



The Christian Index

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The church for the unchurched: how Cascade Hills got its DNA

By Scott Barkley
Web Content Editor

The people at Cascade Hills Church in Columbus are ... different.

They can barely name any top evangelical authors. They're not familiar with the latest Christian music hits. Ask about their favorite church-growth conference speaker, and you may be disappointed by their lack of familiarity.

But, strike up a conversation about Bible characters, doctrine, or how they came to know Christ? There, you'll get input. That's because church members don't know a whole lot about church culture, since few of them came from one.

"We intentionally refuse to pursue members of another church since we don't believe that is of God," says Pastor Bill Purvis. "We will not hurt another pastor or church."

Instead Cascade Hills' focus lies, Purvis stresses, with those unfamiliar with church or don't do church – they might even like church. That pursuit is real, though, as Cascade Hills somehow sees growth even while losing some 350-400 people each year through military transfers at nearby Ft. Benning.

A focus on prayer and



Bill Purvis, right, and his son **Brent** serve as co-pastors of Cascade Hills Baptist Church in Columbus. CASCADE HILLS/Special

that Labrador-on-a-tennis-ball desire to tell others about Christ has transformed Cascade Hills into one of the more evangelistically-minded churches in the Georgia Baptist Convention, as evidenced by the congregation's baptizing over 400 people last year.

Building a foundation

"Twenty-five years ago, with 11 people [from our congregation], we began what came to be called The Pastors Prayer Partner Ministry," Purvis says. "It's been used by God to shape

the hearts of our disciples. Because of it we naturally grew deeper in love, unity, power, compassion, and faith.

"Jesus said, 'My Father's House is to be a house of Prayer.' We've discovered that both biblical evangelism and discipleship result with this foundation."

The process eventually produced a book, *Pastors Prayer Partners*, that outlines what has become a ministry encompassing more than 1,100 church members praying daily and during each of Cascade Hills' four weekend worship services.

Each week Purvis and his son Brent, who serves as co-pastor, preach to a crowd that can identify with a lifestyle devoid of Christ. It's a lifestyle Bill remembers.

Changed by Christ

On April 28, 1974 Bill Purvis lay dying in the parking lot of a run-down theater, blood leaving his body from three stabs of a butcher knife. Cascade Hills' website recalls that "right then and there at a light pole ... he repented of his sins and cried out to God, receiving Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Savior."

On Easter Sunday in 1983 Purvis – joined by his wife, Debbie – accepted the call to become pastor of Cascade Hills, a congregation born in 1956.

According to annual Church Profile Reports, Cascade Hills baptized one person the year Purvis arrived. Five were baptized the next year. For the rest of the 80s the congregation would see no fewer than 21 baptized annually.

Baptisms jumped consid-

erably in the early 90s, right around the time Cascade Hills began The Pastors Prayer Partner Ministry. Since then, the church has averaged 364 baptisms annually. In 2016 the church baptized 472 people, the most among GBC churches.

A daily need

In early 2015 the number of people wanting to be baptized became a pressing matter. Periodic scheduling of baptisms didn't work because too many were ready to go under the water, right then. So, Cascade Hills constructed a temperature-controlled outdoor baptismal pool that can be used year-round.

And it gets used. Daily.

"It had become challenging to open the church every day of the week," remembers Purvis. "We've never covered the pool since it was built."

Various staff members help conduct baptisms, including Bob Hawkins, associate pastor of evangelism and baptism.

"We'll do them any time of the day or night," says Hawkins. "Once, it was at 10 p.m., 25 degrees, and with a 25 mph wind." The droplets coming off the small waterfall at the pool, he adds, "felt like needles."

"We have so many decisions. I'm calling people on a constant basis to set up baptism, go over their testimony, learn their story. We have a really neat system here," he adds.

What works

As Cascade Hills grew, Purvis acknowledges that at times things had to be deter-

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Shorter University Graduate's Path from The Hill

By Shorter University

ROME — Shorter

University graduate Aaron Harper went from the university's campus, lovingly known as The Hill, to Capitol Hill for a summer internship in the office of Congressman Mike Rogers (R-AL). As he served as one of four interns, Harper gained experiences that are already proving beneficial as he begins work on his law degree at Faulkner University Law School in Montgomery.

"Coming from Rome to a big city like Washington, D.C., is fantastic," Harper said in an email interview this summer. "There is always something happening, even in our office building (the Rayburn Office Building, which is where Congressman Rogers' office is). Just the other day, I met Congresswoman Karen Handle, who was recently elected in the most expensive campaign ever. Ben Shapiro, who is a famous political editor, writer, and commentator for 'The Daily Wire,' testified before Congress right down the hall from my office. I even got the chance to meet Rick Harrison, who got famous through his widely popular show on the History Channel called 'Pawn Stars.'"

