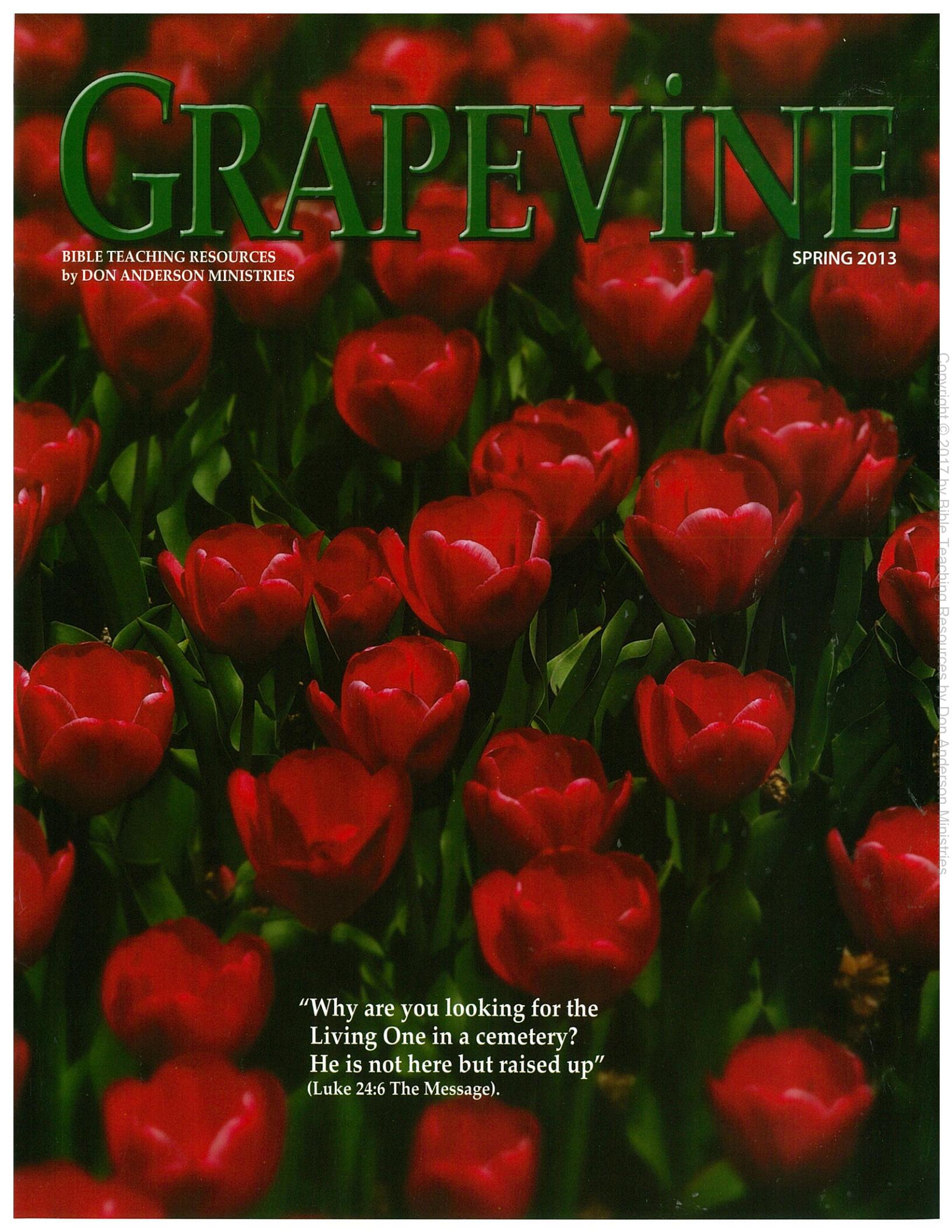


GRAPEVINE



BIBLE TEACHING RESOURCES
by DON ANDERSON MINISTRIES

SPRING 2013

**"Why are you looking for the
Living One in a cemetery?
He is not here but raised up"
(Luke 24:6 The Message).**

Cover Ups Fear the Consequences

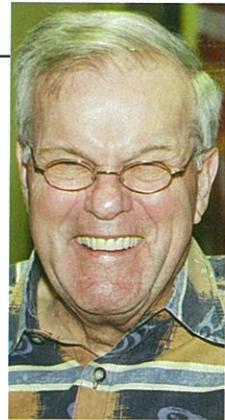
On the national and international scene, charges of cover ups abound. We need not give details. A cover up signals a desire to avoid consequences, a failure of leadership, a dereliction of duty, sometimes even a loss of life.

Solomon warns of the consequences of cover ups in Proverbs 28:13: "People who cover over their sins will not prosper. But if they confess and forsake them, they will receive mercy" (NLT).

David also says to come clean: "Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight! Yes, what joy for those whose record the LORD has cleared of guilt, whose lives are lived in complete honesty! When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long. Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat. Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, 'I will confess my rebellion to the LORD.' And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone" (Psalm 32:1-5 NLT).

