

# The June AFS Meeting



Gail Gill

The AFS program on June 9th (Sunday) will feature **Gail Gill** of the Climate Reality Project giving a slide presentation, "Climate Change is a Reality Now." This presentation highlights the effects of climate change around the world. 2012 temperatures were the hottest ever in the U.S. since

temperatures have been recorded. Climate Change is real and happening right now at an accelerating pace that if unchecked will be irreversible. We need to take action. We cannot afford to delay.

The slide show provides updated information on climate change. Many slides illustrate the effects of extreme weather around the world in 2011 and 2012. Charts and graphs show recent data.

Our planet has been bombarded with extreme weather at an ever increasing rate. The presentation conveys how urgent it is to inform others and to spread the message.



## The Climate Reality Project™

For skeptics, the presentation explains how scientific data demonstrates climate change is real. For those who realize climate change is a problem, these slides provide visual examples and data that can help them remember the message

and then continue to convey that message to others.

The Climate Reality Project is an organization founded by Al Gore. The movie, "An Inconvenient Truth", in 2006, brought public awareness to what climate change was and how global warming was affecting the weather and the stability of our planet. After the movie, the Climate Reality Project invited 1000 people from around the world to attend a conference to become Climate Leaders. Each year thereafter, another 1000 people were trained as Climate Leaders. Currently, there are over 4,000 active Climate Leaders.

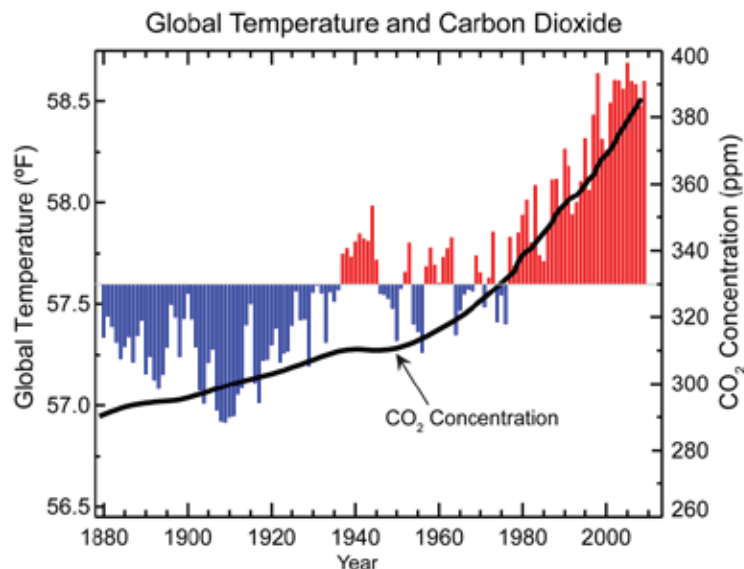
Our goal as Climate Leaders is to reach out to our local communities. We are hoping that by in-

forming a multitude of people, more people will speak out, and our political and business leaders will find the will to switch to clean, alternative energy.

Please join Gail Gill in viewing the slides and having a discussion on how we can change the direction of our nation's energy

policies and motivate our leaders to do something now to protect the Earth.

The program, free and open to the public, will be preceded by conversation and socializing—and a meal at a local eatery will follow the program, for those interested.



Source: <http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov>

## Calendar

6/9 AFS General Meeting, 1:00 p.m.

7/14 Board Meeting, 11:00 a.m.

7/14 AFS General Meeting, 1:00 p.m.

All events at AF Hall unless noted and are subject to change.



## Programs and Speakers

All programs are on the second Sunday of each month at AF Hall, 4775 N. Church Lane SE, Smyrna, GA, unless otherwise noted. Programs start at 1:00 PM, but feel free to arrive at 12:00 for socializing. Visitors are always welcome.

The views and opinions expressed by speakers at AFS do not necessarily reflect those of AFS members or its policy.

**June 9: Gail Gill** of the Climate Reality Project speaking on “Climate Change is a Reality Now”

**July 14: Leo Igwe**, a Nigerian human rights advocate and Humanist leader, will speak on “Freethought and the Problem of Witchcraft Accusations in Africa.”

