

# HENLY TODAY

## A WORD FROM PASTOR DON: COMING TOGETHER AGAIN

*"I was glad when they said unto me, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord'."* The joy associated with this proclamation from Psalm 122:1 resonates with each of us as we make our way back to Henly Baptist Church on Sunday, June 7, 2020.

Thankfully, as a family of faith, we have had access to our worship services through *YouTube* over the past 11 weeks. What initially seemed like an incredible inconvenience has actually morphed into another form of weekly ministry for our church. We are touching and having an impact on an average of 233 lives each week. Consequently, we plan to continue broadcasting our weekly worship services. It's another example of how God can transform a time of difficulty into an expression of good.

In consultation with David Smith at Austin Baptist Association about best practices in promoting safety during in-person worship services, I and our deacons have carefully – and prayerfully – considered the recommended ways to keep everyone safe and to minimize the possibility for contagion.

In order to follow social distancing requirements outlined by the CDC, we will meet for Sunday morning worship in our Fellowship Hall – not the sanctuary – at 11 a.m. One door will be used to enter and leave the building, and hand sanitizer will be available.

To help us provide plenty of appropriately distanced seating, we will attempt to get RSVPs from everyone who wishes to attend. Family members may sit side-by-side, but all other individuals must be separated by an interval of at least six feet unless they are with a family group. If for some reason you've not made an RSVP, you will still be welcomed to attend.

Please note: The church strongly endorses the CDC recommendation that facemasks be worn. Also, to minimize contagion risk, there will be no congregational singing.

Before and after service, I encourage you to visit with your church family outside the building like we always have – but at appropriate distances, of course. I, for one, can't wait! No technology can replace the experience of being face to face, even with masks and six feet apart, with those you love and care about.

I know we're all eager to reconnect as a family of faith. However, just because we can doesn't mean that we should. We're still in the midst of a pandemic in which older folks and those with health issues are more susceptible to serious complications. Prayerfully consider if now is the time for you to join with others for worship.

You are a valued and loved part of our family of faith regardless of the decision you make for now. It is perfectly acceptable to continue to join us on Sunday mornings through *YouTube*. We are better when you are here, but we are not better if your being here compromises your health.



**"Let us go into  
the house of  
the Lord."**

*Don*

## WHEN GOD WINKS

Welcome to a new feature of *Henly Today* that allows us to share stories with each other about a time when the Lord has worked His providence in our lives.

Godwinks are those extraordinary little events in our lives that happen for a reason. Coincidence? Luck? An experience that didn't seem all that special when it happened but that changed the course of a day ... or a life?

We invite you to share your own uplifting stories – or those of a friend or family member – that will bolster our faith, and help us grow stronger and closer as a family of that faith. We will publish all stories anonymously, and take care that no specific names are included. We want everyone to be comfortable knowing they can share a story and not have to worry about details of their lives being known.

Send your Godwink stories to [Pastor Don](#).

If you've got a good Godwink story but would prefer to tell it confidentially to a "ghost writer" who will write it for you, please let Pastor Don know.

## HOW GOD USES OUR ACTIONS FOR OTHERS

The year was 2005. I was on an extended business trip during which I was going to be away for more than a year. Due to the nature of the work, I was only able to visit home and see my wife for a weekend every several months.

I had not attended church in more than two decades. When I was in high school, my family had left our church of numerous years and, despite initially trying, we just couldn't bring ourselves to attend church services. We had been driven from our church by an event of betrayal and hypocrisy. That event and the subsequent actions of people we previously trusted convinced us that modern worship was more about the business of religion than actual spirituality.

Since then, our family had worshiped in our own way: watching sermons on TV, listening to recordings on cassette tape, or simply reading Scripture and sharing our thoughts/feelings in our own family Bible study.

As the years went by and I left to begin life on my own, I had continued those actions, but I always wished I had a church family I could trust. It took me leaving home again to bring that to fruition.

