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## A Troublesome Burden

By James M. Decker

What does it mean to live out your faith as an elected official? And why does it matter?

This is a topic which I approach with care, for several reasons. I am no expert on anything but my own life and I am not entirely sure that I qualify as an expert on that. Everyone has their own lived experiences and perspectives, so your mileage on the topic of faith may vary from my own. I have many friends, supporters, and constituents whose beliefs differ from my own, sometimes wildly so. I have a deep and abiding respect for all humanity, so I take care to represent my faith accordingly.

Which brings me to the cornerstone of the Gospels.

It is no secret in this space that I take very seriously the two greatest commandments (love God, love neighbor). In "The Burden of the Gospels," Wendell Berry writes:

*"The proposition that love, forgiveness and peaceableness are the only neighborly relationships that are acceptable to God is difficult for us weak and violent humans, but it is plain enough for any literalist. We must either accept it as an absolute or absolutely reject it."*

These are difficult propositions no matter your role in life. They become increasingly difficult the more you encounter others who might not feel the same way or who subscribe to a very different value system. Are we obligated to show love, forgiveness, and peaceableness to those people? Even to people who treat us poorly or otherwise show no interest in returning the favor? Oops, there's a Scripture for that. It's in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5) and it's disappointingly direct and explicit:

*"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'"*

*But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?"*

As I embark on a new term as Mayor of Stamford, and as we head into a contentious presidential election season in our country, I find myself compelled to rely on these bedrocks of my value system. Loving God and loving neighbor is no easy task for a single day, much less all day, every day. I strive to get a little better at it each day, knowing that perfection will never be found this side of Heaven. I also know that it will challenge me. Wendell writes:

*"But to take the Gospels seriously, to assume that they say what they mean and mean what they say, is the beginning of troubles...Some of Jesus' instructions are burdensome not because they involve contradiction, but merely because they are so demanding."*

Almost every day, I am asked to make a decision that affects other people. Sometimes those decisions are small, sometimes

they are large. Sometimes I am confronted with the difficulties of love, forgiveness, and peaceableness in a manner that runs contrary to the innate weakness and violence of human nature. I am thankful to have the troublesome burden of the Gospels to guide me accordingly.

*James Decker is the Mayor of Stamford, Texas and the creator of the West of 98 website and the Rural Church and State and West of 98 podcasts. Contact James and subscribe to these essays at westof98.substack.com and subscribe to him wherever podcasts are found. Check out the West of 98 Bookstore with book lists for essential reads at Bookshop.org/*

## Summer Ag Academy open to homeschool educators

By Emmy Powell  
 TFB Communications Specialist  
 Texas homeschool educators are invited to a Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) professional development workshop to help them connect agriculture to their curriculum through science and hands-on activities.

The free event is set for August 9-10 in Garland.

"The Homeschool Ag Academy is a two-day opportunity that allow homeschool educators to learn about various agricultural topics and how to incorporate agriculture into their curriculum," said Jordan Bartels, TFB associate director of Organization Division, Educational Outreach.

The goal of the workshop is to showcase how agriculture can be integrated into the homeschool curriculum and where resources can be found.

Site visits will also be incorporated to help teachers build an understanding of Texas agriculture.


"Site visits are a wonderful opportunity for educators to see agriculture in action," Bartels



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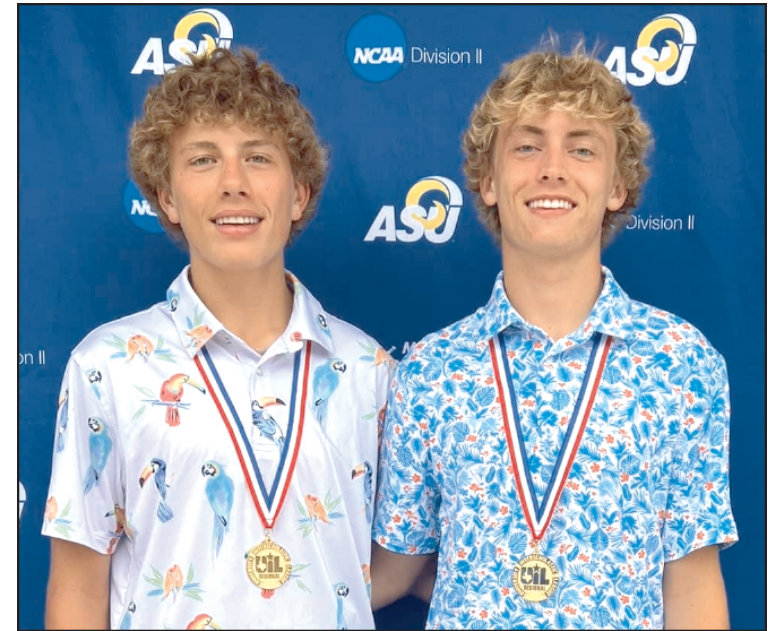
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**Tennis!** Brenner Sherwood (left) and Brayden Sherwood of Robert Lee were recently named the 2024 Region II-1A Boys Doubles Regional Champions. This win earned them a trip to the state tournament this week in San Antonio.