**Aug 11:** A Panel Discussion on Freethought Issues, featuring AFSVP **Michael Buckner**, **Jessica Barber** of Kennesaw State Univ. Secular Student Alliance, **Mandisa Thomas** of Black Non-Believers and **Ray Dickerson** of Fayette Freethought Society

**Sept 8: Luis Granados**, author of *Damned Good Company* by Humanist Press, will speak on his book.

**Oct 13:** AFS Board Member **Paul Broman** will speak on his encounter with the Church of Scientology.

## AFS Email List

The AFS Announcements email list provides subscribers with reminders and updates on AFS activities. Send an email to [AFS-Announce-subscribe@yahoo-groups.com](mailto:AFS-Announce-subscribe@yahoo-groups.com) to subscribe. The AFS Forum email list is a place for discussions of freethought, atheism, agnosticism, church-state separation and religion. To subscribe to this list, send an email to [AFSForum-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:AFSForum-subscribe@yahoogroups.com). For information on other AFS email groups, visit the AFS website at <http://www.atlantafreethought.org>.

*The Atlanta Freethought Society is a member-run organization dedicated to advancing freethought and protecting the rights and reputation of freethinkers, agnostics, atheists and humanists.*

We welcome anyone who is interested in learning about living a good life free from religion through attending AFS speeches, debates, and discussions. We employ protests, letters to the editor, broadcast appearances, and any other reasonable and civil means available to achieve our mission.

We define freethought as “the forming of opinions about life in general and religion in particular on the basis of reason and the evidence of our senses, independently of tradition, authority, or established belief.”

We actively support a strict separation of church and state as the best means to guarantee liberty for all, regardless of religious belief or lack of belief.

We seek to educate ourselves on many topics but especially on religion and non-religion. We do this through a series of thought-provoking speakers and programs, and by maintaining a web forum and an extensive library of freethought, religious, and related books, pamphlets, videotapes, and audiotapes.

We provide an organization where freethinkers and non-theists can develop friendships, talk freely, socialize and enjoy each other’s company. We do not discriminate against anyone on such irrelevant grounds as race, sexual orientation, age, gender, class, or physical disability. We welcome members and leaders of all political parties and preferences.

Because we are designated by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) educational organization, contributions to AFS are tax deductible.

Any who are like-minded are welcome to join us.

## Atlanta Freethought News An AFS Publication

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### Atlanta Freethought News

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# On Bibles in the Georgia State Parks

by Laura Ross



**YOU MAY HAVE HEARD** about the recent kerfuffle when **Ed, Diane, and Michael Buckner** decided to take a relaxing vacation in Amicalola Falls State Park in April and to their amazement, found not one, not two, but seven full Gideons Bibles (Protestant KJV) and two Gideons New Testaments plus Psalms and Proverbs (one of those in Spanish) – nine Bibles in all – in their cabin!

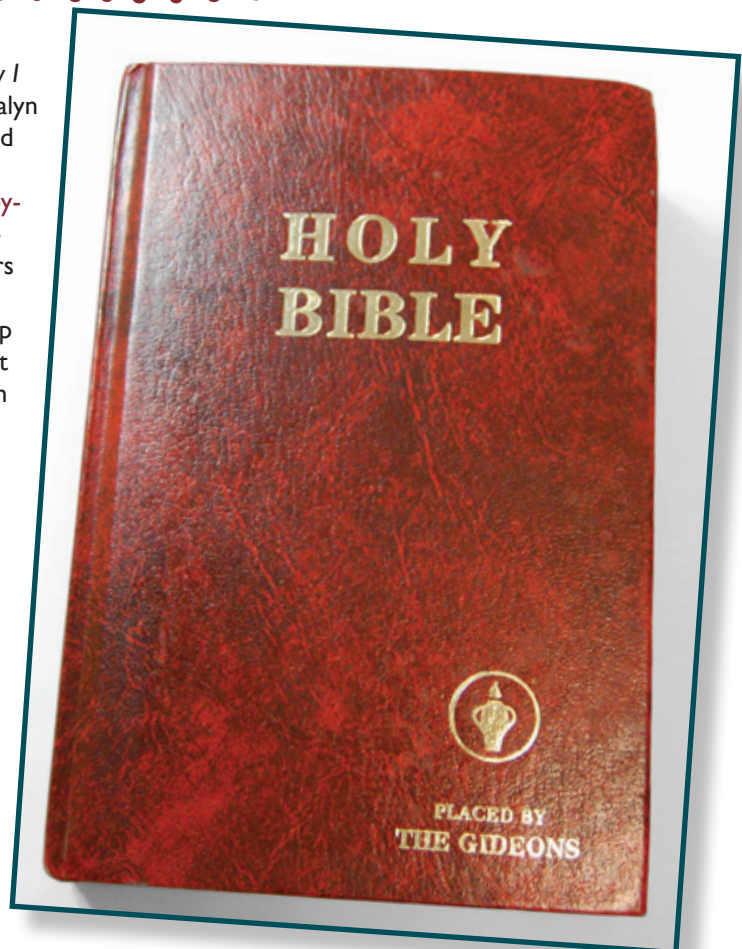
Ed, being Ed and all, brought the overkill situation to the attention of the desk clerk, and management agreed to point out the predicament to Georgia DNR. Shortly, Ed got a telephone call from GDNR Deputy Commissioner Homer Bryson, who said that the Bibles were temporarily removed from the parks until the Georgia attorney general weighed in on the matter.

