

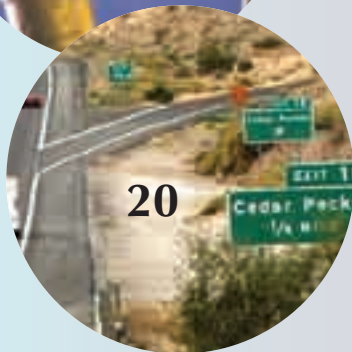
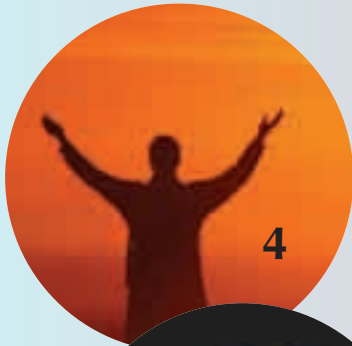
Free Indeed

Great truth in an old hymn (p. 4)

Modern slavery (p. 10)

Miller's mistake (p. 16)





ARTICLES

- 4 **Redemption** — by Jason Overman
- 8 **Slaying Sin Samson’s Way** — by David Kidd
- 10 **The Scourge of Slavery** — A BA exclusive interview with Deann Alford
- 11 **A Tale of Two Gates** — by Pyatt Cook
- 12 **Breaking the Chains** — by Michael Flores
- 14 **Everyday Redemption** — by Lennox W. Abrigo
- 15 **Eight Years’ Worth of Love** — by Carol Davis Gustke
- 20 **Guideposts for the Journey** — by Roger C. Palms

DEPARTMENTS

- 3 **First Word** — For Freedom’s Sake
- 7 **Questions & Answers**
- 16 **CoG7 Journey**
- 18 **My Journey**
- 22 **Youth Reach**
- 24 **Mail Bag**
- 30 **International Tour** — Canada
- 31 **Last Word** — Right Now Counts Forever

27 **COG7 IN ACTION**

SWORD, Mission Cuba, and more



Miss the last issue on the end times? View it and the current issue, plus download the last eight BA's, at www.cog7.org/BA.

Coming in the March BA: reconciliation: victory over alienation and separation; also, the hope of Israel

In the January and February issues of *Now What?*: the stress of caregiving, stopping an abortion (<http://now-what.cog7.org>)

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For Freedom's Sake



Few words in any language appeal to and attract us more than those that speak of liberty. People the world over share an innate desire for freedom. Nothing new here.

Where liberty is defined mainly as the privilege of doing what we want, bondage soon follows. A better definition of *freedom* names the desire and power to do what we ought. Understood this way, liberty becomes unselfish and sustainable.

The thought here is that many folks don't do what they ought because they are not at liberty to do it. They don't think the pure thoughts God requires, speak the loving words others need, or keep the positive attitude they themselves desire, because, in a real sense, they can't. They are not free.

This is true in arenas of personal conduct and morality. Multitudes are enslaved to ideas, speech, habits, compulsions, and addictions that they inwardly despise. Our bondages to the fallen world, the sinful flesh, and the sly Devil produce a sense of guilt and an iron grip that are nearly impossible to break, try as we may.

To free us from these chains, God wrote a rescue plan and called it *redemption*. It means "rescue through a payment," and it addresses our sin-slavery directly. Through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, God acted to redeem/rescue us 1) from the guilt (penalty) of our sins once and for all and 2) from the grip (practice) of our sins one day at a time. As Christ-followers, we are forgiven and are learning to walk in freedom, to do the things we ought and want, through the redemption in Christ at the price of Himself!

Ultimately, too, God intends to redeem/rescue us, not just from the penalty and practice of our sins but also from the presence and possibility of sin forever in His eternal kingdom. This is the climactic reason and purpose for which He paid the price of our redemption.

Human bondage is a negative factor in our personal conduct and among those who are subjected to the indignity of forced servitude in our world. The interview on page 10 speaks to the magnitude and gravity of this problem, operating just below the radar of public awareness. "Redemption! Liberation!" are our prayer-cries for these slaves also. With faith in Christ and the gospel, let's help them find freedom.

— Calvin Burrell



Redemption

A great word picture to help us understand the Bible's central message. by Jason Overman

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**Redeemed — how I love to proclaim it!
Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb;
Redeemed thro' His infinite mercy,
His child, and forever, I am.**

Perhaps this beloved hymn says it best. Written by the prolific American lyricist Fanny Crosby, it captures in simple verse the most precious truth of our faith: We are redeemed!

