

# **BaptistWay Bible Series for April 10: Christians must display faith through actions\_40405**

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**BaptistWay Bible Series for April 10**

## **Christians must display faith through actions**

Numbers 13:1-3, 17-20, 25-33; 14:1-10, 30-31

**By Wayne Smith**

*First Baptist Church, Lamesa*

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## **LifeWay Family Bible Series for April 10: Christ's church should**

# **show an impartial love\_40405**

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**LifeWay Family Bible Series for April 10**

## **Christ's church should show an impartial love**

James 2:1-13

**By Mitch Randall**

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## **LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for April 10: Conform to Divine Potter's will for your life\_40405**

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**LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for April 10**

# Conform to Divine Potter's will for your life

*Jeremiah 16:1-20; 18*

**By Dennis Tucker**

*Truett Seminary, Waco*

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## Cybercolumn by Brett Younger: An interview with a real, live theologian\_40405

March 29, 2005

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| Vernon<br>Davis<br>with son-<br>in-law<br>Brett<br>Younger. |
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# CYBERCOLUMN:

## An interview with a real, live theologian

**By Brett Younger**

Vernon Davis is my family's favorite giant in the field of theological education. He was professor of theology and dean of the Logsdon School of Theology at Hardin-Simmons University (1995-2004), professor of theology and dean of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (1983-1995) and the pastor of three churches. He has been teaching the church to be the church all of his life.



Brett  
Younger

He's also a fine father-in-law. During a recent visit to Fort Worth, after two basketball games, barbeque ribs and a movie, I asked him a few questions.

• **Brett:** *Dr. Dad, first let's make sure we understand the ground rules. You've been interviewed by many journalists who take objectivity seriously, but for this interview, you understand that I will misrepresent your answers in any way I find amusing.*

**Dr. Davis:** I know. I've read your columns for years.

• *When Carol first introduced you to me, was your first thought, "I think we got a winner here"?*

No. I really thought she'd get over it.

*Have you noticed that your grandsons are turning out pretty well?*

Wonderfully well.

- *Does that surprise you?*

No. I know their mother.

- *Let's go a different direction. How have churches changed over the last 40 years?*

It's difficult to characterize all churches, but as a whole, there is less cultural support for the church—particularly in our part of the country. As a result, churches tend to be more concerned about survival or maintenance goals than they are mission and ministry goals.

- *Can not having cultural support be good for the church?*

It does tend to make the church go back to its roots, its basic beliefs and commitments. We have to rethink what it means to be Christ's disciples. When the church is culturally favored, we tend to do those things that keep those benefits coming to us.

- *What is the greatest challenge facing the church today?*

The greatest challenge is to be faithful to the church's message and reach people at the same time. How do you maintain a healthy institution while doing the work that the church is called to do?

- *Are there ways in which being true helps the church reach people?*

The church has made a mistake in trying to run after people by sounding like everyone else. That's short sighted because ultimately, if we're not true to our own foundational beliefs, then we don't have anything to give

and what others receive from us seems empty. If we preach the gospel and incarnate the love of Christ, we'll find that society is hungering for that kind of reality.

- *Are there ways in which you see churches being true to who they are supposed to be?*

Many churches are finding ways to preach the gospel to the poor and make Christ's love visible. They are discovering how the fellowship can support one another in times of crisis.

- *How do churches lose their sense of purpose?*

All churches experience times when what they do isn't successful by the world's definition. We tend to panic then and worry about having enough people to fill the building and pay the bills. Chasing whatever seems to be working is a disease in the contemporary church. When we do that we become secular and self-defeating.

- *Is that the biggest mistake you see churches making?*

I think that the biggest mistake is measuring ourselves by the criteria of contemporary America instead of the gospel. I see us measuring ourselves by the things we call success, by the things we can see, and talking less about those things that grow out of our commitment to the cross.

*Brett Younger is pastor of Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth and the author of Who Moved My Pulpit? A Hilarious Look at Ministerial Life, available from Smyth & Helwys, (800) 747-3016.*

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# Abstinence helping fight AIDS in Africa\_40405

March 29, 2005

Posted: 3/24/05

## Abstinence helping fight AIDS in Africa

**By Erin Curry**

*Baptist Press*

NASHVILLE (BP)—In sub-Sahara Africa, more than 6,000 AIDS victims die each day and more than 8,700 new infections occur each month, underscoring the need for effective HIV prevention methods among Africans who are still healthy.

