



Our final Issue

Saying Goodbye

Devotional Essays by Gene Shelburne

THE CHRISTIAN
Appeal



Saying Goodbye

After sixty years of editing *The Christian Appeal*, I sat down to compile my essays for this final issue. If these were the last words I get to share with most of our readers, I asked myself, what should I say? What would be a proper goodbye?

During all these decades, our main purpose has been to honor Jesus. Our primary message has been that we need to imitate Jesus and obey his commands. The challenges our nation faces have changed during these years, but the solution to them has not. If we love one another as Jesus loved us, we will avoid much of the anguish and disarray so common in this secular age.

Thank you for being one of our readers and for helping us share the Good News about Jesus with your family and friends. May God bless and keep you in his grace.

—Gene Shelburne,
Senior Editor

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*W*ise words
are more valuable
than much gold
and many rubies.

✿ Proverbs 20:15 (NLT)



John Gulley

Saying Goodbye

“Fear Not”

What are you afraid of? Most of all? Most of the time?

Don't be ashamed to confess it. Each of us—every living, breathing human—has to deal with fear of some sort. Those who appear to be scared of nothing are just working harder than the rest of us to hide their fears.

Most four-year-olds are afraid of the dark. I was. You, too, I bet. When I was learning to swim, a buddy of mine was terrified even to be near water. I loved swimming, so that surprised me. My dear mother was petrified with fear when we had to drive on the narrow mountain pass roads to get to Idaho in the 1950s.

Our gamut of fears is endless. Various friends of mine have phobias that are triggered by snakes, spiders, dogs, tornadoes, heights, guns, cancer, flying, needles, lightning, strangers, or toilet paper shortages. Now we could add viruses to that list.

The truth is that the majority of our inner terrors can be traced to our universal fear of death. And we don't need to be told that we have a malignancy to start trembling inside. Perfectly healthy people panic when their food supply is threatened.

“Fear not,” the angels said at

the empty tomb of Jesus. Or, as our newer Bibles put it, “Do not be afraid.” Does Easter have a more practical message for all of us than this?

That first Easter morning those female friends of Jesus came to his tomb intending to embalm his body. How would performing such a duty make you feel? Obviously, the two Marys were frightened, and the angel addressed their fears.

Death arouses some level of fear in all of us. I remember officiating at funerals where some family member could not force himself to stand beside the open casket or even to look at their dead loved one. Even those of us who have fears like that under control still can trace almost all our anxieties to the ultimate threat of our own death.

My friend Joe Barnett recently wrote: “A nail-biting Christian is a pitiful sight to the Lord, for fear displays an anemic faith.”

“Fear not!”—or its equivalent—is the most-repeated command in the Bible,” Joe noted, before he observed, “There must be a reason for that.”

Then he asked, “Are you listening?”

That's a message all of us need to hear.



Saying Goodbye

From Bad to Worse

The condo my lady managed to book for us in exchange for our expiring timeshare weeks was elegant. One of the finest we ever stayed in.

But even before we got inside it, we encountered one problem. It was a jillion yards from our handicap parking place to our condo door. The only entrance ramp was at one end of the lengthy facility, a country mile from the elevator that was the only way for mobility-impaired folks like us to get down to our unit's level. Then, when the elevator dumped us there, we had to retrace all those steps to get to our door.

When we finally did get into the condo with all our baggage, it was luxurious. We were surprised and pleased to see its elegance. But our aching joints and aging muscles made the trip to and from our car an ordeal.

We endured it all weekend, limiting our treks to our vehicle. On Monday, in her always kind, courteous tones, Nita called and asked the reservation clerk if she could move us to a unit that required fewer steps. Yes, the clerk responded, and she even sent young staff members to haul

all our stuff to the new unit.

After the baggage handlers left, one look around told us the first condo had been much newer and finer. "I shouldn't have asked to move," my lady confessed. But the move was made and we had to live with it.

Life is that way. Leave one job to take a higher-paying one, and only when you get there will you know that your new supervisor is an intolerant tyrant. Trade your familiar car for a newer one, and you'll likely find yourself missing many of the old car's features you took for granted. Changes that seem desirable don't always make life better. Factor in this truth if you've been thinking about leaving home, or getting a divorce, or changing churches.