Having embarked on this extended trip away from home, and knowing the work was going to be arduous, I felt led to look for somewhere to go and worship. I was staying with a very good friend of mine who was there working with me, but beyond him and his family I had no other support structure. I also had no knowledge of the area or the available churches there. My friend was a man of faith, but he shared my disdain for the modern business of religion.

I was on my own – or so I thought. I pulled out the *Yellow Pages*. (Note for you young folks: The *Yellow Pages* was a real book that was periodically printed and distributed within a specific geographical area. The pages were actually yellow, and they contained the phone numbers, addresses and descriptions of businesses in that area. Some of you may remember this now-extinct phenomenon: We called it a phone book.)

As I leafed through the pages containing the churches, I once again became dismayed. This was a small, rural area and yet there were multiple pages of churches, all with their own claims – many with advertisements telling me why they were the one I should attend. I almost gave up, but I prayed for the Lord's guidance and looked through them again.

I finally chose one, not feeling particularly excited about it but still committed to try. It was across town in an area I had never been to, so I had to pull out a map (Don't get me started on what those were...) to plan out directions to get there. Just before closing the *Yellow Pages*, I noticed another church listing. It was just one line – its name and number – but it had the same name as the church I attended as an adolescent. I thought to myself, "Well, if the one I chose doesn't work out maybe I'll drop by that one." I must have also noticed the street address, but I did not consciously commit it to memory.

The next day was Sunday, so I got up, got ready and left, following the map to the church I had chosen. As I was sitting at a traffic signal, I saw a street sign for the street name for the second

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**Henly Today** is a monthly publication of Henly Baptist Church. Pastor and Executive Editor: Don Forrester. Our mission is to report on and encourage participation in all church activities, share stories of our church family, and to support the fulfillment of our church's 100-year-plus mission "to be a spiritual lighthouse in the community through the practice of Christ's teachings, evangelism, outreach, and social and benevolent ministries." Please send your news, comments and address updates to: [HenlyToday@gmail.com](mailto:HenlyToday@gmail.com).

## OUR LEGACY IN COLOR AND LIGHT

I may be getting ahead of myself by telling you the story behind our church's newest stained glass window – which hasn't even been installed yet – but the moment I saw it last week I knew it had to be in this issue of *Henly Today*.

This window is a tribute to Decker Ayers who went to be with the Lord on Sept. 15, 2018. The specialness of the window has to do with the messages of light and hope it beautifully portrays. In many respects, they are the same messages associated with the cardinal. The cardinal is said to represent celebration, rejuvenation, hope, health and joy.

It was through Divine providence that Decker and his wife, Lindley Pond Ayers, ventured into Henly Baptist Church. I had met the couple at a social gathering months before, where I was simply a tag-along as Treva's husband. It was not until Lindley attended a memorial service for a mutual friend where I was officiating that she had thought of me as anything other than Treva's husband. She had no idea that I was pastor of Henly Baptist Church.

In addition, I was surprised to learn that Lindley and Decker were the owners of a home where a couple of dear friends previously lived. The home and its property have a special uniqueness and sense of serenity. Being in the home is like being in a tree house in the midst of nature's bounty – where the outside seems inside. The wrap-around covered porch adds a welcoming ambience. The property is off the beaten path, and the only thing a cell phone could be effectively used for is a paper weight. It's the kind of environment where relationships and love seem to flourish.

When I first met Decker, he was sick and tired of being sick and tired. I wouldn't describe him as a "glass is half full person," but he was tired. He had moved to Texas years ago from Cooperstown, New York, at the invitation of a friend from the first grade to help build the friend's mother a home in Fredericksburg. She wanted a Cape Cod style house, and they were in short supply.

Architecture and design were second nature to Decker, and over the next 35-plus years he excelled in building homes with a reputation for quality and excellence in craftsmanship.

My impression could be off, but early in our relationship I got the sense that Decker was a pretty private person and that he didn't need a lot of friends. He had friends – he had good friends. For him to open his home and his life to me was a gift, and I will forever be grateful.

