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# contents

PathPointe Magazine

Volume 26, Issue 12

December 2025

- Page 2      **Christmas Memories Last Longer**  
*Dr. T. D. Worthington*
- Page 6      **Radio Bits**  
*Your Christian Superstations!*
- Page 8      **No, Not Now... It's Christmas**  
*Dr. Sherry Worthington*
- Page 10     **Does Happy Equal Holy?**  
*Mrs. Amber Sherman*
- Page 12     **AfterGlow**  
*Mrs. Connie Peters*

President and Publisher: Dr. T. D. Worthington  
Editor: Tiffany W. Johnson  
Advertising Director: Jeremy Worthington  
Contributors: Tiffany Johnson, Connie Peters,  
Amber Sherman, and Sherry Worthington  
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# Christmas Memories Last Longer

*Dr. T. D. Worthington*

*“But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.”*  
**Luke 2:19**

I am sure Mary never forgot the angels, the shepherds, the star, or the wise men. These were things that I am sure were burned into her memory. How is your memory doing these days? It appears to me that people forget more things than they used to. So many people miss appointments now that some places even charge a fee for no-shows. Memory loss was once relegated to those with dementia or just growing old, but now I know many young people who seem to be lost in a fog.

As I write this article, it is November 13th. This may be a special day for you. But I don't remember many November 13ths in my life.

I don't even recall many July 4ths. I don't remember most of my own birthdays, or Thanksgivings or Easters, for that matter. But I remember Christmas. I may not remember each one of them in the correct order. I may not be able to recall all the specific events, but I remember Christmas—even *the ones from over 70 years ago.*

What is your favorite Christmas memory? If you had the opportunity to share, what might you recall? Would it be your family gathered around the Christmas tree or the laughter and fellowship of visiting family and friends? Would it be a special kiss under the mistletoe or struggling to assemble a toy? Would it be visiting with relatives or perhaps even experiencing a hardship or illness?

What is it about Christmas memories that seems to make them last longer? Is it just me, or do you have the same experience? Is there some special power in Christmas memories? When I smell Christmas trees, for example, I remember the live trees we always had at home when I was a child. I visited my granddad's house hundreds of times growing up, but it is the Christmases I usually remember. I remember Grandma's decorations. I remember the wreath they hung on the door. I remember the aroma coming from the kitchen. I remember her Christmas fruitcake. What is this about Christmas memories?

Another cool thing about Christmas memories is that, even in the middle of July, if you are having a

bad day, you can pull one out, and it can lighten your load. Christmas memories can even recenter your life and help you recall who you really are.

Isn't that what happened to Ebenezer Scrooge in Charles Dickens's classic story? As the story begins, it would be hard to imagine a more miserly and miserable man than Ebenezer Scrooge, who, among other things, hated Christmas, regarding it as nothing but a "humbug." But Scrooge was transformed. On Christmas morning after his metamorphosis, he confessed to being "*as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a schoolboy.*" Yet, the new Scrooge wasn't only delighted to say "*Merry Christmas*" to his neighbors rather than "*Bah! Humbug*", he actually wanted to spend time with the family he had previously spurned. Relationships mattered to him more than they had in decades. On top of that, Scrooge had come to care deeply about others, expressing his concern with generosity toward people in poverty, a newfound fairness as a boss, and a passionate personal investment in Tiny Tim's life.

What brought about such a miraculous change in Scrooge? Was it not, in part, the memories of Christmas past? Scrooge became filled with Christmas memories from his pre-humbug life as he also assessed his post-humbug future. Scrooge was transported back to the place where he was a lad in boarding school. When Scrooge was reminded of his boyhood self, left alone at Christmas in his dismal school, Scrooge sobbed with newfound emotion. He then

recalled the Christmas parties that old Fezziwig would give to his employees and friends. Suddenly, the cold-hearted Scrooge became strangely warmed, softened by the power of his memories. By the end of the first ghostly visit, Scrooge was well on his way to becoming a new man.