said. "These visits allow teachers to gain a unique experience that they can take back home to share with their children and relate to what they are teaching."

TFB has hosted professional development events for over 30 years to help Texas teachers make the connection with agriculture, providing them innovative techniques to incorporate the subject in their curriculum.

Only the educator is eligible. Children are not permitted to attended.

The workshop is limited to 40 participants. A waitlist will begin after the first 40 spots are filled.

Participants are responsible for their travel and lodging if coming from a location other than the surrounding area.

Registration closes July 26.

Additional information and registration details for the Summer Ag Academies can be found at [texasfarmbureau.org/aitc](http://texasfarmbureau.org/aitc).

For more information, contact TFB's Educational Outreach team at [edoutreach@txfb.org](mailto:edoutreach@txfb.org) or call 254-751-2569.

## Area Churches Invite You to Worship

### Bronte

- Bronte Church of Christ**  
PO Box 346  
118 S. Jefferson • Bronte  
Sun. 10 am & 6 pm, Wed. 7 pm
- Central Baptist Church**  
324 S. Franklin • Bronte  
(325) 473-4811  
Dale Patterson, Pastor  
Sun. 10 am Sunday School  
11 am & 5 pm Worship
- First Baptist Church**  
424 S. Washington • Bronte  
(325) 473-2331  
firstbronte@gmail.com  
Pastor George Cooper  
Sunday 9:45 am Sunday School,  
10:30 am Worship  
Wednesday 6 pm - 8 pm  
Children and Youth
- Bronte Methodist Church**  
Corner of Washington & Holmes  
Bronte • (325) 650-4836  
Pastor Keith Fletcher  
Sun. 10:00 am Sunday School  
11:00 am Worship
- St. James Catholic Church**  
215 N. Washington, Bronte  
(325) 365-2687  
Rev. Timothy Hayter, Pastor  
Sunday Bilingual Mass 8 am  
**Robert Lee**
- Emmanuel Pentecostal**  
PO Box 794 • 1004 Hillcrest  
Pastor Brantly Robertson  
(972) 841-2009  
Sundays 10 am, Wednesdays 7 pm
- First Methodist Church**  
PO Box 144 • 9th & Chadbourne  
Pastor Gary Karschner  
Robert Lee • (325) 453-2417

- Sun. 11 am Worship,  
**Southside Church of Christ**  
PO Box 698 • 8th & Houston  
Robert Lee (325) 453-2176  
Sun. 10 am, Sunday School  
11 am Worship
- Wed. 6 pm, Worship  
**Northside Church of Christ**  
PO Box 508  
9th & Chadbourne • Robert Lee  
(325) 453-2685, (325) 763-2118  
or (325) 473-1053  
Services: Sun. 10 am
- Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church**  
601 W. 10th, Robert Lee  
(325) 365-2687  
Rev. Timothy Hayter, Pastor  
Saturday Vigil Mass 6 pm
- Robert Lee Baptist Church**  
PO Box 493 • 22 W. 11th  
(325) 453-2724  
Chris Walls, Pastor  
Sun. 9:45 am, Sunday School  
11 am Worship
- Wed. 6:30 pm, Prayer Meeting  
**Victory Assembly of God**  
(325) 453-2208, PO Box 638  
202 E. 6th Street, Robert Lee  
Rev. Rocky Youngblood, Pastor  
Sun. 9:45 am, Sunday School  
10:45 am & 6 pm, Worship
- Wed. 6 pm, Bible Study  
**Coke County**
- Pecan Baptist**  
PO Box 542 • 12 miles West of  
Robert Lee on Sterling City Hwy  
(325) 453-2065, Bill Hood, Pastor  
[www.pecanbaptistchurchrl.com](http://www.pecanbaptistchurchrl.com)  
Sun. 10 am, Sunday School  
11 am & 7 pm, Worship