



Vestry Voices

The Church Family Newsletter

First Congregational
Church of Clinton

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Rah-daph – to Pursue

Surely your goodness and unflinching love will pursue me all the days of my life ...

Psalm 23:6a (NLT)



Rev. Gary Kiontke



This may be the first time many readers of this newsletter have seen the correct translation of Psalm 23. Of the translations loaded on my Bible software, only the (New) Jerusalem Bible also translates *rah-daph* as pursue in Psalm 23. It is interesting to note that the translators of the King James Bible only used the translation “follow” eighteen times for *rah-daph*, compared with “pursue/pursuer” eighty times, “persecute/persecutors” twenty-seven times and “chase” thirteen times out of a total of two-hundred-forty-three times this verb is in the Hebrew Bible.

A solid Christian doctrine is that all Scripture is inspired in the human authors by the Holy Spirit and is without error in the original languages (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21). But, the Holy Spirit did not override the human author’s vocabularies or writing style. Missionaries will point out that the Good News of Jesus was intended to be translated from its language of inspiration, Greek, because Jesus and the Twelve spoke Aramaic or Hebrew, not Greek. However, although the Holy Spirit guides translators, translations themselves are not inspired. This is the best way to explain why the King James Bible, one of the most accurate English translations ever, got *rah-daph* wrong in Psalm 23.

It is helpful to look at the use of *rah-daph* in the account of David’s life in 1 & 2 Samuel, other non-Davidic Psalms, the Torah, Proverbs and Isaiah.

After Yahweh rejected Saul as king, Saul sought to take David’s life. He pursued David in the wilderness of Maon (south of Hebron in Judah), but, ended his pursuit when the Philistines invaded the land (1 Samuel 23:15-29). Soon after this, David could have killed Saul in a cave, but he did not. David called down to Saul and asked why he was pursuing him, then Saul expressed regret (1 Samuel 24). Toward the end of David’s reign, his beloved son Absa-

lom rebelled against him and David fled Jerusalem with six hundred loyal men (2 Samuel 15:1-18). David’s former advisor, Ahithophel advised Absalom to immediately pursue his father while he was at his weakest (2 Samuel 17:1-4). But this advice was overridden by David’s close friend, Hushai’s, advice (verses 5-14). After Absalom died and David returned to Jerusalem, Sheba, from Saul’s tribe of Benjamin, rebelled against David. He commanded his nephew Abishai (Joab’s brother) to pursue Sheba. They do so and Sheba is executed as the result of the words and actions of a wise woman in the city Abel of Bethmaachah, located north of the city of Dan, one-hundred thirty miles north of Jerusalem (2 Samuel 20:1-22). Finally, after David’s sin of taking a census, Yahweh gave David three punishment options, the second being three days of fleeing from enemy pursuers; he chose three days of a plague from Yahweh (2 Samuel 24:1-14). So, as an anointed king and soldier, David knew about deadly pursuit, as both the pursued and the pursuer.

The priestly songwriter Asaph, when Israel was under attack from a coalition of foreign armies, pleaded with his God to persecute them with a tempest, and they will seek Yahweh’s Name (Psalm 85). Three times in Psalm 119, the pious priest who wrote this song of tribute to God’s word uses *rah-daph*. The first time is in the eleventh letter – *Koph*: he asks that those who persecute him will be punished, and that he will be helped from them (verses 81-88). In the twentieth letter, *Resh*, he says many are persecuting him, but he does not turn from Yahweh’s testimonies (verses 153-160). Then in the twenty-first letter, *Shin*, he says many persecute him without cause, but his heart is in awe of Yahweh’s Word and he has great peace (verses 161-168).

In the Proverbs, the way of the wicked is an abomination to Yahweh, but He loves those who “follow after” (*rah-daph*) righteousness (15:9). The one who “follows after” (*rah-daph*) righteousness and steadfast love will find life, righteousness and honor (21:21). It is comforting to know that wise

(continued on page 2 ...)