The majority of the work of the interns was answering phones and talking with constituents, Harper explained. "We also ran bills to different



Shorter University graduate **Aaron Harper**, right, stands with Alabama Congressman **Mike Rogers** (R). Rogers experienced Washington D.C. as an intern in Rogers' office this summer. SHORTER/Special

committees and helped give tours, but it was mostly comprised of answering phones.

Harper said the experience allowed him to put into practice the principles he had experienced firsthand in his interactions with faculty at Shorter. "A lot of the internship is interacting with constituents. Whether those interactions are over the phone or in the office, we want to treat them respectfully. There was never a time when I went into a professor's office at Shorter and they did not treat me with respect. I think that goes a long way when building relationships,

which is what we want to do with our constituents."

Harper is the son of David Harper, chair of the university's Board of Trustees, and Beverly Harper, a Shorter graduate who serves as administrative assistant to the dean of Shorter's School of Fine and Performing Arts. His brother, Andrew, is a 2014 graduate of Shorter University. Aaron received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Shorter at the end of August with a major in history and a minor in education.

He returned home from Washington, D.C., in August

to find he had been called off the waiting list to begin law school at Faulkner University. He quickly made the decision to accept the offer and relocate to Montgomery. Of the future, Harper said he would like to work in politics, working his way up to being a legislative assistant to a congressman.

Justin Pettegrew, associate professor of history, said he expects to see great results in Harper's future. "Aaron was a naturally intelligent student whose academic prowess improved throughout his years here at Shorter. He was particularly gifted at oral presentations and he was a leader in group discussions. No doubt, his internship for Congressman Mike Rogers provided Aaron with real-world experience that helped him gain entrance to law school and will help him as he studies law. I'm excited to see how the Lord will use Aaron to impact America in the years to come."

Charles Charter, assistant professor of history at Shorter, agreed. "I have been privileged to instruct Aaron in several courses at Shorter University and consistently found him to be a sharp thinker, a fair and balanced judge of published scholarship, a clear and cogent writer, and an articulate discussant. I am sure he will excel in his pursuit of law studies."

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mined as necessary. Was this particular method of teaching, music, or strategy reaching people? Did it draw them closer to Christ? No cow was sacred enough to get in the way of pursuing the lost.

"Since the overwhelming majority of our church

members came by conversion and never attended another church, we have less religious tradition to overcome," Purvis points out. To that point, Cascade Hills' body includes some of Columbus' wealthiest and poorest citizens.

Those with another

religious background have joined, too. "One of the 'highlight days' for me was when we saw – in one service – two people of the Jewish faith, two of the Muslim faith, and a young Hindu lady all coming to Jesus. I'll treasure that experience forever!" Purvis exclaims.

"We don't hide behind the walls of the church and fear the world. We know the biblical gospel works. Nothing changes a life like the power of God, and His power comes when He is present!"

Our theme for the Mission Georgia Offering this year is Generosity. It is a privilege to be generous when it comes to accomplishing the work God has given us to do.

With that brief introduction, I want to introduce you to Johnny Jennings, his wife, Gwen, and his son, Brent. This is a fine Georgia Baptist family who has demonstrated remarkable generosity expressed in gifts to the Georgia Baptist Children's Homes and Family Ministries.

I had the privilege yesterday of visiting with Johnny and his family in their Ringgold home. Johnny, who is in his 80s, has been a strong advocate for the Georgia Baptist Children's Homes for many years and a faithful member of their

board. Since 1985, Johnny has been collecting tin cans and paper, having it recycled, and using the money earned to make gifts to the Children's Homes.

You may find this remarkable, as I certainly did, in raising funds by selling cans and papers, Johnny Jennings has raised more than \$408,000, which he has given to the Children's Homes ministry. When I heard that number, I was absolutely astonished as I am sure you are. It demonstrates what one person with a heart for doing the work of God can accomplish.

As I sat in Johnny and Gwen's family room recently, Johnny told me how for years now he has been collecting loose change for the purpose of donating it to

the Children's Homes. He is a member at Burning Bush Baptist Church, where they have placed collection jars in the Sunday School classrooms and many are participating in this giving opportunity.

It was interesting to know, and Johnny was excited to tell me, that he has collected 26 miles of pennies. He informed me that it takes 18 pennies to make a foot. Based on that calculation, he was able to determine that he has collected 26 miles of pennies.

At that point, Brent made this comment, "If every Sunday School class throughout the Georgia Baptist Mission Board would collect loose change for the Children's Homes, the Children's Homes would never again have a financial challenge."



J. Robert White
Executive Director

Johnny said, "Our collection of change has been done under a theme I developed called 'Your change could change lives at our Georgia Baptist Children's Homes.'"

I thought to myself, "What a wonderful idea!"

