

Joy IN THE JOURNEY

Activities & Service Opportunities of Mayfair Church of Christ

Mayfair's "Life-Seasoned" Singles

By Greg Biggs

"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20 KJV).

Some believers find themselves in a land of isolation. Often it is the result of unplanned events, finding many of us single. As such, many occasionally ponder what HE wants us to do? Does God have a plan for our singleness? If you find yourself in this group, you are not alone at Mayfair. In December 2025, a small group of us decided to formalize an effort to bring this crowd together and begin short-term gatherings and adventures to share God, fun, and our personal paths to God. We wanted it to be a wonderful way to strengthen believers and share the Good News with non-believers!

The seed group was attended by Jeaneen McGinnis, Greg Smith, Patricia Henderson, Kim Davis, Rick Kyle, and me. Our initial group did not have a formal name, and we are still pondering a name. We know that God takes His sheep and makes us His soldiers regardless of our rank and situation.

In a few words, we agreed that our mission would be to find things to do and places that would appeal



... river rafting on the Ocoee.

for gatherings at various times and places for Mayfair's "life-seasoned" singles. We hoped to build momentum that would bring together others similarly situated and foster bonds of fellowship. Most of the credit should go to Kim Davis, Jeaneen McGinnis, and Patricia Henderson. They have an immediate gift of planning events with great insight. Probably, if I had to affix their personalities, they are the best mixture of Mary and Martha. Rick, Greg, and I are just the "grips" of the group.

In December 2025, we arranged our first outing to attend a candlelight string performance of ABBA's greatest hits. It was close to home, a trip down memory lane, and just plain beautiful. We also planned a Christmas Dinner at the Hampton House in Hampton Cove. In February 2026, Rick and Jeaneen hosted "Game Nights" that included many different games of strategy, intrigue, eating, and lots of laughing. In March and April, we enjoyed a local hike and an outing at TopGolf.

In May, Kim hosted at her home with good food and live music. In June, we enjoyed a weekend of rafting the Ocoee River and hiking.

Reach out to me if you'd like to join us, and please share your ideas. Send me your email and phone number, and you will be notified.

Contact Greg at GregBiggsLawoffice@yahoo.com or 334-301-4779.



The "Life-Seasoned" Singles enjoyed a local hike and...

Honoring Those Who Serve

We recently began a new series honoring our unsung heroes who serve God by serving others. In this issue, we honor Will Kistler. As we honor these servants, we are reminded of these words of the Apostle Paul, *“We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you” (1 Thessalonians 5:12 ESV).*

Will Kistler

By Don Gardner

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares (Hebrews 13:2 ESV).

If your first visit to Mayfair was in the past quarter-century, you may have been greeted by Will Kistler, who heads up the Parking Lot Ministry. An Electronics Engineering graduate of Youngstown State University and Penn State University, Will came to Huntsville to work for the U.S. Army Missile Command’s (MICOM) Advanced Sensors Directorate at McMorrow Labs on Redstone Arsenal.

When he arrived in Huntsville in 1981, Will was not yet a Christian, but a coworker at MICOM invited him to the Lincoln Church of Christ. Later, a friend’s mother encouraged him to study the Bible with Lincoln’s pulpit minister, Tom Scott, who now worships at Mayfair. The following year, in 1982, Will was baptized.

In 1983, Will began worshipping at Mayfair, where he met his future wife, Lisa, while attending the Mayfair Singles’ class. They dated until she received a promotion at work and was transferred to Athens, GA. Chris Plitt, now Chris Farber, a close friend of Lisa, played matchmaker and got them back together. After several months of long-distance dating, Lisa quit her job in Athens and moved back to Huntsville to marry Will.

In late 2000, Mayfair moved from the old location on Whitesburg Drive to the current facility in Jones Valley. In the process, several new ministries were initiated to help communicate to guests that they were welcome. “We wanted all guests to know, as soon as they entered our parking lot, that they indeed were our honored guests,” says Joe Essner, “Mayfair also wanted to reserve some of the best parking spaces for those visiting. Will agreed to coordinate this important first-impressions ministry. From day one to present, Will has been one of the first persons to say: ‘Welcome to Mayfair!’”



Will Kistler

The goal of the Parking Lot ministry is to make visitors and members feel welcomed to Mayfair. Will seeks to be that first “friendly face” to greet guests when they arrive on campus. He is also on hand to provide information to visitors and to provide an additional layer of security on our campus.