There was a cover up attempt at the time of the resurrection. The empty tomb bred dependence on God in some hearts, a desire to deceive in others. A great cover up was concocted to explain away one of the best documented facts in human history: the resurrection of the Christ.

Matthew wrote to convince his mostly Jewish audience that Jesus Christ was king, the promised messiah making a valid offer of the kingdom they longed for, and that he was rejected and crucified. Let's turn to Matthew 28 and see some of the first scoffers. We'll be using my personal translation of the Greek text.



The Religious Establishment's Reaction— Matthew 28:11–15

Now while they were going on their way, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened. And when they had assembled with the elders and counseled together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, "You are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were sleeping.' And if this should come to the governor's ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble." And they took the money and did as they had been instructed; and this story was widely spread among the Jews, and is to this day. (DAV)

Let's back up in Matthew just a bit to set the stage for this chapter's events. The first seven verses of chapter 28 tell us about the women's early Easter morning excursion to the empty tomb. An earthquake had occurred; the stone in front of the tomb's entrance was rolled away by an angel; the guards had fled, and an angel waited within to give the women the glorious news that the Lord was alive and was planning to see His disciples.

We pick up the action as the guards, frightened because their charge was missing, entered Jerusalem to relate the incredible news to the chief priests. We'll witness how the religious establishment—the Pharisees and Sadducees composing the Jewish governing body or Sanhedrin—dealt with the whole episode. These leaders were the ones with the most to lose materially and socially if this Jesus were truly the messiah. His resurrection would affect their position, pre-eminence, reputation; there would be a new order, a new religion. Much was at stake.

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GRAPEVINE

SPRING 2013

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From the Editor

Now that BTR has officially started its 41st year, we can think of no better way to launch our spring issue than by revisiting the place that brought Don and Pearl Anderson to Texas 45 years ago: Pine Cove. The East Texas camp and conference center has grown considerably over the decades. We caught up with Pine Cove President and CEO Mario Zandstra recently for updates on Pine Cove's expanding facilities and relatively new Base Camp program. Thanks to Mario and Pine Cove's Kathy Lawrence for their time and assistance with the article. We hope you'll enjoy the Pine Cove pictures as well. Kathy, incidentally, is the daughter in law of BTR's original chairman of the board, the late Bill Lawrence. Thanks also to Walter Wilhelm for his reflections on what Pine Cove has meant to his family.

Finally, won't you consider sponsoring a BTR video conference class this fall? Just contact the office for details.

As always, thank you for your faithful friendship and support. May the Lord richly bless you and yours.

—Jane Rodgers



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Pine Cove: Transforming Lives for 45



It was September 1967. Don and Pearl Anderson left The Firs in Bellingham, Washington, to serve in East Texas at the new Christian camp, Pine Cove on Lake Palestine near Tyler, Texas. In the summer of 1968, Pine Cove played host to over 300 campers. By the time of Don's departure from Pine Cove in 1972, the center featured a full slate of kids and family camps, serving over 2,700 campers.

And Pine Cove has only continued to grow, with over 1,000,000 campers to date.

Today, Pine Cove conducts overnight youth and family camps at the original Lake Palestine location and near Houston, at Columbus, Texas. Summer day camps are held in Tyler and Columbus. An ever expanding "Base Camp" ministry involves Pine Cove staff working in conjunction with local churches and taking the full day camp experience to locations across

Texas and beyond Texas borders, too.

Last summer, Pine Cove served more than 25,000 campers, with 4,000 trusting Christ. This took a lot of workers. Pine Cove recruited summer staff from over 150 colleges and universities, eventually hiring 1,227 college students.

Add to the summer programs a mix of weekend and holiday retreats and the Forge, an eight month discipleship program for young adults, and you get a very full picture. Things are busy at Pine Cove.

We recently caught up with Mario Zandstra, Pine Cove President and CEO, for an update and look to the camp's future. It is bright indeed. Catching up with Mario is a bit of an achievement in itself. He keeps a busy schedule and is often on the road, recruiting and otherwise taking the Pine Cove vision across Texas and beyond.

GV: You came to Pine Cove in 1998. What was your background before that?

Mario: I was a husband, father, dad, in the Dallas business world. I moved from the business world to Pine Cove in April 1998 as a

Years

response to God's call in my life. I was in the commercial real estate business and I took some of the same skills that I had then, which included envisioning something in the future, designing it, and building it.