Isn't it amazing how one person demonstrating generosity can be so contagious that it encourages many others to also become generous? My prayer is that Johnny Jennings will have that kind of impact all across Georgia.

EDITORIAL

The PubMed Health Glossary defines Psychosis as "a severe mental disorder in which a person loses the ability to recognize reality or relate to others. Symptoms include being paranoid, having false ideas about what is taking place or who one is, and seeing, hearing, or feeling things that are not there."

Based on this definition it would appear that transgendered individuals are suffering from some kind of serious psychosis. Whether a transgendered person is psychotic, schizophrenic, or has a Dissociative Identity Disorder, he/she needs help. We should not be trying to normalize or facilitate their behavior, but provide love, compassion, and whatever counseling or therapy that is available.

Some have even called transgendered individuals dysfunctional. "Dysfunctional" is defined as "not performing normally, an abnormal or impaired functioning of a bodily system or organ."

If a marriage or a family is dysfunctional, that family needs counseling and sometimes intervention in order to halt the conflict, misbehavior, and sometimes child neglect or abuse in order to resolve the problems. It would be tragic to do anything that would exacerbate or aggravate the problems that have created the turmoil or improper behavior.

If an individual has psychological problems or dysfunctions like a bipolar disorder, post-traumatic syndrome, or a panic disorder it would be unseemly or patently indecorous to do anything to contribute to the mental and emotional pain that person is experiencing.

So, if someone is suffering from a gender identity problem or who has determined that he/she does not feel comfortable with his/her sexuality, why would we want to complicate matters for them by encouraging them to pursue a sexual identity contrary to the way God created them?

According to a FOX news report last year Caitlyn Jenner, formerly Bruce Jenner, was experiencing regret over transitioning from male to female and was considering a reversal of that decision. Jenner later denied any interest in detransitioning, but other sources indicated that Caitlyn hinted of "sex change regret."

God created us male and female. If we abandon our biological sex can God's purpose for our lives be fulfilled? Is God glorified through one attempting to change his/her sexual identity? Christianity Today asks these additional questions: "Is it morally permissible for a doctor to remove healthy organs? Is it acceptable to give puberty-delaying drugs to children who feel gender conflict? Is it ethical for society to require people to live as one gender if they identify strongly with the other?"

Although a growing percentage of Americans believe there is nothing morally



J. Gerald Harris
Editor

wrong with someone wanting to change their God-given sexuality, it is difficult for me to concede it is God's will or within the framework of biblical morality.

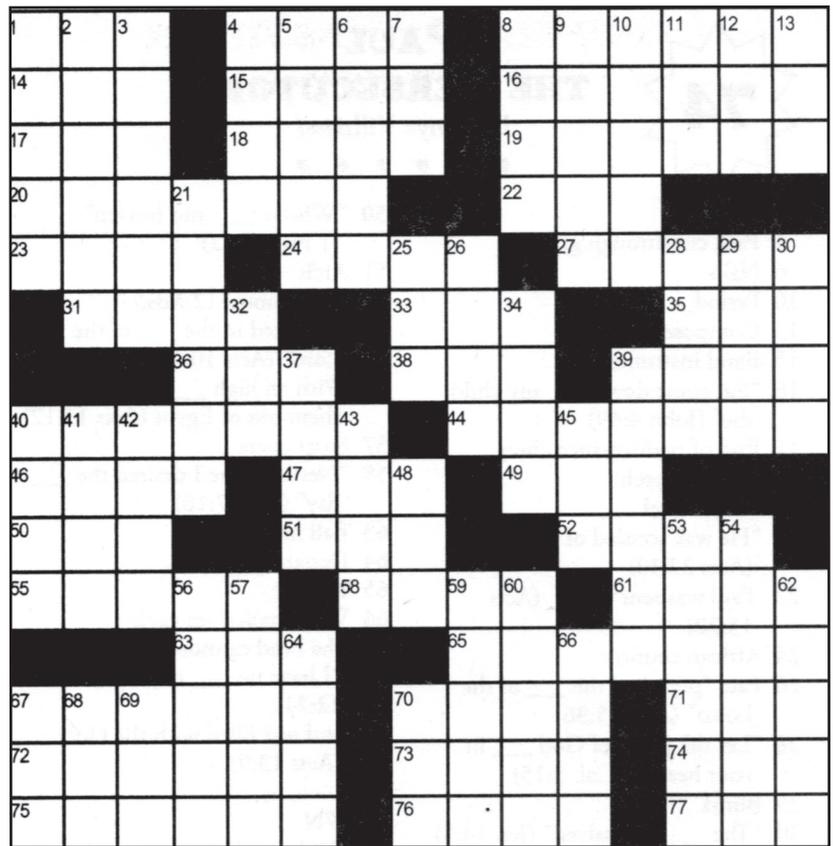
The point is we do not do well when we attempt to facilitate someone's perceived sexuality. When we do that, we not only enhance the pathway to their psychological and emotional distress, but succumb to the agenda of a secular world's push for no moral absolutes.