International Mission Board workers Larry and Sharon Pumpelly believe that despite resistance by government entities and cultures, they are seeing progress in the acceptance of abstinence and faithfulness promotion in the fight against AIDS.

Government organizations such as the U.S. Agency for International Development are progressively more open to funding faith-based organizations that promote abstinence over condoms in AIDS prevention, she noted.

“There are still people in those organizations who will probably never see that abstinence is a strong, viable choice, but there are others who will look at the facts even from their own research and say abstinence is at least one good choice and would be very much in favor of giving support to faith-based organizations,” she said.

The Pumpellys began serving as IMB missionaries in Uganda in the mid-1980s, when some people were suffering from AIDS but did not know what it was.

By the early '90s, they knew they would have to implement a strong AIDS prevention program because about 30 percent of the sexually active population in Uganda was HIV-infected.

They worked with a team of Ugandans to develop a program designed specifically for the local culture to promote abstinence before marriage and then got permission to use the True Love Waits abstinence program name in Uganda.

By the turn of the 21st century, the AIDS rate in Uganda had dropped to just 6 percent.

Despite a general disagreement between faith-based groups and government-based agencies over whether abstinence or condoms are more responsible for the drop, the Baptist AIDS Response Agency—a branch of the Kenya Baptist Convention—is receiving funding from the U.S. government and working closely with USAID and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The Baptist AIDS Response Agency has set up voluntary counseling and testing centers in Baptist churches, where members of the congregations serve as counselors to people at risk for AIDS, Sharon Pumpelly said.

“I think you will still have outspoken people who will just say we probably



shouldn't go that direction, but I think it's much different than it was 10 or 15 years ago," she said.

The effort to change mindsets about preventing AIDS is broader than government organizations, she noted. Many Africans simply don't believe it's possible for a person to wait until marriage to have sex, she asserted.

"When you have a culture—American or African—that tells you it's impossible, you look for a response based on the fact that you think it's impossible," she said, referring to why so much focus is on condoms.

Her husband, now the IMB's Richmond, Va., associate for Central, Eastern and Southern Africa, said believing abstinence is possible requires a certain amount of faith that many people have not yet acquired.

USAID generally has tended to focus more on condoms and has been reluctant to promote abstinence and faithfulness because of an unwillingness to acknowledge faith-based solutions, but African nationals do not share that reluctance, Pumpelly said.

"For Africans, the spiritual side of things has everything to do with life," he said. "Whether they're Christians or they're still dealing with their traditional religions, the spirit world affects everything that they do. If it's a sore toe or a bad crop or infertility in marriage, it all has to do with something spiritual for them. And America doesn't know how to deal with that in other cultures. They're just too scientific for their own good."

Mrs. Pumpelly told about training a group of Massai pastors how to take True Love Waits back to their people who typically don't limit sex to marriage.

"I asked, 'Do you think it's possible for a boy with God's help to grow up and not have sex with anyone until he has sex with his wife in marriage?' That room was quieter than the proverbial pin drop," she said. "Eventually

this old man got up and answered in his native tongue, 'If he did, everyone would know he's a Christian.'

"I really believe we're missing an incredible witness of who Christ is and his power by not telling young people worldwide that with God's help, they really can not have sex until they're married and receive all that God has for them," she said.

She found the youth of Uganda very receptive to the abstinence message of True Love Waits, which culminates in signing a commitment card pledging to be sexually abstinent until marriage. The Pumpellys made signing the card difficult so that the youth would take it more seriously. For instance, after presenting the True Love Waits message, they would dismiss everyone and ask only those willing to make the abstinence commitment to stay and sign the card.

Just like in any culture, Mrs. Pumpelly said, myths about sex abound in Uganda and push young people into early sexual activity. African cultures have a system of passing on sexual mores to the next generation, she said, but with urbanization and the staggering number of deaths from AIDS, that system has broken down, and the next generation is not being taught like previous generations.