Most visitors are very responsive when Will greets them, but he says, “It has happened when some just keep walking and don’t acknowledge you. But for all I know, they have a lot on their mind, or some family member is waiting on them. I would say 95% of guests are very responsive.”

When visiting other congregations, Will says he has never seen greeters in the parking lot. “I think this effort goes a long way,” he says, “in making people feel welcome. There were times when I helped inflate a low tire, close a gas flap, put an umbrella over someone getting out of their vehicle, even walking

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

them into the building under an umbrella.”

For four or five years, Lloyd Burcham stepped in to help greet visitors in the parking lot. Lloyd was able to fill in when Will experienced health problems that limited his ability to serve in that capacity.

Greet one another with a holy kiss (2 Corinthians 13:12 ESV).

The author of the book of Hebrews points out that we are to show hospitality to strangers and that in doing so, some have entertained angels without knowing it (Hebrews 13:2).

Five times in the New Testament, we are told to

“Greet one another with a holy kiss.” That may sound like an odd command in our current culture, but in the ancient Middle Eastern culture, a kiss on the cheek was a standard greeting among family and close friends, symbolizing acceptance.

Today, we might accomplish the same results with a handshake or a hug. The use of the word “holy” emphasizes that this greeting must be pure, sincere, and free from lust or deceit. Essentially, it needs to focus on an attitude of sincere love, from sincere hearts.

If you would like to join Will as one of the first people to greet visitors in the parking lot, then feel free to do so. You can be one of the first to say, **“Welcome to Mayfair!”**

WHAT IS PRAYER?

A CONVERSATION WITH GOD

By Dick Savage

A lot is said in the church about prayer. We usually pray when we gather. We ask others to pray for us, and we say we will pray for others. That is wonderful, but what is prayer?

Prayer is a fervent, personal, and sometimes group act that unlocks spiritual resources. Prayer is the act of communicating with God, the Creator. It is practiced in order to build a personal relationship with God, who loves us greatly and has demonstrated it time and time again. While often associated with asking, prayer is fundamentally about connection and nurturing a relationship with God.

Types of prayer include adoration, confession of sin, supplication, thanksgiving, and praying on behalf of others. Prayer is used to align our will with God's will. It is an expression of faith and trust in God, demonstrating our dependence on Him.

A basic definition of prayer is “talking to God.” Prayer is not meditation or passive reflection; it is a direct address with God. It is the communication of the human soul with the Lord who created the soul. Prayer

is the primary way for the believer in Jesus to communicate their emotions and desires to God and to have fellowship with God.

Prayer can be audible or silent, private or public, formal or informal. As the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia puts it, “Christian prayer in its full New Testament meaning is prayer addressed to God as Father, in the name of Christ as Mediator, and through the enabling grace of the indwelling Spirit” (“Prayer” by J. C. Lambert).

Prayer is described in the Bible as seeking God's favor (Exodus 32:11), pouring out one's soul to the Lord (1 Samuel 1:15), crying out to heaven (2 Chronicles 32:20), drawing near to God (Psalm 73:28), and kneeling before the Father (Ephesians 3:14).

Paul has a great deal to say in Philippians 4 about developing and maintaining spiritual stability, resulting in JOY in one's life. In verse 6, Paul says, “Don't worry about anything.” Worrying is wrong thinking (the mind) and wrong feeling (the heart) about circumstances, people, and things. The antidote to worry is a secure mind. If we are to conquer worry, have a secure mind, and have a stable, joyful life, we must meet the conditions that Paul lays down in this passage.

Spiritually stable people react to trials with thankful prayer. Such prayer is the antidote to worry and the cure for anxiety. Paul says that in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. Right praying involves all three.

The word prayer is the general word for making re-

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

quests of God. It carries the idea of adoration, devotion, and worship. We must see the greatness and majesty of God. We must realize that He is big enough to solve our problems.

Certainly, the Father enjoys hearing His children's expression of thanks. Jesus once healed ten lepers, and only one returned to say thank you. We are sometimes eager to ask, but we are slow to say thank you.