One change is always an improvement—the one we make when we obey Jesus' command, "Repent." Leaving behind a life-ruining sin, ending an addiction, or saying No to a bad habit will always bless us. The apostle Paul tells us to "rid" ourselves of anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy talk, and lies, and to "put on a new self" made clean by Jesus. We'll never regret that change.

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Saying Goodbye

Bible Puzzles

Every morning for forty years I taught an academic Bible course in a public high school. Getting to interact with over a thousand students during those four decades blessed me more than I can tell you.

Twice in a recent week I crossed trails with students from the 1980s. Both of them are now old men, so I didn't recognize them, but they knew me and greeted me warmly. And both of them told me how much that college-level Bible study has blessed them all of their lives. It enabled them to read the Bible and make sense of it.

Is Bible study a regular part of your life? Or does your copy of God's word gather dust on a shelf because you don't think you can understand it?

The Bible is not an easy book. Even those of us who study it as a vocation find sections of Scripture we can't explain. In his excellent book *Working the Angles*, Eugene Peterson recalled hearing Gilbert Highet say that "anyone who reads the Bible and isn't puzzled at least half the time doesn't have his mind on what he is doing."

But the part we do understand will bless us immeasurably. We'll have to go to heaven before we

can know what Ezekiel or the apostle John were trying to tell us in their strangest visions, but who can't understand, "You shall not steal," or, "You shall not murder"? What follower of Jesus needs help to discern his instruction, "If you love me, do what I tell you to," or to plug into his promise, "Come to me if you're burdened, and I will give you rest"?

Some portions of the Bible baffle us because those verses contradict our doctrinal assumptions. I visited one congregation that never studied Romans. "We can't understand it," they told me. Of course, they couldn't. It clearly says that Christians are justified by faith, not by works—the opposite of what they were teaching.

If we're convinced we'll go to heaven because we are so right and so good, we're not likely to understand Paul's clear message in Ephesians 2 that "you have been saved by grace, through faith—and this is not because of anything you do. It is the gift of God, not by works."

Nobody needs a Bible course to comprehend a simple verse like Colossians 3:8, "Rid yourselves of anger." But in today's world, all of us need to read it.

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Making Guns Safe

Growing up in the little town of Kerrville, Texas, I was blessed that next door to the house our father had built for us lived the Cordell family.

They had two boys, Ron and Bobby, roughly the same age as my brother and me. Our father was a preacher. Their dad, Vern Cordell, was an Air Force colonel. He taught us boys how to safely use guns.

But in our home we had no guns. Not one. Although my father grew up shooting rattlesnakes and rabbits and crop-consuming critters, if he ever owned a gun as an adult, I never saw it. He never spoke negatively about firearms. He never did object when we went hunting with cousins or neighbors. But for some reason that he never divulged to us kids, our home (except for the Daisy BB guns we boys used constantly) was gunless.

In those post-WWII days, all of our relatives owned guns. Lots of them. Most of them were country folks—farmers or ranchers or inheritors of their parents' isolated country houses—so for them guns were necessary tools for safe and profitable living. I loved jack rabbit hunting on their places, and—if I do say so—I became a pretty good shot.

What I'm telling you is that at least for the last half of the 1900s, guns were a normal part of my life. Almost all of our kinfolks and neighbors and church friends had them. Guns were in all of their homes. And I don't remember a single one of them ever using a firearm to harm somebody else. Not once.

This convinces me that the problem behind travesties like the Uvalde and Buffalo mass shootings is not the products of Winchester or Remington or Colt. Instead, trace those tragedies to a generation raised without faith and, far too often, without fathers. Take bullets and AK-47s away from these angry, uncontrolled people, and they will find alternate weapons to convey their hatred.

The Bible teaches serious Christians to raise their sons and daughters to be "self-controlled, sensible, and well-behaved." Our offspring are "not be heavy drinkers (or drug-users) or troublemakers." Instead, we're told to produce kids who are "kind and gentle." But a generation who never hear a Bible read, or never darken the door of a church, or never see decent behavior modeled for them by godly parents will keep making headlines that horrify our souls. CA

Saying Goodbye

March of Dimes

A news blurb about our area's new March of Dimes administrator ignited a swarm of long-forgotten but rich memories of my first involvement with that famous organization.