I know this was only a story, it was make-believe, and there are some elements in the story that, as a Christian, you may not appreciate. Still, there is a good reason to believe that powerful Christmas memories can actually make a positive difference in our lives, too. Jump-starting our fondest memories could be a good thing. Positive Christmas memories can enrich your life today. They can help you to live in the present while facing the future with greater delight and a deeper understanding. Often, reflecting on the past enables

you to experience a more profound sense of who you are and why you are alive.

How should we think about this from a Christian perspective? Here are four brief implications.

**First**, if we believe that everything that has happened in your life has been allowed by God and that He can use it for ultimate good, then recalling those memories would be a good thing. God wants us to enjoy the good gifts He has given us throughout our lives. God wants you to remember that He has made a long-term investment in your life.

**Second**, memories can be a pathway to gratitude. As you allow your mind to enjoy pleasant memories, you can pause to thank God for them, and for the people and events they have brought to mind. There is much in Scripture that encourages





us to remember the past. Usually, these are memories of what God has done in the past—*events that might still be influencing our present*. These memories help us always to remember God’s never-ending love and faithfulness in our own lives.

**Third**, though memories can also bring to mind painful episodes from our past, looking back, we may very well see God’s presence even in those hard times. We might now see how God used those struggles to help us grow to be more like Jesus.

**Fourth**, research suggests that nostalgia might motivate you to be more understanding and tolerant of others. A little more empathy for others can go a long way to promoting peace on earth. Plus, empathy for those who are suffering might spur you on to greater generosity, as happened with Ebenezer Scrooge.

Perhaps we should all attempt to create a special Christmas

memory this year. It could be a fresh reminder of what Christmas is really all about – *the birth of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, and the joy of celebrating His birth*. Think about it. It doesn’t require a trip to the store, an online purchase, or a large sum of money to make Christmas memories that will last. It often just needs one small investment, a little bit of time.

You see, God designed us for relationships. In other words, He never intended for us to be alone. More importantly, He wants us to remember the gifts He has given us, which are right in front of us every single day. In addition to the gift of His Son, He gave us the gift of our loved ones, our family and friends, and the memories that naturally followed. And now, for me, the memories of more than half a century of Christmases seem to be as fresh as they were the day they were born. These are not tattered, faded black-and-white photographs, but vivid, clear memories of the priceless gift of

the abundant life God has bestowed upon me.

Ebenezer Scrooge said, “*I will honor Christmas in my heart and try to keep it all the year.*” The only real way you can do that is if we retain in our hearts hundreds of Christmas memories. Each one is as unique as a snowflake.

This Christmas, I will hold dear all my memories of the past, yet embrace the excitement and joy of the present, especially when looking into the eyes of my grandchildren and great grandchildren, because I am sure that, as each of them anticipates the future, they will also be building memories. And maybe, I might be in some of those memories. That would be nice, because Christmas memories seem to last the longest.



*Dr. Worthington has been in the ministry nearly fifty years and serves as President of Pathway Ministries and Christian Bible College.*





## Little Moments

Every year, it's the same rerun. We tell ourselves, "This Christmas, I'm going to start early and get ahead so I can slow down and enjoy the season!" Inevitably, we deceive ourselves. Just when we think we've got it under control, here comes the unplanned... The family emergency... The stomach virus... The additional visitors we weren't expecting... The stocking stuffer we forgot to get. It happens to all of us.

Each of those little things add up to become a load of stress if we let them. But each of those little things won't add up to the fond memories of this holiday season we'll remember for years to come. They just won't, because they really aren't all that important or significant.

A few years ago, I was a big ball of nerves (as I am most years). Work deadlines, some family issues, financial concerns, and a lot of unknowns and uncertainty about the future were all adding up. We also had a new addition to our household arrive less than two weeks before Christmas.

Everything was so rushed. That Christmas almost seems like a blur now as I look back. So many details I can't even remember. I do remember I was overwhelmed, but that is not what I remember most. What do I remember? I'm glad you asked!

