
THE OLIVE BRANCH

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2023



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Living the D.R.EA.M. with Christ

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and future.”

Jeremiah 29:11

D – Develop = People, ministers, and facilities to serve the needs of the community.

R – Reach = World Missions, US Missions, and Community Outreach. Reach the People where they are with the love of Christ.

E – Equip = Believers with the knowledge of God to establish them in a relationship with Christ.

A – Anoint = Holy Spirit lead spontaneous worship that glorifies God and draws people to Him.

M – Mobilize = The Church to exercise their gifts in ministry outreach and missions.

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The Olive Branch



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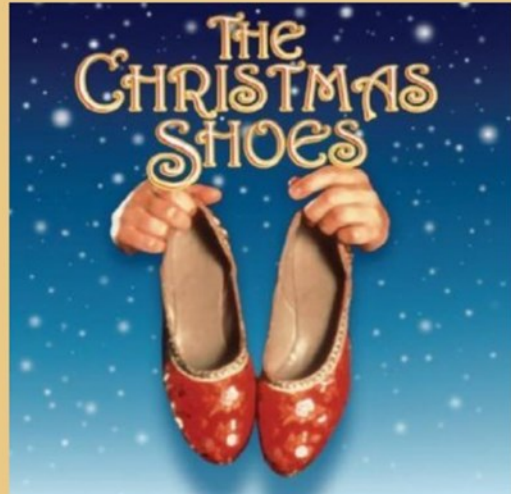
Free Admission

December 15 @ 6:30pm

December 16 @ 3:00pm

December 17 @ 9:30am

651 N Ocotillo Dr
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A Dramatic Musical

Share

Are you someone that gets messages, directions from God? Our lives, our walk with God, are common. We all experience the same or at least similar experiences. We pray for the inflicted with injuries and illness; we pray for the son or daughter or other family member that has stopped going to church. We may have difficult decisions in our life, regarding our finances, employment, family or health related. If you are one that gets these words of wisdom, knowledge, or encouragement, please share them with the rest of us. Share them with me at aj1stolivebranch@gmail.com, if you feel like "I'm not a writer" share what you have, I will edit the words to publish the message here in the Olive Branch for all of us to benefit. You may be an inspiration to someone who needs that word of encouragement, or to hear that Praise report to remember that God is on the throne, and He still answers prayer. I look forward to reading your messages from God.

God bless you,

Brad Gonzales, editor

“Have you not known? Have you not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary? There is no searching of His understanding. He gives power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.” Isaiah 40:28-31

Behold Your God!



Fran Barbano

One thing I pray that we will know and understand before our lives are over is the love of God. Because God's love is by far the greatest love to be found in the entire universe. Truly, God is love. His love is immeasurable, unwarranted, and completely misunderstood.

We have no concept of His ultimate power. He is Omnipotent, All-Knowing, All Powerful, Almighty God, the Great I Am. He is Magnificent, Holy, Wonderful. He is our Comforter, our Healer, our Hope, our Rock. The most amazing fact is that He loves us.

We have no idea how much love our Creator has for us. He loves each one of us as if there were only one of us. He cannot love us anymore than He already does. He will never love us less. His love is unconditional, something finite beings cannot truly comprehend. God is infinite. He has no beginning and no end. He always was; always will be. And yet He loves us.

He will never stop loving us. Even if or when we reject Him, He still loves us unconditionally. Yes, we can break His heart when we reject Him, but He will never stop loving us. God is a picture of unconditional love.

I've had people say, "If God is so good and loves us so much, why would He send anyone to hell?" Another misconception. God has given each of us free will. That means **we choose**. We can choose to be good or bad; we can choose to live righteously, or we can live like the devil. Either way, we should know in advance that for every decision and every action, there is a consequence and a reaction.



If we live like the devil and never repent and turn away from our riotous lifestyle or sin, we will spend eternity with the devil. God doesn't want that for any of us. That's why He, through His prophets down through the centuries, has given us His Word to live by. There is no other book like the *Holy Bible*. It is a book of history, mystery, intrigue, prophecy, and coming future events. In this *Holy Bible*, God has given us instructions on how we should live, love, and prepare for the future.

Perhaps we've walked away or never had a relationship with God, deciding to do things "our way," only to discover that we find ourselves in a self-made pit of hell by our choices. Until we cry out to God, we will stay there. But like the prodigal son of scripture, when we cry out to God, He comes running. Phillips, Craig and Dean have a song about that son, in the song When God Ran. In part, it says, "And then he ran to me, he took me in his arms, held my head to his chest and said, 'My son's come home again.' He lifted my head, wiped the tears from my eyes and said, 'Son, do you know I still love you?'" This is a picture of God when we return to Him. He will always love us even if we never return to Him, but our choices determine our eternal destination. Choose wisely.