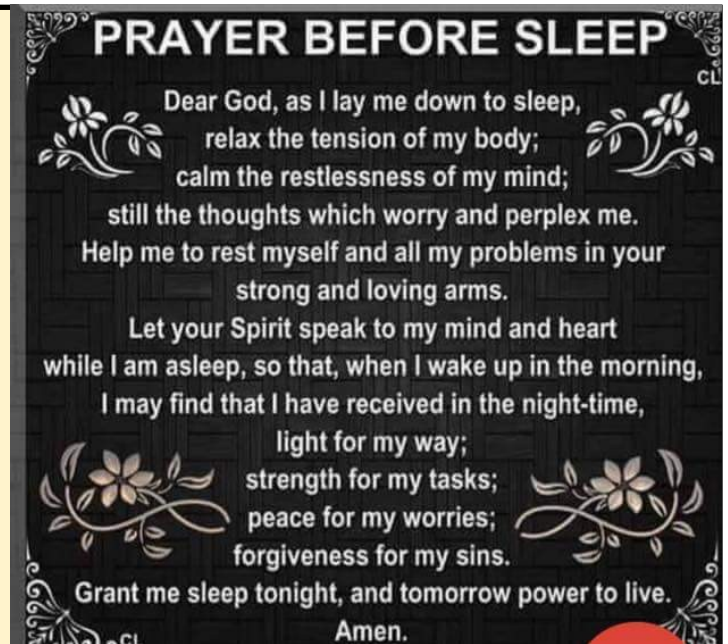
This is why this directive is found at the end of Philippians and not at the beginning. If we have the single mind of Philippians chapter 1, we can have adoration. If we have the submissive mind of chapter 2, we can come with supplication. If we have the spiritual mind of chapter 3, we can come in thanksgiving. Paul wrote:

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6–7 NIV).

Worry about nothing; pray about everything. Everything? Yes, God wants us to talk with Him about everything. How often should we pray? The biblical answer is *“pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17 ESV)*. We should keep a running conversation going with God all day long.

There is no special formula for how to pray given in the Bible. We should just do it! We can pray under all circumstances. Prayer develops our relationship with God and demonstrates our trust and dependence upon Him.

We pray to praise God, thank Him, and tell Him how much we love Him. We pray to enjoy His presence and tell Him what is going on in our lives. We pray to make requests, seek guidance, and ask for wisdom. God loves this exchange with His children, just as we love the exchange we have with our chil-



dren. Fellowship with God is the heart of prayer. Too often, we lose sight of how simple prayer is really supposed to be.

When we make petitions to God, we let God know exactly where we stand and what we would like to see happen. In our prayers, we must admit that God is greater than we are and ultimately knows what is best in any given situation (Romans 11:33–36).

God asks us to trust Him. In prayer, we say, essentially, *“Not my will, but your will be done.”* The key to answered prayer is praying according to the will of God and in accordance with His Word. Prayer is not seeking our own will but seeking to align ourselves with the will of God more fully (1 John 5:14–15).

The Bible contains many examples of prayer and many exhortations to pray (see Luke 18:1; Romans 12:12; and Ephesians 6:18). God's house is to be a house of prayer (Mark 11:17), and God's people are to be people of prayer: ***“Dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God's love” (Jude 1:20-21 NIV).***

The God who created us and who has invested so much of His time in redeeming us, really does want to hear from us. Just Do It!

Mayfair Assistance Helpline: Mayfair Church of Christ offers a helpline for members who may require physical assistance with home maintenance, automotive repairs, or transportation needs. If you need one of these services, please call and leave a message regarding your needs, and you will be contacted for details.

Call 256-881-4651 (during business hours) or 256-704-3384 (evenings & weekends)

“Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life” (Proverbs 16:31 ESV)

In this issue of “JOY in the Journey,” we continue our series on Mayfair’s Senior Members, who truly wear a “Crown of Glory.” As members age, they are often unable to meet with us due to health issues, but are still near and dear to our hearts. This month, we learn more about one such member, Beverly Dunlap.

Beverly Dunlap

By Jeff Dunlap

Beverly Killebrew Dunlap was born on July 9, 1935, in Springville, Tennessee, to Carl and Cora Killebrew. She grew up alongside her sister, Betty Joyce. Beverly and her family were devoted members of the Springville Church of Christ, where her father served as an elder. She attended the Springville School, a twelve-year school, in her hometown, where she discovered her love for cheerleading and actively participated from the 7th through the 12th grade.

While cheering, Beverly met Reuben Dunlap, who played basketball on the school team. Their relationship blossomed. Reuben began saving a seat for Beverly on the school bus each morning so they could spend time together before classes. After years of dating, Reuben proposed to Beverly.

Reuben, who was three years older than Beverly, was nearing graduation. He decided to enlist in the Air Force. Beverly waited four years for him to complete his military service before they could marry.

He completed his basic training at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas, and was then transferred to an Air Force base in North Carolina. In 1952, he received orders to deploy to Germany during the Korean War.