May God help those who are trapped in a sexual identity crisis!

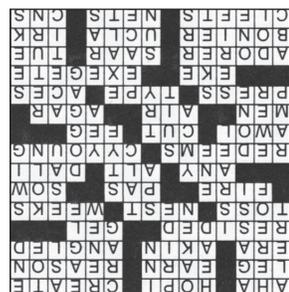
And may God help us all!

ACROSS

- 1. “___, she is broken” (Ezek. 26:2)
- 4. Southwestern American tribe
- 8. “___ in me a clean heart” (Ps. 51:10)
- 14. Make bare the ___ (Isa. 47:2)
- 15. Obtain
- 16. “I cried by ___” (Jonah 2:2)
- 17. Time period
- 18. Similar
- 19. Fished
- 20. Dwelled
- 22. Hair product
- 23. “___ thee like a ball” (Isa. 22:18)
- 24. “Set thy ___ among the stars” (Obad. 1:4)
- 27. “Three full ___” (Dan. 10:2)
- 31. “The house of Jacob shall be a ___” (Obad. 1:18)
- 33. Doctors for car safety
- 35. “Thou shalt ___,” (Mic. 6:15)
- 36. “Neither shall be ___ more” (Joel 2:2)
- 38. Option (abbr.)
- 39. Painter of melting clocks
- 40. “Thou that savest by thy right hand,” as in Ps. 17:7, does this
- 44. Best pitcher award (2 wds.)
- 46. Military leave without permission
- 47. “Essau may be ___ off” (Obad. 1:9)
- 49. Tracking electrical impulses of the brain
- 50. “All the ___ of thy confederacy”
- (Obad. 1:7)
- 51. “Behold the fowls of the ___” (Matt. 6:26)
- 52. Mount Sinai in Arabia (Gal. 4:25)
- 55. “The ___ is full” (Joel 3:13)
- 58. Classification
- 61. Experts
- 63. Stretch to make do
- 65. Interpreter
- 67. A worshipper of God, as in John 9:31
- 70. France and Germany river
- 71. Day of the week (abbr.)
- 72. Skinner
- 73. California univ.
- 74. Make angry
- 75. “The ___ of the rock” (Obad. 1:3)
- 76. “The spreading of ___ in the midst of the sea” (Ezek. 26:5)
- 77. Nervous sys.



- 9. “___ a right spirit within me.” (Ps. 51:10)
- 10. “Exalt thyself as the ___” (Obad. 1:4)
- 11. Communication method
- 12. “The great ___ of his right foot” (Lev. 14:28)
- 13. “An utter ___ of the place” (Nah. 1:8)
- 21. Captivity of the children of ___ (Obad. 1:20)
- 25. Resort hotel
- 26. Baby powder
- 28. “The house of ___ for stubble” (Obad. 1:18)
- 29. Cologne (Gr.)
- 30. Quick drink
- 32. Bethlehem to Bethany (dir.)
- 34. Eye infection
- 37. Song by the Village People
- 39. Muzzle (2 wds.)
- 40. Freeway entrance
- 41. Earthen vessel, perhaps, as in Lev. 6:28
- 42. “As thou hast ___, it shall be done unto thee” (Obad. 1:15)
- 43. “Many shall make ___ unto thee” (Job 11:19)
- 45. “___, they shall drink” (Obad. 1:16)
- 48. “Will ___ them as gold is tried” (Zech. 13:9)
- 53. Vinegar is this
- 54. “For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou ___” (Gen. 3:19)
- 56. Stems of letters
- 57. Trapshooting
- 59. “The men that were at ___ with thee” (Obad. 1:7)
- 60. To glorify, as in Obad. 1:4
- 62. Searches
- 64. Goofs
- 66. Time periods
- 67. TV station
- 68. Pain measurement
- 69. “Even thou was as ___ of them” (Obad. 1:11)
- 70. God will cause the ___ to go down at noon (Amos 8:9)



DOWN

- 1. Notify
- 2. “The fame ___ went abroad” (Matt. 9:26)
- 3. Tennis player Andre
- 4. “Thy reward shall return upon thine own ___” (Obad. 1:15)
- 5. Made of oak
- 6. “The ___ of thine heart hath deceived thee” (Obad. 1:3)
- 7. “There was no room for them in the ___” (Luke 2:7)
- 8. “Upon the ___ of the rock” (Job 39:28)



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This special edition of The Christian Index is distributed online bi-weekly at www.christianindex.org to provide additional content to readers who prefer a print version of the publication. To read additional stories of how God is working through Georgia Baptists, visit the website daily for stories that inspire and inform.

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