

Harding University

Scholar Works at Harding

Footnotes: Curated Resources for Ministers

Harding School of Theology

2-4-2019

Footnotes: The Coddling of the American Church + Carlus Gupton + The Future of Print

Bob Turner

Harding School of Theology

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.harding.edu/hst-footnotes>

Recommended Citation

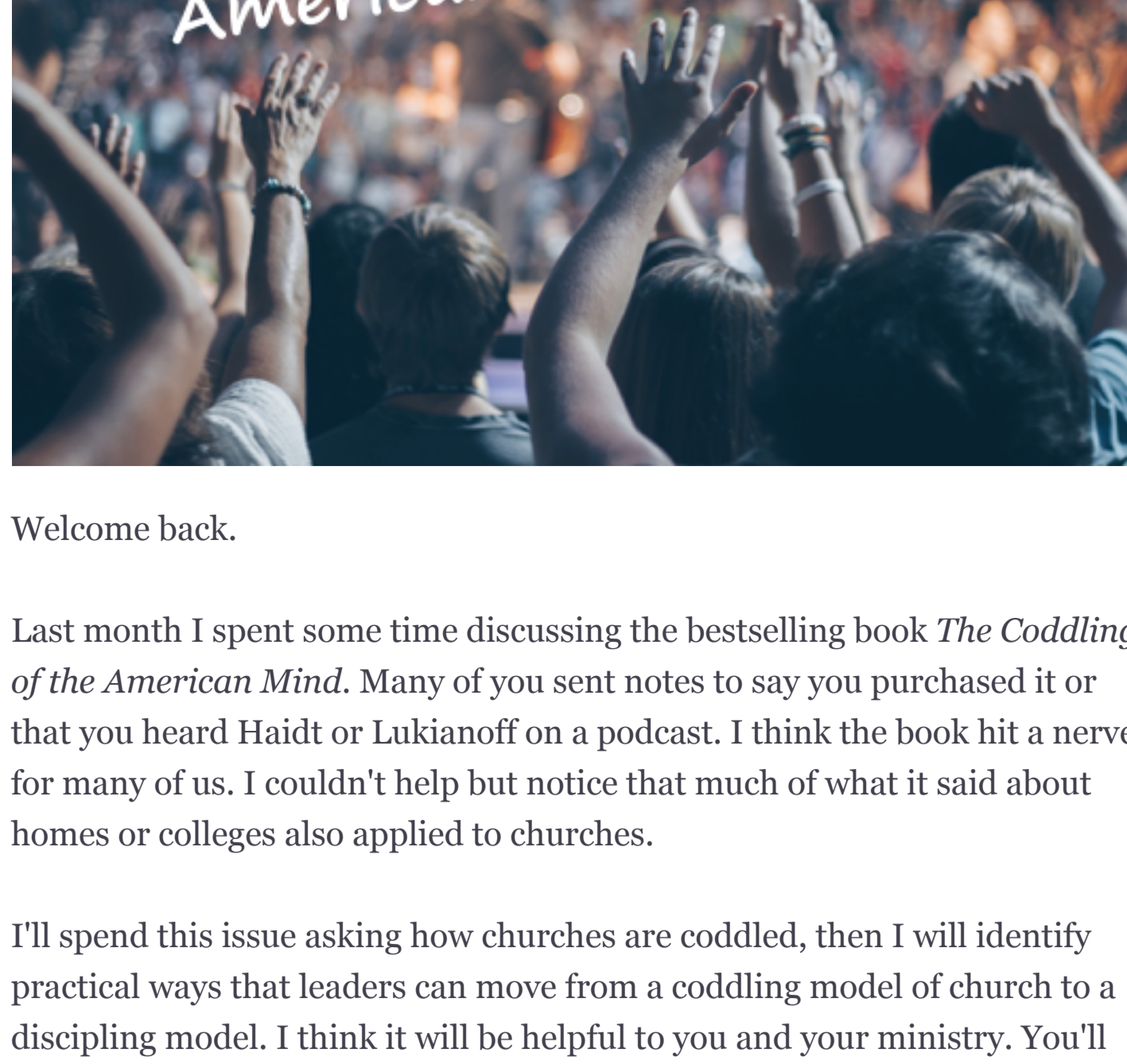
Turner, B. (2019). Footnotes: The Coddling of the American Church + Carlus Gupton + The Future of Print. Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.harding.edu/hst-footnotes/18>

This Newspaper is brought to you for free and open access by the Harding School of Theology at Scholar Works at Harding. It has been accepted for inclusion in Footnotes: Curated Resources for Ministers by an authorized administrator of Scholar Works at Harding. For more information, please contact scholarworks@harding.edu.