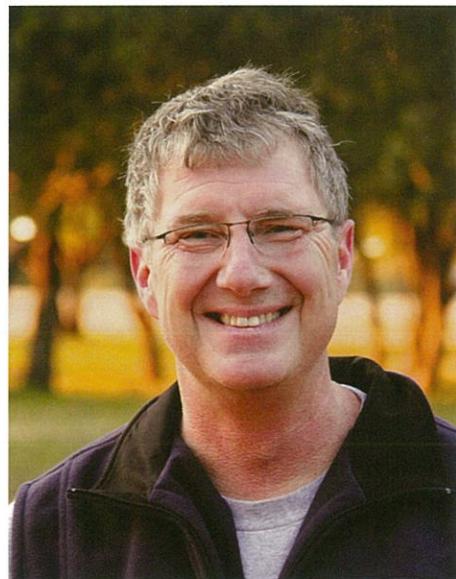
GV: The programs have expanded a lot since 1998.

Mario: We have since gone from three camps to nine camps...5,500 campers in the summer of 1998 to 25,000 last summer. It is a great opportunity to minister to kids and families and tell them about Jesus.

GV: Pine Cove has a relatively new Base Camp program. Tell us about it.

Mario: We create a mobile unit and take our staff to do "day camp" at local churches that we partner with. We have held Base Camps in Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, Louisiana, and Oklahoma. The rest have been in the Dallas, Houston, and Austin areas. We had over 5,000 campers at Base Camp last summer.

It's really a remarkable opportunity. We give the parents a chance to send their kids to a day camp this way. We give the campers a full blown camp experience



at whatever location we are—a city park, inside a church, etc. At McKinney, Texas, we partnered with an organization called 3E, working with 20 area churches. That Base Camp was designed for at risk kids.

GV: Do the churches advertise Base Camp? And what is the cost?

Mario: Eighty percent of the campers come through word of mouth. Twenty-five percent trusted Christ at Base Camp last summer. We even had parents who trusted Christ. We taught the kids how to share Jesus with their parents. Parents

continued on next page





were drawn into a relationship with the Lord as kids talked with them. The churches follow up afterwards. Many parents indicate they are ready to find a church home.

Base Camp runs first through sixth grade. It is priced about the same as daycare. Some churches subsidize campers. It's just a great way to experience camp. Some will even transition to overnight camp.

GV: What about growth in Pine Cove's more traditional camps?

Mario: Yes, we have grown exponentially in our youth camp program, too. That first week in 1998, we had just opened a high school camp and we had 75 campers. Now we have two elementary camps, three middle school camps and a high school camp: six distinctly different youth camps for overnight kids. In Tyler, we have two family camps and four youth camps. In Columbus, there are one family camp and two youth camps. This summer we will open our second youth camp in Columbus: Pine Cove Silverado.

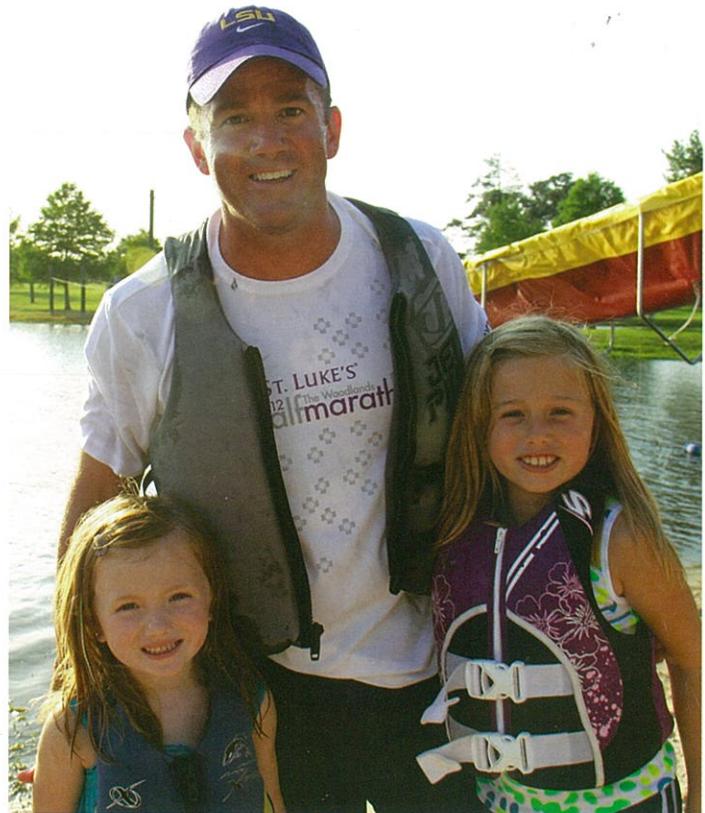
GV: You hire a lot of staff, too.

Mario: We hire great college kids; we train them in a great way, and we expect great things. We want to invest in their lives and let them be used by God.

GV: Pine Cove has come a long way, hasn't it?

Mario: By God's grace we have; however, the truth is we stand on the shoulders of great men and women of days gone by. There's Don Anderson, Phil Hook, and Dan Bolin who were here before me and they were great men of vision and character who helped Pine Cove be what it is. The first summer, there were 300 campers; now there are 25,000.