Inside this issue:

Rah-daph — to Pursue	1
Sundays in May	2
It Just Happens*... “... As the World Turns, Continued 2 ...”	2
Psalm 23 (NLT)	3
Worship with Dave Coles — May 25th	4
Special Movie Night	4
May 2025 Calendar of Events	5



Rah-daph – to Pursue (... continued from page #1)

people, who pursue righteousness in Jesus Christ, are loved by the Covenant God and will find the greatest blessings from Him, namely: His life, righteousness and honor imputed to them.

There are two passages in Isaiah that round out our consideration of *rah-daph* outside of Psalm 23. The first is an appeal by Yahweh to the people of Judah who are about to go into exile in Babylon. He said if they would return and rest (in Him), they would be saved; and, if they would be still and trusting (before Him), they would be strong. But, collectively, they would have none of it! They want to flee on horses (to Egypt). So, He says their pursuers (*rah-daph*) will be swift. But, His desire is to be gracious and merciful to His people; and, those who wait for Him will be blessed (Isaiah 30:15-18). Later, Yahweh offers eternal salvation to His people who follow after (*rah-daph*) righteousness and seek Him (Isaiah 51:1-6). This is fulfilled in the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Coming back to Psalm 23, my good friend from my Pastor's Roundtable group in South Hamilton, Bob Leroe, post-

ed a quote from Chad Bird on his Facebook page. It said in part: “[In Psalm 23] the translation of ‘follow’ is far too bloodless for the Hebrew verb *radaph*. It means ‘chase after or pursue.’ The goodness and mercy [steadfast love] of God don’t follow us like a good little puppy dog. They gallop after us like a celestial stallion. They chase us down the labyrinthine paths like the hound of heaven. They stay hot on our heels ... all the way to heaven’s gate and into the arms of our Father.” I responded: “Thank you Bob!!! From the first time I translated this Psalm for a class on Hebrew poetry, I wondered why the KJV translators (who by and large made an excellent translation) made such a ‘wimpy’ choice as ‘follow’. David knew all about pursuit: first as a shepherd protecting his sheep, then as a soldier. But what a wonderful thought that when the Good Shepherd’s sheep wander, He pursues them (us) with goodness and *hesed* – steadfast love!!!”

It is my hope that this article on *rah-daph* in Psalm 23 will get all who read it more excited about the Good Shepherd Jesus Christ (John 10) than they were before they read it.

~vv~

Sundays in May

We will have Communion on May 4 and May 18.

Dave Coles will speak on May 25 (see article on page 4).

Here are the details on the sermon texts and themes for each of the worship services:

Date	Scripture	Theme
May 4	Joshua 24:1-13; Psalm 77:11-20	Yahweh takes His people through the waters to give them a home
May 11	Proverbs 31:1-9; Psalm 113	Wise advice from the mother of a king
May 18	Joshua 24:14-28; Psalm 69:13-18	Faithful obedience to Yahweh means to serve Him only
May 25	Dave Coles	Update & message

It Just Happens*... “... As the World Turns, Continued 2 ...”

by Petros

“It Just Happens*...” Pastor Gary prayed and acknowledged God has a purpose “... just where You want us to be,” (for His people). It resonated so well with what my daughter Jessica wrote last month: “*Be where He put you and stop rushing through each moment.*” During Easter, there were many reminders of how God so loved the world. One vivid memory is the detailed, long thorns that Jesus had around his head from the (wall hanging behind the pulpit) crown of thorns. I can imagine the pricking pain of just one thorn dig-

ging deeper every moment and the agony of knowing the thorn will continue to penetrate deeper with every passing second. I can only imagine the combined thorns digging would make me hold my head as still as possible, only to be pushed and endure more pain by carrying the old, rugged cross through the mocking and insulting crowds. I can only imagine the physical pain would be partly diminished by the spiritual disheartening caused by the (former) followers who “do not know what they are doing” in their mob hatred.