Footnotes¹

Curated Resources for Ministers



Welcome back.

Last month I spent some time discussing the bestselling book *The Coddling of the American Mind*. Many of you sent notes to say you purchased it or that you heard Haidt or Lukianoff on a podcast. I think the book hit a nerve for many of us. I couldn't help but notice that much of what it said about homes or colleges also applied to churches.

I'll spend this issue asking how churches are coddled, then I will identify practical ways that leaders can move from a coddling model of church to a discipling model. I think it will be helpful to you and your ministry. You'll find:

- Footnotes Roundtable with ministers from the Chicago Church of Christ.
- Footnotes Audio with Carlus Gupton. Don't miss this...he's really good.
- My 1,000 words on the future of print
- More Footnotes

Thanks for reading.



Footnotes Roundtable: ICOC Chicago

Today I'll talk with some friends from the [International Church of Christ](#). Don't confuse this group with Churches of Christ who are ethnically diverse, and thereby "international." This is a particular branch of the Stone-Campbell Movement who have historically put a major emphasis on discipleship and evangelism. Those from an earlier era might know them as the [Boston Movement](#), though much has changed since then. These men and women are some of my favorite church leaders around right now. They are high energy and really serious about discipleship. There are pockets of these churches in [LA](#), [Chicago](#), and [Boston](#). I sat down with:

- *James Becknell is the Congregational Teaching Minister for the Chicago Church of Christ.*
- *Maurice Charles is the Campus Minister for the Chicago Church of Christ*
- *Clint Larr is the Evangelist for the Midpoint Ministry Center.*

What are some examples of churches coddling their members? In what ways are we trying to attract and pacify members rather than making disciples?

James Becknell: I don't know if it is coddling or not, but I see a trend towards a kind of consumerism within the church that is catering to the retention of members and the attaining of new members. The members and potential members are the consumers and the church is the product.

Clint Larr: When we don't call people to discipleship we're coddling them. We usually attract and pacify members when we're more concerned about immediate results rather than long-term health. Attracting a crowd is exciting but relatively easy. Making whole-hearted disciples is far more difficult and less glamorous but it pays way more dividends for the kingdom.

JB: I know this sounds cynical, but this is a reality in the culture that we live in today that we have to deal with. It is a conflict to hold together the call of the gospel within our Christian community and the truth of the economic pressure to retain members.

Maurice Charles: We coddle when we set low and/or unclear expectations for relational intimacy (discipleship and partnership) and participation in personal ministry to the lost.

CL: We coddle the church when we shy away from that hard work of making disciples.

MC: Or when we let a rigid focus on traditions and debates/controversies of the past or obsess on things that primarily concern current members, we hinder our ability to move forward with visions of hope, inspiration, and impact.

It seems that a large, impersonal church context makes discipleship nearly impossible. What are things you do to encourage 1-on-1 relationships and discipling opportunities?

CL: Discipling relationships are an expectation for each member in our church.

JB: I have been immersed in this community since my early twenties and I don't know anything other than this. If I could try to explain this discipling 'phenomenon' I'd really have to say it comes down to a clear desire and focal point from the very beginning of our formation and it represents our core interests and strengths. It is definitely not a program that was implemented by a leader at some point. It is our identity as a community. Now it is a standard expectation for participation in our community.

CL: We make this clear when someone wants to become a member and we reiterate this yearly in some sort of series.

What specific practices do you recommend?

MC: I would preach and teach a midweek and Sunday series focused on examples of relational intimacy and mutual submission found throughout scripture.

JB: If somebody comes to join us, we teach them the scriptures and talk about this up front as a part of what it means to join us. The expectations are laid out very clearly at the beginning and then people have a choice whether or not this is the kind of community that they are looking for. We don't try to water down this message for new members because we know that if they don't embrace it, they will quickly become uncomfortable because of our intimate involvement in one another's lives. It is not a pressure thing at all, we just want people to understand so that they can choose for themselves if this is for them.

