrote the following lines, but I fear they often apply to churches today:

*I am shielded in my armor*

*Hiding in my room, safe within my womb*

*I touch no one and no one touches me*

*I am a rock*

*I am an island*

Too often churches operate as islands unto themselves. Yes, every Baptist church is independent. We know that Christ is the head of the local church—not a presbytery, not a bishop, not a pope. Unfortunately, such independence can too often turn into isolation. It shouldn't be this way. Local churches ought to work together for the sake of the Great Commission.

This year at Mount Vernon, we are thinking about the importance of serving other churches. Put another way, Christians in our congregation ought to be concerned about Christians in other congregations. It's not enough to care about what is going on inside our four walls or even in our own neighborhood. A heart for the nations is expressed in a heart for other churches.

In January's *Perspective*, I argued we ought think and act as world Christians, caring "not only for reproducing from within our body but serving other bodies of Christ—locally and internationally." This, I suggested, is a practical implication of Jesus' prayer for his future disciples that "we may all be one" (John 17:20). In February, I said we can serve other churches by knowing, encouraging, strengthening, and sharing all for the sake of the gospel. This is the New Testament church pattern (Col. 4:7; Eph. 6:22; Acts 14:22; Acts 11:22). Last month, I insisted we need to take personal responsibility for this kind of cooperative effort. National denominations can be helpful, but if we neglect the nitty-gritty work of developing relationships with other churches in our area and around the world, we are forfeiting one of our most basic Christian duties.

My guess is you haven't thought much about this. I understand. I also know the topic of serving other churches may not be very interesting to you. Perhaps a story will help show you how valuable a concern for serving other churches can be.

A few years ago, a young man joined our church hoping

to cut his teeth in pastoral ministry. He intended to eventually move to a rural part of his home state and either plant or revitalize a small church. Though he loved Mount Vernon, he came to realize it might be better for him to gain some experience at a work still in the throes of revitalization. He had come to a few pastors' fellowships of the Greater Atlanta Baptist Network, and there he met a pastor engaged in just this sort of work. He wound up interning with this brother: evangelizing, disciple-making, preaching, and getting a front row seat to the joys and difficulties of turning a church around. Eventually, marriage came knocking at his door. He still had room to grow pastorally, but he didn't have a church that could provide for him full-time. Thankfully, another church pastor in our network had an opening for an assistant pastor. The young man was able to change his church membership one last time to gain the experience in pastoral ministry he needed.

What made this man's journey between three churches possible? Ultimately God! But what means did God use? He used a network of local churches who know one another, encourage one another, and serve one another for the sake of the gospel. His adventure from membership in our church to pastoring in another church is just one example of the fruit of serving other churches. This story is one reason Mount Vernon is part of a local church association, the Greater Atlanta Baptist Network.

Reader alert: I'm about to take you back in time, to get a taste of how churches in America have engaged in the type of networking I'm hoping will be recovered in our generation.

AMERICA'S FIRST BAPTIST ASSOCIATION  
Is the type of church networking I've been writing about a new thing? Not at all! Again, go back to the essays I've written for this year's *Perspective*, and you'll see that this type of cooperation is simply New Testament Christianity. However, we don't just see this kind of cooperation in the Bible; we see it in American church history.

The first Baptist association in America started with just five churches in the Philadelphia area in 1707. "The Association of Particular Baptist Churches" committed to meet each year for mutual counsel and encouragement. These churches had actually organized preaching conferences together for years, but they eventually saw the wisdom in a more formal arrangement. They identified themselves as "particular" Baptists in the sense that they agreed with the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith which taught Christ died "particularly" for all the people God the Father had chosen before the foundation

of the world.

What did these churches do when they gathered as the Philadelphia Association? They still heard good preaching, but they also strategized for evangelism, addressed hard pastoral questions, and sought to identify young men who might be well-suited to enter full-time, vocational ministry. Between 1707 and 1851, this Association grew from five to 64 churches. However, these numbers don't take into account the scores of other churches who wound up forming their own Baptist associations.

A glance at the first few years of the Philadelphia Association proves there is nothing new under the sun. Churches have been dealing with the same questions for years, and each new generation is in need of returning to Scripture for godly wisdom. The advice offered by the Philadelphia Association isn't inerrant, but there is much wisdom in many counselors (Prov. 15:22). An association is, by definition, a collection of many counselors.

