

# Wonderful Things

Volume 1  
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## **What On Earth is This?**

### **Q: What is “Wonderful Things”**

A: “Wonderful Things” is a monthly newsletter. We hope that “Wonderful Things” will serve as a way to keep us connected as we deal with this season of separation from our Sanctuary and our regular rhythms of life together as a Church community. It is our hope that this monthly newsletter will be a source of encouragement, inspiration and information.

### **Q: Whose Idea Was This?**

A: Pastor Woodall began discussing the idea of a newsletter with members of our Church a few months ago. The idea was generally well received. The next question to consider was the matter of format (how often the newsletter would be released, what would it feature etc). The prospect of extended time apart has created a circumstance in which a newsletter could be a helpful way for us to stay connected to one another and encouraged as we deal with the challenges that will come in the days ahead

### **Q: Why is the newsletter called “Wonderful Things”**

A: We have been, and we will continue to be surrounded by challenges. It would be easy for us to slip into despair and become overwhelmed, yet God continues to keep us and preserve us. Even in the midst of the challenges that surround us He gives us so many wonderful things. He has given us His Presence. He has promised to be with us, and with His provisions he supplies our needs. We must focus on the wonderful things that God is doing in our lives and in the life of our Church.

## **Q: What Can I expect from “Wonderful Things”**

A: 1. Our plan each month is to include a Sermon manuscript from Pastor Woodall. In addition to a Sermon manuscript, Pastor Woodall may also include a devotional lesson, or a reflection based on a wide range of subject matter.

2. We also plan to include a list of all Birthdays and Anniversaries we will be celebrating from month to month.

3. We are still working on the details of our publishing schedule, but the magazine will be released either monthly or quarterly and in each issue we will feature one of three segments:

Our “Wonderful Community” will highlight a community function or event that showcases how God continues to richly bless the community around us.

Our “One Wonderful Thing” will profile a story or a moment that happened in the life of our members that demonstrates how God continues to comfort, keep and preserve the members of our Church, and community.

Our “Wonderful History” which will highlight and commemorate one of the many moments that function as an expression of God’s goodness to us down through the years.

## **Q. Can I contribute to the magazine?**

A: Absolutely!!! God has blessed our Church with a wealth of members who are full of wisdom and insight. This magazine is for EVERYONE in our Church family to enjoy. It is our prayer that each of our members will feel

free to share their stories, their photos or anything they have that will contribute to making Wonderful Things even more wonderful. If you would like to contribute contact our newsletter staff.

**Q: Who is on the staff?**

**Editor-in-Chief**

Pastor Daylan Woodall

**Editor**

Lesley Fletcher

**Lead Writers**

Annette Davis & Angela Elliot

**Special Feature Editor**

Mary Kelly

\*If you would like to work on our "Wonderful Things Staff", or if you have ideas that you would like to contribute let one of our staff members know.

## **From the Pastor's Pen: "Thoughts on Our Current Circumstance"**

Beloved,

As I write this our nation, our state and our community are each in the grip of crisis. I am writing this letter for three primary reasons. My first reason is that we might develop a better sense of what we are up against as a community. Secondly I want to provide a basis concerning the changes that we will be making in the life of our Church as a response. Thirdly I would like to provide us with a Biblical lens through which we might look to better understand our situation and find comfort and hope.

What we are up against is called the Coronavirus or Covid 19. According to the Center for Disease Control, "The Coronavirus disease is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person mainly between people who are in close contact with one another. The disease is spread through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, and it can also be contracted by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it. Symptoms of the sickness include fever, cough and shortness of breath".

The disease is deadly. Death rates that are startlingly higher than the average for people age 60 and over, as well as for people with high blood pressure, diabetes, asthma and other chronic conditions. These factors constitute a higher than average risk for many of the members of our Church. As I write this thousands of people have died in The United States from this disease, and there are confirmed cases in each of the counties around us. The Center for Disease Control and the National Institutes of Health have issued guidelines that need to be followed in order to slow and eventually stop the spread of the disease. Among these guidelines are to avoid gatherings of ten or more people. As your Pastor I am responsible to God for you, and I will not put you in harm's way.