After graduating from Springville School, Beverly moved to Nashville, Tennessee, where she attended Nashville Business College while living with her sister, Betty Joyce, and brother-in-law, R.D. After completing business college, she returned to Springville to live with her parents. Reuben and Beverly married on September 10, 1955, after he returned from Germany.

After marriage, they relocated to Detroit, Michigan, the same year. Reuben attended Radio, Electronics, and TV School (RETS) while they both worked for the Great Lakes Greyhound Bus Line. After he completed



Beverly Dunlap

RETS, they both accepted positions at Chrysler on Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama. Beverly worked as an administrative assistant from 1958 to 1962, while Reuben worked as an electrical technician.

In 1960, Reuben was offered a position with the US Army Missile Command. While working as a technician, he completed his engineering degree and continued to work for the Missile Command until he retired.

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

Reuben and Beverly began their family in 1962, welcoming two sons: Gregory and Jeffrey. After their birth, Beverly became a homemaker. Beverly's father passed away in 1971, and her mother, Cora, continued living in Springville until 1973, when Beverly and Reuben invited her to live with them and eventually built an addition to their home to accommodate her. Cora helped Beverly with household duties while Reuben was at work. Cora was a beloved member of the family for over 40 years and passed away in 2013 at the age of 105.

Beverly volunteered in the clinic at Chaffee Elementary School and later at the library at Grissom High School. In 1984, she returned to the workforce as an administrative assistant for the US Army Corps of Engineers, where she worked for 13.5 years before retiring. After retiring, she helped care for her grandchildren. Reuben continued his career with several engineering firms as a Chief Staff Scientist before ultimately retiring in 2008.

Beverly has enjoyed many activities throughout her life. In her late twenties and early thirties, she was an avid bowler until a back injury forced her to stop. She loved traveling, often accompanying Reuben on business trips to Europe and other destinations.

Camping and picnicking at Smith Lake were favorite pastimes with her family. Beverly's passion for gardening and spending time outdoors is well known, as is her love for hosting family and friends.

Reuben was an enthusiastic fisherman and kept a camper trailer on Lake Guntersville. The couple enjoyed camping at the lake, fishing from their pontoon boat, and experiencing the beauty of the outdoors together.

Beverly, Reuben, and their sons were active members of Farley Church of Christ, where Reuben served as a deacon. Both were involved in children's and young adult ministries. Later, the family became members of the Mayfair Church of Christ.

Beverly enjoyed working with toddlers and five-year-olds, while Reuben taught the boys' teenage class. He also participated in hospital ministry, assisted with the Lord's table, and volunteered as a greeter.

Reuben and Beverly continued their involvement at Mayfair, participating in the Monday Meals program



Reuben and Beverly Dunlap

until health concerns related to COVID-19 forced them to stop. During the pandemic, they attended church virtually via livestream.

In 2022, Beverly suffered profound losses: her son Gregory experienced a life-threatening stroke that severely impacted his speech and right side, Reuben passed away from congestive heart failure, and her sister Betty Joyce died due to dementia. Despite these hardships, Beverly's faith remained strong.

Over the past seven years, Beverly has faced a genetic condition affecting her eyesight. Even as her vision and hearing decline, she continues to find joy in attending church and cherishes her church family at Mayfair. Sundays, when she can visit with her church family, are the highlight of her week.

Beverly's sons, Greg and Jeff, are both married. Greg has three daughters, and Jeff has a son. She holds her daughters-in-law, Kelly and Karen, in special regard. She also has four grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Beverly is known for her kindness, positivity, and unwavering strength. She never speaks an unkind word and remains optimistic, always looking forward to the next day despite physical challenges. Her family and friends deeply admire her, considering her a true inspiration to all who know her.

Getting to Know Your Elders

We conclude our series on getting acquainted with our Mayfair elders by learning about Dick Savage and his family, their history, and how they came to be at Mayfair.

Dick Savage

As I look back over my life, I can see how God was forming me along the way. All along my journey, God blessed me richly and protected me from serious harm. What I am today is the sum of my experiences and the influences of many good people.

My parents met in Ogden, Utah, during World War II. Dad was in the Army Air Force (the U.S. Air Force wasn't established until later in 1947), and mother worked as a riveter (a true Rosie the Riveter) for the Civil Service, repairing aircraft damaged during battle. They met in May 1945 and married in June 1945. After the War, they settled in McMinnville, Tennessee, my mother's hometown. Dad went to work for First National Bank as a bookkeeper and retired 60 years later as the Executive Vice President and a member of the Board of Directors.

