We are currently in a series of sermons on Ephesians 1 that I am calling, “God’s Supreme Purpose.” The Apostle Paul’s emphasis in chapter 1 is not on what we must do for salvation, but rather on what God has done for us in Christ.

After the introductory greeting (Ephesians 1:1-2), the Apostle Paul begins the longest sentence and doxology in the entire Bible in verse 3 (and concludes at the end of verse 14). He writes, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.” This verse introduces us to an astonishing description of how God saves sinners. In verses 4-14 we learn that our salvation was planned by the Father (1:4-6), purchased by the Son (1:7-12), and sealed by the Holy Spirit (1:13-14). So, in Ephesians 1:3-14 Paul blesses God for having blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing.

The second part of Ephesians 1 is a prayer. In Ephesians 1:15-23 Paul prays that God will open our eyes to grasp the fullness of the blessing that is ours in Christ.

A healthy Christian will follow Paul’s example of keeping in mind God’s blessings. In addition, a healthy Christian will also express gratitude to God for those blessings. Sometimes Christians struggle in their walk with the Lord because they seek new spiritual blessings, apparently unaware that God has already blessed them with every spiritual blessing in Christ. On the other hand, other Christians place such a great emphasis on what is already theirs in Christ that they do not seem to experience their Christian privileges more fully. What we learn from Paul in Ephesians 1 is that God wants Christians to know all their blessings in Christ, and also to keep praying that we may know the fullness of all that he has given us.

That, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, is my prayer for each one of you!
The TBPC Missions Committee would like to cordially invite you to attend the 2017 TBPC Missions Conference beginning on Saturday, February 25, 2017.

This conference serves as a great opportunity to meet the missionaries that our church supports. In addition, we can learn the prayer needs of each of our missionaries and rejoice at how God’s Word is being shared throughout the world. Esaie Etienne from Haiti will be the keynote speaker this year and he has selected the theme of “The Witness of the Gospel in the City” for the conference. We will also be joined by the Vander Ploegh, Adawonu, and Newman families.

On Saturday evening February 25 at 6 pm the Mission’s Committee will be hosting our first annual Chili Cook-off. Sides and fixings will also be provided for the dinner. We are looking for the best Chili recipe in the church. First place will be taking home a trophy and bragging rights for the whole year. If you are participating in the Chili Cook-off, please let Freddy Fritz know.

On Sunday morning February 26 at 8:45 am we will provide another great opportunity to meet our missionaries during the Sunday school time. Our missionaries will rotate between classrooms to answer questions, socialize, and share stories and praises about their work in the mission field. After CF&E, Esaie Etienne will be preaching from the pulpit during our Sunday worship.

After Worship on February 26 at 12:30 pm everyone is invited to join the Missions Committee and our missionaries for lunch. We are planning to eat at a local restaurant; more details to follow about the location.

Please make some time the weekend of February 25 to attend the Saturday dinner and Sunday events for the 2017 TBPC Missions Conference. If you plan to attend any of the events, please sign up on the welcome card to allow us to plan accordingly.
SUNDAY, JANUARY 29 NTCA SCHOLARSHIP SUNDAY  Each year our preschool provides scholarship assistance to families who have financial needs. Responding compassionately and with financial help when a family has a crisis situation is an important part of our preschool’s ministry to children and families. We depend entirely upon donations to fund the scholarships that are awarded each year. A special offering will be taken on Sunday, January 29, would you prayerfully consider a contribution to the NTCA scholarship fund?