I remember going outside at night with our new grandson to get some air. It was cold, so we were both bundled up good. He was a bit fussy, so we just walked around and talked. Well, I talked. As I held that little ball of joy in my arms, we walked down the sidewalk for a good block or so. I pointed out the Christmas lights that brightened up our little street and told him of how they represented the Light of the World, Jesus Christ. I pointed out a manger scene and told him all about

the Gift God gave us. I remember thinking to myself what a precious gift the Lord had given me in that 10 minute walk to be the first one to tell this precious baby all about Him. I remember praying for many more opportunities to share Jesus with him in the future. That is a memory I will never forget.

Those small moments... Those are what matter. We won't remember the brownies we burned for the church fellowship. If we do, we'll probably just laugh about it. It's the little things we'll remember with fondness. The little moments of gratitude and remembering why we celebrate will make the biggest difference in the long run.



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## Christmas and Music

Music plays such an essential role in our Christmas celebrations. Actually, when you study the biblical accounts of Christ's birth, you discover that music played an irresistible role in the Gospel. In Luke's Gospel alone, several hymns of praise are related to the birth of Christ. There were songs about His coming birth; there were songs on the day of His birth, and there were songs soon after His birth.

It is still true today, no matter where you go in the world, wherever the Gospel of God comes to earth, music is not far away. Music is the natural response to the news of redemption. Paul commanded the church, in **Ephesians 5:19**, to speak *"... to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."*

Even the angels were created with the ability to sing. In **Job 38:7**, you discover a time when, *"... the morning stars sang together..."* Morning stars are a reference to the angels. They were singing together in praise of their creator God.

On the evening of Christ's birth, the angels formed a massive choir of praise to that group of stunned shepherds. **Luke 2:13** records, *"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God..."* The sky was filled with angelic beings who began to praise God. According to **Luke 2:14**, the angels said, *"Glory to God in the highest..."* The verb tense indicates that the angels repeated this over and over again. All the shepherds could do was stand there with their mouths open and their hearts thumping. The earth shook with the chorus of praise.

Indeed, music and Christmas are inseparable. That is why we take our Holiday music so seriously here at **GoMix Christian Radio**. Of course, songs honoring our

Saviour did not start only after the baby's birth. There was a prelude of music long before Joseph and Mary ever arrived in Bethlehem. Actually, there was a grand Christmas song composed six hundred years before the birth of Christ. You can see the lyrics yourself in **Isaiah 9:6**.

*"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."*



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No, no, no! This can't be happening. I can't squeeze in one more thing. I already have so much to do. With Christmas parties, family gatherings, shopping, decorating, mission activities, and the everyday responsibilities, I don't have time for this. It is insane.

Do you ever feel this way? I love all aspects of Christmas, but the older I get, the busier it seems to get. Perhaps I am just slowing down. I enjoy family and friends, going to the nursing home with the school, gathering shoe boxes for Samaritan's Purse, and helping the

needy as we are able. There just doesn't seem to be time...*for Jesus.*

We sometimes get so busy with good things that we forget the most important. I am sure Jesus wants us to help the less fortunate, and He doesn't mind us spending time with family and friends. But we make ourselves feel better by saying, *"On Christmas morning, we read the Christmas story so our children will know the real meaning of Christmas."* Do we really think that is all it takes? We must show that we know the real meaning of Christmas.

What if Mary had the attitude many of us do? Would there have been a Christmas? If she had said, *"Let me check my schedule. I think I can fit it in."* Mary could have said, *"This is just too much trouble, it is way too hard, or I have obligations at the temple."* God chose Mary because He knew her heart. There was no doubt that Mary had her priorities right. I know she was not perfect, but she had time for Jesus. Mary set everything aside to do what God had called her to do. She had concerns and fears, but she gave them to God.

I don't think she was fretting the whole journey to Bethlehem. She probably had concerns, but I don't picture her jumping down Joseph's throat over every bump in the road. I can't imagine her worrying about every detail the whole trip. Sadly, we are the least patient with the ones we love the most. What do you think her reaction was when she found she had to give birth in a stable? Did she break down and cry, or did she smile and say, *"We will be okay, Joseph. I know you wanted better, but God has this."* On that first Christmas, Mary and Joseph were alone and completely dependent on God.