I was born in McMinnville, Tennessee, on 18 July 1946. I don't remember much about that day. I am thankful for the parents God gave me, the small town where I grew up, and all the people who were positive influences on my life. I cannot name them all, schoolteachers, Sunday School teachers, and other townspeople had a significant impact on my formation.

My mother was a member of the church of Christ. Her family had been members of the church for several generations. My dad was from Webb, a small town in western Mississippi, and his family was members of one of the denominations in that town.

In my earliest memories, I attended Sunday School without my parents. Mother would frequently join me at worship. Often, we did not attend worship but went to the lake as a family. At age 13, I was baptized during a gospel meeting with Willard Collins as the speaker. From that time on, my mother, younger brother, and I regularly attended Sunday School and worship. Eventually, my dad and brother were baptized and were faithful members of the Lord's church, both eventually serving as deacons.

From my youth, I possessed a strong appreciation

for academics and graduated from high school with honors. In addition to academics, I enjoyed being involved in other activities. I played trumpet in the band and was Drum Major my senior year. I performed in several stage productions during my high school years, as well as singing in the school chorus. As a senior, I was awarded the Band Medal and the D.A.R. History Medal.



Dick and Jean Savage

During my senior year, I applied for an appointment to the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, but did not receive an appointment that year. After graduating from high school, I attended the University of Tennessee and majored in Engineering Physics. In the Spring of my freshman year, I received an appointment to the Military Academy and arrived at West Point in July 1965 as part of the class of 1969. I found I had a strong desire to serve something larger than myself, and I set out on a life of service to God, country, and others. As a cadet, I taught Sunday school for the children of the families that lived at West Point. It was a rewarding experience for me.

At the end of my second year, I met my future bride, Jean Ezell, in Brooklyn, New York. Jean had traveled there on a mission trip with a group of Christians from her college, Middle Tennessee State University, and Vanderbilt University. A friend of mine from high school was also on that trip. She knew I was at West Point and invited me to come to Brooklyn for the weekend to meet with the group. It

(Continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 7)

was there that I met Jean. It was love at first sight for me. Jean and I experienced a long-distance relationship for two years, while I was in New York and she was in Tennessee. We learned a lot about each other through the many letters we exchanged, phone calls, and the few times we were together while waiting for both of us to graduate.

I did well in academics and graduated 90th in the class of 800. The four years I spent at West Point taught me to balance multiple, simultaneous tasks while attempting to perform everything to the best of my ability. Challenging and stretching myself beyond my ability, experience, and comfort zone contributed to any success I may have achieved. Living within the Cadet Honor System reinforced the Christian values instilled in me by my parents and my church home. I learned to never compromise my integrity while choosing “the harder right rather than the easier wrong.”

Jean and I were married on 20 June 1969 and began our life’s journey together in service to God wherever God directed the Army to send us.

Upon graduation from the Academy, I was commissioned as an Air Defense Artillery (ADA) 2nd Lieutenant and attended the officer basic course at Fort Bliss, Texas, where I was recognized as the Distinguished Graduate.

After completing the Officer Basic Course, I was assigned to a missile unit in Germany as a platoon leader. I later served as the Battery Executive Officer, Commander of the Headquarters Battery, and eventually the Battalion Security and Intelligence Officer, responsible for physical, personnel, and document security for the entire Nike Hercules missile battalion.

During the Germany assignment, our son Derrick was born with a serious heart defect. This event and the following years increased our faith and brought Jean and me closer to God and each other.

Jean and I were part of a group that planted a congregation of the Lord’s church in a small German town. We drove about 45 minutes each way on Sundays to participate in worship services with the Christians who met there. I participated in the preaching rotation. We had been Christians longer than most of the others in the small group that met together. They

asked questions we could not answer but should have been able to answer. It was then that Jean and I made a firm commitment to serve God with all our hearts and to make God and the church the priority in our lives.

Following the three years in Germany, I was assigned to a missile unit in Korea where I again served as the security and intelligence officer, responsible for physical, document, and personnel security for a Nike Hercules battalion of six firing batteries scattered over a 10,000 square mile area, with 1400 personnel. During this time, Jean and Derrick lived with her parents, while visiting frequently with my parents.

After 13 months in Korea, I attended the ADA Officer Advanced Course, where I was recognized as an Honor Graduate. We then moved to Atlanta, where I attended the Georgia Institute of Technology and earned a Master of Science degree in Nuclear Engineering. During my time in graduate school, our daughter, Kristi, was born with a serious heart defect.