Georgia Governor Nathan Deal sprang into action and ordered that the Bibles be put back in the cabins, reasoning that if the state didn't buy them, the state isn't endorsing a religion. As a compromise, he said he would allow other groups to put their materials in the cabins, saying, "If there is some atheist literature in state park cabins, visitors don't have to read it. If they want to put it there, I can't guarantee its safety." Accepting that challenge, American Atheists said they would be

delighted to supply books for the night stands, including *Why I Am Not A Muslim*, by Ibn Warraq, *Why I Am An Atheist* by Madalyn Murray O'Hair, *God is not Great*, by Christopher Hitchens, and *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins (<http://news.atheists.org/2013/05/17/atheists-to-accept-georgia-governors-offer-by-sending-atheist-books-to-state-parks/>). Dave Churvis, a representative of the Georgia State University's Secular Panthers has indicated on the AFS Facebook page that the SP will be donating secular materials as well, once school starts back up in the Fall. Not to be outdone, our own Atlanta Freethought Society is donating night stand reading materials as well: such as *Why I Am Not A Christian* by Keith Parsons and *Uppity Old Atheist Woman's Dictionary* by Carol Faulkenberry. They are going to need bigger night stands to hold all these books!

In the meantime, a media storm ensued. Ed was interviewed on I!Alive (<http://www.i!alive.com/news/article/293440/3/The-man-behind-Georgias-latest-Bible-controversy>) as well as Woodall's Campground Management (<http://www.woodallscm.com/2013/05/buckner-tells-his-side-of-ga-park-ordeal/>). Reuters picked up his story (<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/05/21/us-usa-georgia-bible-idUSBRE94K12520130521>). Also the Christian website World has written about this, somewhat unsympathetically ([http://www.worldmag.com/2013/05/georgia-governor\\_orders\\_bibles\\_back\\_to\\_state\\_park\\_lodging](http://www.worldmag.com/2013/05/georgia-governor_orders_bibles_back_to_state_park_lodging)).

It goes on and on. Just Google Ed Buckner Bibles and you'll see what I mean. We know somebody famous!



# Why Are We Alive?

by Dwight Lyman

We go to work, we eat, are entertained or entertain others with movies, music, TV, drama and comedy, we party with friends, couple, have sex, yet behind all our activities lurks the question, *why do we exist?* What is it all about? Why should there be life rather than not? And why us—why are we the ones who should be alive?

I think it is fair to say that this is the ultimate religious question. All of our major religions have a “story” whose purpose is to answer it.

It’s likely that humans are the only species on earth who asks such a question of themselves. That observation itself, that we alone ask the question of existence, is often thought to be a clue to the answer. Perhaps other animals fail to ask why they are alive because they have no “higher purpose”; perhaps we ask because we sense that we do. That we even wonder about such things could itself be evidence that there is something “untold” about our lives, that there is “something more.”

Before continuing, let’s ask ourselves what kind of answer could ever satisfactorily resolve this question of “why?”

Imagine God asking himself (itself/herself)

Why do I exist? What is my purpose?

For God, what could the answer be to such a query? What is it that makes God’s existence meaningful for God?

If we try to address this question from God’s point of view (rather than our own) we are likely to conclude that no possible answer could do God justice. God doesn’t have a “higher purpose” because God is the higher purpose. God doesn’t yearn for “more” because God is the “more.”

God doesn’t have to ask why his life is meaningful, or what makes it meaningful, because God is the source of meaning itself. If your life is the source of meaning, it makes no sense—indeed there is no need—to ask why or whence.