My prayer for each of us is that we will come to the full knowledge of God's great love for us. I pray that if we have strayed, we will repent (be sorry and *turn away* from our sinful ways) and return to God before our last breath. Look at the world around us. Chaos reigns. None of us knows when our last breath will come. Only God knows that. Please, if we do not have a relationship with the One who loves us more than we could possibly comprehend, make that eternal life saving decision today. May we not wait until our last breath before we decide. He is our hope. Our only hope in this world and in the world to come.

To learn more about our Magnificent God, read Isaiah chapters 40 through 43. Then read the Bible each day. We must allow the Holy Spirit, through the prophets, to teach us. If new to the Bible, start with John's gospel and the book of Romans in the New Testament.

God bless you!



What happened the American Grit?

This is the first in a series of articles that I will be writing. Hopefully, there will be an article every issue for the Olive Branch. I hope you will enjoy this journey with me.

INTRODUCTION: Where did the American Grit go? As I pondered this question, which has taken some time, I came to this conclusion. You may not completely agree with me, but don't make a decision until you hear me out. This is what came into my mind; "America's Grit went from the heart and soul of man to become only a crop of grain for a food staple." What do I mean by this statement? I mean, it looks to me that the trait of man's entrepreneurial spirit and willingness to work hard and being proud to be self-sufficient, has been traded in for a dependency in government handouts and programs. We have settled into a status-quo mindset and whatever attitude. This attitude shows up in every sector of our lives today and is getting worse every day. We are told what *the best way* is to raise our children, in their opinion! Government coerced us, news analysts', medical practitioners ...etc. there are just too many 'we know better' think tanks out there dreaming of ways they can turn, and have been quite successful, to turn the American dream into a nightmare. These mindsets are undermining the attitude that initially made America great. It's difficult to determine where to begin due to numerous factors to consider. First, I would list things in alphabetical order, but that would make it difficult to show progression or regression. So, I decided to try to list the things I wanted to present in this document and create a catchy acronym. That didn't work either. So, I looked at what are the fundamental roots that shaped America. So, my model will be that of a tree!

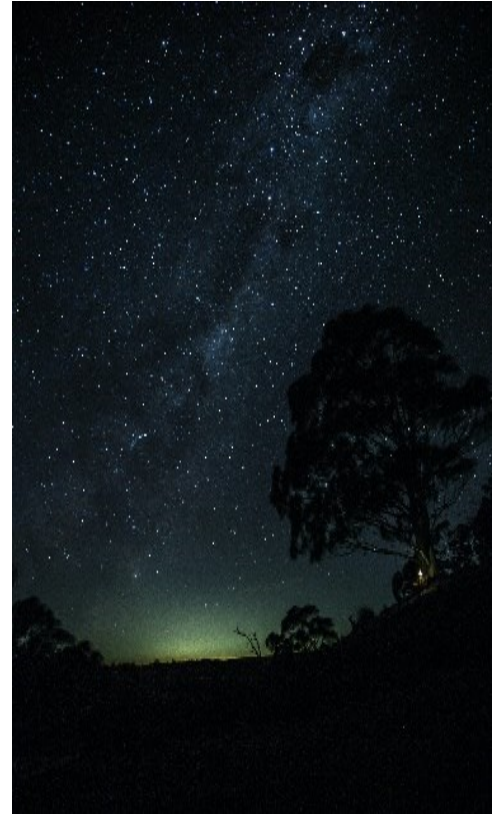


What then, is the foundation or root of our beginning and build from there? We have all heard the phrase 'Freedom is not Free'. That is perhaps one of the first truth we as Americans learned. Freedom costs someone something and we are the beneficiaries of that cost. Our nation was built by those who had the courage to endure hardships, failures, and reputational risks. Today, that honor is being threatened. Not from the outside, but from the inside. So, let's get started!

Can you imagine what it was like to see the star that foretold the birth of Jesus? Maybe it was like this.

My name is Darian, I'm a student of the Magi. I was so excited to be chosen to be a student of these wise men. Little did I know that my job was to stare at the sky night after night after night and report back to them if anything out of the ordinary was seen. So, this is what I did every night until sunrise. It would change a little as the night went on toward sunrise and occasionally, I would see a shooting star.

Nearly 600 years ago, after the Jews became enslaved here, in Babylon, there was a prophet named Daniel. When the Hebrews came here, they renamed them all. They renamed Daniel - Belteshazzar. King Darius was tricked into signing a law that for 30 days no one was to pray to anyone, devine or human, except to him. (Daniel 6:1-28) The King reluctantly was forced to throw him into a lions' den because he continued to pray to his God. The next morning the king went out to the lion's den and cried out *"Was your God, whom you serve faithfully able to rescue you from the lions"* Daniel responded *"My God sent angel to shut lions' mouths so that they would not hurt me."* The King decreed that everyone should tremble with fear before the God of Daniel.



As you can imagine, he became very well-known and respected. He became Chief of the Magi and taught the Law of Moses and the prophets.