"So, they're getting a lot of their information from the wrong sources, and consequently, it's not good information. It just causes more chaos when they get these myths," she said.

But with the help of programs like True Love Waits promoted now by Ugandan Baptists and with the endorsement and strong support of Uganda's president and first lady, Uganda has become a success story in the fight against AIDS.

In 2003, President Bush visited Uganda to spotlight the abstinence method before he allotted \$15 billion to help prevent the spread of AIDS in Third

World countries.

As time passes, more government groups are realizing the research they sponsor in countries like Uganda is concluding that condoms are not working to curb the spread of AIDS nearly as well as the abstinence and faithfulness message.

“Some of those people were people who were negative (about abstinence) and they looked at the research and said: ‘Oh, wow. It’s our research that says what they’re doing is working,’”

Mrs. Pumpelly said. “... I think you’re probably going to get more reports of Ugandans who say that it was choosing abstinence” that brought the AIDS rates down.

The transformation in Uganda is simply the work of God, she said, and such a transformation can be replicated in any country.

“What was fascinating is that by faith, we told Ugandan youth that they had the power to change the history of their country, that God would bless their nation when its individual members chose to follow his ways,” she said. “Just like there are different generations that can tell you something different about their history, their generation could say, ‘We turned Uganda around on AIDS.’”

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention ( SBC ) and around the world.

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# Christians urged to build friendships with Muslims\_40405

March 29, 2005

Christians should share their faith by making friends with Muslims, but first they should learn about the region the person is from and the branch of Islam they are a part of.

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## Partnership for Environment helping Nigerians meet water needs\_40405

March 29, 2005

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## Partnership for Environment helping Nigerians meet water needs

**By Ferrell Foster**

*Texas Baptist Communications*

DALLAS—Baptist Medical Centre in Ogbomoso, Nigeria, now has the clean water a hospital needs, thanks to volunteers mobilized by the Partnership for the Environment, an independent nonprofit organization related to the

Baptist General Convention of Texas.

The BGCT helped launch Partnership for the Environment four years ago, and the group now is involved in several projects worldwide to bring water to people in underdeveloped areas, said Terri Morgan, the organization's president and a former BGCT Christian Life Commission employee.

The United States government recently honored two volunteers who spearheaded the Nigeria project, along with three BGCT employees who were recognized for their roles in the effort.

Joseph Duggan, senior policy adviser for U.S. Agency for International Development, presented the President's Volunteer Service Award on behalf of President Bush to Jon Low of Roanoke, Va.; Chris Strock of Richmond, Va.; and Keith Bruce, coordinator of institutional ministries for the BGCT. He also recognized the efforts of Royce Rose, director of theological education for the BGCT, and Don Sewell, director of the Texas Partnerships Resource Center.

The awards are part of the administration's "Volunteers for Prosperity" program, which is seeking to promote volunteer initiatives around the world. He described it as supporting shorter-term efforts than the two-year Peace Corps commitments.

The Nigeria project was led by Low, a former "missionary kid" who grew up in Ogbomoso. He rallied former missionaries and their families to raise money to drill two water wells at the Baptist Medical Centre, which formerly was a mission point of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

Strock provided the drilling expertise for the project, traveling twice to Ogbomoso. Bruce, Rose and Sewell have worked to establish a broader network of relationships in Nigeria that includes sharing Texas Baptist university faculty with the Baptist Theological Seminary, which is adjacent

to the hospital, and a new partnership between Texas and Nigerian Baptists.

The Partnership for the Environment helped bring together this diverse group of concerned Christians. The international development organization was hired by the Nigeria Faithful Fund to do “site evaluation and assessment of the situation in Ogbomoso, related to the overall sustainability of the water sources and supply,” Morgan said.

Partnership for the Environment chose Strock for the project “based on his qualifications and our initial understanding of what some of the problems might be,” she said. The Nigeria Faithful Fund “trusted us through this process, and we developed a close and productive relationship.”

Prior to the project, the hospital used rainwater collected from a system of gutters and an underground cistern, Strock said. It also had a well that did not go deep enough to get safe water.

Contamination was rampant, and there was blindness to sanitation problems at the hospital, he said. During one of Strock’s visits, three children died of typhoid fever.