The questions discussed at these meetings are still interesting today. For example, what is to be done when a church member and a church don't see eye-to-eye on a particular issue? This is one of the questions that prompted the Baptists in Philadelphia to meet in 1707. They affirmed each local church is autonomous, but they also saw the value in seeking input from one another: "It was also concluded, that if any difference shall happen between any member and the church he belongs unto, and they cannot agree, then the person so grieved may, at the general meeting, appeal to the brethren of several congregations."<sup>i</sup>

As the years went on, more questions came to the floor. What do you do if you have a congregation but no one to preach? "Read a chapter, sing a psalm, and to prayer and beg of God to increase their grace and comfort."<sup>ii</sup> Can a believer marry an unbeliever without coming under church discipline? "Answered in the negative."<sup>iii</sup> What happens if a church member is getting upset about minor, secondary issues, matters that are cosmetic? "Such persons, contending, quarreling, and so refraining church communion upon such light grounds—since such things are left undetermined by our great Lawgiver—are much to be blamed; and a church is nowise obliged to yield to such vain humours . . . seeing the matter in debate is so trivial."<sup>iv</sup>

In addition to answering questions, each year someone was invited to write a letter to the Association as a whole, usually a special word of encouragement. In days where people rarely traveled and a word of exhortation couldn't be sent easily by mail and certainly not by e-mail, these yearly letters proved to be a balm to the soul of many a

tired church pastor and member. In 1748, one brother encouraged the Association with these fine words:

The satisfaction you express to have received from our last year's narrative, encourages us to go on in the work of the Lord with cheerfulness. We trust, through your fervent prayers to God in our behalf, we met in love and gospel fellowship, and our debates and consultations were without heat and animosity; thanks be given to the Most High for this valuable blessing. The doctrines of the glorious gospel have been held forth among us with power and clearness, under which we enjoy some comfortable measure of the divine presence.<sup>v</sup>

The Philadelphia Baptist Association may have been America's first, but it certainly wasn't the last.

### BAPTISTS IN EARLY GEORGIA

Nearly seventy years after the founding of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, there were only five Baptist churches in Georgia. One of them, Big Buckhead Church near Augusta, is where God saved George Liele, the first African-American Baptist minister who went on to help found churches around Augusta, Savannah, and eventually throughout the island of Jamaica. Both predominately white and black churches in Georgia took comfort in associational life.

In 1784, pastor Daniel Marshall founded the Georgia Baptist Association with the help of his son, Abraham. Daniel was born in Connecticut, experienced the ministry of George Whitefield, evangelized native Americans, and eventually entered pastoral ministry at the age of 50. He ministered throughout Virginia before landing in Georgia when he was 65. Here he founded Kiokee Baptist Church in Augusta, the oldest continuing Baptist church in the state.

Abraham Marshall succeeded his father as the pastor of Kiokee Baptist. He took his father's mantle as the leader of the Association. Like its predecessor in Philadelphia, the Georgia Baptist Association regularly convened to address practical ministry questions. In 1798, the Association took up the question of whether Scripture required family worship. Marshall penned the answer:

Question: What shall be done with those professors who do not hold worship with their families? . . . It is our opinion that the churches to whom such professors belong, first admonish, exhort, and reprove them, but if they will not be reclaimed, then deal with them as neglectors of known duty.<sup>vi</sup>

Today, pastors and church members alike rely on online

resources such as The Gospel Coalition, Desiring God, 9Marks, and Grace to You to get their spiritual and church-related questions answered. These ministries are a treasure-trove of Bible knowledge. But before the formation of such ministries, believers relied upon the important conversations which took place in the context of associational relationships. Pastors met to hammer out issues that affected all of their churches. These associations adopted statements of faith, helped plant churches, raised up pastors, and started educational institutions.

It's impossible to look back at Georgia's history without recalling the sad reality that American Baptists split over the question of whether slaveholders should be allowed to represent Baptists as missionaries. Georgian Baptists defended this position and the Southern Baptist Convention formed in Augusta in 1845.

