

FAITH

For God's sake

By Michael Bannon

I'm beginning to learn the driving "culture" on Highway 98. From what I've observed, though the speed limits range from 55 mph down to 35 mph, few keep to the posted limit. But driver's beware! A friend giving me a ride to the airport warned me as we entered a 35 mph stretch, "Watch your speed through here or you'll get a ticket."

Let's talk about laws for a moment; what is their function? We might assume that laws exist to prevent us from doing what is, well, unlawful. But if laws were effective at prevention, we wouldn't need law enforcement. And how many of us know all the laws to which we are subject? In 2018, Governor Scott signed over one hundred bills into new laws. One hundred new laws! How can something you don't know keep you from doing something you shouldn't do?

Some believe that God's law, particularly the Ten Commandments, functions as a preventative. I wonder how many of us even know the Ten Commandments. The Bible presents a different function for God's law: "Through the law comes the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). People were sinning against God, so he gave his law to inform us of the fact. The Apostle Paul writes, "Had it not been for the law, I would not have known sin" (Romans 7:7). We're very familiar with law functioning this way. If I'm driving along Highway 98 and suddenly notice blue flashing lights in my rear-view mirror, I pull over, and the law officer informs me of the law and how I have broken it.

God's law informs us that we have sinned against God, but it cannot prevent us from sinning. The Apostle Paul, a Pharisee, knew God's law thoroughly, but he lamented, "I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing."

But God's goal in informing us of our sin is to reveal our need for the rescue from sin that only he can provide. His law makes clear that "none is righteous, no, not one...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," (Romans 3:10, 23). What our sin has earned for us is death, eternal separation from God (Romans 6:23). But God has made a way for people to meet the righteous requirements of his law perfectly. God sent his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to this earth to accomplish two important tasks: Christ lived the sinless life we are unable to live, then he died for our sins. When a person puts their faith in Christ alone, God forgives that person's sins and declares them righteous forever. His sins are laid on Christ, who died in his place, and Christ's sinless record is credited to him forever. God's Spirit comes to dwell in that person to begin a change process to give him both the desire and the ability live a life pleasing to God.

Can you imagine being on Highway 98 and everyone drove the speed limit, not for fear of the penalty of lawbreaking, but because it pleased their heart to do it? Now if we could just get folks to use their turn signals!

Future police officer needs supportive family

Meet Jeremy! He describes himself as smart, helpful and enthusiastic.

Jeremy's case worker says he is all boy as Jeremy loves to play outside, play video games and build Legos. Jeremy says his perfect day would include playing Need for Speed on Xbox followed by riding bikes with his forever family.

He also describes himself as a good friend and is welcoming to new people in his life. Jeremy is polite yet struggles at times with focusing and following directions. With encouragement and support, Jeremy does well in school and enjoys art, music and physical education.

He is motivated to do well and dreams of becoming a police officer one day.

Jeremy was born in August 2010.

There are more than 500 children in temporary foster homes in Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa and Walton counties. They have been abused, neglected or abandoned. While some may eventually return to their birth families, the rest will need adoptive families.

Families First Network is a community-based care agency that provides foster care and adoption services for children and families in the Northwest Florida area from Escambia County east to Walton County.

Families interested in adoption can contact Families First Network at 1-866-313-9874 in Pensacola or by contacting Adoption Recruitment Specialist, Kati Andrews at 850-469-3847.



Homeward Bound

By Michael Bannon

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Home. The word evokes memories, good memories for some as the place where family gathered and shared life, where children were nurtured and grew, where the benchmarks of life were celebrated. For some, home evokes different memories, difficult memories of conflict and loss, the catalysts for leaving home. Even still, home is the place to which many return – eventually.

For T. Austin Huggins IV, pastor of Christ Evangel Christian Fellowship, Navarre was home. His family moved here when, in his words, "Navarre was the tree-gap between Pensacola and Fort Walton Beach." Huggins's home life was not ideal; his father left, and a harsh stepfather took his place. The spiritual influence in his life was his grandfather, T. Austin Huggins Jr., known to him as Papa, a bear of a man whose massive three-hundred-pound frame sheltered a tender heart. Huggins recalls how Papa would weep through the hymns at the church to which he would take young Huggins on occasion. The desire of this big man's heart was that his grandson would come to faith in Christ.

Huggins's mother began taking him to First Baptist of Navarre where, at the age of 12, he made a profession of faith and was baptized, but admits that his profession was not genuine. His faith remained in himself. At 18, he left home to join the Navy and became a submariner. He excelled as a sonar man which stoked his faith in himself into an ugly arrogance.