Morgan described the situation as overwhelming. “It’s just primitive,” she said.

Since Southern Baptist missionaries pulled out, the hospital has been self-supporting in an area where financial resources are limited. Despite the situation, Strock said, the hospital continues to provide important and helpful medical care for the city.

Previous water wells had been dug only until they hit a layer of rock, preventing the well from reaching clean water underneath, Low said. The Partnership for the Environment project penetrated the rock and reached good water.

“This partnership has been a good combination,” bringing together both science and faith, Low said. “This was a very prayerful project.”

Practically all of the money came from the “Nigerian Mission family,” which formed the Nigeria Faithful Fund, he said. “We just wanted to do something good.”

Low read e-mail messages from Burster Iyere, administrator of the hospital, that expressed deep anguish during two points when he feared the drilling had failed. “Everybody is distraught,” Iyere wrote.

Nigeria Faithful Fund’s newsletter gives Iyere’s report after the wells came in successfully. He wrote: “Today is one of the happiest days in my life. We are all so glad here. The completion of the wells was an exhilarating experience for all of us. I wept for joy. The yield is amazing. It is as if we have water fountains. We give God the glory.”

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention ( SBC ) and around the world.

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## **Hispanic cowboy church first of its kind\_40405**

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# Hispanic cowboy church first of its kind

**By George Henson**

*Staff Writer*

WAXAHACHIE—Iglesia Bautista de Los Vaqueros in Waxahachie is the first church of its kind, but it definitely will not be the last, predicted Ron Nolen, Baptist General Convention of Texas consultant on Western heritage churches.

“We believe 100 of these (Hispanic cowboy) churches could be started in Texas,” Nolen said. “The potential for the vaquero church is tremendous when you consider that there is a Hispanic population of 6 million (in Texas), and a significant percentage of those are agrarian people. A lot of those are cowboyed up—with their hats and boots.”

The vaquero church began when Frank Sanchez, a member of the Cowboy Church of Ellis County, noticed several Hispanic men were coming to the church’s Thursday night buck-outs, where men attempted to ride bulls. Sanchez began talking to them, and several began meeting him for Bible study on Sunday evenings.

The group has become a mission church of about 50 people meeting each Sunday evening at the Cowboy Church facilities. Sanchez has turned leadership of the group over to Herman Martinez, who is serving as interim pastor. Martinez also is pastor of Templo Alpha and Omega in Waxahachie, which meets on Sunday mornings.

Services at Templo Alpha and Omega are a combination of Spanish and English, but the vaquero church services are all Spanish, including the music, Martinez noted. The music also is Western-style, with accordion,



acoustic guitar and bass guitar accompaniment.

Martinez grew up in the city, but he has experience in a rural setting, as well, and he noted he has enjoyed working with the vaquero congregation that comes from area farms and ranches.

One of the church's pressing needs is its own facility, Nolen said.

"They desperately need a building of their own, an identity of their own," he said.

Ellis Baptist Association Director of Missions Larry Johnson said the mission's supporting partners have been searching for a permanent pastor since December but as yet have not found anyone. Nolen agreed a good fit can be hard to find.

"Baptist people haven't sown a lot of seed in this culture," Nolen said, "so we don't have a lot leadership we can draw on."

Finding a pastor for any Western heritage church is a different process than in traditional churches, he said.

"Many of these churches are pastored by men who have sensed a call and have come out of other trades, and many are led by lay pastors," he said.

The Ranch House Schools for developing leadership for Western heritage churches are filling a niche that will lead to more churches being started, including the vaquero churches.

"These men never learned how to take their love for the Western culture and merge it into their desire to serve Christ. The Ranch House Schools teach them how to do that," he said.

"But if there is a shortage of trained leaders in the Anglo-driven cowboy work, we have an even smaller pool to work with when it comes to the

vaquero churches.”

Texas Baptists have a great opportunity to reach Hispanics who have an affinity for Western culture, but meeting the need will demand sacrificial giving, Nolen insisted.

“If we had \$1 million, we could start 30 churches, that would run more than 1,000 in five years,” he said.