It's not obvious where Abraham Marshall would have stood on the issue. He died in 1819, 26 years before the founding of the SBC. It's clear from his memoirs that he was an acquaintance—perhaps even a close friend—of David Barrow, the Kentucky Baptist who preached against slavery.<sup>vii</sup> Marshall was also instrumental in the founding of Georgia's first Black Baptist church. After George Liele fled to Jamaica, one of his disciples, Andrew Bryan, faced racist persecution for preaching the gospel. Bryan wanted help founding a church. He and his friends turned to Abraham Marshall for assistance. Hearing of their predicament and, in the words of one biographer, "not fearing the wrath of man nor any stigma that the enemies of the Gospel would attempt to throw upon him," Marshall traveled 165 miles from Augusta to Savannah. There he baptized 45 believers and ordained Andrew Bryan as the pastor of First African Baptist Church in 1788. Two years later, Bryan led his congregation to join the Georgia Baptist Association.<sup>viii</sup> In 1802, several predominately black and white churches formed the smaller Savannah Association.<sup>ix</sup>

Why does all this matter? Because it shows that in American history, both North and South, Baptist churches made a habit of forming local associations—networks—to encourage the work of the ministry. Large, national denominations have their place. However, the knowledge and relationships available at the local level are what has, historically, made denominationalism work.

#### WHY ASSOCIATE?

Baptists had been formally associating in England since at least 1704, a few years before the Philadelphia Association formed.<sup>x</sup> Nearly a century later, Baptist Dan Taylor explained why these networks are so important.

Writing in 1793, he offered five reasons churches should associate today. His points—rephrased below—are worth repeating.<sup>xi</sup>

First, we should associate for the advancement of the gospel. Different churches have different gifts, different strengths. When we put our minds and resources together, we can find creative ways to unleash the unchanging gospel of Jesus Christ. Taylor wrote, "We all need assistance by instruction, by example; by a mutual communication of our difficulties, or escapes, and our failures. And most of us, by mutual intercourse, may be able to contribute a considerable share toward the more effectual propagation of the gospel."

Second, to protect Baptist distinctives. Talking about what divides us as Christians is not popular today. However, it's difficult to engage in practical ministry like planting churches with believers who disagree over the definition of a church or the proper subject of baptism. Associations become groups where secondary but important distinctives can be maintained. Yes, there is room for conferences like Together for the Gospel and websites like The Gospel Coalition that don't divide over secondary matters. There is also a place for churches who agree on baptism and church government to partner together.

Third, to know and encourage other churches. Yes! "We experience mutual benefit, as well as pleasure, in these annual interviews. We feel our hearts warmed afresh with love and zeal; we find our hands strengthened, notwithstanding our many discouragements." The Greater Atlanta Baptist Network has been such an encouragement to me, personally, this past decade. Our participation in this association hinges on our willingness to serve—and be served by—other churches.

Fourth, to help raise up pastors. I mentioned the story of the young man who started at MVBC but is now a staff pastor at another church in our area. His journey was possible, due in part, to the willingness of local churches to get to know one another better. Taylor put it this way, "By our associations, these men become known to other churches, who want their assistance; and they, in due time, are invited to exercise their abilities with comfort to themselves."

Fifth and finally, to assist one another financially. "Many places of worship have been erected in various parts of the kingdom, and which could never have been built, had it not been through the intercourse established by these annual meetings." Starting and struggling churches are often in need of help. A culture of serving other churches will help us pass along the

man from heaven that we don't need ourselves.

#### WHY ASSOCIATE?

Since my arrival in 2008, Mount Vernon hasn't planted one church—not one. Many might see that as a failure on our part, a dereliction of our duty to reproduce. However, I'd suggest that if you look more closely at what's been accomplished through our commitment to serve other churches, you'd find a much different and much more encouraging story.

- We have supported pastoral internships in Germany, the Middle East, and Kenya which have trained pastors to plant and revitalize churches in some of the most difficult spiritual soil on earth.
- We have poured into church planting missionaries in Central and East Asia who are laboring among Muslim people groups hardened against the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- We have raised up pastors, through our own internship program, who are now shepherding in Byron, GA, San Juan, Dominican Republic, and Fujairah, United Arab Emirates.
- We have contributed to the building funds of congregations without permanent meeting space inside the perimeter of Atlanta—where churches have, sadly, been fleeing for decades.
- We have invested in church plants both as a local church and an association in Villa Rica, Athens, East Point, Decatur, Winston-Salem, and Philadelphia.
- We have, for nine years now, sought to bring pastors together once a year at Feed My Sheep to encourage them to keep on treasuring Christ and preaching the gospel—regardless of the results.

Lord willing, before this decade is over, God will bless our efforts to send many MVBC members away to plant the gospel in parts of our area who would be helped by a like-minded church. But until that day, may we not lose our vision for serving other churches near and far.

– Aaron Menikoff

<sup>i</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>v</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>vi</sup> Thomas Ray, *Daniel and Abraham Marshall: Pioneer Baptist Evangelists to the South Including the Memoirs of Abraham Marshall* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2006), 37.