The saddest part of all of this is I find myself falling into this trap. And it is not only at Christmas, but all throughout the year. I have trouble managing my time and energy to put priorities in the right place. I talk to my Lord all throughout the day, but He gets very little quality time. I tend to do the urgent instead of the important. Maybe I should have the attitude that Jesus is the urgent one.

Like many of you, I get so busy that I mix up my priorities. God has called me, as He has called you if you are a Christian, to be His child. We are to lean on Him for everything. Our relationship with God is to be the main concentration of our lives. **Matthew 6:33** states, *"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."* Our Lord is not saying we cannot plan, but He is saying to make them His plans. God comes first, and everything else is next.



In theory, if God is first, everything else should fall in place. Be careful! Sometimes we get so busy serving that we miss the mark. Martha was busy serving Jesus, but Mary was fellowshiping with Him. Our service is a part of fellowship, but it is not the dominant factor. How can we truly serve Him if we don't have fellowship with Him?

It can be compared to the married couple that is so busy working, keeping the house, caring for the children, cleaning the house, buying groceries, etc., that they have no quality time for each other. No time to talk about the day and remind themselves of their love for each other. We get so busy with the urgent that the important things in life get pushed aside. A married couple is set for disaster if they don't find time to build their relationship. Why do we think our relationship with our Heavenly Father can survive on less?

Shall we turn over a new leaf together? May we seek Jesus first in all things? The Scripture promises that if we seek Him first, all things will be added. We need to remind ourselves that service doesn't equate with fellowship. Our lives can be wrapped up in doing good, yet still lack the right priorities.

Let's start with this Christmas by getting our priorities right. Put God first in all things. We will be surprised how everything will fall into place. Shall we give it our all? I am going to try. How about you?