They were faithful with what they had and we want to be faithful to what we have. We boldly proclaim the gospel, sowing seeds of faith in the lives of our campers.



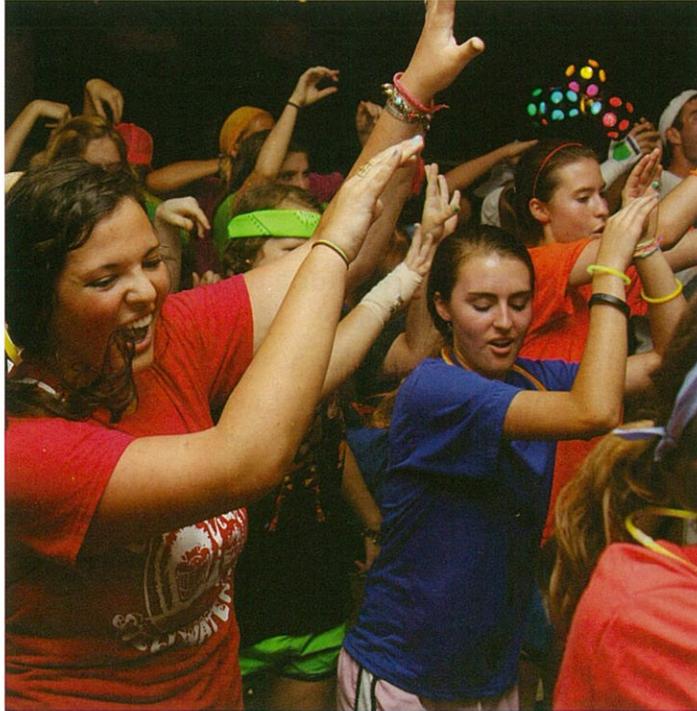


Pine Cove has indeed grown exponentially since those early days in the late 1960s. As Mario and staff would tell you, it is all because of the blessing of God.

Despite the growth, Pine Cove stays true to its mission statement: "Pine Cove exists to be used by God to transform the lives of people for His purposes and His glory."

"God is the transforming agent," according to Mario Zandstra.

If you are considering a summer camp experience for your family, children, grandchildren, we can think of no better place to be than Pine Cove. For information about camps, conferences, programs, facilities, and even scholarships, check out the website: www.pinecove.com.



Homework

Christian camping is a

What do you mean you've never heard of Don Anderson Ministries? It's in your own backyard!" my mother exclaimed as she invited my wife, Ashley, and me to attend a couples conference at Kaleo Lodge, near Van, Texas. We had lived in Tyler, Texas, for about seven years at the time.

My parents, Ron and Martha Bostwick, first became aware of BTR from Don's Sherman, Texas, Bible study class in the early 1990s. From there, my parents regularly attended Don's family camp at Trail West, near Buena Vista, Colorado, with my nephews and nieces.

Mom and Dad had taken my two older sisters and their husbands, separately, to Kaleo the two previous years so I knew "no" would not be an acceptable answer. Besides, the weekend was "free"; it was right after tax season, and my in-laws were going to babysit our two year old daughter, Riley. Deal!

We were amazed at Don's ability through the Holy Spirit to bring the scriptures alive during the studies. The marriage conferences became our time to recharge and we began to invite other couples to enjoy the weekend to carry on the tradition started by our parents. Ashley and I attended the couples conferences at Kaleo Lodge and Salado, Texas, from 1994 to the mid 2000s. We attribute the stability of our 24 years of marriage to the Christ-centered principles we learned during these get away weekends.

My relationship with Don has grown richly through the years as he has guided and mentored me through a career change in 1999, personal hardship in 2003, and spiritually, with my community service in Tyler. Don even baptized our son, Christopher, in 2007! Don and I are also ac-

countability buddies and have met at his office on the first Saturday of every month, excluding the summer months, for the last 10 years. Our meetings together are a time of spiritual encouragement and accountability based upon Proverbs 27:17: "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."

Through the years we've learned of Don's original affiliation with Pine Cove Christian Camps. How ironic it is that as much impact as Don has had on our lives; Pine Cove has had a similar impact on our whole family. Ashley was saved at the Towers camp when she was 9 years old and she also attended the Ranch camp. The drive from her home in Paris, Texas, was only two hours, but her excitement grew as the pine trees grew thicker on the roadways, signaling that Pine Cove was near.

Ashley and I each attended many parent-child weekends with our kids at Pine Cove. As a father of two girls who are now young ladies, those one-on-one father/daughter weekends with each daughter, separately, were the foundation of our relationships through the adolescent and teenage years. I will always be grateful for one of the speakers who challenged the dads one weekend to find ways to "stay in your daughter's world." This was not an easy task for a dad, but with God, nothing is impossible!