<sup>vii</sup> Ibid., 91. Barrow and his church wound up being kicked out of his local association because he “meddled” with emancipation!

<sup>viii</sup> Ibid., 59–63.

<sup>ix</sup> Johnny White, “George Liele,” in *A Noble Company: Biographical Essays on Notable Particular-Regular Baptists in America*, ed. Terry Wolever, Vol. 5 (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2014), 63.

<sup>x</sup> B. Carlisle Driggers, “The Early Baptist roots and Religious Environment of George Liele” in *George Liele's Life and Legacy*, ed. David T. Shannon (Mercer, GA: Mercer University Press, 2012), 33.

<sup>xi</sup> John Rippon, *The Baptist Registry*, 552. Found at [https://archive.org/details/baptistannualreg00ripp\\_0/page/336/mode/2up?q=Liele](https://archive.org/details/baptistannualreg00ripp_0/page/336/mode/2up?q=Liele).

## When Pain Is Real and God Seems Silent: Finding Hope in the Psalms

Written by Ligon Duncan

In this fallen world, everybody suffers, but if you're a Christian, you may experience the deep heartache of feeling left alone by God in the midst of your pain. In *When Pain is Real and God Seems Silent*, Ligon Duncan walks his readers through Psalms 88 and 89 with pastoral care, highlighting how each Psalm can help us look to God when we're treading the waters of suffering. Here are three encouragements I gleaned from Duncan's insights.

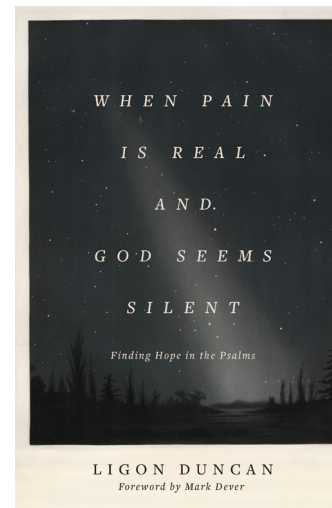
First, God's character is not altered by our circumstances. Each Psalmist begins his raw complaint to God by crying out in praise for who he is. He is the God of salvation, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness (Psalm 88:1; 89:1). He does not change, even when our circumstances do. Resting in the truths of God's character provides great hope for the suffering Christian.

Second, God is sovereign over our suffering. Though we can't always know the reason for our pain, we can trust that God will fulfill his purposes in it. And as we rest in God's good character, we can trust that these purposes are for our good and his glory—even when they are difficult to bear.

Third, the Christian's suffering is temporary because Christ suffered God's wrath for us. Duncan reveals how each of these Psalms point us to the suffering of Christ and how he, more than anyone, can sympathize with us in our pain. He was "sorrowful even to death" as he anticipated the cross and cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" in the climax of his suffering (Matt. 26:38; 27:46).

This short book (only 58 pages) is overflowing with encouragement from Psalms 88 and 89, and I highly recommend it to any Christian. It is a helpful companion to study Psalms 88 and 89 and a wealth of encouragement for those in the midst of suffering or for those walking alongside another brother or sister who is hurting.

— RECOMMENDED BY MARJORIE ROBERSON



### Excerpts From the Book

## 1

"God places psalms of lament, like this one, in Scripture so that we could all learn how to cry to the Lord in our sadness and grief together. Psalms like this one teach us to share in one another's suffering and to bear one another's burdens."  
— Psalm 88, p.25

## 2

"We must never interpret God's character by our circumstances. We must instead interpret our circumstances by God's character."  
— Psalm 89, p.44

## 3

"Because God is good, his sovereignty is a benevolent omnipotence, not a tyrannical one. God wields his sovereign power for the good of his people and for their ultimate blessing (Rom. 8:28)."

— Psalm 89, p.48

## What If I'm Discouraged in My Evangelism?

Written by Isaac Adams

There are many reasons—both right and wrong—we get discouraged when sharing the gospel. *What If I'm Discouraged in My Evangelism?* by Isaac Adams, aims to fight discouragement in evangelism. Adams encourages us to focus on Christ as we share the gospel by pointing out what is common, reminding us of our job in evangelism, and challenging us to find the object of our hope. To no surprise, Adams spends the majority of his time focusing on Christ.