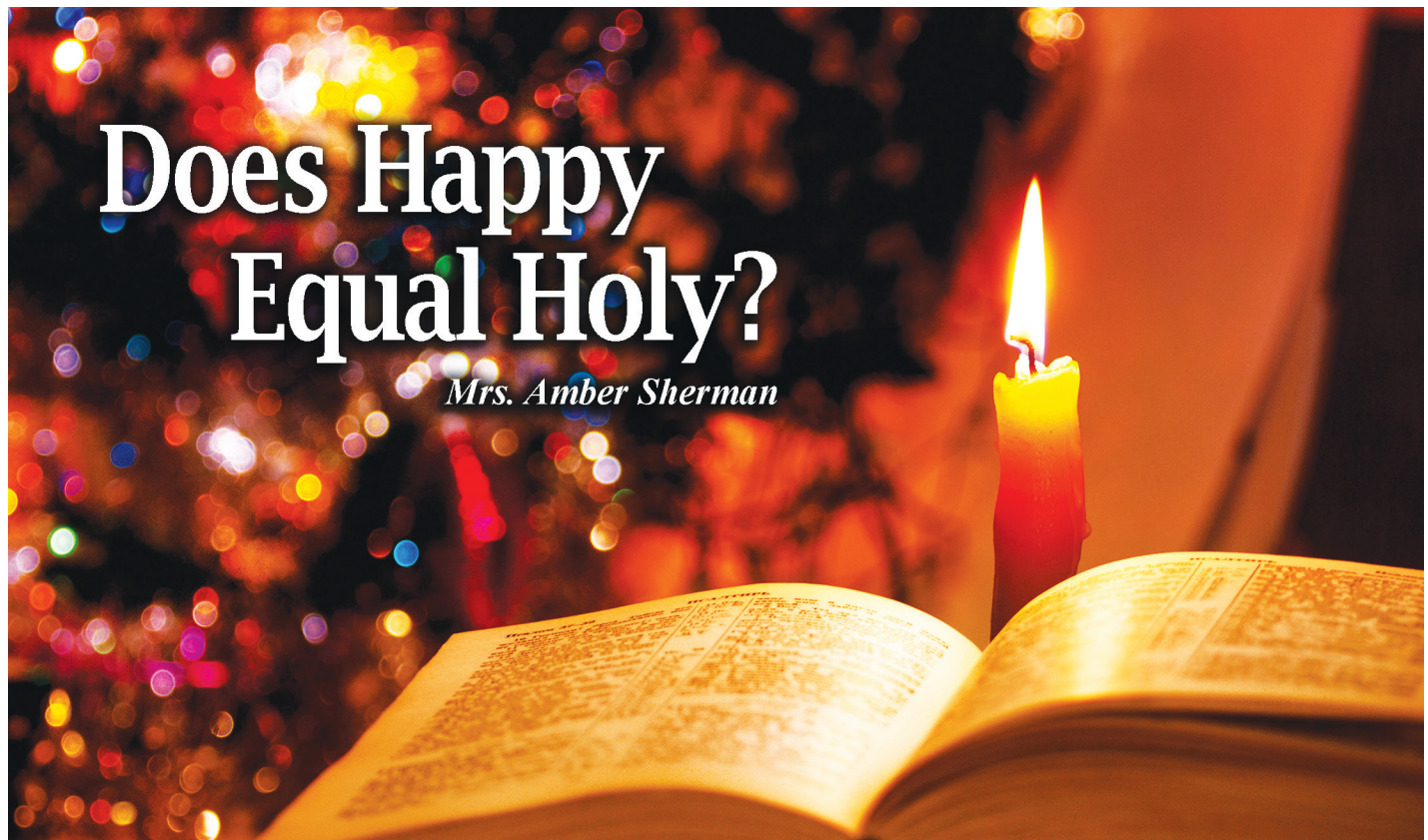
*Merry Christmas!*



*Dr. Worthington has five children and twelve grandchildren. She serves as Principal of Pathway Christian Academy in Goldsboro.*

# Does Happy Equal Holy?

*Mrs. Amber Sherman*



We recently had a celebration for my in-laws' anniversary. At the gathering an older gentleman walked up to me and honored me by saying he liked my articles because he liked to "think" about things. He said my articles would usually say something that would get him pondering about something he had not thought of before. Apparently, we have something in common because I like to "think" about things too.

As we near the season of our Lord's birth... I wanted to ponder on why He came. I heard a convicting statement a couple of years ago by Elisabeth Elliot on her radio program *Gateway to Joy* and it has really stuck with me – "*God has put us here to be holy, not happy.*" Now, that does not mean that serving Him does not have its joy. It is more to say that happiness cannot be our only goal. Obeying and serving Him must be. Jesus

gave up Heaven for us. Would He do so for the single reason of our happiness alone? Seems like that would be such a superficial goal. One that would be sadly lacking when our time to go to Heaven comes. Christians are supposed to steadily deny self and become more like Jesus... holy. If we arrive in Heaven and our life goal has been to be happy, what type of selfish individuals are we that this has been our primary goal and focus in life? For one who continually seeks one's own happiness is by default a self-seeking person. That one will neglect others in the pursuit of their own happiness and desires.

With that in mind, there is a phrase I keep hearing parents and spouses say which is really concerning. It sounds something like this: "*Whatever he wants*" or "*whatever she wants.*" "*We will go if he wants... She can have... Let me ask her... If he doesn't want*

*to do it, don't make him.*" I sadly heard one man say, "*As long as my wife is happy and God is happy, I am happy.*" Unfortunately, I found this man confused placating his wife at all costs with helping her to become more like Christ. He was misunderstanding his role of leading his wife and being the head of the home. The Bible says that husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the Church. Jesus' goal is not to make the Church happy. It is to make it holy, presented to Himself one day without spot or blemish (**Ephesians 5:25-33**).

Likewise, I have heard countless parents and grandparents make decisions daily based upon what that child "wants." I get frustrated when my life sometimes becomes affected, and even temporarily revolves around, a child's fluctuating whims. Sometimes adults become the casualties surrounding other adults' decisions... which are

based on the whims of their spouse or child.

I do not know about you, but I am glad God does not do that. I am glad He over-rules my prayers when I do not realize what I am asking or the consequences that would come if He gave me what I asked for. I am exceedingly glad (*most of the time*) that He grants my requests according to what is good for His kingdom and not on my wants alone.