## The Meaning of Meaning

But to understand this, let’s look at what it means to be meaningful. Words, as we know, are (usually) meaningful, but what makes them meaningful? Their meaning derives from the fact that they reference—that is to say, they point to—something

in the world. Sometimes, to be sure, words only point to other words which point to other words and so on. But eventually there are real, existing things being pointed at which are the source of meaning (even if only in a pretend way, as in fiction), or else the whole pile of words signifies nothing.

Put simply, something is meaningful if it points at something else which serves as its source of meaning. Thus a theist would say that our human lives are meaningful because they point back to a source of meaning in God. But notice a peculiar consequence of this. Unless there is a greater God who is God’s source—and by definition there isn’t—God’s life isn’t meaningful. God has nothing to point back to for a source of meaning.

In this sense in which we use the word *meaningful*, if applied to God’s case we have to admit that God is not meaningful. God’s existence doesn’t reference something else. This follows because God is a *source* of meaning, something which *meaningful* things reference, and not something whose existence references elsewhere.

To our God asking himself what makes his life meaningful, the correct response would be,

God, you don’t understand—that question doesn’t apply to you because you are not meaningful but a source of meaning.

And what if the question doesn’t apply to us either? What if it makes no sense to ask the *why* questions about our existence because, like God, we are sources of meaning, because our *living* does not reference elsewhere.

## Unexplainable Us

It’s not even that we must create meaning for ourselves, as Sartre maintained. After all, do we imagine God making up stories about himself, creating “reasons” for his existence? It would be unnecessary. Existence doesn’t need meaning, and the attempt to apply “meaning” can only bring it down a notch.

Real beings exist; they don’t exist for a reason.

In fact, reasons are only explanations. They come afterward, when we want to talk about things. When we want *ideas* to work with. Just as it would demean God to say he exists for the purpose of bringing us into the world and furthering our human careers, so it demeans us to say that God created us to carry

out some grand plan of his. Meanings and explanations turn us into mere tools. To say we need a meaning is to say—beforehand—that we are tools for something else. It makes us illegitimate, makes us *important for someone else*, rather than *important within*.

All such efforts stem from the mistaken trap of believing that thought can legitimize existence. It never can.

We can smother ourselves in explanations (as we smother everything else)—and they are useful (*extremely* useful when the scientific method is followed)—but explanations can never justify *usefulness* itself, or justify us in our lives.

We are not the sort of things that need be or ever can be explained. We simply are.





## De-Valuing the Body

What is curious is that theists cannot accept the possibility of bodily life being valuable on its own. From the natural perspective, this is difficult to comprehend. The atheist wonders how one could *not* see bodily life as inherently valuable. How can value not be embodied?

The answer is that theism derives from an incomprehensible but long-standing tradition of splitting body from soul, with all value assigned to the soul side of the equation. The body is devalued “by definition,” which means the theist faces a logically-defined barrier to identifying our bodies as valuable.

As one theist explained to me years ago,

The soul, the personality, is actually the being, not the body. The body is the mere tool or the puppet of the soul to be used for playing the game, and for communication. The truth is that you don't need a body to experience joy and pleasure. Actually the pleasures that can be had on a 'body' level are quite low level when compared to the spiritual ones of serenity and exhilaration.

Life, the soul, the being, can exist with or without the body, but the body without the soul is little more than a hunk of meat with no goals, no hope, no desires, no personality. It is in short 'dead' for all practical purposes, except for that it can breath and perform the physical functions of life. —John Kendrix, *Seekers BBS, Atlanta, GA, 11/14/1988, Msg# 6476, To: The Atheist, Re: Bodies (spelling corrected)*

Kendrix's devaluation of the body demonstrates the pernicious (if not outright evil) influence of spirituality. It represents a viewpoint endemic to theism, which effectively sets believers up for a life bordering on depression, unmoored from any stable source of value. Within its framework, God is essential of course, and in this sense devaluation of the body serves the religious priesthood well.

Yet God's role is a disturbing one here, for deity serves as a last-ditch effort to introduce a stable and enduring source of value for our lives, a desperate way to make some kind of sense of life and why we exist as bodies.

But you can't make sense of why we exist as bodies by *denying* that we are bodies or denying that bodies are valuable. And you can't deny the body's cen-

trality to life and at the same time live and feel with any kind of sanity or moral ground. The problem is that adding God doesn't make sense of things. A bodiless God, brought in to be the ground of life, is anything but grounded. Inevitably God floats off in the realm of non-existence, weightless, groundless, absurd.