I was just sixteen, a junior in high school, and an editor of our school newspaper, when the local March of Dimes board tapped me and a classmate to go with them to their annual state convention in Dallas. That trip was loaded with a swarm of first-ever experiences for me.

To begin with, we boarded a Braniff 727. It was my first time to fly. In Dallas, we stayed in a downtown luxury hotel. I'd never been inside an edifice that posh. Do I need to tell you that my adrenaline was flowing that week?

I remember nothing—absolutely zero—about their convention, but I'll never forget the journey back home. Weather cancelled lots of flights nationwide that weekend. Braniff did an amazing job of finding a seat here and another there to get our contingent of lawyers, bankers, and store owners back to their jobs by Monday, but on that Sunday night three of us still were stranded in Dallas.

Two of us were the students (glad to have an excuse to miss school the

next day). The other was a rather stuffy socialite lady. Since she had no job to hurry home to, her buddies nominated her to be the board member stuck in the city babysitting two teenagers. She seemed less than thrilled about the assignment.

That Sunday night at Love Field the Braniff ticket agent kept calling names of folks to fill vacant plane seats. But not our names. After a couple of hours, our cranky caretaker lost it. She belled up to the ticket counter and began loudly blessing out that poor agent. After several minutes of this abuse, he beckoned a limo driver and told him to ferry the three of us to Amon Carter Airport over an hour away in Fort Worth. Anything to get that angry dame out of his face.

Later I wondered if that out-of-control woman ever calmed down enough to realize that her outburst of anger cost us needless miles of transit and made our return flight several hours later than it would have been if she had behaved.

Hair-trigger anger seldom benefits anybody. The wise man in Proverbs got it right: "A fool is quick-tempered; a wise person stays calm" (12:16). That March of Dimes leader proved it that night.



Saying Goodbye

“Music Man” Memories

On a major holiday recently, my lady was clicking through the TV channels looking for something to watch on that idle afternoon. From our adjoining indoor patio where I was goofing off, suddenly I heard the sweet barbershop harmony of “Lida Rose.” Nita had found our favorite Broadway musical/movie—Willson and Lacey’s *The Music Man*, and I was thrilled to hear their inimitable (but funny) barbershop quartet crooning its lines.

The Music Man tops our catalog of musicals, partly because more than six decades ago it was the first movie my lady and I attended together after we were wed. For that reason alone, we’ll always love it. But we still agree that it’s one of the best that we’ve seen since then.


In today’s Hollywood/Broadway milieu, this classic is rare indeed, because its sole purpose is to entertain. No social snipes. No political pandering. No racial references. No vulgarity or profanity. Just relaxation and fun. *The Music Man* always blesses us, and I’m certain that it will always be one of our prized memories.

Did you grow up (as I did) singing, “Precious memories. How they linger! How they ever flood my

soul!” Do any of us have a greater, finer blessing than our memories?

Not all of them are blessings, of course. All of us know that. We can’t erase the indelible scars of our own worst mistakes or of the gross abuse some of us have suffered at the hands of others. Those awful memories will last forever. But for those of us who have found God’s grace in Jesus, even recalling our own worst sins can bless us. Whenever we remember them, those memories make us freshly grateful that God has forgiven us for so much.

In one of his memorable songs, the late Cathedrals bass singer, George Younce, tells us, “Memories are one gift of God that death cannot destroy.” In its context, that line likely is saying that even after we bury a much-loved spouse, the memories of our good times together will live on. But in numerous Scriptures, the Bible expands this idea. In story after story it often seems to imply that even when we leave this life and go to heaven, our memories will go with us. Even death will not destroy them.

If this is true, what does it tell us about the kind of memories we need to be creating right now? 

Saying Goodbye

How Newcomers Find Us

One morning last summer I was surprised to find on our front lawn, packaged in a plastic bag just like our newspaper, a Yellow Page phone book.

Seeing it revived memories of the days when I moved back home to pastor an Amarillo congregation in the late 1960s. One of my church-growth strategies then was to make sure that our small church had a larger, more prominent Yellow Page ad than any congregation of our brand.