Our oldest daughter, Riley, was a Pine Cove camper annually from her first year of day camp to her last year at the Shores camp. She also served as a Baby Ruth (counselor in training) and worked at the Bluffs camp the summer of her freshman year in college. But, the most important thing that happened at Pine Cove during her years as a camper was that Riley gave her life to Christ, and for that, we are eternally grateful.



family investment

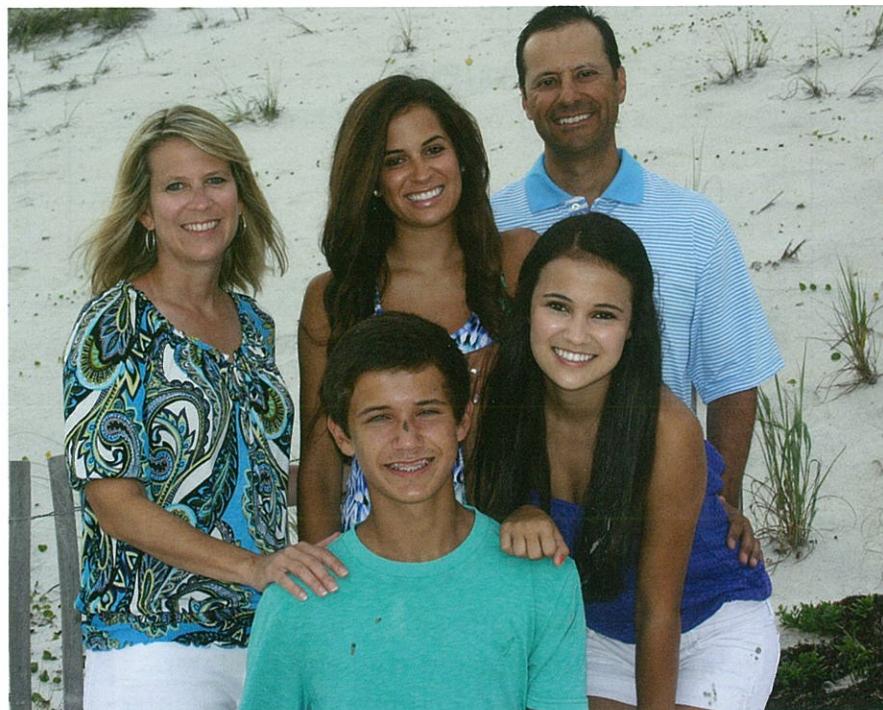
by Walter Wilhelmi

Like Riley, our daughter Madison attended Pine Cove every year from her first year of day camp to her last year at the Shores camp. Madison will serve as an assistant in the Camp in the City program this summer.

One of my most cherished memories of Pine Cove was with Madison at a father/daughter weekend camp at the Towers. During worship, one of the counselors, Moolah, encouraged the dads to go out onto the grounds and share our salvation stories with our daughters. After I shared my salvation story with Madison, she shared hers with me. I had no idea she had given her life to Christ the previous summer. When I asked her why she hadn't told me before then, she responded "You never asked!" Thank you, Moolah! Don always told us the counselors made Pine Cove special and this was another example.

Our son, Christopher, who is five and seven years younger than his sisters, had no choice but to attend Pine Cove! In actuality, he couldn't wait to be old enough for day camp. For years, he would play the putt-putt course when we picked up the girls from the Towers camp. He also attended Pine Cove from his first year of day camp to the Towers and Ranch camps. This summer will be his second year at the Timbers.

Ashley and I were amazed that Christopher wanted to go to Pine Cove so badly that he attended the first two years of the Towers camp BY HIMSELF because his friends didn't want to stay overnight. Not too many eight and nine year old kids were brave enough to attend alone but it just reflected his love for Pine Cove.



We loved picking up all our kids at the closing ceremonies. It's our tradition to eat lunch at a nearby restaurant to hear stories about their week. What an incredible impact the ministry of Pine Cove has had on the Wilhelmi family! The Lord has shown His favor upon our family as a result of our faithful support of this ministry. Who would have known that our mentor and confidant Don Anderson would have been Pine Cove's first executive director? Who would have known that this incredible Christian camp would be in our own backyard, right here in Tyler, Texas?

Providing your sons, daughters, or grandchildren with a camp experience like the ones at Pine Cove will have everlasting rewards.

RECIPE CORNER

Donna's Delights

Thanks to Donna Anderson Skorheim for this delicious soup recipe.

Tater Tot Soup

One 32 oz. bag of frozen tater tots or 12 hash brown patties

2 cans chicken broth

1 stick butter or margarine

6 slices American cheese

1 1/2 cup shredded cheddar cheese

1/2 cup green onions, sliced with tops

1 tsp. minced garlic

2 cups sour cream

2 cups milk

1 tsp. salt

1/2 tsp. pepper

Real bacon bits

In a large pot, combine tater tots and broth over medium heat until mixed well and the tater tots are crumbled. Add remaining ingredients, except the bacon. Stir well, then cover and cook on low for 20 minutes or until hot. Do not boil. Garnish with bacon bits and extra shredded cheese (if desired). Enjoy!