FEBRUARY HAPPENINGS AT TBPC

MONDAY, JANUARY 30 – TUESDAY, JANUARY 31 8AM-2PM  NTCA PRIORITY ENROLLMENT – Our church preschool, New Tampa Christian Academy (NTCA), will open priority enrollment for TBPC members on Monday, January 30. NTCA offers an early childhood development morning program for children who are two, three, or four years of age by September 1 of the academic year. All classes meet from 9:00 a.m. until noon with options which include two, three, and five half-day options per week. Regular registration will begin in February and continue on a first come, first served basis until the classes meet their maximums. For more information about the school and/or the registration process, please contact Heather Olsen via email at ntca@newtampachristianacademy.org or phone 813-973-2443.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 19  3:00 PM  NEW MEMBER’S CLASS – Anyone interested in learning more about TBPC is welcome to attend the New Member’s Class at 3:00 p.m. until 7:00 p.m., which includes dinner and childcare. Please write “NMC” on your Welcome Card, contact the Church Office or see Pastor Freddy.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 25  6PM  MISSIONS CHILI COOK-OFF – The Missions Committee is hosting a Chili Cook-off and are seeking the best Chili in the church. If you would like to place your chili in this friendly competition, please contact Luke Egbert (legbert35@yahoo.com or 813.541.3518) or Freddy Fritz (freddyfritz@tampabaypresbyterian.org).

FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

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<tr>
<td>Phil Lear</td>
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<td>Rock Roque</td>
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The Women’s Ministry held its first Sister to Sister gathering of 2017 with our traditional Soup’s On event. We had three homemade soups and lots of wonderful side dishes. Marianne Cali opened our event with prayer and later gave the devotion where she focused on this being a time of new beginnings. As always, her words were inspiring. Twenty-three ladies attended including the daughters of Patty Lugo and Susan McAveety and the guest of Michelle Hunter.

Instead of playing a game, we decided to have an ugly sweater cookie competition. Nancy Kirkpatrick and Joyce McNulty baked several dozen sugar cookies in the shape of a sweater and our task was to decorate them. Oh, what fun, especially when ugly sweaters are so popular during the holidays. Nancy judged our designs and presented prizes to the winners. A partial list includes: Isabel Lugo who had the most exciting and valentine-like. Leann DeStefano’s cookie was the most spring-like design. Most classic award went to Linda Childers. Lillian Ordahl received recognition for the most beautiful design. Nancy presented Gertrude Hunter with the ugliest sweater cookie award. It was all in good fun!

**SAVE THE DATE – BUT REGISTER NOW**

The 2016 PCA Women’s Conference, Transformed: Florida, is being held on March 3-4, 2017 at Covenant Life Church PCA in Sarasota. The purpose of the regional Transformed Conferences is to provide an accessible (geographically, spiritually, financially, generationally, and ethnically) opportunity to encourage and equip all the women of the PCA. Women of ages 14 through 104 are invited to attend to study Romans 11:33-12:2. I have yet to attend one of the conferences but I understand that they are well worth attending. Although the meeting is not until March, Early Registration ($75) ends 1-31-17 and Regular Registration ($100) ends 2-17-17. Hotel rooms are going fast. I have my reservation; do you have yours? See you there.

For more information and registration information:
President Donald Trump. How does that sound? If you’re part of the wave of voters who relish his promise to make America great again, it probably sounds pretty good.

But can he do it? Can President Trump truly make America great? Well, that all depends on how one defines “great.” President Trump made clear during the campaign what he intended to do as president. His “Positions” website outlined the major issues he would focus on as president and his action plans for doing so.

The president’s “Contract with the American Voter” outlines the actions he intends to take in his first hundred days in office. It includes six measures to clean up the corruption and special-interest collusion in Washington, DC, seven actions to protect American workers, and five actions to restore security and the rule of law. It also addresses some broader measures he intends to work with Congress to enact during those early days such as middle-class tax relief and the repeal and replacement of Obamacare.

His remaining listed positions are these: Child Care, Constitution and Second Amendment, Cybersecurity, Economy, Education, Energy, Foreign Policy and defeating ISIS, Health Care, Immigration, National Defense, Regulations, Tax Plan, Trade and, Veterans Affairs Programs.