During my first decade of ministry, I had preached for a lively but small congregation located on the main freeway in what was then the north side of Phoenix. Our fine new church building shined like a star alongside that busy thoroughfare. The constant stream of newcomers in the Valley of the Sun couldn't keep from seeing it, and often they visited us first. Almost every Sunday we had a dozen first-time visitors, so I knew the value of getting new residents to look at our church first.

The congregation I came to serve in Amarillo was buried in an isolated neighborhood, so I elected to make us visible by purchasing the biggest Yellow Page ad of any congregation in our non-denominational

denomination. Back in those pre-GPS days, those ads were the way everybody—especially newcomers—found whatever they were looking for in town. The Yellow Pages worked for us. Lots of new residents sat on our pews first.

But those days are over. My church has not appeared in a phone book or a Yellow Page ad for two decades, and nobody has missed us. Instead, in this digital age, folks new in our city Google to identify a church and then depend on Siri to get them there. Realizing this shift in social habits, our younger leaders have wisely enlarged our church's digital footprint to let this latest generation know we're still here.

Jesus wants all of his people to be visible. Two of his most famous metaphors described his followers as “a light for the world” and “a city on a hill.” I remain convinced that a far more effective outreach than all of our Yellow Page ads or fancy websites has always been the personal invitations church members offer to their new neighbors.

“Come worship with us,” can't be found in any Bible verse, but those friendly words can help our new friends find a place to serve the Lord.



Saying Goodbye

Anger, Anger—Everywhere

Uncontrolled anger. It seems to be everywhere all the time.

In Shelbyville, Kentucky, a customer shot out a drive-thru window when she didn't get a fork and napkin with her order.

In Hawaii, airport police had to tase an irate passenger who threw a fit because his luggage didn't arrive with him.

Cops in Florida reported a weird case of road rage. They arrested some furious guy who spat food into the face of a woman driver who was trying to apologize to him for whatever she did to tick him off.

In northern Minnesota, Angelo Borreson was charged with murder after he fatally shot a woman who honked her horn and yelled at him to hurry up. Police said she had come to his home to help him, but temper trumped thankfulness.

The Albuquerque *Journal* reported that Joe Macias got into an argument with his wife and doused her with gasoline. He intended to incinerate her, but he was the one who was inflamed. With rage.

Okies have to deal with it, too. In Dell City, Oklahoma, two customers got so mad about a blooper on their chicken order that they smashed Sonic's glass door. At least, they


attacked the door instead of the order-taker.

At a McDonald's in Ohio, though, it was the employee, not the customer, who lost it. She got so upset with a customer that she threw a blender in the lady's face and broke her chin and jaw.

A truck driver on I-75 in Georgia was hospitalized with life-threatening injuries after he got shot several times in what appeared to be a case of road rage.

A six-year-old boy on a Los Angeles freeway was not so lucky. Strapped in his booster seat in his mother's pickup, he had done nothing to deserve his fate, but a bullet fired in a fit of road rage ended his life.

Anger also boiled over in St. Louis when a female sheriff told some gal that she couldn't come inside a gas station without a mask. The enraged customer gave the sheriff a concussion when she clobbered the officer with her own baton.

Anger. Everywhere. All the time. Uncontrolled wrath seems to be breaking out all across our land. Headlines just keep validating James' warning that our anger seldom makes us do something God would approve. That's why he counsels us, "Be slow to get angry." 

Saying Goodbye

Weapon Bans

Did you hear the news report about the Connecticut mother who strangled her three children and then hanged herself? Police found her hanging in a shed.

Lawmakers want to ban guns because people get killed by them. Will they now add rope to that list of illegal threats?

Did a single week pass last year without a news report of innocent people being annihilated by some angry or crazy driver who targeted them with his car? Do we need to add automobiles to the list of deadly instruments that should be outlawed?

What about knives? I don't know the exact count, but an alarming number of subway murders in New York and other metro areas have been knife attacks. And last summer some out-of-control dude went on what Fox News called "a stabbing spree." He badly injured five young men, one of them fatally, when they were tubing on a Wisconsin river. Have you heard any lawmakers suggesting that we pass bills to ban knives? Or maybe box cutters, like the one the Times Square slasher used?