CL: Over time, it has become a deep conviction within our church culture that discipleship cannot be done alone. We need others for support, guidance, help, and encouragement. We rely on our small groups to be the context where people find these discipling relationships and to help each small group leader make sure everyone in their group is involved in a consistent discipling relationship.

Often, churches coddle members during times of conflict, when members feel hurt, ignored, or threatened.

JB: Every community has its challenges. It's hard to lead based on principle and there is always the temptation to please people and desire to make them as comfortable as possible. This is only human nature and I don't think there's anything wrong with it. Pleasing people and making them comfortable is a wonderful thing! The challenge is when the comfort of the flock is in conflict with the greater interests of the whole community. As a family of churches we have tried to stick closely to the leadership principles we observe in the scriptures as well as the wisdom of various leadership experiences both in scripture and in real life.

MC: It is important to give people language to help them voice what would constitute "feeling heard" in their opinion. Sometimes their expectations will be reasonable and at other times their expectations are unreasonable.

CL: In those times I try to remember the kingdom is not a democracy. I serve at the pleasure of the King. I need to do this with compassion, gentleness, patience, and respect towards those I lead, but I am in this position to advance His purposes, even if they are difficult or unpopular.

MC: All of this has to be couched in communal submission to the lordship of Jesus. If we will submit to His dominion in our thoughts and conduct, we can sort through anything as a community.

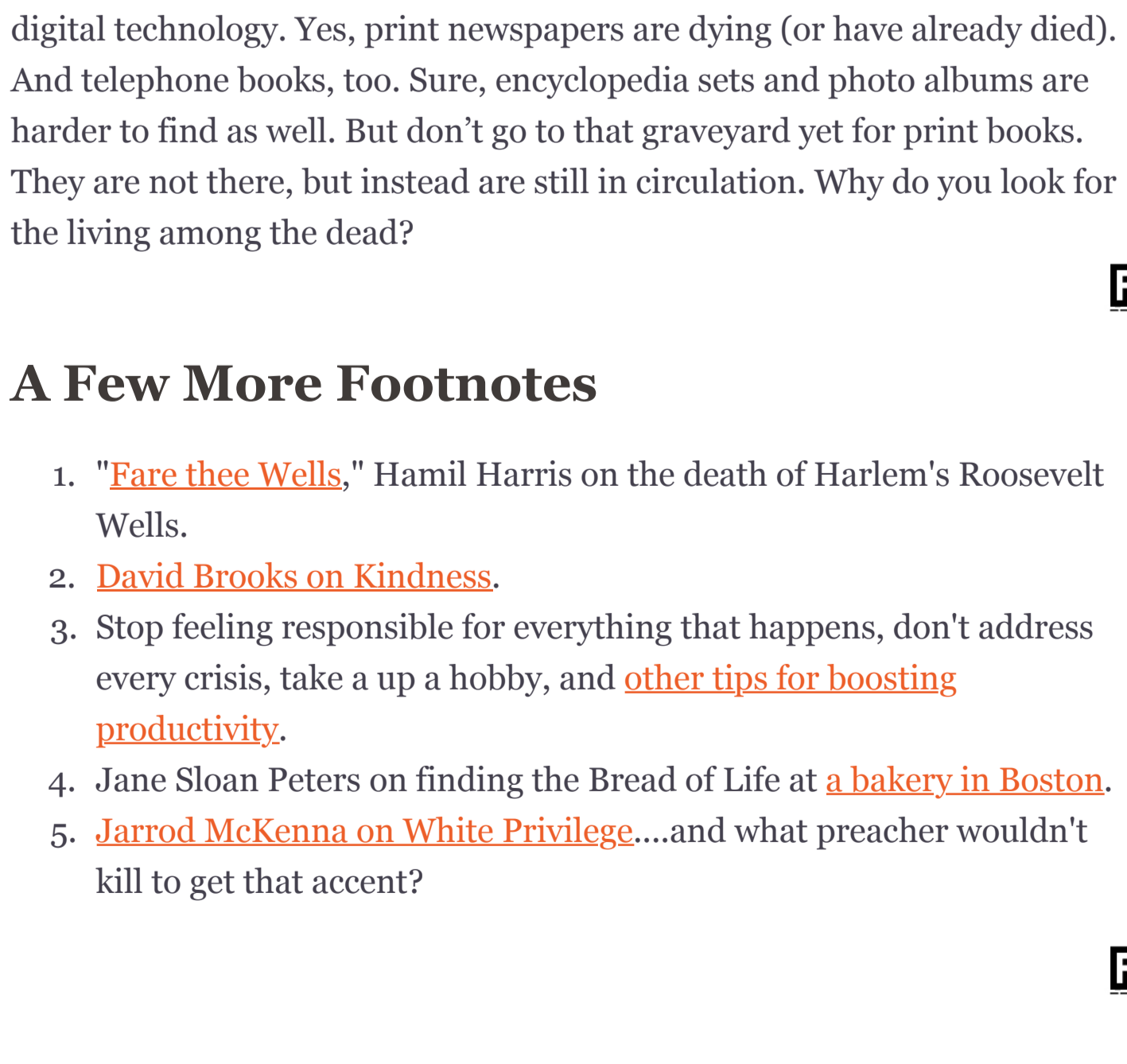
CL: The leader's disposition and how he processes the challenges are the biggest factors in navigating their group well through that difficulty.

