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EMOTIONAL HEALTH &
PRAYING THE PSALMS

PAGE 3



FROM THE EDITOR

TRAVIS J. JOHNSON

Have you ever had to unlearn something? When I taught myself to play the guitar, I was hitting the right chords but playing them incorrectly. Despite being able to play, the bad habits I developed hindered my progress. Once I unlearned the wrong techniques and learned the correct ones, I could transition to the next chord more easily, and my playing began to improve.

In my prayer life, both privately and corporately, I had to unlearn several poor habits. For example, I believed longer prayers were better, focusing more on length than the quality of my time with God. I also used overly formal language, thinking it was more reverent, but it created a barrier to an

intimate connection with God. Additionally, I had to unlearn the idea that prayer was a one-way conversation where I did all the talking without leaving room to listen to God. Unlearning these habits made my prayer life much more fulfilling and effective. The turning point was learning to pray with my Bible open and incorporating the Psalms into my prayers.

For thousands of years, the Psalms have served as the hymnal and prayer book for the people of God. The Psalms were read, chanted, memorized, sung, and prayed as an expression of dependence on God. No other book is quoted more in the New Testament than the Psalms, and Jesus quotes from

the Psalms more than any other Old Testament book. Even as Jesus was dying on the cross, he prayed the words of Psalms 22 and 31. After Jesus ascended to his Father, the early church continued to sing and pray the Psalms, now with the new understanding that the King of Israel the Psalms spoke about was Jesus the Messiah they had witnessed.

This quarter, we are focusing on praying the Psalms. Pastor Darrell Stetler II has written a timely article on this subject. I trust that this issue will deepen our connection to God through the richness of these ancient prayers and guide us in incorporating them into our daily lives and corporate worship. ■

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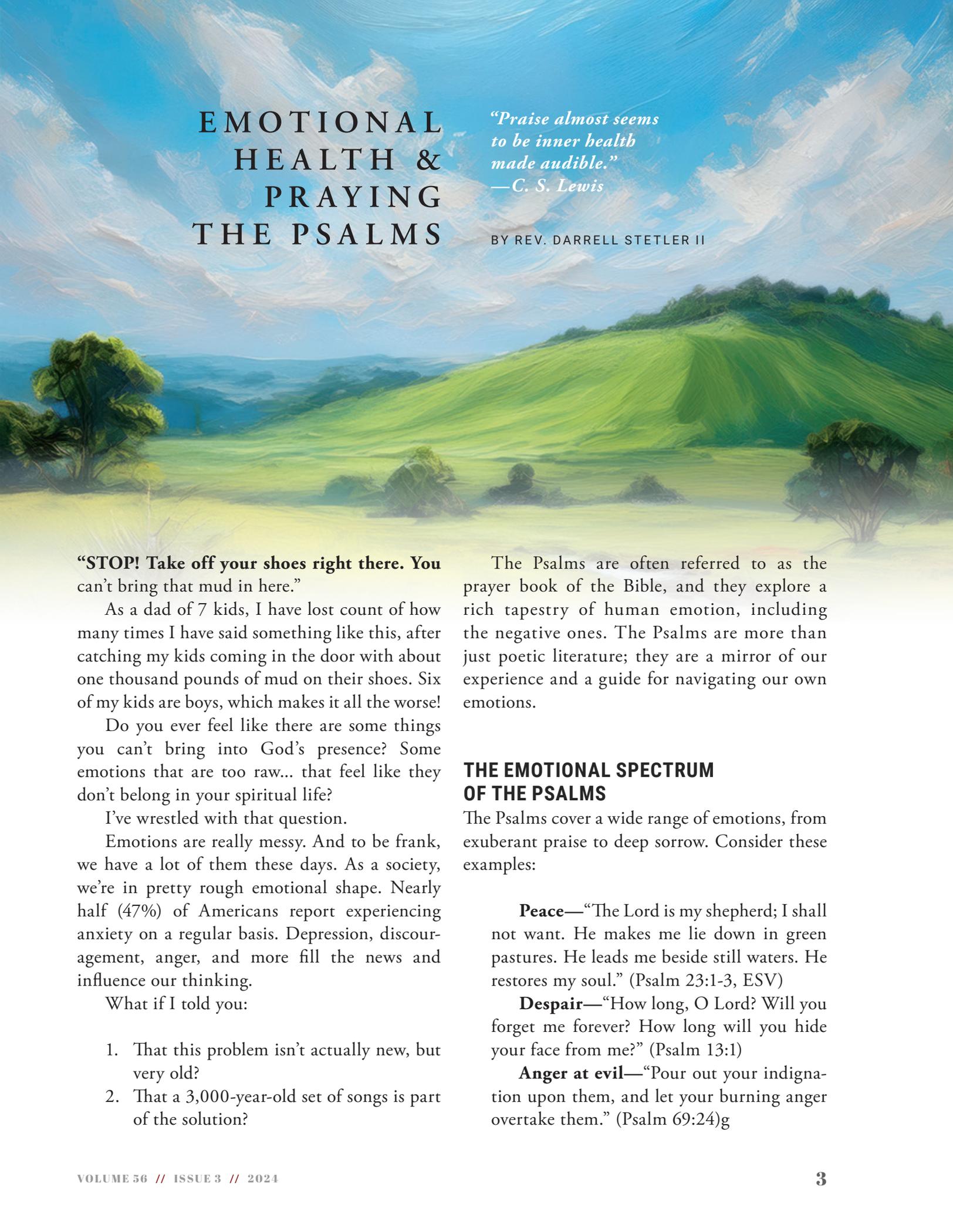
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EMOTIONAL HEALTH & PRAYING THE PSALMS