The core problem with God is that he has no body, and therefore no way to move or exist, no way to be valuable, much less to serve as a source of value for us. A disembodied mind—whether God's or ours—can't bring value to life.

It takes a body for that.

## Getting Rid of the Middleman

The natural world view enhances our inherent value because it removes the “middleman”—God—which has separated us from our worthiness. Many claim that nature without God leads to despair and loss of intrinsic value to life, but in reality we ought to be delighted to be able to dispense with the middleman. Without God, ultimate worth comes back to bodily life itself.

Remove God from your world view and everything that matters gets redirected to life.

If we think of ourselves as natural, and of the natural world view as one that folds God into nature, then we see that atheism can only enhance our worth as human beings. Naturalism eliminates God, but more importantly it eliminates the need for God. It brings value—*everything* we value—home to our bodies. Home to us.

<http://atheology.com/2007/05/21/why-are-we-alive/comment-page-4/#comment-2366>

Images from *2001: A Space Odyssey* from MGM/Warner Bros., directed by Stanley Kubrick

# Other Meetings of Interest in Metro Atlanta

**The Fellowship of Reason** meets on the first Sunday of every month at 10:30 AM at AF Hall. They also have meetings for book discussion, philosophy, a classic film course, and other events. See <http://www.fellowshipofreason.com>.

**The Fayette Freethought Society** hosts lunches, dinners, book discussions, civic activities and more. See details at <http://www.meetup.com/Fayette-Freethought-Society/>

**The Peachtree City Humanists** meet often for discussions at Starbucks, lunch, dinner at She's Bistro, and more. Several upcoming events in June. See <http://www.meetup.com/Peachtree-City-Humanists-PTCH/>.

## **GUST (Gwinnett: Understanding Secular Truths)**

meet often for discussions, etc. For more information, see <http://gust.domek.org/>.

**The Atlanta Science Tavern** will host **Michael J. Kuhar** speaking on **The Addicted Brain: Why We Abuse Drugs Alcohol and Nicotine** on Saturday, June 22nd at 7:00 p.m. with suggested donation of \$3.

Addiction destroys lives. In his book, *The Addicted Brain*, Michael Kuhar, a neuroscientist researcher at Emory, explains how and why this happens. He also presents advances in treatment and prevention.

Please join the monthly Manuel's meetup as Michael tells us why the brain is vulnerable to drugs, why drugs get control of the brain and behavior and what we can do about it. His talk will begin with an overview of the field - everything from molecules to government policy - but the focus will be determined by audience questions and areas of interest.

Copies of Michael's book, *The Addicted Brain*, will be available for sale after his talk thanks to the assistance of Charis Books & More. (<http://www.meetup.com/AtlantaScienceTavern>)

**The Black Nonbelievers of Atlanta** will be having their monthly meetup on Saturday, June 8, 1:00 p.m. at Barnes & Noble Southlake, 1939 Mount Zion Road, Morrow, GA. (<http://www.meetup.com/Black-Nonbelievers>)

**The SOS (Secular Organizations for Sobriety)** meets on Tuesdays at 7:30PM in Roswell. For more information, send an email to [donnaigore@yahoo.com](mailto:donnaigore@yahoo.com).

**The Atlanta Skeptics** will be having a Skeptical Movie Night Saturday, June 15, 6:00 p.m. at MD Tech Pro's office, 3580 Pierce Drive, Suite 160, Atlanta, GA.

While everyone recovers from a fantastic SkeptiCamp and we start lining up speakers for the upcoming months, I thought we'd do something a little different:

So come along to the inaugural Atlanta Skeptics Movie Night!

We will meet back at the same location as SkeptiCamp with the plan to watch a few skeptically themed movies/shorts. I'm

currently open for suggestions and will publish the selected movies soon.