BTR on the radio, Internet & email

Mindanao Praise Radio in the Philippines features Don's teaching 30 minutes a day, Sunday through Friday. **Persevering & Pressing On** first began broadcasting in the Philippines on November 3, 2008.

OnePlace.com broadcasts began October 4, 2004, and continue to be popular. We have received requests from different parts of the world for Bible teaching resources. Check out **Persevering and Pressing On** at www.oneplace.com.

Are you receiving **BTR's Monday morning emails via Constant Contact?** Join the over 500 recipients and start receiving weekly messages featuring scripture, teaching, and quotations to help you start the week. Sign up at www.bibleteachingresources.org.

Goodbye to Genevieve Martin

After more than two decades of being BTR's right hand person, Genevieve Martin has relocated to College Station and is pursuing opportunities there. We saw it coming when Billy took a position at Texas A & M University. Words are inadequate to express our thanks for Genevieve, Billy, and family for all they have done for BTR over these many years. We wish them success and the Lord's richest blessings in their new life in Aggieland!

HE IS NOT HERE,

Technology upgrades

Check out the BTR website, www.bibleteachingresources.org. It will soon be even more user friendly. We are also installing additional security features.

Studies in 2 Timothy are being video recorded to add to those available. Check out BTR resources at www.bibleteachingresources.org.

Interested in hosting a videoconference class? BTR has three units available for use by those who wish to provide home or business Bible studies via videoconference. Contact the office at 903-939-1201 or toll free 877-326-7729 for more details or email dam@bibleteachingresources.org.

Welcome to Karen Domel

Karen Domel has joined the BTR staff, working remotely on projects from her home in Aledo, Texas. Karen has significant experience in business administration and project management. She has also served for ten years as a youth and family crisis counselor. Karen and her husband, Neal, who works for Lockheed, met while serving on the leadership team of their church singles group. The Domels enjoy gardening, entertaining, cooking (well, Neal just taste tests), and hiking and skiing in Colorado. Karen also decorates cakes in her spare time. We are glad to have Karen on board.



HE IS NOT HERE...



Pearl's Reflections

by Pearl Anderson

David Roper makes a powerful assertion on the resurrection of Jesus: "The Son of God died and rose again, and His resurrection is the guarantee that God will bring us up out of the ground: A thinking, feeling, remembering, recognizable person will live forever."

Believers do live forever.

To what do we have to look forward?

There are two scenarios. If we are alive, we will experience the rapture. If we are dead, we will experience the resurrection and our heavenly bodies. Either way, our savior, Jesus Christ, has guaranteed we will be with Him in heaven. Frankly, now that I am going through the throes of senior maturity, I think I would prefer the rapture!

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HE HAS RISEN.

BOOKSHELF

by Don Anderson

The History of Providence

by Alexander Carson, Versa Press 2012
I am planning on using this treasure in my devotional time this year. Here is an excerpt: "Nothing is so little as to be below the attention of his Providence: nothing is so great as to be beyond the power of his Providence to accomplish" (38).

Grace Walk

by Steve McVey, Harvest 1995.
This is a wonderful little book on the in-living Christ.

God Is in the Small Stuff & it all matters

by Bruce Bickel and Stan Jantz, Barbour 1998
A delightful meditation with 40 short chapters, this work will give you fuel for living. Here are a few chapter titles to whet your appetite.

- 20. Embrace Adversity
- 21. The God Who Comforts Us
- 24. Communication Is More Than Talking
- 25. Encouragement Is a Gift
- 29. Compassion: Much More Than Pity
- 31. Criticize and You Walk Alone
- 32. Relationships Take Time
- 33. How To Really Love Your Spouse
- 40. God Is in the Small Stuff

Who Is This Man?

by John Ortberg, Zondervan, 2012
One of John's finest works, this concerns the unpredictable impact of the inescapable Jesus. Check out these excerpts:

Normally when someone dies, their impact on the world immediately begins to recede. As I write this, our world marks the passing of digital innovator Steve Jobs. Someone wrote that ten years ago our world had Bob Hope, Johnny Cash, and Steve Jobs; now we have no Jobs, no Cash, and no Hope. (11)

It is in Jesus' name that desperate people pray, grateful people worship, and angry people swear. From christenings

to weddings to sickrooms to funerals, it is in Jesus' name that people are hatched, matched, patched, and dispatched. (14)

Jesus' Blueprint for Prayer

by Haddon Robinson. Discovery House 2002
Here is an excerpt from a modern classic:

When Jesus taught us to pray, He gave us a comprehensive blueprint to follow. The first three requests deal with God's glory. The last three requests deal with the family. While the petitions to the Father talk about "Your name," "Your kingdom," and "Your will," the last three requests have to do with us: "Give us," "forgive us," and "lead us."