Though Decker never said so, I got the sense that he didn't have room for a lot of preachers in his life. He grew up Presbyterian but, by his own admission, it didn't take him long to take a step or two away from his Presbyterian upbringing when he left home.

One Sunday Decker said to me, "If you've got some time this week, I'd like to talk." The invitation was music to my ears. The conversation that ensued was comfortable, open and honest. We sat outside on the deck, figuratively in the middle of paradise.

Decker was candidly up front with me. He said, "I want to talk, and I suspect we are not going to agree on everything."

"Good," I responded. I added, "I can always benefit from people who think differently than I do. I suspect that previous life experiences build the foundation of what most of us believe. Consequently, I'm not threatened when someone else sees it differently."

The ground rules we set for the conversation were that we'd both be candid and open. Subsequently, I was surprised that we agreed on a lot more than we disagreed. Though he didn't hold me personally responsible, he did suggest that "church people" don't always get it right.

How could I disagree with him? His criticism and observations had merit.



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We say one thing and often contradict what we say we believe by our behavior. He mentioned a lack of empathy for people who are down and out or people who think differently than we think. He also mentioned that “church people” often come across as judgmental and uncaring. He was batting a thousand. I couldn’t disagree with any of that.

Our theology wasn’t quite in sync, but I didn’t find that a problem. We are all a work in progress. One Sunday, weeks later, the focus of my message was on the one area where I perceived Decker and I weren’t on the same page. After the sermon, he came up to me and said, “Don, I liked the message. I want you to know that I believe exactly what you believe. He then asked, “Do you understand what I’m saying?” I smiled and said, “yes.”

The last months of Decker’s life were lived with a sense of hopefulness that didn’t seem particularly tied to his health status. One of the things I’ve missed in the months since his home-going are the text messages Lindley generated to provide updates.

Whether it was two steps forward and one step back or two steps back and one step forward, the consistent message was always, “It’s all good.” I wish I still had those messages on my phone – they were priceless. There was one message where Lindley described “the love of her life” as resembling his “old self.” I don’t know how many adjectives she used to describe Decker, but the number was many and they were all positive. I had the thought: Wow! Wow! Wow! There is no man alive that would not long for that kind of affirmation.

By the way, the love that Lindley had for Decker wasn’t one-sided. She was the love of his life. Even in the midst

of his fatigue, he wanted more than anything to get well. It wasn’t self-centered on his part. It was an act of love. Decker wanted to get well simply because Lindley wanted him to get well.

One Sunday at church, Decker asked me privately to do him a favor. Would I mind having a prayer with him and Lindley, and bless the ring that she wore representing their marriage?

Well, Lindley is always two steps ahead. She only walks one speed, and it is fast. She was halfway to their truck after services before I could ask her to stop for a moment and visit. I don’t think I’ve ever prayed to bless a ring before, but I spoke about the love that the ring represents: a love that has no beginning and no end. Lindley had no idea what prefaced any of that unexpected celebration of love, but Decker was pleased, and I was honored to have shared the experience.

I was privileged to be with Lindley at Decker’s bedside when he breathed his last breath and went to be with the Lord. It was the most precious of moments. The immediate sense of peace and the light that filled the room were clearly signs from above. I don’t have the words to describe what we both saw and felt, but my being there to witness it all was a privilege that fills me with gratitude.

Our church’s beautiful new stained glass window expresses what words cannot. It is a perfect tribute ... because it is Decker’s story. One shared with the love of his life.

- Don Forrester

***“Every good and perfect gift is from above,  
coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does  
not change like shifting shadows.”***

James 1:17 NIV

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church I had noticed just before closing the *Yellow Pages*. This was on my side of town and much more convenient. So I made a right turn from the left hand lane – it was a very quiet morning and there was no one else around – and drove down just to see where the “second chance” church was.

Upon seeing the church, I decided to attend there that morning and try the other one the next Sunday. I frame this statement in these terms because saying “I felt led” would be disingenuous. Sometimes you do receive an overwhelming feeling, like “I should really see about finding a church while I’m here,” but other times you just make a simple choice. I have found that both ends of this spectrum can be His direction.