“We are so far behind, it’s going to take a real commitment from Texas Baptists to meet this need. The door is wide open, and I believe God is waiting for Texas Baptists to walk through that door.”

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## **Texas Baptist named to lead Sri Lanka’s child protective services\_40405**

March 29, 2005

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## **High court weighs prisoners' religious**

# rights

**By Robert Marus**

*ABP Washington Bureau*

WASHINGTON (ABP)—The U.S. Supreme Court is weighing the question of whether a federal law designed to protect prisoners' religious freedom goes too far.

At stake is whether Congress can pass laws creating special protections for religious practices among the institutionalized. But the high court's decision, expected later this year, could extend far beyond prison walls to any laws making it easier for individuals or organizations to practice their faith.

The justices heard arguments in the case of several current and former inmates of Ohio prisons who sued the state to gain accommodations for their various non-mainstream religious practices. In the first test of the law to be heard by the high court, several of the justices seemed skeptical about the constitutionality of the law, which was passed in 2000.

Although the cases originally were filed in the 1990s as constitutional challenges, the prisoners amended the cases after Congress passed the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act, often referred to as RLUIPA.

One of the law's provisions requires states to accommodate religious practices by inmates in their prisons—such as providing a special diet or allowing particular kind of religious clothing—unless prison officials can show a compelling reason why they should not grant such requests. If they do not provide the accommodations, then officials also must show they have “burdened” the inmate's religious exercise in the least restrictive manner

possible.

The 2000 law passed with support from a broad spectrum of political and religious leaders, evidenced by the fact that its two main Senate co-sponsors were conservative Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) and liberal Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.).

But in late 2003, the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals used the lawsuit—whose plaintiffs include practitioners of Satanism, the Wicca religion and an adherent of a white-supremacist form of Christianity—to overturn RLUIPA.

A three-judge panel of the appeals court said the law violates the First Amendment's establishment clause, which prevents Congress from establishing a religion or giving preferred treatment to religion. By specifically accommodating religious rights, the court said, RLUIPA advances religion and prefers religion over non-religion.

"The primary effect of RLUIPA is not simply to accommodate the exercise of religion by individual prisoners but to advance religion generally by giving religious prisoners rights superior to those of nonreligious prisoners," Judge Ronald Gilman wrote in the court's opinion.

But other federal appeals courts have upheld the law's constitutionality. The prisoners appealed the decision to the Supreme Court, which accepted the case in October.

Several of the justices seemed skeptical of the 6th Circuit's reasoning in overturning RLUIPA.

"Ohio pays for (prison) chaplains, but it doesn't pay for, say, psychologists to come in for agnostics," Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg said to Ohio Solicitor General Douglas Cole, who argued the state's case. "So, aren't you then violating the establishment clause by your own theory?"

Even Justice John Paul Stevens, the member of the court generally considered most hostile to expanding religious rights, noted the state's accommodations for prisoners who adhere to Christianity and other large faiths in contrast to the denial of similar accommodations to minority-faith prisoners.

"Is there anything really at stake here beyond treating them the same as you treat mainstream religions?" Stevens asked Cole.

But Cole said Ohio doesn't have a problem with accommodating minority religions; it just opposes the broadness of the law forcing it to do so.

A "narrowly targeted accommodation" would be better, Cole said, because of "the unique incentives and burdens in the prison context."

For example, he theorized, inmates may be tempted to feign adherence to certain religions to gain additional privileges, or for more nefarious purposes such as using religious medallions as indicators of gang membership.

"Is it permissible for Congress to create incentives for prisoners to say, 'Yes, I'm religious' to receive these additional benefits?" he asked the justices.

Cole also contended the law creates too much entanglement between the government and religious practice, because it requires prison officials to judge what is and is not a true religion. "Congress is, in a sense, asking federal judges to sit as overseers of religious life in prisons throughout the 50 states," he said.

But Justice Antonin Scalia shot back: "Why is it worse for judges to be overseers of religious life in prisons than it is for wardens?"

The court had difficult questions for the other side as well, though. Several

justices posited hypothetical religious accommodations that prisoners may ask for or temptations inmates may face to claim religious rights in order to gain privileges.