The problem is not the weapons. The mindless metal in the barrel of a .357 magnum or in the blade of a dagger never targeted even one victim. We won't save lives by banning

weapons of any kind. People who are mad enough or crazy enough to murder others will find some tool to do it with. Always have. Always will.

Instead of banning weapons, maybe we need to ban video games that teach kids to kill and kill and kill again before they're three years old. Maybe we need to ban endless TV dramas full of bloody violence. Maybe we need to recreate a society where most kids have two parents they can honor, parents who model patience and gentleness and love to shape their offspring.

In every state we already have laws against deadly violence of any kind, regardless of the instrument used to kill another human. But those laws—even the ones with the stiffest penalties—do nothing to subdue the rage or hate or insanity of a person bent on killing. When Cain gets mad enough or jealous enough to murder Abel, even laws made in heaven won't stop him.

To put a lid on the dangerous mayhem of this generation, we don't need more laws. What we need is more people filled with God's Spirit and his fruit of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." Against those traits, the Bible says, "there is no law." CA

Saying Goodbye

The Frozen Bugle

Few things touch my soul more than the somber notes of “Taps” beside the graves of veterans I’m burying.

Several years ago, in the dead of winter, I was laying to rest a longtime friend. The honor guard for that funeral were active airmen who came all the way from San Antonio to blow the trumpet and fold the flag. For some reason, the undertaker and family took far longer than usual to roll from our church to the cemetery east of town. For almost an hour, in bitter cold, the honor guard and I stood beside the grave and visited while we waited.

Several times during that delay, the bugle-blower tested his horn. Then, when the hearse finally did appear in the distance, he stood his bugle on a nearby gravestone and stood at attention.

Getting the family ushered to the grave took several minutes. I kept my words brief, but they still added to our time exposed to the cold north wind.

When the time came for “Taps,” the all-business, proper private picked up his bugle and blew to produce that well-known three-note tribute to the veteran we were burying. He puffed and

blew, but no sound came out of his bugle. Not even a squeak. During our long wait, the icy wind had frozen the trumpeter’s saliva in his instrument. When it became apparent that “Taps” was not possible that day, I stepped in and covered for him by calling for the final portion of the service to proceed.

After we were done and the family had departed, I heard the furious sergeant dressing down the bugle player for his failure to play “Taps.” Not being a military guy of any rank, I exercised my authority by stepping between them and telling the sergeant to hush and back down.

I explained to him that his young bugler was a south-Texas guy who had no way to foresee what an Amarillo norther might do to his horn. Both the sergeant and I had heard him preparing and making sure he was ready. The farthest thing from his mind was a frozen bugle.

That airman learned something that day. So did I. That sergeant’s angry outburst taught me to be sure I know why the person fouled up before I unleash my anger and criticism on someone who has upset me.

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Saying Goodbye

Stepping on a Crack

Like most folks in the western world, I learned while I was still just a brat to recite the little sidewalk jingle: “Step on a crack / Break your mother’s back.” Remember that one?

Superstitions of all sorts have plagued humans, probably ever since we got booted out of Eden. In her later years, I wonder what kinds of fruit Eve warned Adam not to pick or nibble on.

For at least the first half of my life, superstition kept most hotel chains from using 13 as a room number. They knew that a lot of their guests would not reserve such a space. And, while most of us chuckle about it, more people than we might expect worry about all sorts of calamities on any Friday numbered the 13th.

I’ve never let it bother me, but all of my life I’ve heard the warnings that if you broke a mirror, you could expect seven years of bad luck. In a world where all sorts of unfortunate things happen to all of us during such a time period, why link them to a shattered mirror? But I know some people who do.

Remember the old warnings about walking under a ladder? It’s a good way to get a brick or

a paint bucket dropped on your head, but bad luck?

In almost every land and in all generations some farmers have planted and harvested “by the moon.” In other words, superstitions have kept them out of their fields in certain moon phases. I’ve known some wise, good men whose farming habits were guided by those inherited myths.

I was surprised to learn, though, that even some thieves and robbers have superstitions that shape their craft. Early in the past century, so I’m told, the bad boys believed that stealing a deck of cards could bring tons of bad luck down on your head. The most dangerous misstep of any burglar, however, was to rob a church. This would guarantee you a life filled with trouble, the superstition warned sticky-fingered galoots.