Anyway, this church, the pastor, and the congregation felt like I was coming home – much like when I first attended Henly. I never visited that other church and never gave it a second thought. I just thanked the Lord for leading me there and thought the story was over. It wasn’t.

That same Sunday night at the evening service I met a young man who was in the same line of work as me. He wasn’t in the same program – we didn’t work together – but he seemed to be interested in what I was doing. So I struck up a conversation with him.

Over the following year my new friend attended church sporadically, but we would always speak at length when he did. Because of my work it was also hit-and-miss when I could attend, but he began asking when I would be around and asking my insight. It turns out he had an interest in genuinely following in my footsteps, and he was happy to have made my acquaintance. Once I learned he was seeking a sort of mentor, I made a point to contact him anytime I was going to be around.

I also went to say goodbye – and ensure he had my contact information – before I returned home once my work was complete. It was only then that I learned from his father, the associate pastor of the church, that my new friend and mentee

had been struggling with life when he met me. He had never really attended church. In fact, that first Sunday evening I attended was his first time in a while. He only came because his father said I had been at the morning service and that I would be back that evening. (They held two services on Sunday and I tried to attend both whenever I could.)

On that first Sunday when my friend’s father asked me if I was coming back for the evening service, I thought he was just being friendly. But knowing I was coming, he then convinced his son to attend that evening as well. From our first meeting, the son started arranging his life so he could attend. His father confided later to me that he was coming just to speak to me. By the time I left to return home, his father had shared with me the full story: that his son had initially attended only for our discussions, but that he had become more tied in with the

church and was excited to continue despite my leaving. By then, he was giving his witness, signing special music and helping his father with the Bible study.

For a while I stayed in touch with my new friend and his father, but I have since lost contact. At our last interaction, they were both still doing well – despite the fact the church no longer exists. It seems the pastor left, and my friend’s father had to retire for medical reasons. The church, being very small, just didn’t survive.

I have often felt blessed for God’s hand in bringing me to that church – and often thanked Him – but I also hold that story close and relive it in my mind often. I do that to remind myself that while we may put everything in the context of how

it impacts us, it is often not about us at all. We seldom learn how our actions influence others.

I am thankful for both God’s direction and my friend’s father’s insight into how his son would benefit from my influence. At the time, for me it was all about having folks with whom to worship and decompress from a high intensity, high stress work situation. Little did I know that at the same time, God was using me as a witness to show a young man the benefits of attending worship services and pursuing an extended spiritual family.

**WANT TO READ MORE?**

**When God Winks at You:**  
How God Speaks Directly to You  
Through the Power of Coincidence

By SQuire Ruchnell



Publisher’s overview: True stories from both everyday and famous people demonstrating that God does communicate with us, making incredible things happen in our lives every single day. Through these tangible signposts from God, we receive personalized messages that reassure us, stop us from worrying, chart our path in life and help us keep the faith. The author writes, “When God winks, He is reaffirming that there is absolutely nothing about us that He does not know - our every hurt, our every desire. And that to me is very comforting.”

## Connecting Through Zoom

**9:30-10:15am Sundays** - Sunday School: The Book of John

**7-8pm Wednesdays** - Men's Bible Study: *Ten Men of the Bible* by Max Lucado

**7-8pm Thursdays** - Family of Faith Connection: A time just to visit. We are calling it Happy Hour because face-to-face shared time is indeed happy.

If interested, contact Don Forrester at [HenlyToday@gmail.com](mailto:HenlyToday@gmail.com) or (202) 770-9490.

## Because You Asked

Folks have asked where to mail their tithes and offerings. They may be mailed directly to Evelyn DeMoss, Church Treasurer, at 17651 Panorama Drive, Dripping Springs, TX 78620 or to Henly Baptist Church at 200 Henly Loop, Dripping Springs, TX 78620. Thank you for your ongoing support!