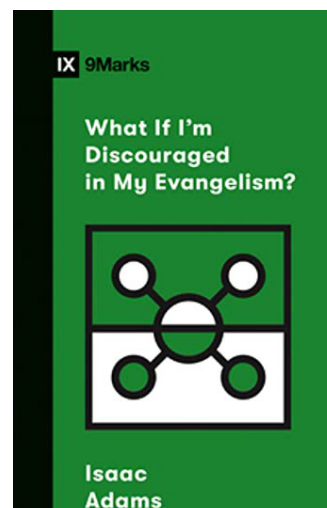
Here are a few questions I found helpful to consider. First, are you prayerless? If evangelism is not a regular part of your prayer life, you should not be surprised you're rarely sharing the gospel. "Discouraged evangelists are prayerless evangelists" (40). Adams encourages us to not only pray but to talk to fellow believers about it. Ask others if they have opportunities to share the gospel. Someone who has evangelism regularly on their mind will likely share the gospel more.

Second, are you a parent? Christian parents can carry unnecessary guilt because they are not able to evangelize as regularly as they did before children. Some may feel as if they moved off the front lines, where "real" ministry happens. Adams reminds parents that they are on the front lines. Parents are doing *real* ministry. In 2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14-15, we see that Timothy was spiritually influenced by his mother and grandmother. Children are a parent's primary audience, so they should share the gospel with them and be encouraged.

Lastly, are you enjoying Christ? It is discouraging to have had an opportunity to share the gospel that failed. We often feel grief. Godly sorrow leads to repentance (2 Cor. 7:8-10). Amen! But also take comfort. "Jesus, not your evangelistic track record, is your righteousness before God" (17). Remember the gospel and enjoy Christ more. "Sharing Jesus comes from the overflow of loving Jesus ... If you want to grow in evangelism, do all you can to fix your eyes on Jesus" (18).

Though the book is short, it is encouraging. You can read it in an hour. (It is only 64 pages!) It is helpful because it engages discouragement in evangelism very practically, making the book unique. If you are a believer struggling in your evangelism, it will hopefully encourage you to proclaim Christ.

– RECOMMENDED BY DARIUS TUCKER



### Excerpts From the Book

## 1

"Enjoying God, it turns out, is a large part of what it means to obey God. Discouraged evangelists too often think they can be dutiful evangelists without being happy evangelists. Yet we should not separate the two."

– Hope in God Who Counts Us Righteous in Jesus, p.18

## 2

"If you don't have a trail of souls you've won behind you, take heart: people rejected the prophets, the Lord, and the apostles. Yet the prophets, the Lord, and the apostles still glorified God in their ministries, and we can too."

– Hope in God Who Vindicates His Justice, p.30

## 3

"As one author said, 'God is as much, if not more, interested in doing a great work in us as he is in doing a great work through us.' God is at work in you even when it seems he's not working through you, and discouraged evangelists would do well to remember this."

– Hope in God Who Vindicates His Justice, p.32



# APRIL

*These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!*

April 1	Acts 2:1–13	April 14	John 18:28–40
April 2	Acts 2:14–41	April 15	John 19:1–30
April 3	Acts 2:42–3:10	April 16	John 19:31–42
<b>April 4</b>	<b>Acts 3:11–4:12</b>	April 17	Psalms 119:129–136
April 5	Isaiah 57	<b>April 18</b>	<b>2 John</b>
April 6	Isaiah 52:13–53:12	April 19	3 John
April 7	Isaiah 54	April 20	John 20:1–18
April 8	Isaiah 55	April 21	John 20:19–30
April 9	Isaiah 56	April 22	John 21:1–14
April 10	Matthew 11:20–30	April 23	John 21:15–25
<b>April 11</b>	<b>Isaiah 57:15</b>	April 24	Psalms 29
April 12	2 John	<b>April 25</b>	<b>3 John</b>
April 13	John 18:15–27		

\*Sermons in bold

# TAKE UP & READ

# NEW MEMBERS



**Nana  
Agyekum**



**Liya  
Berhane**



**Sam  
Cook**



**Ansley  
Cook**



**Lance  
Cooper**



**Sonja  
Cooper**



**Andrew  
Dallas**



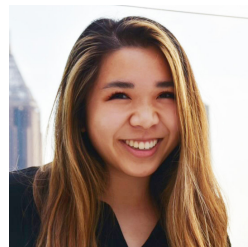
**Kerry  
Danoff**



**Jacob  
Davis**



**Anna  
Lambert**



**Maria  
Liu**



**Casey  
Weaver**



**Katherine  
Weaver**



*Mount Vernon*  
BAPTIST CHURCH