Certainly, all of these are important, but they are principally focused on material things. If the president succeeded in optimizing all of them, would our nation truly be great? No doubt we’d be safer, healthier, more affluent, better educated, more respected in the world, and less dependent on other nations for essential products and services. Even so, would that ensure our country would be considered great?

Only if true greatness is measured by material things or power over others. But it’s not, is it? Many a man has amassed power and riches yet was not thought to be truly great: Joseph Stalin, Adolph Hitler, Saddam Hussein, for example. Why, instead, were they on the list of the world’s miscreants? What were they missing?

They lacked perhaps the most essential attribute of true greatness: character. Their motives were impure, their actions despicable.

To be truly great, nations must possess great character. How’re we doing on that? Not good enough and continuing to decline. Just in the last few years, we’ve seen enormous shifts in our national culture that are constantly, energetically and boldly shrinking the boundaries of depravity:

• While the murder of millions of babies per year for any reason at all or no reason is already a national disgrace, we learned in 2015 that pro-death organizations could stoop even lower when the Center for Medical Progress revealed that selling body parts from some of those aborted babies has become a money-making venture for organizations like Planned Parenthood.

"The time for empty talk is over."*1

President Donald J. Trump Inaugural Address, January 20th 2017
• Despite the fact that religious freedom is enshrined in our Constitution’s first amendment, it has of late been relegated to a status where it’s simply another interest that must be balanced on an equal footing with competing interests, notwithstanding the fact that the opposing interest is not called out in the Constitution (e.g.: the idea that a woman should have a right to abort a baby at her employer’s expense notwithstanding that the employer’s faith prohibits that action).

• While homosexual behavior was long considered aberrant in America, the fall of standards such as the Defense of Marriage Act and Don’t Ask/Don’t Tell along with the Supreme Court’s legalization of homosexual marriage demonstrate that homosexuality is now completely normalized, so much so that often those who don’t enthusiastically endorse it are considered bigots (e.g. bakers and florists) and are often sued to the point of losing their livelihood for politely refusing to tacitly endorse something that opposes the tenets of their faith).

8Worse yet, the transgender movement is pushing hard against the social mores that proceeded from the Christian faith of our ancestors by a pervasive information campaign and legal action that leaves nothing to chance. How bad is it? “By the fall of [this year], kindergartners (emphasis added) in Washington State will be taught to understand the range of gender roles, identities and expression across cultures” using tools such as The Gender Unicorn. Are you ready to daily disabuse your 5-year-olds of the fallacies their teachers—who you’ve told them to respect—are telling them?

• The object, of course, is to indoctrinate our children early and often so they will be full-fledged transgender adherents by the time they’re adults.

• Speaking of adults, many of America’s college students have bought into the transgender meme. Just check out what they have to say in man-on-the-street interviews at Seattle University about gender. Here’s a sample from a video produced by the Family Policy Institute of Washington:
  
  • It’s fluid
  • There’s no real difference between men and women
  • There may be a difference between men and women, but I don’t know why I think that
  • There is no need for that difference to exist scientifically and logically
  • If you think you’re a male, or if you think you’re a female, that matters more than biology

Are you ready to respond in a thought-provoking way to that sort of nonsense?

Meanwhile, basic respect for others, another key tenet of character, continues to fall further and further out of style. Perfect example: Recently, four Chicago teens tortured a mentally ill teen while streaming the event live on facebook and later posed arrogantly and defiantly for their mug shots. At the first hearing for the teen
assailants, Judge Maria Kuriakos Ciesil posed a question to them that is apt for our country at large: “Where was your sense of decency?”11 Where indeed. Relativism tends to erase character qualities like decency.

Yet neither President Trump’s campaign positions nor his Contract with the American People nor his inaugural address focused on any plans to elevate America’s character and heal our plummeting culture. Why not?

It’s not his job; it’s ours.

Cultural healing can’t be legislated nor implemented by executive orders nor decided by our Supreme Court. More often than not, laws simply reflect culture rather than shape it.