Addressing Paul Clement, the federal government's acting solicitor general who argued in support of the prisoners' case, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor said RLUIPA "provides an unusual framework or context, and if you could find some religion that required drinking beer every day ... there's a real incentive here to 'get religion.'" The courtroom responded with laughter.

Clement replied: "First of all, this is not an absolute entitlement to get a religious beer at 5 p.m. every day."

Both Clement and Ohio attorney David Goldberger, who also argued for the prisoners, told the justices that prison officials could do away with problems caused by religious accommodations under the "compelling state interest" test. "To the extent that there's a compelling governmental interest, the prison officials can simply say, 'No,'" Goldberger said.

However, the justices repeatedly showed sensitivity to difficulties state corrections officials might face in complying with the law.

But Clement and Goldberger countered that one of their opponents' suggestions—striking RLUIPA and instead creating laws or policies accommodating specific religions and practices—would in itself violate the establishment clause. "It's important for us to assure that religious groups of all types are accommodated," Goldberger said.

Justice David Souter, addressing Cole, said the sort of case-specific accommodation Ohio recommends instead of RLUIPA would naturally end up favoring majority faiths.

"It would also be discriminatory, wouldn't it? I think that gets you from the frying pan into the fire," he said.

Attorneys arguing for the inmates' case also said invalidating RLUIPA as a broad violation of the establishment clause would jeopardize numerous other state accommodations of religious exercise that have existed for centuries, such as tax exemptions for churches.

In a friend-of-the-court brief filed by the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty and the Becket Fund on behalf of a coalition of religious and civil-rights groups, attorneys argued the 6th Circuit's ruling does just that.

"If allowed to stand, the rationale of the court below would potentially invalidate numerous other federal and state acts whose sole purpose and effect is to accommodate religious exercise," they wrote.

Clement said that is one of the reasons why the federal government believes RLUIPA is constitutional and necessary. "Every state in the union provides some accommodation to religion," he told the justices. "At least RLUIPA has the advantage of making sure all religions are accommodated neutrally."

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## **Texas Baptist named to lead Sri Lanka's child protective**

# services\_40405

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## Texas Baptist named to lead Sri Lanka's child protective services

**By Craig Bird**

*Baptist Child & Family Services*

Sri Lanka's government has invited a Baptist agency to shape the country's first child protective services program, and the man who got Texas Baptists involved in tsunami relief will lead the effort.

David Beckett, who was instrumental in connecting both Texas Baptist Men and Baptist Child & Family Services to victims of the disaster, has been named Sri Lanka director for Children's Emergency Relief International.

In that role, he already has started responding to requests from national and provincial administrators to shape a program to provide long-term care for children who lost one or both parents to the killer tidal waves.

"Initial estimates of 10,000 orphans were significantly overstated but there are still hundreds—maybe thousands—of children at risk, and the Sri Lankan officials are to be commended not only for responding to the immediate pressing needs but for being forward-looking enough to seek a permanent solution to the on-going needs of children that will last long after the horror of Dec. 26 fades," Beckett said. "Many of the orphans pre-date the tsunami. They are victims of a civil war that started 20 years ago."



Since Children's Emergency Relief International was the only aid group in Sri Lanka with foster care expertise, the international arm of Baptist Child & Family Services found itself unexpectedly sitting at the table with agencies like UNICEF, Save the Children, the Red Cross and World Vision, talking with the government about how they could help.

"There was an understandable fear by Sri Lankan officials who wanted to know who we were and what we did, but we quickly formed some great relationships," Beckett explained. "The Sri Lankan people love children, so we had that in common. When I had my first meeting with the provincial commissioners, she told me that two days before she had told her co-workers: 'We have to set up some kind of foster program. But how can we do that since we don't have anyone who knows how?' We developed a solid friendship very quickly."

In April, Children's Emergency Relief International will begin a pilot program with about 50 children in the Batticaloa area where Texas Baptist teams have concentrated their efforts.

"The government has already invited us to go into three other provinces, but we want to make sure we are doing the right things in the right way before we accept that invitation," Beckett explained. "The urgency of the first weeks has been eased because all the children have been placed with extended family or friends. What we will be doing is organizing a system that will provide support for those children and their caregivers along with counseling services and a structure to ensure the children are treated safely."