The substance of all superstition is fear. The antidote to all superstition is faith. If we truly believe that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, we don’t have to lose any sleep worrying about things like black cats and hooting owls and Zodiac signs.



Saying Goodbye

Mental Midgets

I can't remember the last time I heard somebody use the once-quite-common term "mental midgets." But, whether or not that phrase is now verboten because it might be offensive to growth-challenged dwarfs, it is still a precise description of too many people we have to deal with. "She can't see the big picture," is another metaphor we often use to identify the same deficiency.

What we're identifying with comments like these is not a lack of intelligence. Some of the most brilliant people we know still seem to have a shortage of common sense or perceptiveness. For whatever reason, they just "don't seem to get it."


Size also comes in handy when we want to compliment someone for their compassion or their generosity. How often, when a neighbor or a member of your church has done a good deed, have you lauded them because "they have a big heart"?

Not long ago some of my pastor friends and I were talking about multiple ways our colleague, the late Dr. Winfred Moore, blessed us and our whole community. Somebody closed that discussion by saying, "He was a giant of a man!"

Tall or short, fat or skinny, big or little may taint the vocabulary we use to describe another person, but those physical attributes seldom shape the kind of people they are. Some of the sorriest humans I've known were physically the most perfect. Likewise, some of the finest folks have had obese or string-bean bodies but magnificent souls.

The Bible tells us that Goliath, the giant who challenged David, was over nine feet tall. His job was to frighten and kill people. But the good Book also tells us that Jesus pointed to small children and told his men, "Of such is the Kingdom."

Hollywood has misled us to assign hero status to macho guys like James Bond or John Wayne and to measure female characters by how alluring they look in a bikini. Most of us know better. We know that genuine goodness and true greatness have little if anything to do with how handsome we are or how much we weigh.

But size does matter. If you doubt that, consider an Adlai Stevenson quote my friend Bill Summerhill shared in a recent blog. Stevenson wrote: "You can tell the size of a man by the size of the thing that makes him mad." 

Saying Goodbye

My Neighbor's Sins

Sometimes my mistakes show up at the most inappropriate moments. Like my foul-up in a column I wrote last year about crazy spell-check misspellings in professional news stories.

Would you believe that, after citing a dozen of those spelling bobbles, I closed that column with a sentence that contained a mistake of my own? I left out a word. And, worse than that, I didn't know it. That column got published with my mistake intact.

Although I had edited that column at least half a dozen times as I prepared it for various venues, somehow I read over that omission. And when a friend emailed me about that mistake, at first I still couldn't see it.

This experience proved what all professional writers and editors know: our own mistakes are the hardest for us to see. Often they become almost invisible. We editors quickly detect the flaws in somebody else's copy, but the mistakes in our own writing seem to hide from our eyes.

Of course, this tendency of people to be blind to their own errors isn't limited to journalists. When you drive erratically—when you sit too long after the light turns green

or swap lanes too close to my front bumper, I'm quick to confess your sins, but it's rare for me to recognize my own driving mistakes that tick off drivers around me.

When you talk too loud at the café table next to mine, I promise you that I'll notice it, and I'll probably fuss about it to my wife. But if my booming bass voice disrupts your dinner, probably I'll never be aware that I'm bothering you.

I can see your faults, but not my own. So when I whine or complain or criticize other people for the way they are performing, most of the time I will be blind to my own bad habits that are equally annoying. That's why Jesus had to warn us about trying to remove the speck in a friend's eye when we have a log in our own.

One more time in this issue let me quote the late George Younce. I still chuckle when I hear his inimitable bass voice belting out this truth in the ditty called "Practice What You Preach." To an older sister who was constantly gossiping about others in their country church, George sang:

*Stop talkin' 'bout your
neighbor's sins;
Start thinkin' 'bout
your own!*

That's good advice.



Saying Goodbye

Open Mouth, Insert Foot

Let me begin this column by confessing my ignorance.

In high school and during my first two years of college I played on the tennis team. I spent a scad of hours on the court, played in dozens of tournaments, and whacked the ball thousands of times. But no coach or experienced player ever advised us to play with our mouths open all the time.