I then returned to West Point for assignment to the Department of Mathematics, where I taught calculus and other math courses, serving initially as an instructor and later as an Assistant Professor. While there, I earned an MBA from Long Island University. I was part of the rotating preaching team at the local congregation of the Lord’s church.

While in New York, Jean had very serious surgery, and a few months later, Kristi had surgery to correct her heart defect when she was one month short of her third birthday.

After three years at West Point, the Army sent me to the Department of Energy Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California, where I performed duties as a Research Associate. I conducted research in nuclear weapons development, effects, and related scientific and engineering technologies. Working as a physicist in a nuclear weapons design division, I was part of the team that designed the warheads for the Ground Launched Cruise Missile, the 155mm and 8-inch artillery projectiles, as well as the neutron bomb.

While there, I preached for the local congregation and served as a deacon for adult education. The elders there had a significant impact on my life that

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from page 8)

remains to this day.

In January 1982, the Army decided it was time for us to move again and sent us to Huntsville, Alabama, where I served as the Nuclear Research and Development Coordinator for the Ballistic Missile Defense System Command. I provided the interface between the missile systems under development, DOD contractors, the Department of Energy, the Nuclear Weapons Systems Safety Committee, and the Army Nuclear and Chemical Agency. In June 1986, I became the Deputy Director for Directed Energy Weapons supporting the President's Strategic Defense Initiative Organization (SDIO) and served as the Army Program Manager for the X-ray Laser weapon. I retired from active duty in 1989 with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, with over 20 years of military service.

I continued to support Army programs for defense contractors until I fully retired in 2013 after 44 years of service to the country. During the time in Huntsville, as an Adjunct Professor, I taught several math classes as well as ethics classes at the local Faulkner University campus.

During our early years in Huntsville, Jean's dad came to live with us while her mom was in a local nursing home. We are grateful for the time in Hunts-

ville, where our son and daughter grew up in the Mayfair youth group.

Jean and I have been married for 57 years. These years have been full of challenges but in all things that have come our way, God has journeyed with us. In our retirement years, we are focusing on serving God however He wants and caring for our family.

In 1989, I was appointed as an elder for the Mayfair congregation, serving in that role for over 37 years. This has been the most important, challenging, and rewarding role I have ever been asked to assume. I treasure the relationships I have had with the various elders and ministers with whom I have served.

Jean and I are thankful for all the ways God has blessed us through the years. We are extremely grateful for our son, daughter, 3 granddaughters, two are married, and two grandsons, one is married, and their spouses, who are all Christians. We also have 2 great granddaughters.

I have tried to live by the West Point Code, "Duty, Honor, Country," and as a Christian, it was my goal to accomplish both personal and professional affairs with honesty, integrity, passion, and dedication. I am particularly fond of these words from the West Point Alma Mater:

"And when our work is done, our course on Earth is run, may it be said, 'Well Done, Be thou at peace.'"

Who Are You Influencing?

By Don Gardner

Beginning with the January 2024 issue of **Joy in the Journey**, we have shared with our readers the personal stories of each of our shepherds through a series entitled "Getting to Know Your Elders." In each of these articles, our elders have unfolded the story of their lives from their childhood to how they came to be at Mayfair and to serve as part of our eldership. They shared with our readers the stories of how they met their wives and the powerful influence these Christian ladies have had on their lives.

As I worked with each of these gentlemen on this series, I came to see how our Almighty God has used the influence of others to bring them to Christ and take on the leadership roles they now hold.

While some of these men were raised in the Lord's church by Christian parents, others were not. It is those stories of them coming to faith through the

influence of others who taught them the truth that I found fascinating.

Jesus told his disciples, "*In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven*" (Matthew 5:16 ESV).

It is amazing the influence we can have on others. Peter tells wives they can influence their husbands through their Christian conduct: *Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct* (1 Peter 3:1-2 ESV).

Paul points out that the influence parents have on their children: *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord* (Ephesians 6:4 ESV).

We never know how God might allow us to influence the life of someone else, who in turn might go on to do great things in His Kingdom.

For A Time Such As This The Book of Esther

By Nobie Stone

Introduction:

The Classics Class has been studying the book of Esther, a story from the Old Testament centered in Persia in the 4th century BC. Paul tells us that the Old Testament was written *“to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures ... we might have hope”* (Romans 15:4).