German theologian Helmut Thielicke points out that the whole of life is captured in the rainbow of these requests: "Great things and small things; spiritual things and material things; inward things and outward things—there is nothing that is not included in this prayer." (17)

More than a Bucket List

by Troy & Toni Birdsong, Thomas Nelson, 2012

Having seen the film *The Bucket List*, I was excited to read the book. It's great! The Birdsongs include 179 recommendations. I marked 42 for personal observation. As we grow older we need guidance tools and this little book would make a great gift to seniors on your list. Here are a few titles:

- Pursue laughter
- Live your dreams
- Become a more positive person
- Live with compassion
- Live a life of love and laughter
- Forgo the organ recital
- Watch less TV
- Love on your library
- Renew your mind each day
- Get great at everyday romance
- Make love a verb
- Accept God's forgiveness

mailbag

■ This letter is to thank you for all your years of teaching God's word. I attended your class in downtown Dallas sometime during the '70s or '80s at a bank building. It was a fantastic way to spend a lunch hour hearing God's word.... Thanks you so much for your daily Bible reading books that come every six months. I'm enjoying reading it along with the *Daily Bread* and Dr. Stanley's daily Bible reading.



■ I was ready to choose a college when Don came to First Presbyterian Church as youth minister. Don & Pearl encouraged me to select Northwestern College, (their Alma Mater). While at college, my father had cancer. Don visited my father and led him to the Lord! After graduation I was engaged to be married to Floyd. Don met with us. He wanted to be assured of Floyd's salvation. Don married us August 9, 1963. Their ministry has been a blessing and an encouragement to us all these years. Thanks Don and Pearl for the way you have blessed our lives.

■ Don married us in 1977 at Hide-A-Way Church. He was my folks' minister and good friend. We lived in the Dallas area and attended many of Don's Bible classes. What a joy. The last Bible study we attended was on 1993 in Plano. The first evening, we told Don that our house was for sale and we would be moving to Arkansas. Don said we could not leave until the six week study was completed. The day after the last class, our house sold. We knew Don had a direct line to the Lord, but this was awesome!

■ Thanks so much for *A Great While Before Day*. I just got through singing, "For Those Tears I Died."

■ Happy 40th anniversary Don! I remember, as a new believer in Jesus, attending your Bible study in downtown Dallas on Thursdays during lunch time. I truly learned so much, my memories are of you sitting up on the stage and sharing Bible gems. Your teaching was truly an oasis in the middle of the workday.

■ This is certainly a "voice from your past"!! It has to be at least 40 years since I was in your class at John Nilands house in Dallas. I remember so well your method of teaching. You put the teaching of the Bible in everyday situations that we could grasp and incorporate into our everyday lives. More than likely, I originally went to that class because I got to be with the "cool" (or what I perceived at that time) as cool people. Once I got into it though, I came because you made the word live for me. At that time in my life I was certainly a carnal Christian~looking back I see so much sin in my life. Thankfully, God never gave up on me.

■ As you well know, I was raised in a sweet Christian family, had done all the lip service I knew to do; however, the real journey...having a true relationship...started with your class. YOU planted the seed. Now, as my four children are in their 20s and 30s, I keep praying that a Don Anderson will come into their lives.

Pearl's Reflections

continued from page 11

Sorry Lord I forgot. You are the potter—I'm the clay. As Barbara Johnson puts it concerning the rapture, "He'll toot and we'll scoot." The Lord has promised, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness" in 2 Corinthians 12:9 (NASB).

Peterson in *The Message* paraphrases 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 beautifully:

So we're not giving up. How could we! Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without his unfolding grace. These hard times are small potatoes compared to the coming good times, the lavish celebration prepared for us. There's far more here than meets the eye. The things we see now are here today, gone tomorrow. But the things we can't see now will last forever.

As Don and I often say to each other, "I will see you here, there or in the air!"

Clipboard continued from page 2

A Promise of Prosperity—Matthew 28:11–13

Here's the early morning picture. The ground shook with violet tremors; the terror of the guards keeping watch over Jesus' tomb steadily mounted. An angel appeared to roll away the immense stone covering the mouth of the cave, and the tough Roman guards fainted dead away. On awakening and finding the grave vacant, their fear increased at the thought of being accused of dereliction of duty. There was no use guarding an empty tomb, so they took off for town, heading not for their military superiors, but for the Jewish chief priests.

Imagine it.

Close to dawn on the first Easter Sunday morning the Roman guards tumbled into town to rouse the religious leaders with their news of trouble. The chief priests and elders held an emergency meeting to discuss what to do. They must nip this thing in the bud. Matthew recounts that they "counseled together... [and] gave a large sum of money to the soldiers" (28:12). In other words the Jewish leaders told the soldiers to cover up the truth. The guards could not be allowed to confirm the resurrection, or their religious world would be shattered.