After prayerful consideration and discussion with our deacons and trustees we have made necessary changes in the life of our Church in response to this new circumstance. We will no be meeting together for worship. All functions and meetings have been postponed until further notice. Starting on Sunday March 22nd we moved to a "Call in Service" format. This format allows us to broadcast Sunday School, The Sunday Morning Sermon and Bible Study via phone each at their regularly scheduled times. In addition to the Call in Service option, the Sunday Morning Sermons are still being recorded and posted on our website [FirstMBD.org](http://FirstMBD.org) for later viewing.

These measures are allowing us to maintain a sense of continuity and stability. As we journey toward an uncertain future, the Church will remain intact. We must remember that the Church is not the sanctuary, but is the community of believers who love, serve and worship Christ together. This season has required us to adapt, but we will remain together. Our giving is being managed through one of three channels. Giving by mail is an option. We have increased our monitoring of mail during this time and you are able to drop off your gift on site at our mailbox. Our mailbox has been secured and is regularly monitored. Secondly, each Church member has been assigned a deacon and trustee who has the responsibility of staying in touch and working to respond to our congregation's needs. You can give by contacting your designated deacon or trustee to arrange pick up of your gifts, and finally you can give online at [FirstMBD.org](http://FirstMBD.org).

In closing as we stand on the precipice of a seemingly uncertain future I want to draw our attention to the words that Jesus offered the disciples in Matthew 28:16-20. After charging the disciples to do the work of ministry, he gave them the most important piece of equipment they would need on their journey. In verse 20 he states "...behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." He did not promise them, ease, comfort and convenience. He promised them that He would be with them. The Lord's promises are sure. The Lord has been with us since 1866 when twenty one former

slaves and Pastor Alfred Peters met in the home of Ms. Jane Young and gave the Lord their hearts and their hands. His promises are sure. He will be with us today and tomorrow. Be of good courage!

**A Sermon from Pastor Woodall:  
Philippians 3:7-14  
“Living on The Lord’s Time”**

There is something about the passage of time that tilts us towards consideration of this question “What am I doing with my time”? It is a common question. Yet, however common this question may be, for those of us within the family of faith that have accepted Christ as our Savior it is the wrong question. Salvation changes our relationship with time. Once we accept Christ as our Savior we realize that the time and the lives that we previously thought of as ours, do not belong to us but in fact they belong to the Lord. In the text before us Paul presents a clear picture of how his relationship with Christ draws a line of demarcation in his thinking. Paul had been changed.

Before Paul’s conversion experience he was a self righteous religious zealot. The activities of his life reflected a belief in a works based righteousness. The foundation of a works based righteousness is the incorrect presumption that the only difference between the righteous and the wicked can only be understood by the differences in their external works. Before his conversion the activities of Paul’s life were done with the intention that God might know him.

But God already knows us, He knew us before we were formed in the wombs of our mothers, he knows the number of hairs on our heads and our every internal thought or machination. He knows that we were born in sin and shaped in iniquity. He knows us. Therefore a proper relationship with

God cannot be characterized by a type of righteousness wherein we seek to make ourselves known to God or by what we do for him. Rather, as Paul discovers after his conversion, what his conversion means. He realizes our lives should not be about making ourselves better known to God, but rather about seeking to know God better. Right relationship with God means that our lives in their entirety become about knowing God in his entirety. After his conversion Paul rightly realizes that his conversion means, Paul realizes that now he is living on the Lord's time. This fact informs his perspective about the past, the purpose of his present, and his posture about the future.

### **I. Perspective About the Past (v.7-9)**

In verse 7 Paul writes "The things were a gain to me..."

Paul is speaking now in past tense. What are things Paul referring to? Paul is referring to his ethnic purity, his circumcision on the eighth day was a ritual rite reserved only for the most ethnically pure Hebrews. However, not only is Paul ethnically pure but he is culturally prestigious. Paul was born into one of the most revered tribes in Israelite culture. The Tribe of Benjamin was a tribe that had never wavered in its faithfulness. Not only was Paul ethnically pure and culturally prestigious, but he had religious zeal. Paul had previously been a pharisee. The pharisees were a religious and litigious group who made it their business to keep not only the law, but the tradition of the elders. At a previous point Paul had been in the upper echelons of Jewish society in every possible way. Paul had been a big wig, yet his Salvation taught him that everything in his life that wasn't Christ mattered much less than he originally thought.