And, while much can be learned regarding the current war with Iran (the existing remnant of the ancient Persian empire), this is certainly not the knowledge that Paul had in mind. So, while there is great interest in the history of the people with whom we are at war, we also asked the questions with which we are most concerned and which we will consider herein: “Why is the book of Esther included in the Bible?” and “What does the Lord want us to learn?”

Interestingly, the Lord God is never mentioned in the book—the Lord never speaks, there are no miracles, no mention of the Law of Moses, nor of the land of Israel or the city of Jerusalem. So the question becomes more serious: Why is the book included in Scripture?

Background:

As the story opens, we are introduced to the Persian king, Ahasuerus (in Greek, the name translates to Xerxes, the name by which he is known in history and the name used herein). Xerxes becomes dissatisfied with his queen, Vashti, and, on the advice of his “wise” men, deposes Vashti and begins a four-year search for her replacement.

Vashti’s demotion makes way for Esther, a young Jewish girl. She has been raised by Mordecai, her cousin, who is in the employ of the king, serving at the “king’s gate.” Esther is beautiful and has all the attributes of royalty—grace, judgment, loyalty, and humility. Esther is outstanding in every way, and she shuts down the “queen competition.” But at Mordecai’s direction, she kept her Jewish origin unknown in her new royal position of queen.

Finally, we are introduced to the king’s most trust-

ed nobleman, Haman, a conniving, egocentric, and evil man, possibly a descendant of King Agag, the only Amalekite spared by Saul (1 Samuel 15:20).

Haman’s Decree:

When he learned that Mordecai had not knelt before him to pay him honor, Haman—knowing Mordecai was a Jew—rather than only having Mordecai killed, decided to have all the Jews slaughtered (3:2-6). He went to King Xerxes to gain his permission. Haman convinced King Xerxes to allow this slaughter:

“There is a certain people dispersed ...in all the provinces of your kingdom who keep themselves separate. Their customs are different...and they do not obey the king’s laws; it is not in the king’s best interest to tolerate them. If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them...” (3:8-9).

And so the king gave his approval to the decree Haman would write. The decree was sent throughout the empire, with orders to *“destroy, kill, and annihilate all Jews—young and old, women and little children—on a single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar...”* (3:13).

It was with the publishing of Haman’s edict in Susa that Mordecai learned of his plot. He revealed Haman’s plans to Esther, the queen (4:1, 4-8). Then he told her, *“Who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this* (4:14). Her response was to ask the Jews of Susa to fast for her... *“and if I perish, I perish”* (4:16).

It was through this one young girl and her devotion and courage that a whole nation would be spared through God’s providence. And not only a nation, but access of the whole world to salvation from sin through the coming Messiah, whose necessary lineage she preserved.

God’s Providence:

God’s providence is clearly revealed through the sequence of events that followed. No one event was definitive, but the sequence, as a whole, was highly

(Continued on page 11)

(Continued from page 10)

improbable. The night before Haman's request of Xerxes:

1. It just so happened that on this particular night, the king couldn't sleep (6:1).
2. It just so happened that he chose the chronicles (the record of his reign) to be read to him (6:1).
3. It just so happened that the book (scroll) was opened to the account of action taken by Mordecai that had saved the king's life (6:2).

The king asked what recognition Mordecai had received. His attendants responded that nothing had been done (6:3). It was still early morning, so the king asked, *"Who is in the court?"* (6:4a)

4. It just so happened: ...Haman had just entered the outer court of the palace to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on the gallows he had erected for him... (6:4b).

"Bring him in," the king ordered (6:5).

What was about to happen was a total shock to Haman! And why not? He already has the king's permission to wipe out the entire Jewish race—Mordecai's life is, by comparison, a trifling matter.

The king asked Haman, *"What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?"* (6:6-9)

Thinking he was the one to be honored, Haman suggested an extravagant display. The king responded, *"Go at once...and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai the Jew who sits at the king's gate"* (6:10).

So Haman...robed Mordecai and led him on horseback through the city streets, proclaiming before him, "This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!" (6:11)

After his brief recognition for his service to the king, Mordecai humbly returned to his station to assume his duty (6:12).

Haman, however, was humiliated—having been made the instrument of the very public recognition of Mordecai...Mordecai!!—the very man he had planned to subject to public impalement! Haman rushed home with his head covered. (All of this began because of Haman's hatred of a single man—far below him in social status—on whose account he

would annihilate the whole Jewish race. It appears that Haman served as a pawn for yet another of Satan's attempts to prevent the appearance of the Messiah).

