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I have long maintained that when it comes to pressing into the 21st century of gadgets and hi tech goodies, I feel like a dinosaur. In fact, I have often lamented the fact that I am a “technosaurus wreck.”

In the 90's I railed against those who *had* to carry pagers and treated every beep like an emergency... until my kids gave me a pager for Father's Day. (I'm certain their mother put them up to it.) Then I eloquently decried the *electronic leash* that tethered *lesser men* to their mobile phones ... until my congregation pushed me into the 21st century with a cell phone anniversary gift. For years the ability to make phone calls was more than sufficient ... until a well-timed text message moved me into the next stage of techno-desire. I used to say I longed for a computer as easy to use as a phone. I finally got my wish — I have trouble with both for now I have been seduced by the smart phone. It is a slippery slope. My Commodore 64 (which I never quite figured out) gave way to an Apple, which gave way to a PC, which gave way to a laptop, which is now being supplanted by the I-Pad I got for my birthday. As inept as I am with their use, my gadgets have become so important I risk panic when they're not securely attached to my belt. To paraphrase the Apostle Paul: “Wretched man that I am, who will set me free from my techno slavery?”

Now I have entered the world of apps. I need the weather; there's an app for that. I need a map; there's an app for that. I need a compass; there's an app for that. I need a calculator; there's an app for that. I even have an app to check stock market quotes, which has become a source of distraction and worry when the market goes down. I'm really not sure why it bothers me so; all my assets are creatively tied up in debt!

Just recently, however, I've found a couple of apps that are quite meaningful to me. I found the You-Version Bible app last November. It has been an incredibly useful tool for helping me stay current with my daily Bible reading. There are a number of daily reading plans from which to choose. I selected a plan that interested me and typically read first thing in the morning. The app keeps track of my progress; and if I'm late with my reading, I receive a subtle reminder and I'm back on schedule. At Christmas my nephew showed me another app that is quite remarkable. It's called SpaceJunk. This app locates my position anywhere in the world and then allows me to aim into the sky to see and identify whatever stars, planets and satellites are there. What seems amazing to me is that the app reveals what stars are overhead even when the skies are cloudy or the sun is shining. You can even point it down and see what stars appear on the other side of the earth. It is an amazing thing to have an app that allows you to see what is really there, even when you can't really see it.

Hey, there's another app like that. It's called faith. As we step into a new year, as we move toward the future God holds for us as individuals and congregations and a Region, faith is a critical app. Reading about Moses shepherding the Hebrew people out of Egypt, through the wilderness and to the edge of the Promised Land is a story about faith-steps. Moses would not move unless faith allowed him to see that God was moving. The writer of Hebrews recounts a long list of God's faithful people and then says:

“Each one of these people of faith died not yet having in hand what was promised, but still believing. How did they do it? *They saw it way off in the distance, waved their greeting, and accepted the fact* that they were transients in this world. People who live this way make it plain that they are looking for their true home. If they were homesick for the old country, they could have gone back any time they wanted. But they were after a far better country than that—heaven country. You can see why God is so proud of them, and has a City waiting for them.” (Heb.11:13-16)

What is faith allowing you to *see way off in the distance*? The beginning of a new year always seems like a good opportunity stretching forward to the great things God holds for us. Faith will allow us to see God’s preferred future for ourselves, our churches and Region, guided by the great mandates spelled out in scripture. Faithfulness to these will enable us to see off in the distance to something wonderful God has in store.

What are those great mandates?

- The Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) which sends us to preach the gospel and make disciples.
- The Great Commandment (Matt. 22:36-38) which calls us to love God and one another.
- The Great Community (Rom. 12:4-6) which establishes us as the Body of Christ and members one of another.
- The Great Criteria (Matt. 25:31-46) which lays upon us the responsibility to care for the last, the least, the lost and the left-out.

Life and ministry in 2012 ... there’s an app for that. Let us look and live by faith so we can truly see the good things God has in store for us as we follow Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

John Williams
Executive Minister

Religious Liberty Essay Scholarship Contest

Open to all high school students in classes of 2012 & 2013

TOPIC:

The religious beliefs and affiliations of presidential candidates often become campaign issues. Is that fair? Should presidential candidates talk about their religious beliefs? Are there certain religion-related questions each candidate should or should not have to answer?

In an essay, you must use and cite sources, such as the U.S. Constitution and news articles.

For entry forms and more information,
visit www.BJOnline.org/contest

Grand Prize: \$1,000 scholarship & trip to Washington, D.C.

Second Prize: \$500 **Third Prize:** \$100

Deadline: March 15, 2012