(continued on page 3 ...)



It Just Happens ...* (... continued from page #2)

My imagination of Jesus suffering is only a very thin slice of the Love Pie, God offers to all. The irony is in the whole scheme of God's effort and provision to love His people; the thinnest slice is the most critical part of God being able to have a People after His Heart. The rest of the pie is God-given opportunities to prepare us for our eternal home. And walking the followers through this domain. The Bible, at times, resembles God's Love Story for His Creation. Starting with a Garden/Paradise, so Mankind had everything to suit his needs and pleasure. But God knew better. From the parting of the Red Sea, to looking up at the serpent on the pole, in order to be healed from snake bites (which was a prelude to looking up to Christ on the Cross to be healed from our sins). God wanted His People to have the Faith that He was the God who wanted to be Our God! And when God gave us ten simple commandments to show how we could love and obey Him, we rebelled. God knew we would, at some point, realize we could not measure up. He would have to come down from Heaven to suffer and die to make a way for mankind to be removed from our selfish ways. "Love in Action" was a ministry I served with. In comparison, God's love was like a bolt of lightning.

"It Just Happens*..." I have been reflecting on God's outpouring of Love and my inability to capture the essence of it all. My thoughts explored God's undeserving Love and the Kingdom of Heaven – Jesus brought for us to have on earth. I enjoy living on the edge of Heaven on Earth, knowing that God loves me and I need not be concerned about "politics" or the world crisis. I have joy most of the time because of the praise songs He gives us. I can admit to God my failure to keep Him centered in my life. I seem to be preoccupied with the things that I can control and find pleasure in. So, I took interest when my daughter explained her meditation to "cleanse oneself," in order to declutter her mind of all distracting thoughts. Once achieving this state of mind, she could experience the goodness of Creation. Thus, from last month's sharing, "*Things are always working out for me!*" and attributing the reason being "*... spend less time resisting that you are worthy of God's love and the bigger picture he*

has for you." While we are both fulfilled, in that we are not letting the world turning around us, affect our outlook on the day due to living in the blessed reassurance of God's Love ... I felt like I could be missing out on more blessings by not "walking the walk." I recall from last month about not letting the Accuser, Deceiver, and Adversary belittle my mindset. And all who look to the Father, knowing He will give me victory over my enemy, though they may be as many as the grains of sand by the seashore.

"It Just Happens*..." Pastor Gary preached on two topics, back-to-back, that filled the void I felt. But, while the Word of God suffices to give clear direction, I will still need to reach out to God more, to fully "live it," from Psalm 23. Pastor Gary pointed out goodness and mercy do not "follow" us all the days of our lives. But referencing Chad Bird, "*goodness and mercy gallop after us like a celestial stallion. The Good Shepard chases us like the hound of heaven ... all the way to heaven's gate and into the arms of our Father.*" When I feel like I'm lost in my own world, it's good to know the goodness of God will not let me stray too far. And a lasting impression was, we are given our service calling from God's plan for us. His Will, will be done; whom am I to doubt the power of God in my life? And let us not forget who we will be ... Children of the True God. Amen and amen.

"Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor uselessly." Psalm 127:1

Author's note: This article's title "It Just Happens*..." counters the cliché ... things just don't happen. "It" will stand for the world view one chooses to abide in. "Just" is the character of the God who wants to be our God. He has made us in His image – righteous; by faith in God. "Happens" will be the events and experiences God uses to grow our faith. All things work for the glory of God. When we turn from our ways and we look to God and live His Word – His plan for us unfolds. ~v~

Psalm 23

A psalm of David.

- 1 The LORD is my shepherd;
I have all that I need.
- 2 He lets me rest in green meadows;
he leads me beside peaceful streams.
- 3 He renews my strength.
He guides me along right paths,
bringing honor to his name.
- 4 Even when I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will not be afraid,
for you are close beside me.