*“Praise almost seems
to be inner health
made audible.”*
—C. S. Lewis

BY REV. DARRELL STETLER II

“STOP! Take off your shoes right there. You can’t bring that mud in here.”

As a dad of 7 kids, I have lost count of how many times I have said something like this, after catching my kids coming in the door with about one thousand pounds of mud on their shoes. Six of my kids are boys, which makes it all the worse!

Do you ever feel like there are some things you can’t bring into God’s presence? Some emotions that are too raw... that feel like they don’t belong in your spiritual life?

I’ve wrestled with that question.

Emotions are really messy. And to be frank, we have a lot of them these days. As a society, we’re in pretty rough emotional shape. Nearly half (47%) of Americans report experiencing anxiety on a regular basis. Depression, discouragement, anger, and more fill the news and influence our thinking.

What if I told you:

1. That this problem isn’t actually new, but very old?
2. That a 3,000-year-old set of songs is part of the solution?

The Psalms are often referred to as the prayer book of the Bible, and they explore a rich tapestry of human emotion, including the negative ones. The Psalms are more than just poetic literature; they are a mirror of our experience and a guide for navigating our own emotions.

THE EMOTIONAL SPECTRUM OF THE PSALMS

The Psalms cover a wide range of emotions, from exuberant praise to deep sorrow. Consider these examples:

Peace—“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul.” (Psalm 23:1-3, ESV)

Despair—“How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?” (Psalm 13:1)

Anger at evil—“Pour out your indignation upon them, and let your burning anger overtake them.” (Psalm 69:24)g

Rather than leaving our emotions on the doorstep of the presence of God, the Psalmist brings them right on inside. Believe it or not, it is okay to feel a wide range of emotions, and bringing these feelings to God is a key function of prayer.

OUR RELUCTANCE TO BRING OUR EMOTIONS TO GOD

If you feel reluctant to be too honest about your emotional state, then you're in good company. In Psalm 73, Asaph was wrestling with self-pity, disappointment with God, and bitterness. But, he didn't really want to admit it out loud: "All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence... If I had said, 'I will speak thus,' I would have betrayed the generation of your children." (Psalm 73:13-15)

Asaph says it feels like a betrayal to say that, especially out loud! But emotions are real, and they do have power to hurt us. They cause mental distress, physical illness, and (sometimes) sinful actions as a result.

I want to suggest that one way to process our emotions is to refuse to take off our shoes at the back door of God's presence, but to bring them in by a simple devotional practice: Praying the Psalms.

WHAT IS "PRAYING THE PSALMS?"

Praying the Psalms means to use the words of the Psalms as a guide for our own words, prayers and worship.

To "pray a Psalm," you might take a passage and echo the words of the Psalmist, adding your own in the process. To give one example, for Psalm 1:1, you might pray:

"Lord, I want to be a blessed man/woman. Help me not to walk in the advice of wicked people, or to go back and stand in the way of sin that I used to live in. Don't let me sit down in the seat of mocking and cynicism about you and your ways. I want to be blessed instead!"

EMOTIONAL BENEFITS OF PRAYING THE PSALMS

1. The sanctification of our emotions

Holiness means "separated to God." So whatever we give to God, he makes holy by remodeling it into his own image. We do this with our bodies (Romans 12:1), our flesh and spirit (2 Corinthians 7:1), and our double-mindedness (James 4:8).