Life on a submarine wreaks havoc with a person's circadian rhythm; Huggins turned to alcohol to cope yet continued to perform his duties with competence. Nonetheless, he admits that he was dying on the inside; trust in oneself has a short

Huggins

shelf-life. Huggins's self-trust was hit with another salvo. Eager to return to civilian life, he learned that an earlier thyroid problem had not been cared for properly; his service was extended so a Navy doctor could treat him. Meanwhile, he received news from home that his mother had lung cancer.

After being discharged, his life sank even deeper into alcoholism pulled down by the ballast of insomnia and utter helplessness over his mother's worsening condition. Huggins found work as a safety officer at a shipyard in Panama City fitting in well with his hard-living co-workers. But even they recognized something was wrong the day he, their safety officer, stood unaware beneath a massive weight suspended from a crane. He was in a fog having just

learned that his mother's cancer was terminal, and his live-in girlfriend had left him. The boss sent Huggins home. That night, his self-trust in ruins, it came to Huggins's mind to pray, something he hadn't attempted in a long while. He scrutinized God, and God scrutinized him. "It wasn't pretty," Huggins said. That night, he surrendered his life to God putting his trust fully in God's provision of salvation through faith alone in Christ alone. For the first time in years, he slept soundly. The sun rose on a new day and a new Huggins. His weekly routine became working six days at the shipyard then driving two hours to Navarre for worship services Sundays at First Baptist. He had come home.

Huggins eagerly shared

his newfound faith in Christ with his workmates. He devoured the Scriptures, came to know them well, and took them to heart. To his surprise, he was asked to fill in as teacher for the young singles class. Soon he was made the permanent teacher. There was a change of leadership at the church at that time, and the interim pastor offered Huggins the position of associate pastor. At the advice of a trusted mentor, he accepted and became the associate pastor providing leadership for the young singles and the youth. It was while on staff at First Baptist that he met a young woman who worked in the church office and would become his wife. Eventually, Austin sensed it was time to leave the "nest" once again. In 2017, the Huggins, with a group of families who value his teaching and leadership, formed a new church, Christ Evangel Christian Fellowship.

The Huggins family had moved to Bagdad, Florida, a few years earlier for more affordable housing,

however, the other church families live in Navarre. So, Thursday nights, Christ Evangel meets in Navarre in a member's home and Sundays they meet in Bagdad at the Huggins's home. The long-term goal is to find a permanent, public location in Navarre.

Christ Evangel maintains close friendships and partnerships with various churches in the U.S. and abroad. The church supports and is actively involved in mission work in Philippines, Nigeria, Nepal and Kenya, through First-Love Radio (firstloveradio.org). Locally, Christ Evangel hosts the protestant services at The Beacon, an assisted living center in Santa Rosa. They also minister to the drug and alcohol addicted at The Mission of Hope in Alabama. Those interested in meeting times and locations for Christ Evangel Christian Fellowship should call 850-564-4348 or visit the Welcome page on the church's website (christevangel.org) and complete and submit the message form.

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Photos by Michael Bannon

T. Austin Huggins IV is pastor at Christ Evangel Christian Fellowship. His journey through faith was not an easy one.

Faith Briefs

Super Bowl Champion Sony Michel to speak at Momentum Church on Easter
Sunday, April 21, Momentum Church in Gulf Breeze and Navarre will feature a personal interview with Special Guest Sony Michel, Super Bowl Champion and Patriots running back, during three services at Gulf Breeze High School and Navarre High School. Michel will be speaking during the services about the challenge of hard work and tenacity, always trusting God and never giving up. There will be multiple gathering times offered: Gulf Breeze High School at 9 a.m., 11 a.m., and 5 p.m. as well as a broadcast to Navarre High School at 9:15 a.m., 11:15 a.m., and 5 p.m. Michel will

be live at the Gulf Breeze campus 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. services. Kids environments will be available during all services. Admission is free and the event is open to the public. For more information, visit www.easteratmomentum.com.

Singles Great Adventure Weekend
The Singles Great Adventure Weekend is coming to Pensacola April 5-6 at Olive Baptist Church. Join the church for a weekend full of surprises, adventure and loads of fun. It begins at Olive Baptist Church in Pensacola Friday evening, April 5 at 6 p.m., to receive instructions, event preparations and fellowship. Saturday's Adventure will involve

searching for clues, performing challenges and snapping photos and videos of your four-person team as you travel throughout the Pensacola area. The Adventure is like a reality show and road rally wrapped into one. It's part tour, part race, all excitement. You will need your wits ready, your energy high and a sense of adventure. Each member of the winning three teams will be awarded a cash prize. Registration is \$20 per person and includes an event T-shirt, pizza & salad dinner Saturday night, door prizes and entry into a grand prize drawing. Registration is limited and ends Sunday, March 31. For more information, contact Cynthia at 850-475-1147 or register online at www.olivebaptist.org/GreatAdventure.

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