The event will be pot luck / byob, and Shaune Beatty, president of Atlanta Skeptics, will provide cups/plates/cutlery but bring along whatever you would like to eat/drink and lets have some fun. (<http://www.meetup.com/AtlantaSkeptics>)

There will be a **meetup for Atlanta atheists** on Sunday, June 9, at 6:00 p.m. at Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur. (<http://www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists/>)

Another **meetup for Atlanta atheists** is scheduled for Sun., June 23, at 4:00

p.m. at Five Seasons Brewery, 5600 Roswell Rd, in Sandy Springs. (<http://www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists>)

**IIG Atlanta** will maybe have a general meeting Saturday, June 15 at 4:30 p.m. at Manuel's Tavern (602 N Highland Avenue Northeast, Atlanta, GA 30307). We're a new, ambitious group affiliated with IIG-West and exist to promote critical thinking about the paranormal, supernatural and unexplained. We also offer \$50,000 for anyone who can demonstrate evidence of the occult or paranormal under properly controlled conditions. We look forward to meeting you! Questions? Visit [IIGAtlanta.com](http://IIGAtlanta.com) or contact Shaune Beattie by gmail: [shaune.beattie@gmail.com](mailto:shaune.beattie@gmail.com). (<http://www.meetup.com/IIG-Atlanta/>).



# Become a Member!

**(Or renew your membership with this form or online at [www.AtlantaFreethought.org](http://www.AtlantaFreethought.org)!)**

If you've enjoyed what you've read, we enthusiastically invite you to join the Atlanta Freethought Society. Every month you will get our acclaimed monthly newsletter, the Atlanta Freethought News, voting rights in the organization—and enjoyment of the superb speakers we have coming up, as well as the social and activist events that we sponsor!

**Individual memberships:** One person can become a member for \$50 per year.

**Sustaining memberships:** One person can become a sustaining member for \$100 per year.

**Life memberships:** Avoid the hassle of renewing every year. A life membership lasts a lifetime.

**Paper newsletter:** We encourage members to receive the newsletter by email. This avoids the printing and mailing expenses. But if you really want the paper version of the newsletter, just let us know and we will send it to you at no additional charge. (You can also pick up a paper newsletter at any AFS meeting.)

Thank you for your support! We look forward to your being with us in the coming months!

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*"Religious bondage shackles and debilitates the mind and unfits it for every noble enterprise, every expanded prospect."*

—James Madison, 1774

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### An Uppity Old Atheist

### Woman's Dictionary—\$8

By the late, great Carol Faulkenberry (illustrated by Amanda Faulkenberry); like Ambrose Bierce's Devil's Dictionary—but better: more biting, funnier. Guaranteed to make you laugh out loud and to challenge at least one idea you hold.

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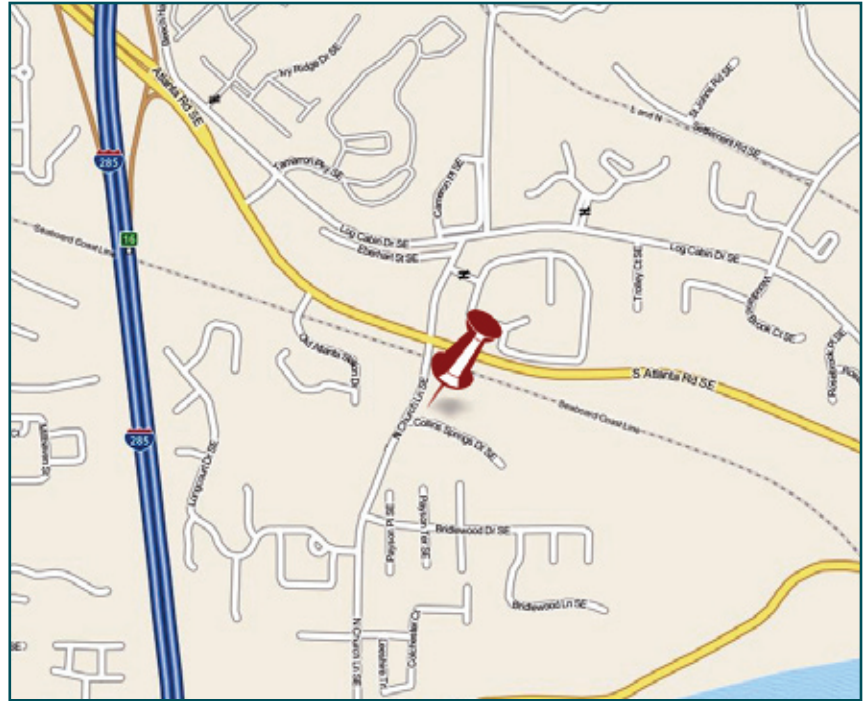
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*Dare To Think  
For Yourself!*

**The June 9 Meeting:  
1:00 at AF Hall,  
4775 N. Church Lane SE  
Smyrna, GA**

**This Month's Speaker:  
Gail Gill**



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