- Your rod and your staff
protect and comfort me.
- 5 You prepare a feast for me
in the presence of my enemies.
You honor me by anointing my head with oil.
My cup overflows with blessings.
 - 6 Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me
all the days of my life,
and I will live in the house of the LORD
forever. (NLT)

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Pastor Gary's First Vacation Week **Monday, May 19 thru Sunday, May 25**

Because Dave Coles will be speaking on Sunday, May 25, Pastor Gary will take his first week of vacation this calendar year the week before Dave speaks.

Worship with Dave Coles — Sunday, May 25, 2025

by Sally Camara

Dave and Jean Coles, workers serving with Beyond, will be visiting our church on May 25, and Dave will be bringing the message that Sunday.

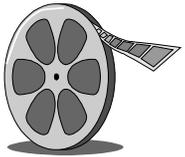
Our church has been one of their supporters for several years now. Nearly 40 years ago, Dave participated in a Perspectives on the World Christian Movement course which led him into missions work. Perspectives has taught thousands around the world to better understand God's plan of salvation – His intention to get glory among ALL peoples of the world. Dave and Jean have served in Indonesia and Africa, translating and teaching many concepts from Perspectives. Their purpose is to help people catch a vision for reaching remaining unreached peoples with the Good News of salvation in Jesus. Dave has also been the co-author of

two recent books – “Cabbages in the Desert” and “Living Fire.” I have read “Cabbages in the Desert,” and it is full of testimonies of those successfully doing church planting in Africa.

It has been several years since Dave and Jean have visited us and we are honored they are coming. If you haven't heard Dave before, he is an inspiring, enlightening, and very interesting speaker with many insights and testimonies to share.

Hope you all can come out and take advantage of the opportunity to hear what the Lord is doing through this ministry. ~VV~

Movie Night **Special Night: Friday, May 30 at 7:00 PM**



We show a movie once each month, in Fellowship Hall, usually on the fourth Friday (*fifth Friday, this month*). The movies shown in the past have covered a range of genres, and were usually thought provoking.

We are able to show these movies based on the church's CVLI® license. However, this license does not allow us to advertise or publicize the names of these movies to the general public, and they are always free of charge.

We usually have free snacks available, and you are also welcome to bring your own meal, if you wish.

So, please join us for a night out at the movies!





MAY 2025

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
27	28	29	30	1 (**)	2	3
4 Communion Sunday (Note #1)	5	6	7 (††)	8 (**)	9	10
11 FCC Worship; Coffee Hour after Worship (Note #2)	12	13	14 (††)	15 (**)	16	17
18 Communion Sunday (Note #3)	19 Pastor Gary's first vacation begins (Note #4)	20	21 (††)	22 (**)	23	24
25 Guest Dave Coles; Coffee Hour; Last day of Pastor Gary's 1st vacation (Note #5)	26 June "Vestry Voices" Articles Due (Note #6) Memorial Day	27	28 (††)	29 (**)	30 Movie Night (Note #7)	31

Calendar Notes:

- #1) 5/4 — Communion Sunday: **10:27 AM.**
 - #2) 5/11 — FCC Worship: **10:27 AM. ALSO:** Coffee Hour/Fellowship after Worship.
 - #3) 5/18 — Communion Sunday: **10:27 AM.**
 - #4) 5/19 — Pastor Gary's first vacation begins.
 - #5) 5/25 — FCC Worship with Dave Coles: **10:27 AM. ALSO:** Coffee Hour/Fellowship after Worship.
ALSO: Last day of Pastor Gary's first vacation.
 - #6) 5/26 — Articles are due for the June issue of "Vestry Voices" (for assembly/mail-out on May 27).
 - #7) 5/30 — Special Movie Night — in Fellowship Hall: **7:00 PM.**
- (††) Wednesday Bible Study: **11:00 AM** (in FCC Parlor)
 (**) Thursday Prayer: **3:00 PM** (in FCC Parlor).