Back to the original question - *“Does happy equal holy?”* Unfortunately... it usually means quite the opposite. So, if you find yourself saying often, *“Whatever he wants”* or *“Whatever she wants,”* you may want to take a step back and see if your goal for that one whom you love so much is to make him happy... or holy. The road to holiness is a hard road, filled with self-denial and daily sacrifice. Constantly being given what one “wants” is actually crippling that individual from accepting the challenge of the higher and harder holy road. Or perhaps you are crippling even yourself. Is your happiness what you seek most? Christ came to make us holy, thus He faced the cruelty and anguish

of the Cross. He did not say, *“Be ye happy, for I am happy.”* He said, ***“Be ye holy; for I am holy.”*** **Peter 1:16** (*Peter quoted from the multiple references in Leviticus 11, 19, and 20.*)

God has called us out from among the heathen, out from among the world (**Leviticus 11, 19, 20**). Thus, He declares we are to be like Him... to be holy. And usually that does not mean doing “whatever we want.”

It is our holy calling as a husband or wife to support our spouse in their calling from the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and show them clearly what you must do because God has called you to it. Wives, you are the helpmeet. God created and sent you to help your man meet his calling from the Lord. Parents, it is our holy calling and responsibility to prepare our children for what the Lord may be calling them to in the future. That includes Biblical and academic education, discipline, character training, godly expectations, and life lessons to name a few. If your child is spoiled and accustomed to getting *“whatever he or she wants,”* God is going to have extra battles to face with your child before he or

she can be useful in His Kingdom. Prepare your child for the Master, frequently asking yourself what type of adult he or she will become if they continue on this path. Many difficult adults are pampered or spoiled children in a big body.

Hard as it will be, pick the road to holiness – for yourself and your loved ones whom God has placed in your care. There will quite often be the contrasting choice of *“Do what will make me happy...or do what is holy?”* *“Do what will make him temporarily happy... or help him move toward the road to holiness?”* *“Do what she wants... or help guide her into Christ’s holiness?”*

***“Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”***

**Matthew 16:24**



**Mrs. Amber Sherman** is the mother of four and serves as a teacher at Pathway Christian Academy in Goldsboro, N.C.

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# Mary's Ponderings

Mary, Jesus' mother, was a ponderer. Imagine her pondering after the angel announced her upcoming virgin pregnancy (**Luke 1:27-35**). The first and only occurrence of that miracle was being fulfilled in her. What an awesome responsibility! When she greeted her cousin, Elizabeth testified of the blessing that would belong to Mary (**Luke 1:41-45**). Even in the praise she received, Mary focused the praise on God.

In the temple, Simeon testified that baby Jesus would bring salvation to the world (**Luke 2:25-35**). Jesus' parents marveled at his prophecy. Simeon added that Jesus' birth would bring pain and sorrow to Mary. She could not have fully understood the meaning of that statement at that time.

As Joseph and Mary engaged in the daily responsibilities of raising a family, did they forget Jesus' mission? When Jesus was twelve and they lost Him after visiting the temple, what were they thinking? How could they lose the Son of God? God had given them the responsibility, and they had failed. Imagine their desperation. When found, Jesus said that He was doing His Father's business. What was Mary thinking? Was she angry, relieved, confused, or did she experience a combination of those emotions? Mary treasured the experience in her heart (**Luke 2:51-52**).

Although the time had not come for Jesus to begin His public ministry, Mary knew He was capable and committed Him to solve the problem at the wedding in Cana. Was she ready to surrender Jesus to full time ministry at that time?

Three short years later, Mary finds herself witnessing the crucifixion of her Son. Had 33 years with Jesus come to this? What happened to God's plan? She was helpless to stop the proceedings. What did she ponder in those days between the crucifixion and the resurrection? And what joyful ponderings awaited her when she saw her risen Saviour! Their meeting was not recorded, but it must have been a highlight of her life!

Even though Mary knew Who Jesus was, she was caught off guard at times because she was not aware of the full plan. Sometimes, we don't understand the difficulties we face in life, but we can be assured that our Father has a perfect plan. Ponder that!



*Mrs. Connie Peters has two children and resides in Princeton, NC. Now retired, she formerly served as an instructor at Pathway Christian Academy in Goldsboro.*

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