JB: I have found that wisdom must prevail in all circumstances that we face in church life. It's much like being a parent and needing to make decisions about the direction of your family even if it might not be enjoyable or pleasurable for every member of the family. You still need to guide and direct the affairs of your home to the best possible outcome. You may be challenged by the choices you have to make but you don't feel the need to apologize for them because you are compelled by a deep sense of responsibility.

CL: Edwin Friedman's *Failure of Nerve* would be a helpful read.



Footnotes Audio: Carlus Gupton



Editorial: Does the Death of the Paper Mean the Death of Print?

Last year we added nearly 3,000 print titles to [the library collection](#). Though it was a typical year for us, it represented a slight fraction of the total number of books printed in 2018, in which nearly 700 million were sold in the U.S. alone. Reports indicate a recent [uptick in sales of print books](#). While Jeff Bezos, eBook mavens, and Kindle addicts might try to convince you otherwise, print books are in a good place for now.

A common challenge I hear is that the struggles of print newspapers foretell problems for churches. I understand why someone would associate the two (both are words on paper that have received challenges from digital platforms). That said, the perception that digital news killed the newspaper should not foreshadow the death of print books at the hand of digital books. This is because digital news did not kill print news.

Print news was killed by everything else in the paper.

Print newspapers operated on a business model where large, far-reaching staffs of editors, reporters, journalists, and columnists were paid full-time salaries to report and comment on their respective areas of expertise. Papers had a variety of sources of revenue, the most obvious being the individual subscription. This is the one most of us are familiar with, and was often recovered by a 13-year old boy in a heavy coat, huffing it around the block with a single hole-puncher in one hand and a metal ring of cards in the other. That is admirable work and probably bought him the newest *Incredible Hulk* and a few Charleston Chews, but it was never enough to fully fund the entire operation of running a daily newspaper.

Let's suppose a daily newspaper charged .75 per issue and was delivered to 250,000 households in a metropolitan area like Boston (.75/day for six days + \$2 on Sunday = \$84,500,000). While 84 million may seem like a lot of money, that sum funded a headquarters, newspaper, human resources, printing factory, delivery fleet, sales team, and about 1,300 coffee pots of strong, albeit cheap, coffee scattered throughout the premises. Such an undertaking could burn through \$85 million pretty quickly. The redeeming news for print newspapers was that they had daily cash flow beyond subscriptions. They had ads, classifieds, personals, and inserts. These streams were really significant. People would pay newspapers to help them sell firewood or used dishwashers and to market their garage sales. That was a nice revenue stream.

And the papers needed it. When you bought a paper you weren't just paying for news. You were paying for Ruth Reichl to eat dinner at Le Cirque and for Roger Ebert to watch *Dances with Wolves*. You paid for Mitch Albom to attend Super Bowls, Will Shortz to produce crossword puzzles, and Charles Schultz to draw cartoons. *WaPo* readers paid for Wilbon and Kornheiser to sit in their cubicles and argue with each for free long before ESPN learned that people would pony up to watch.

Basically, newspapers had massive revenues that covered massive expenses. Now, pull out a few pieces of that revenue: 1) Craigslist kills the classifieds, 2) Match, Tinder, and every other dating site kills the personals, 3) Facebook, Twitter, and Google kill the ads—replacing them on digital sites with contextualized ones (*are you 28, male, and want better abs?*). That's all it took. Three losses meant three streams of revenue gone. No one could shoulder a daily subscription rate that could subsidize that loss. It would cost like \$11.25 per day to host the paper.