But in what way are our emotions made over into the image of Christ if we cannot be honest about them?

To push the analogy about my kids, if we simply leave our emotions at the back door

when we come into God's presence, and then put them back on when we re-enter the world... won't they just stay muddy? If those shoes never come inside, how will they ever be cleaned?

Praying the Psalms helps us to bring our emotions in the door of prayer. Even if that includes disappointment with God or a feeling of being betrayed by him, Psalms brings it right on in. In prayer, that emotion can be recognized, spoken out loud, and then brought into alignment with God.

2. Enjoying God more

The expression "Praise the Lord" or its variations appear hundreds of times in the Bible, and frequently in the Psalms. CS Lewis struggled with that, feeling as though God was like an insecure woman desiring compliments. But look at this incredible conclusion shared in his "Reflections on the Psalms."

The most obvious fact about praise—whether of God or anything—strangely escaped me. I thought of it in terms of compliment, approval, or the giving of honor. I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise unless ...[shyness] is deliberately brought in to check it. The world rings with praise—lovers praising their mistresses,

readers their favorite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favorite game—praise of weather, wines, dishes, actors, motors, horses...

[And] just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it: “Isn’t she lovely? Wasn’t it glorious? Don’t you think that magnificent?” The Psalmists in telling everyone to praise God are doing what all men do when they speak of what they care about. My whole, more general, difficulty about the praise of God depended on my absurdly denying to us... what we delight to do, what we indeed can’t help doing, about everything else we value.

...we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation.

...In commanding us to glorify Him, God is inviting us to enjoy Him.

Why does God ask you to praise him, and give us so many examples of it? Because he wants to invite us to enjoy the fountain of all goodness...himself!

3. Challenging our false narratives

One of the purposes of praying

the Psalms is to speak affirmative truth to ourselves.

We unconsciously tell little stories to ourselves all the time. It’s one of the ways we understand and process the world.

- “I disappoint everyone around me.”
- “It’s just another example of my success/failure/mistakes.”
- “There’s a lot of bad things going on in the world.”
- “Things usually don’t work out for me.”
- “He’s against me, just like most folks.”

These narratives are mostly unconscious. But have you ever considered that you’re just *listening to yourself*?

David takes another tack entirely in his prayer life: He speaks affirmatively to his own soul, commanding himself to take the perspective that is true: “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation.” (Psalm 42:5)

Praying the Psalms gives us the opportunity to refuse to be led around by the unconscious narratives of our heart.

There is spiritual value in not waiting until emotions catch up. Instead, it is good to start speaking the truth *until we believe it*.

CONCLUSION

A few months ago, after a particularly long discussion with one of my young boys, I said to him, “Buddy, say ‘Dad, you’re right.’”

Tearfully, he replied with those words. I hugged him and turned to leave the room. He said, “Hey, Dad...?” I paused to listen. “You know what I hate?” he continued. “I hate it when you make me say things, I really don’t believe.”

Well, after I scraped myself off the floor from laughing, I came back in and explained something.

“Son, we need to say what is true, whether we feel like it or not. If we commit to speaking the truth, eventually our feelings get lined up with it. And listen, buddy—I’m going to keep helping you say true things, until the day comes that you recognize and feel that they are true.”

If you need your Father in heaven to say that to you, then maybe it’s time you got a cup of coffee, sat down to pray... and opened your Bible to the Psalms. ■

Darrell Stetler II pastors the Bible Methodist Church in south Oklahoma City. He is the creator of NewStart Discipleship Resources, and the Gospel Trunk or Treat for churches. You can download a free copy of his workbook, How to Pray the Psalms at howtopraythepsalms.com.



WORLD MISSIONS NEWS UPDATE

R.G. HUTCHISON, MISSIONS DIRECTOR

SUMMER MISSIONS SERVICES [1-2]

Dr. Hutchison traveled to each of our regional camp meetings this summer, presenting updates from Bible Methodist Missions. We are thankful for the grass-roots enthusiasm and support for missions that are present in each local church and regional conference. It was also a blessing to have the Muir and Troyer families join us along the way. One highlight this year was honoring Rev. Clair and Melba Sams for their service to Bible Methodist Missions, which has spanned the better part of three decades.