Children's Emergency Relief International also has been asked to train government social workers who will staff the program.

Beckett anticipates building several "camp facilities," which can provide day care and summer programs.

“The families who care for them need time to put their own lives back together and resume their jobs,” he said. “This will free them to do that as well as offer the children educational, recreational and counseling programs.”

Beyond that, needs will surface as the government and Beckett’s agency watch the program unfold.

“The Lord may turn us to the right or to the left,” he pointed out. “But he’s been in the center of this from the first, so we can trust him to keep us where he wants us to be.”

One possibility informally raised by government officials is to minister to a group of 70 “child criminals” imprisoned by the Tamil insurgents who have waged war against the central government for more than two decades.

“The details were pretty skimpy, but the government and the Tamil leaders agree it is a group that needs attention,” Beckett said. “It is definitely something we will be looking into.”

Beckett, his wife, Kim, and their 4-year-old daughter, Eva, had made the permanent move to Sri Lanka exactly one week before the tsunami hit. In fact, they spent Christmas day at the beach near Colombo, “just relaxing and enjoying the country.” Less than 24 hours later, the country’s beaches, including the one where they relaxed, were littered with an estimated 30,000 dead and hundreds of thousands of shattered homes and businesses.

Beckett, a member of Curry Creek Baptist Church in Boerne, had worked on disaster relief teams with the Texas Baptist Men, so he put in a call to the group to see if they could help. When the first reports of numerous orphans were broadcast, Mrs. Beckett reminded her husband of his trip to Moldova with Children’s Emergency Relief International and how impressed he had been with the agency’s work setting up that country’s

foster care program.

When the government said they would welcome that help, he called Kevin Dinnin, president of Baptist Child & Family Services, and five days later, a Children's Emergency Relief International team was on the ground assessing child care needs.

The Beckett family flew back to Sri Lanka March 24 after a three-week crash course in childcare in San Antonio. Beckett experienced the whole spectrum of Baptist Child & Family Services childcare, including foster care, emergency shelters, intervention programs and counseling.

Hours were spent with agency administrators crafting procedures and guidelines for the program that would maintain the ability to take care of the children while being culturally appropriate for the Asian country.

That task was enhanced by the involvement of Janet Perera, a Sri Lankan who has lived in the United States 20 years. She is a counselor with the Dallas Independent School District and earned her counseling certification at Dallas Baptist University.

She was in the country for Christmas when the tsunami hit but already was flying home when the government announced it was ready to enlist counselors. Frustrated, Perera contacted another agency that was sending a counseling team—but was told since she wasn't a member of the organization she couldn't go. Instead "they sent a group who had no knowledge of the people or the country," she said.

Faculty at DBU referred her to Texas Baptist Men who, in turn, put her in touch with Baptist Child & Family Services and Children's Emergency Relief International.

She took vacation time to spend two days advising on the standards.

“I’m very impressed with what CERI is putting together,” she said. “Everyone is so dedicated to doing the best for the children and that includes knowing what will work in the culture and what won’t. But they are going to be able to do a lot of good.”

The agency will offer individuals and groups the opportunity to sponsor specific Sri Lankan children who are covered by the foster care program. Monthly contributions will provide not only financial support for the child's living expenses, but also a portion that will be set aside in a savings account for the child's use upon turning 18 and aging out of the program.

“Primarily, that fund will be for college education to ensure a better economic future,” Dinnin explained.

“We learned early on that we weren’t very good at seeing where our involvement in Sri Lanka would lead,” he added. “God continues to open new doors to help children and families and to bring amazing people—like David and Kim—into our ministries.

“We’re just going to try to be faithful to his leadership and to be good stewards of the resources Texas

Baptists and our other friends have given us to invest in Sri Lanka. I can hardly wait to see what happens next.”

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention ( SBC ) and around the world.

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# **BaptistWay Bible Series for April 3: God gives direction in the use of his gifts\_40305**

March 29, 2005

Posted: 3/23/05

**BaptistWay Bible Series for April 3**

## **God gives direction in the use of his gifts**

Leviticus 25:8-17, 23-24, 35-43

**By Wayne Smith**

*First Baptist Church, Lamesa*

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March 29, 2005

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