**v.7 "But whatever things were gained to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.**

Paul points out to us that gaining Christ causes the Christian not only to lose our attachment to less important things, but the presence of Christ in our lives radically changes what we view as important. When we are saved Christ becomes the priority. verse 8 uses the language of comparison.

v.8 "...I count all things to be lost in view (when compared to) of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord".

Paul states categorically that everything else is less important than Christ, but more than that, Paul gives us insight into the Christian cognition, the Christian's way of thinking. He shows us how a relationship with God affects our understanding. The very definition of knowledge, or "knowing" has changed for Paul. His knowledge is no longer limited to the human institutions of culture, and tradition but Salvation through Christ prompts Paul to realize that knowing Christ was more important than knowing anything or anybody else.

v.8 " [Christ] for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ (v.9) and be found in Him .

Paul says In the process of coming to know Christ better and becoming more like Him, he has suffered loss but God has so much power, that He is able to do addition and subtraction at the same time. Paul says I suffered loss, but the consequence of the loss I suffered was gaining Christ. God allowed me to experience loss, but after loss I had more than I started with, because God gave me a deeper understanding of Himself. Paul is recounting that every time he looked around after loss, he found more of God. So Paul reasons that although he suffered loss, because he gained Christ in the process, he counts that which he lost as being less important than Christ whom he gained. We ought not go into another second of our lives without being able to count correctly.

Paul is not forlorn or disappointed about all he had given up for the cause of Christ, because Christ is preeminently important to Him. Christ is preeminently important to Paul because he has discovered that any righteous, or system of belief, that does not put faith in Christ is ultimately meaningless because it has an insufficient foundation. Paul expresses in verse 9

v. 9 "...not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law.."

Paul reflects that he is not saved by his own righteousness, but Salvation has come to him by Grace through Faith in Jesus Christ. Paul has learned that a self centered, law based manmade righteousness accomplishes nothing. There is good theology here. Humankind is a weak and insufficient foundation for righteousness because all flesh is like grass. Grass withers and the flower thereof fades but Christ is eternal. Humankind is an insufficient foundation because we are weak, we are fallen and we stand in need of constant Grace and Mercy, from a Holy and Righteous God who is infinitely stronger and more perfect than you and I. We are insufficient foundations because as one scholar put it, mankind needs to die for sin but mankind is imperfect. If man were to die for sin, God's demand for a perfect sacrifice would go unsatisfied. The wage of sin is death, but only a perfect sacrifice will pay the debt. God's only begotten son is not obligated to die for sin, because he is without sin, but His atoning death on the Cross is the only way we might be forgiven so he dies as an expression of God's great love for us. Paul writes that the only sufficient righteousness is what he says in verse nine.

v.9"...that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith"

Paul's experience taught him, and it functions to teach us that there is no competition for what is ultimately important to the Christian. What occupies

the highest place in the life of the Christian is our saving relationship with Jesus and our understanding that Salvation that comes not from anything that we do, but from God by grace through faith in Christ. The most important part of our past is our Salvation, that is what proper perspective sounds like.

## II. Purpose of the Present (v.10-12)

v.10 “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and [fn]the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;  
v.11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead”

Paul's evaluation of the present centers on this question “What am I doing to deepen my relationship with Jesus Christ? Being saved is the most important part of Paul's life, but Salvation has instilled in him a deep desire to get to know Jesus better. What Paul writes here really stands out against the backdrop of our modern world that looks for comfort, continuity and convenience. Paul writes that his desire is not for God to make him more comfortable, but rather for God to bring him to a fuller knowledge of Christ and we can not come to know Christ better through comfort.

It is a blessing that God gives us the privilege of certain comforts, but the life of Christ was not a comfortable life. He said that “Birds have nests, and foxes have holes, but the Son of God has no place to lay His head”. That is discomfort. He said that “A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home.” That is discomfort. Lastly with the Cross in view Jesus looked over Jerusalem and said “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing”. That is discomfort, but Paul writes that he desires to know Christ fully. That is what gives his life purpose of the present for Paul and for us, the chance to get to know Christ

more fully is what gives our lives purpose and direction. Each day is an opportunity to draw nearer and nearer to Christ.