SUMMER MISSIONS TEAM [3-4]

Doug and Judy Eads brought a Bible Methodist mission team to join Joseph Taylor and Gospel Publishing in distributing evangelistic literature in Yerevan, Armenia. Joining the team for this ministry were Karen Blankenship, Charles Holden, and Jennae Holden. We look forward to organizing and sending more teams next year!

TRAINING EXPANSION IN THE PHILIPPINES [5-6]

National Overseer, Rev. Brendel Macadangdang reports that Philippine Bible Methodist Church has launched a program for training leaders in each district, using Shepherd's Global Classroom curriculum. They have named this new program The Potter's Hand Institute. They now are conducting weekly classes at four different training sites in Joseph, Jabez, and Joshua districts, as well as at the national headquarters in Alibago. There are already 45 trainees enrolled in classes, and more are expected! With over 100 Bible Methodist congregations now in the Philippines, the need for trained workers is greater than ever before. This program makes ministry training more accessible to people in each local church and conference.

PHILIPPINE BIBLE METHODIST SHEPHERDS COLLEGE GRADUATION [7]

The Philippine Bible Methodist Shepherds College graduated 10 students, which included several who had completed their studies during the past few years, but who could not attend in-person graduations during the pandemic. Several of those pictured in this graduation are already active in their assigned pastoral ministries.

EZRA BIBLICAL SEMINARY [8]

Ezra Biblical Seminary recently celebrated their 5-year founding anniversary! They also marked a significant milestone with the graduation of their first two students to complete the full 20-course program. This certificate program includes partnerships with Shepherd's Global Classroom (which provides the curriculum) and God's Bible School and College, which provides accreditation for the program. Additionally, more than 30 students completed various courses this past semester.





GREAT LAKES CONFERENCE NEWS

DAVID WARD, PRESIDENT

YOUTH CAMP

We enjoyed a great youth camp, led by Doug Derscheid and Eli Albring, featuring the preaching of Rev. Joey Ratcliff.

Rev. Ratcliff focused on practical ways our young people can build a strong and vibrant faith (1)

We had an awesome group of campers this year (2)

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The 2024 Annual Conference celebrated the 30th anniversary of the Great Lakes within the Bible Methodist Connections of Churches. Saturday evening included a concert by the Joyful Sound Ministry's Male Trio. On Sunday night, Rev. Blake Jones led us on a journey through our brief conference history,

followed by a reception. It was truly remarkable to reflect on the many ways God has blessed and guided our conference throughout the years.

The annual conference commenced Friday afternoon and was wrapped up before lunch on Saturday (3)

Friday night's conference sermon was powerfully delivered by Rev. Timothy Slavens (4)

Pictured are the Conference Executive Committee, minus Doug Derscheid (5)

FAMILY CAMP

Family Camp is always a highlight of the Great Lakes conference year. Evangelistic services begin on Monday evening and included the ministry of:

- Dr. Matthew Hallam (6)
- Rev. John Parker (7)
- The Rob and Stephanie Ryan family (8)
- Rev. Gene and Angie Davis, along with their son, Kent, led the children's services (9)
- Mark Langstaff, who worked with the youth, rounded out this year's ministry team (10)

As is our tradition, Sunday morning and afternoon services were focused on missions. Alongside hearing from Dr. R.G. Hutchison, it was a pleasure to hear about the vision and goals of our own Paul and Esther Troyer as they prepare for their mission to Nepal.

Sunday afternoon's family service featured our children (11) and youth (12)



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HEARTLAND CONFERENCE NEWS

CHRIS CRAVENS, PRESIDENT

HEARTLAND CONFERENCE AND FAMILY CAMP [1-8]

Praise God for Campmeeting 2024! The conference business went smoothly on Monday, followed by a powerful Conference Sermon from Elder Norman Blowers in the evening. God blessed the Ordination Service, where Edwin Tomes was ordained as an Elder. The camp services were truly anointed by God. Each day, large crowds gathered, with many seeking God in response to the inspired preaching, teaching, worship, and singing, all testifying to the Holy Spirit's presence among us! We are grateful for our dedicated workers: Evangelist Rev. Marc Sankey, Bible Teacher Dr. Allan Brown, Singers the Crater family, Children's Worker Michelle

Hopkins, and Youth Evangelist Rev. Randy Brown. A highlight of the camp was the dedication of the J.D. Young Memorial Building. Mr. Ken Brown, son of Dr. Brown, and Conference President Chris Cravens officially opened the beautiful structure by cutting the ribbon. Praise the Lord for the generous offerings received! We exceeded our goals for the camp's annual operation and the special project. To God be the glory!