Matthew is the only one of the gospel writers to record this incident of bribery. Why didn't the religious leaders acknowledge their mistake and begin to examine the idea that Jesus might be the messiah? Why did they continue to resist a truth that would be so much easier for them to accept? The fact is that they were unwilling to let the truth penetrate their hearts. They were going to have things their way, live as they had been living, believe what they wanted to believe. Doing that was their prerogative, because God wasn't going to force Himself on them, any more than He forces Himself on you, me, or any of us.

By shelling out silver, the scoffers tried to discredit the resurrection. The soldiers as-

signed to watch over the tomb were the first paid to deny the reason for its emptiness. And why shouldn't they take what they could get out of it? They were not Jews. The sect of Judaism in which people followed this Jesus fellow was nothing to them. They might be in big trouble with their superiors anyway for allowing the tomb to be opened. They'd better go for the gold while they could.

A Necessary Pretense—Matthew 28:13

The Roman guards were expected to earn the money paid them under the table. The religious leaders instructed them in what to say when asked about the vacant grave: "His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were sleeping" (Matthew 28:13). There it is—the big lie, the fictional account to be given in exchange for financial reward.

The soldiers were to explain that Jesus' disciples robbed the grave of his body while they slept. I can just imagine what their cynical commander might have replied to this. Hmm, fellows, that's interesting. You

mean that the disciples sneaked up to the tomb, broke the seal on the stone, and rolled away that gigantic rock from the entrance, all without making a sound? Somehow, those disciples, those fishermen, managed a Navy Seal raid and you didn't hear a thing? All eleven of them came and snatched the body? Their feet dislodged no pebbles, pressed down no blades of grass, crunched against no sticks? They didn't grunt and groan while heaving the stone out of place? Nobody sneezed? You slept through it all, you say? Well, let me ask you this, then. If you were really sleeping that soundly, how did you know it was the disciples who robbed the grave? You didn't see them, did you?

A competent lawyer would make mincemeat of such perjured testimony within minutes of its admission in court. A judge might throw it out.

Honesty really is the best policy. Too bad the soldiers fogged the issue and blew smoke, instead of coming clean about the empty tomb.

A Pledge of Protection—Matthew 28:14—15

Actually, it was unusual that the Roman soldiers were even involved in the episode. Why were they at a gravesite in the first place? How many times are dead men guarded? The soldiers were stationed at the tomb because the chief priests and leaders feared that the disciples would fake things and make it appear that Jesus had risen. Matthew 27 records that the religious leaders approached Pilate as early as Saturday morning following the crucifixion with an unusual request. The episode reads as follows:

Now on the next day, which is the one after the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together with Pilate, and said, "Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I am to rise again.' Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, lest the disciples come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how." And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard, they set a seal on the stone. (Matthew 27:62—66 NASB)

One thing is certain, the guards who kept watch over the grave were nervous about the idea of claiming they were asleep on duty. They didn't accept that bribe from the chief priests until after the religious bigwigs guaranteed to protect them. "And if this should come to the governor's ears," the Jewish leaders assured the soldiers, "we will win him over and keep you out of trouble" (Matthew 28:14). That pledge of protection was essential. The soldiers' fear of punishment from higher-ups suggests strongly they were Romans. Jewish temple guards wouldn't be afraid of the governor's reaction; they were under the jurisdiction of the chief priests, not the secular authorities.

Whatever the case, the guards pocketed the hush money, and did as they were told. Their false version of the resurrection "was widely spread among the Jews, and is to this day" (Matthew 28:15). How right the apostle was. Two thousand years after the fact, the theory that Jesus' body was stolen is still argued.

Rumors spread fast. Mark Twain said that "a lie can go round the world, while truth is still lacing up her boots." And lies are long-lived too. "One of the striking differences between a cat and a lie is that the cat has only nine lives," Twain also once observed.

Regrettably, a tendency to believe the unfounded permeates our society, and is rampant even within the evangelical church. Our prayer chains, fellowship groups, women's circles, and men's breakfasts are often occasions for dropping tidbits of information about poor Liz or struggling Sid, just enough juicy stuff so we can effectively "pray" for the brother or sister in need.

Think of the Bible itself. No document written over a period of sixteen hundred years by over forty different authors from diverse walks of life, using three languages, could possibly have the continuity and cohesiveness of the holy scripture unless it was inspired by God. The plan of the Lord's redemption of humankind binds the Old and New Testaments together into a remarkable whole. Credible extra biblical sources such as secular histories and archaeological discoveries consistently confirm the historical and geographical accuracy of scripture. That Jesus Christ was a historical person is indisputable.

Peter in his Pentecostal sermon verified the truth of the resurrection. "God raised Jesus from the dead, and we are all witnesses of this. Now he is exalted to the place of highest honor in heaven, at God's right hand. And the Father, as he had promised, gave him the Holy Spirit to pour out upon us, just as you see and hear today" (Acts 2:32-33 NLT).

The resurrection gives meaning to our lives. We live forever because He lived, died, and rose again for us.

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