It has been so long since the King Cyrus allowed the Jews to return home and to rebuild the temple. Alexander, the King of Macedonia, conquered most of the known world, and the Greeks and others had their influence too. Now, the Romans are the dominant force. The Magi believed the time had come for a sign in the sky to tell them that the King of the Jews, had been born.

Then one night I saw this brilliant star in the sky. I immediately went to the wise men, saying come and see the star that just appeared. Excitedly, they began preparing their group for a 900-mile journey west to find the child who would be the King of the Jews.

It was not uncommon for these Magi to travel to other kingdoms, meeting with kings. These were wise men held in high regard. So, when they met with King Herod, they asked, "Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews?" (Matthew 2:2) This news greatly disturbed King Herod, so he summoned the priests to gather more information about the birth of this rival king. They told him, "In Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, for this is what has been written by the prophet" [Micah 5:2].

Being a new student, it surprised me how seriously they responded to this new star. To pick up and go to, well, *I don't know*, and I am not sure they knew either. I've heard stories of how God told Abram to go to a land he promised, leaving his prosperous life behind. I'm not sure I could do that. Noah's dedication to building a boat in the desert, despite not knowing what rain was, ensured our survival.

I have a lot to learn about this kind of faith. Little did I know that on this trip, that would all change.

Upon leaving Jerusalem, the star led the way to a house. The wise men went in with their gifts, gold and frankincense, I could understand, but myrrh? They used myrrh when preparing a body for burial, did they know this child's destiny? We camped outside Bethlehem that night; they shared what they had learned about an angel visiting Mary and told her she was going to have a baby by the Holy Spirit, not by man. She was a virgin. Isaiah wrote about this also [7:14] Another angel convinced Joseph to keep her as his wife. The next morning, we are told that God had told them, in a dream, to go out a different way and avoid Harod the Great and Jerusalem.

It had been many years since the last prophet, Malachi wrote what he heard from God. Now a brilliant star in the sky, the Magi had a dream and angels had visited shepherds, too. It was obvious, that God was again involved in our lives.

Yet, he was born in a stable with the animals, not where a king would be born. What else do we know about this child that God is protecting from the Roman King?

I asked the Magi, my mentors. They had me read what the prophet **Isaiah** wrote, (chapter 53:3) *"He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces, he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely, he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him and afflicted."*

Now, I'm more confused than before. This does not sound like any king I have heard of and why is God protecting him? It sounds like people will not like him, in fact, despise him. I continued to read 5. *"But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds, we are healed."*

What is wrong with these people? He will do all of this to bring us peace and healing. 6. *"All we like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned, each one, to his own way."*

He took upon himself our blame for all our sins, for all our weaknesses. If I was free of guilt, that would give me peace and so many need to be healed. I continued to read 8. *"By oppression and judgement, he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? [His contemporaries, wait that is me] For he was cut off from the land of the living [by His death] For the transgression of my people he was punished. His was assigned a grave with the wicked, and the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth."*

They put this man, this King, to death as if he had done something wrong. He didn't even lie, who hasn't lied! 12 *"....For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for transgressors."*

I also read where King David wrote in Psalms 16 *"I saw the Lord always before me. Because He is my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore, my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest in hope, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, you will not let your Holy One (Jesus) see decay. You have known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence."* [Acts 2:25-28]

So, this baby, Jesus, will grow up, then he will die for our sins, then he won't stay in the place of the dead, he will be resurrected and he will know joy in the presence of God almighty. Wow, no wonder God is protecting his life from King Herod. On our way back to Babylon, we hear that the family had to flee and Harod did the unthinkable, he had all the baby boys killed. He surely is a mad man.

The prophet Hosea wrote “*..out of Egypt I called my son*” This is God saying this baby boy is more than just any King, he is the Son of God! So, God loved us so much that he sent His only son to be the final sacrifice to forgive us our sin. *No one has greater love than to lay down his own life for his friends, “Behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us, that we should be called the sons of God.”*

I will be watching this king as he grows, I have so much more to learn, but what I know already, I believe!

To find out more about Jesus and his sacrifice for our sins, ask the person who shared this with you or visit AJ First Assembly of God. You can also email me at aj1stolivebranch@gmail.com for more information.

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Rom 3:23

“For if while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of His Son, it is much more certain, having been reconciled, that we will be saved by His life. (by His resurrection)” Rom 5:10

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God, is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Rom 6:23

“Therefore, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...” Rom 8:1

“That if you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved...” Rom.

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Events coming soon!

November 10, Friday at 6:30. in bldg. C	Faith Builders Movie Night showing “The Identical”
November 11, Saturday, at 1pm in bldg. C	Love’s Holiday Tea – sign up!
November 11 th – Veteran’s Day	Thank You for your service!
November 23, Thursday – all day	Thanksgiving Be Thankful!
December 15, 16 & 17 in bldg. A	The Christmas Shoes – various times
December 25 th All day	Christmas
January 6 th Saturday 1pm in bldg. C	YAHs - Chili and Desert Cookoff!