Shortly after he returned home, the king's eunuchs arrived to escort Haman to Queen Esther's banquet.

"And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14)

Esther's Request of the King:

Esther had already risked her life by approaching the king in the inner court uninvited to announce her banquet. King Xerxes had to have realized that Esther had not risked her life just to invite him and Haman to dinner, so at Esther's banquet, he, again, asked;

"Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted" (7:1-2).

Apparently, neither Haman nor the king had any previous knowledge of Queen Esther's Jewish heritage.

Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor with you, O king, and if it pleases your majesty, grant me my life—this is my petition. ... And spare my people—this is my request. For I and my people have been sold for destruction and slaughter and annihilation" (7:3-4a).

When the king demanded who? Esther answered, *"The adversary and enemy is this vile Haman!"* (7:6)

In his hateful scheme to annihilate the entire Jewish race, Haman has, unknowingly, implicated the Queen herself! Now his true intent has been fully exposed before the king!

For his part, the king had not given this requested genocide a passing thought—until now that he realizes that Haman's edict would result in the death of his beloved queen.

The king got up in a rage, left his wine, and went out into the palace garden (7:7a).

The king went out to think. He has suffered a double insult from Haman: Not only has the life of his queen been put at risk, but Haman has duped the king himself into thinking the Jews were a threat. He has been used! Now he is furious!!!

(Continued on page 12)

(Continued from page 11)

What followed may have been one of the most awkward moments in all of history! Now panicked, Haman had stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life.

Just as the king returned...to the banquet hall, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining!!! The king exclaimed, "Will he even molest the queen while she is with me in the house?" As soon as the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face (7:7b-8).

Haman Hanged:

Harbona, one of the king's attendants, offered that Haman had a 75-foot gallows built at his house on which he had planned to hang Mordecai.

The king said, "Hang him on it!" (7:9).

There seems to be no love lost for Haman. Harbona seems eager to volunteer information on Haman's activities, and it appears that even his wife and friends were not overly concerned by Haman's impending demise (6:12-13). Haman is truly evil — the kind of sly, conniving man who uses people and nobody trusts.

The King's Edict On Behalf of the Jews:

Now Haman had been deposed and executed, but Esther and the Jewish people were still under the threat of his edict. Therefore, Esther made a second plea to King Xerxes.

Falling at the king's feet and weeping, Queen Esther begged him to put an end to Haman's evil plan against the Jews. *"If it pleases the king," she said, "...let an order be written overruling the dispatches that Haman... wrote... For how can I bear to see disaster fall on my people? How can I bear to see the destruction of my family? (8:5-6)*

Under Persian law, Haman's decree was irreversible, so...King Xerxes replied to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, *"...write another decree...in behalf of the Jews as seems best to you and seal it with the king's signet ring—for no document written in the king's name and sealed with his ring can be revoked (8:7-8).*

The king's edict granted the Jews in every city the right to assemble and protect themselves; to destroy, kill, and annihilate any armed force of any na-

tionality or province that might attack them and their women and children. *The day appointed for the Jews to do this in all the provinces of King Xerxes was the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar (8:11-12).*

This was the same day Haman's edict against the Jews was to have been executed!

In every province and in every city to which the edict of the king came, there was joy and gladness among the Jews ... (8:17).

At this time, the Jews established Purim to celebrate their salvation, a custom they honor each year, and Purim continues to be celebrated by their descendants today.

So what are we to learn from Esther?

1. There is clear evidence of the providence of God watching over the Jewish nation. **God does not abandon his people.**
2. The Jews, saved by the young girl, Esther, were the only remnant of Abraham's descendants through whom the Messiah was promised to come. **God will not allow his promises to fail.**
3. God has accomplished great things through the weak—here, through the teenager Esther; but also through a fearful Moses; through a simple farmer, Gideon; and when the Messiah came, he did not enlist the educated, the powerful or the rich—but rather simple fishermen, a tax collector, a Zealot ...all so that we might know the power of God, and that **what God accomplishes comes from God, not man.**

Finally, as we consider what does not occur in the account of Esther—miracles—we are left with the fact that Esther lived in the **same relationship with God as we have.** She did not see the lame and the blind healed, nor the dead raised to life. Rather, she had to rely on evidence of God's **providence** in her life—as did the Roman Centurion of Matthew chapter eight, whose faith (praised by Jesus) was based on the testimony of his Jewish friends.

This example of "not seeing and yet believing" would seem to be the primary importance of the book of Esther to Christians today.

(All quotations are from the NIV)