But what about the online sites hosted by the paper? Aren't they responsible for the death of print news? Be honest, many of us get our news from stories that are hosted by those sites, but ultimately shared through social media. These online news sites aren't really the opponents of print, but instead co-victims. If the death of print newspapers had been at the hand of digital news, then we would anticipate struggling print papers like the [New York Daily News](#), Portland's [Oregonian](#), Cleveland's [Plain Dealer](#), and Memphis's [Commercial Appeal](#) to recoup the money online that they lost in print. Basically, they would have moved their best talent onto their online platforms, charged a fee, and made it work. That has not happened. If you look closely you'll see that online news sites run old stories for a long time and are losing writers, too. This is mostly because of the deaths suffered in the earlier paragraph (online ads don't pay nearly what print ads paid). There simply isn't the revenue needed to feed the beast. Time will tell if subscription-based "papers" (such as *The Athletic* or my city's *Daily Memphian*) can turn a profit the way their forerunners did. Newspapers did not simply die because people stopped taking the paper (or because they cut the cord as people do with cable). It is financially impossible to produce and distribute newspapers the way they once did. Even if every single person in Memphis, Tennessee who subscribed to the *Commercial Appeal* in 2003 renewed their subscription in 2019, they still couldn't make it work.

All of this is not necessarily true for books. The potential shift from print books to digital books will be determined by whether or not customers prefer digital. If they insist on reading from tablets, publishers will comply. If readers want sheets of paper glued to cloth or paper boards, publishers will keep producing print. For now, people want everything: they want to own devices and download books and listen to audiobooks and get print books in their stocking for Christmas. As long as that is the case, none of these formats are likely to run the others out of business. Whether or not each can flourish might be another matter.

This, of course, presumes that people are still interested in reading. If they choose to watch and click rather than to sit and read, then print books, as well as digital books, might have to ponder their futures. But even if this turned out to be true, it would still be inaccurate to blame Kindle for the death of print books. Instead, it would be the fault of Netflix.

As long as people read and as long as they prefer to read on pages rather than screens, print books will endure. Now, encyclopedia sets and subscriptions to *National Geographic* are another story. And we might wonder what grandma will keep in her attic now that those mainstays are no longer in circulation. Nevertheless, libraries like ours will continue to purchase print books and electronic books because our patrons continue to want both. But for now, for items that they plan on spending more than 30 minutes reading, they mostly want print books.

No question there is a graveyard of things that have been made obsolete by digital technology. Yes, print newspapers are dying (or have already died). And telephone books, too. Sure, encyclopedia sets and photo albums are harder to find as well. But don't go to the graveyard yet for print books. They are not there, but instead are still in circulation. Why do you look for the living among the dead?

A Few More Footnotes

1. "[Fare thee Wells](#)," Hamil Harris on the death of Harlem's Roosevelt Wells.
2. [David Brooks on Kindness](#).
3. Stop feeling responsible for everything that happens, don't address every crisis, take a up a hobby, and [other tips for boosting productivity](#).
4. Jane Sloan Peters on finding the Bread of Life at [a bakery in Boston](#).
5. [Jarrod McKenna on White Privilege](#)...and what preacher wouldn't kill to get that accent?

Subscribe to Footnotes

Back Issues of Footnotes

FOOTNOTES helps church leaders discover the resources that will improve and sustain their ministries. It will regularly feature interviews, book recommendations, site reviews, and editorials. It is a project of Bob Turner. You can direct any questions or feedback to rjturner@harding.edu. Complaints can be sent to his [Juno account](#).

UPCOMING

February 18

Downsizing or Hemorrhaging? Churches of Christ by the Numbers

Copyright © Bob Turner 2019 All rights reserved.

Our mailing address is:
Footnotes: Curated Resources for Ministers
1000 Cherry Road
Memphis, TN 38117

Want to change how you receive these emails?
You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe from this list](#).

This email was sent to <Email Address>
[why did I get this?](#) | [unsubscribe from this list](#) | [update subscription preferences](#)
Bob Turner - 1000 Cherry - Memphis, TN 38117 - USA