HEARTLAND YOUTH CAMP 2024 [9-13]

One hundred and sixty-two young people and over 100 support staff gathered at Beulah Grove for the Heartland Youth Camp. God blessed the week with beautiful weather and

a wonderful sense of His presence. Rev. Brian Wardlaw, Youth President, led the camp activities and services, while Dr. R. G. Hutchison challenged the young people on Monday night to answer the call of God. Beginning on Tuesday morning, Rev. Tim Keep ministered to the youth with his preaching and teaching, leading several young people to seek God's grace at the altar of prayer. The days were filled with fun and fellowship from early morning to late at night. Special recognition was given to the following campers: Bible Bowl Champion: Katrin Eckert; Campers of the Year: Roman Norris and Brooklyn Lavy; President's Award: Jeenae Holden; and the Winning team: The Apostles. Please mark your calendars for Youth Camp 2025, scheduled for July 17-22.



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SOUTHERN CONFERENCE NEWS

DOUG EADS, PRESIDENT

SOUTHERN FAMILY CAMP

Camp Meeting 2024 was marked by God’s presence! The preaching of Dr. Michael Avery and Dr. Randall McElwain was both inspired and inspirational. God used the singing of Daniel and Kendra Brandon to touch hearts and lead people to worship. Priscilla Vernon kid’s church program is second to none, with over 90 kids participating in the children’s services! The youth and ladies’ sessions also saw God work in wonderful ways. Overall, Campmeeting is on the rise! To God be the glory! Everyone is invited to Camp Meeting next year from June 30–July 6, with speakers Rev. Jon Manley and Rev. Rodney Loper.

SOUTHERN YOUTH CAMP

Youth Camp was a tremendous success. God’s presence was felt, and lives were changed. Dwight Crosley did an excellent job leading the event. Our teenagers are eager to make Youth Camp an annual tradition.

CAPTIONS

- 1 The crowds really increased this year. There were kids everywhere!
- 2 Our young people consistently help in the Dining Hall. They do a great job!
- 3 The children had an Olympic theme, so competition was necessary.
- 4 MMK program with the kids earning badges has been a great success.

Many kids will earn the William Gale medallion next year.

- 5 Ordination was a wonderful service. This year there were four candidates—(L-R) Michael Evans, Cale Manley, Danial Brandon, and Marilyn Marchant.
- 6 The highlight of camp: Frank Lester gave his heart to Jesus and was baptized by his pastor, Jon Earls.
- 7 Youth Camp Evangelist, Rev. Travis Johnson.
- 8 The activities never stop. Early morning until very late at night!
- 9 The Youth Choir was *phenomenal* and was led by Kaitlyn Fox.
- 10 Youth President, Dwight Crosley does a great job leading Youth Camp!



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SOUTHWEST CONFERENCE NEWS

AARON JOHNSON, PRESIDENT

SOUTHWEST CONFERENCE UPDATE

- 1 We honored Bro. and Sis. Sam's for their years of service as Southwest Conference President.
- 2 We had a special service for the installation of our incoming Conference President, Aaron Johnson. The Connectional Chairman of The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches, Rev. Blake Jones conducted the service.
- 3 This was the first time Rev. John Manley preached at the Southwest Conference camp meeting. We thoroughly enjoyed his ministry.
- 4 Dr. Mike Avery preaching and teaching as only he can. God helped him bring exactly what we needed.
- 5 God is certainly using this young couple in their ministry as song evangelists. We really appreciated Bro. and Sis. Luther Cole's singing.
- 6 Camp team. (L-R) Evan Burley *Youth Worker*, Luther & Olivia Cole *Song Evangelist*, Ashlea Kline *Children's Worker*, Aaron & Melissa Johnson *Incoming Conference President*, Rev. Blake Jones *Connectional Chairman*, and Rev. John Manley *Camp Evangelist*.
- 7 This group consists of camp attendees who are under 25 years of age.
- 8 We were blessed with a wonderful group of people from our conference attending.
- 9 Our youth enjoyed axe throwing as one of their activities in the afternoon.
- 10 Our newly elected conference president and his wife pictured with the preaching evangelists.
- 11 Pastor Sams prays for the children at Durant before they go back to school.





Christmas Cards for Missionaries

Each year we encourage everyone to send a Christmas card and a small love gift to each of the Mission Department personnel. This annual project has proven to be a great help to them for many years. Let them know that we support and appreciate them!

Send your support to: **PO Box E, Port Clinton, OH 43452**

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