Just as a spiritual revival isn’t sparked from a country’s seat of power, neither is a revival of character. The deliberate, steadfast efforts of common citizens is the essential antidote to the narrative that claims the evils of old are now good, and what was thought to be good for centuries in America is now evil.

The late Chuck Colson put it another way: “The Kingdom of God won’t arrive on Air Force One.” Colson was the Chief of Staff to President Nixon and went to prison for crimes he confessed related to the Watergate scandal of the early 70s.

He is best known as founder of Prison Fellowship and for his daily Breakpoint radio commentaries. At the time of his death, he had become one of the nation’s foremost thinkers on worldviews and their impact. That work spawned what is now known as The Chuck Colson Center for Christian Worldview.12 One of the Center’s principle focus areas is The Colson Fellows Program which “educates people of strong faith with relevant skills, biblical knowledge, and a solid Christian worldview, [so they can] navigate today’s culture and re-shape it in a way that is pleasing to God.”

If you don’t like the direction our culture is going and want to help make it great again, there are just two steps you need to take. First get ready via worldview training (from the Colson Center13 and/or one of the numerous organizations they partner with”14). Then get into the fray!

To borrow from President Trump’s Inaugural address, the time for empty talk about our culture is over; it’s now time for action.

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1 https://www.whitehouse.gov/inaugural-address
2 Image: http://tinyurl.com/hdu42j2
3 https://www.donaldj trump.com/positions
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11http://tinyurl.com/hbwxiqc
12 http://www.colsoncenter.org/about-us
13 http://tinyurl.com/jus29he
14 http://www.breakpoint.org/connections/ministry-partners
MOST RECENTLY RECEIVED MISSIONARY PRAYER REQUESTS

Peter and Lauren Dishman prayers:
- For a core of Christian students this semester who really are beginning to understand how the gospel of grace changes everything.
- For students in the English clubs to have hearts open to discussing the big questions of life.
- For endurance as Lauren continues her Spanish learning throughout her pregnancy.
- For our adjustment to becoming a cross-cultural family of three in May.

Rene and Lilly Palacio Prayers:
- Rene as he continues with regular responsibilities, as well as serving as acting Deputy Director for the Americas until the end of February and for Lilli as she assists him.
- SIM Sudan team, evacuated to Kenya because of the resurgence of civil unrest.
- Carachipampa Christian School (CCS) in Bolivia – The government is making it increasingly difficult to keep the missionary English speaking school open as they make further demands for the school to be “Bolivianized” and operate on the Bolivian School calendar. Pray for resolution, for wisdom and sensitivity and for our missionaries to be effective and intentional in making disciples of Christ. Pray for the SIM Bolivia leadership as they give direction and care, with great cultural understanding, to country staff.
- The preparation and submission of reports for the SIM Board and Finance Committee meetings, which will be held in Bolivia at the end of February.
- Safety in travel for all Board members to the meetings in Sucre, Bolivia, and for the scheduled ministry visits. We pray the visits and interaction would be an encouragement to the SIM Board Members.

Andrew & Meghan Newman Prayers:
- Prayer for us as a family as we continue to get settled in. My wife Meghan is really enjoying staying home and is working remotely for about 10 hours a week. My son is getting older and will turn 2 in March. Pray that we continue to transition smoothly and get more connected to the community.
- Prayer for fundraising. I did a good amount of work over the holiday break, but still have a lot to do. Pray that I would meet individuals and churches that can continue to support the work. And I am very thankful for TBPC.
- Pray for our ministry team. We started a ministry team this semester and I hope that it will be a blessing for the ministry. We meet twice a month and the students on the team help out with all different aspects - from nametags to social media.
- Pray for outreach/evangelism on campus. I have a desire for students to come to know the Lord - but I pray for an even greater desire. And I also hope that our group is welcoming and inviting to students from all kinds of backgrounds.