If you watch professional tennis competition on TV, you may have noticed that it's a rare pro who ever closes theirs. I wonder why. Is that part of the strategy tennis players are taught today? Maybe a way to get more oxygen into their bodies? I don't know. Professional golfers and pro football and baseball players seldom compete with their lower jaw hanging down. In all the years I swung a racquet, nobody ever told me I needed to keep my mouth open, but nowadays almost all of the tennis pros do.

Open mouths may help tennis players win, but they are one of the surest ways to get most of us into big trouble. Just one thoughtless reply, one quick insult, one racist word is all it takes to end a friendship, lose a job, or tarnish our reputation. "Think before you speak!" may

be the best advice my mother ever gave me.

The Bible's famous wise man asks, "Do you see someone who is hasty in speech?" Then he warns us, "There is more hope for a fool than for anyone like that" (Proverbs 29:20). But who do you know—yourself included—who hasn't at some time popped off and spewed words they would forever regret? It's so hard for any of us to keep our mouths closed—tennis or no tennis.

The same wise proverb writer tells us in 19:11 that "to be patient shows intelligence." And it keeps us from embarrassing ourselves by what otherwise may come tumbling out of our mouths.

I like Joe Barnett's translation of Proverbs 12:18: "Reckless words pierce like a sword." The most dangerous member of our bodies may be our tongues.

God's word contains no wiser advice than James' simple admonition: "Be quick to listen, slow to speak" (1:19). Use your ears more than your tongue, he's telling us. Few biblical instructions will do more to improve our lives than that one. So simple. So practical. So wise. In other words, keep your mouth shut.

CA

Saying Goodbye

Across Oceans—and More

One morning last summer I needed some information that I knew my friend and fellow-columnist Mike Haynes probably could provide, so I emailed him.

Mike's reply was almost instant, but to my amazement it came all the way from Scotland. He and his wife were vacationing there, and he had received my email on his cell phone. So he texted his answer to me by sending me an email via his phone. This brief exchange blew the mind of a digital dodo like me.


Back in the early 1960s when my oldest brother began his missionary career in Malawi, Africa, communication like that would have been unthinkable. Telephone calls between continents in those days were exorbitantly expensive (and our incomes were painfully sparse), so the only calls we exchanged were urgent reports of family tragedies. We might call to say, "Grandma died last night," but we never dialed to say, "Happy birthday!"

My brother and I exchanged cassette tapes we recorded to each other while we roamed the areas where we ministered, but those messages would be at least two weeks old before postal folks delivered them on either side of the Atlantic. Those tapes blessed us. They kept us connected.

But our families went for years without hearing each others' live voices.

I'm sure you agree with me that in so many ways today's instant and almost unlimited digital communication is a blessing. Without it, my lady and I would not be able every week to see the smiles and hear the giggles of our toddler grandkids in Oklahoma and the great-grands in Tennessee.

But even when I was just a runt—back when Batman and Dick Tracy were the only characters with walkie-talkie digital devices, the Holy Scriptures assured us that we didn't need a technological gizmo to talk to God and to be heard instantly. To me, this has always been an amazing truth: that the Creator of heaven and earth will listen when I talk to him.

That's what the Bible promises. Psalm 34:17 says, "The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them." This is what God himself promises. "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face," God assures us, "then will I hear from heaven" (2 Chronicles 7:14). What a blessing we Christians have. Like the apostle John, we can say with confidence, "We know that he hears us." 

When the time came for me to make the pages for this final issue of *The Appeal*, I found myself even more in procrastination mode than usual. I don't need a counselor to tell me why.

Too often, I'm tasked with officiating at the funeral service for a dear friend. The time comes to start writing, but to work on the service will make the loss real. It will also mean straining to do my job, which is to find and express the right words for us all. No words will be good enough, but, with God's help, I eventually must get to work and, misty-eyed, try.

That's the way I feel right now. The time has come. Sixty years for Gene and almost forty for me. It's time to lay this longtime friend to rest. We do it with full hearts. Of course, a sense of loss is genuine, but far outweighing the loss, are real joy and deep gratitude for what the Lord has done and for what you have so generously and faithfully supported in every way. Most sincerely, dear friends, we thank you!

—Curtis Shelburne,
Managing Editor

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