### **III. Posture about the Future (v.13-14)**

v.13 “Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead”

v.14 “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”

Paul writes “I press”. This verb “press” teaches us some valuable precepts about the Christian life. The use of the word “press” here helps us realize that our lives are under pressure. While we are striving to do the Lord’s will, and reaching for deeper knowledge of Christ, the Christian is under pressure. There is environmental pressure. This pressure comes from the fact that although we live in this world, the world is not our home. There is internal pressure. This pressure results from our knowledge that in spite of our greatest efforts we can not become more like Christ without His help. Pressing means we are under pressure.

Paul’s use of the word press here teaches us that we will feel pain. We will feel pain when we see the distance between our best efforts and God’s expectations. We will feel the pain and discouragement that comes from missing the mark. Pressing means we will endure pain.

Yet pressing is possible. We must be reminded that small steps towards God are still steps. The same God who empowers great leaps, empowers small steps, pressing is possible not because of our own power, but because if we are pressing toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus, God himself helps us on our journey. Pressing is

possible. Paul's posture towards the future is a pressing posture. It may not always be easy but in Christ, I will become more like Christ and I will arrive where Christ desires me to me.

Can you see Paul balancing the register of his consciousness? In one column there are all of the things lost, and in the other is Jesus. Paul is something of an accountant here, listen to him balance his books.

I've lost status and esteem, but I've got Jesus.

John 1:12 says "But as many as received him, to them gave him power to become sons of God ". I've lost some things but I kept Jesus.

I lost comfort and convenience but I've got Jesus. 1 Peter 5:7 says "Cast all your cares upon the Lord because he cares for you". I lost some things but I kept Jesus.

I dont have the material wealth that I used to have, but I've got Jesus and "Psalms 24 reads "The earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein", I lost some things but I kept Jesus.

Here is the reminder that we should carry into an uncertain future.

Keep Jesus!

**Celebrating  
Birthdays  
January - March**

**January Birthdays**

Angela Elliott - 22th  
Nella Fletcher - 26th  
Annette Davis - 27th

**February Birthdays**

Irene Elliott - 26th  
Clara J. Johnson - 28th

**March Birthdays**

Lynnette Jackson - 9th  
Alijah Khi - 14th  
Olivia Moore - 23rd  
Frances Williams-Jones 24th  
Cee Elliott - 28th  
Elsie Coger - 29th  
Jeremy Cobb - 29th

## **Wonderful Community**

### **Celebrating the release of Ms.Hope Ayers' new Historical Fiction Novel: Gabriel's Balloon**

The Decatur Fellowship of Historic Black Churches is a fellowship made up of eight historic black Churches in our city and in February the Fellowship welcomed Ms.Hope Ayers to Decatur for a reading and lecture about her recently released Historical Fiction Novel, "Gabriel's Balloon". When asked by the Decatur Daily the significance of welcoming Ms.Ayers back to the city Pastor Woodall said the following:

"The overall goal of the Decatur Fellowship of Historic Black Churches is to rebuild the fabric between our Churches, rebuild our communities, and lead people to Salvation in Jesus Christ. Ms.Hope Ayers is a product of our community. Each of us involved in the Fellowship understand that one of the ways we can work to rebuild and ultimately strengthen our communities is by sharing the stories of the people who grew up in our community and went on to have success and make meaningful contributions to society.

"Hope's story serves as an example of what someone who grew up in our community can achieve and her achievements are not in a vacuum. If you had a chance to talk with her she would tell you about the role that the Church and the community had in nurturing and cultivating her as a person and ultimately as a writer.

Our community still has the desire and ability to cultivate the next generation of writers, attorneys, business owners, authors, professionals, leaders and ultimately good citizens and good neighbors. Our community is still filled with people who have the talent and potential to do all of these things and much more. Our hope is that events like this are a way to

celebrate the achievements of people who have roots in our community while encouraging and engaging the next generation of talent that will follow them”.

The event was a great success.