The hymn's beauty is made all the more poignant when we realize that Fanny Crosby was blind from infancy. Despite her disability, she penned more than eight thousand hymns in her ninety-five years. Content in her infirmity, she rejoiced that she

could sing praises to her Lord, undistracted by earthly beauty. Though blind in this world, she delighted that, in the world to come, "the first face that shall ever gladden my sight will be that of my Savior!"¹

Lives like Fanny Crosby's show us the depth of Christ's redemptive work. Its gift rings truest from a place of helplessness. So thoroughly associated in our thinking is redemption with salvation in general that the richness of its

meaning and how it illuminates salvation in a particular way is easily forgotten.

Few words in the Christian lexicon are more familiar and less appreciated than *redemption*. To recover the unique religious significance of it, we must see how the word originally functioned. Before it carried such sacred freight, it was just an ordinary, everyday word.

The meaning

In the ancient Hebrew and Greek contexts from which the Bible emerged, "to redeem" was to rescue or release persons or property from desperate conditions through a purchase. In the Greek world, for instance, a prisoner of war could be redeemed from his captors if his countryman provided the required

payment. The price necessary to secure the captive's freedom was called a ransom. This socio-legal procedure applied to ordinary slaves as well. Manumission was the common practice whereby a slave was purchased from his master in order to be freed.

The same holds true in the Hebrew world. The Old Testament contains the provisions whereby a poor Israelite who had surrendered his property or sold himself into servitude could be released, or redeemed, at the initiative of a near-kinsman (Leviticus 25:25, 47, 48). In such cases, the family member was responsible to bear the expense to rescue his brother. The story of Ruth (4:1-12) offers a vivid picture of this arrangement. A similar transaction in which a price secured release is the redemption of firstborn children from sacrificial obligation (Exodus 34:20).

In short, characteristic of redemption is a) the helpless captivity of one party to the b) overwhelming power of a second party, followed by c) the release of the first from the grip of the second at the expense of a third party.²

The metaphor

From this social context, redemption is taken up as a powerful metaphor for God's gracious working on behalf of Israel and the whole world. It is not accidental that the biblical language of redemption begins, and ultimately echoes, the Exodus story. God heard the cries of His people and told Moses to tell the Israelites:

"I am the LORD; I will bring you out from under the bur-

dens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments" (Exodus 6:6).

Here is Israel's essential story. The people were once slaves in Egypt. But God saw their need and rescued them from the power of their chains.

This is what we mean by redemption. No word in the ancient vocabulary better describes the Israelites' sacred experience. On the far end of the Red Sea, the people would turn back once more to see the enemy sinking from view, and with Moses, they would break into song:

"I will sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea! The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation . . . You stretched out Your right hand . . . You in Your mercy have led forth the people whom You have redeemed . . . whom You have purchased" (15:1, 2, 12, 13, 16).

This song, like Fanny Crosby's, reminds us that our redemption is the result of God's mercy and that it came at a price to Him. Like a near-kinsman, our loving covenant Father acted on behalf of His family. His mercy gladly paid the price to purchase His

own. In the Exodus, the death of the firstborn and of the Passover lambs hint most boldly at the cost of deliverance.

The memory

Israel could not forget this event, for this redemption grounded her identity and life in God. She was often reminded, as was God himself, of the heritage that shaped both past and future:

"But you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you from there . . . Remember Your congregation, which You have purchased of old, the tribe of Your inheritance, which You have redeemed . . ." (Deuteronomy 24:18; Psalm 74:2).

In times of crises, national or personal, Israel's hopes hung on the trust that God who has once redeemed will do so again (Psalm 44:26; 26:11).

The Exodus provided the paradigm of redemption that continued to develop as Israel became increasingly aware that there were enemies greater than Egypt. So in her poets and prophets, attention turned to the unbreakable grip of ultimate captors: sin and death. With one eye on the original Exodus, these visionaries predicted the ultimate redemption from the ultimate Redeemer

Like a near-kinsman, our loving covenant Father acted on behalf of His family. His mercy gladly paid the price to purchase His own.

— a new, climactic Exodus. “The Redeemer will come to Zion . . .” (Isaiah 59:20), and sin and death will be vanquished.

“O Israel, hope in the LORD; for with the LORD there is mercy, and with Him is abundant redemption. And He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities” (Psalm 130:7, 8).

“I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave, I will be your destruction!” (Hosea 13:14).

Israel understood the redemptive principle. She was hopeless against her enemy. Only God could provide the necessary ransom to secure her liberty:

None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him . . . But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for He shall receive me (Psalm 49:7, 15).

Jeremiah summarized it eloquently: “For the LORD has redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of one stronger than he” (Jeremiah 31:11).

The Messiah

The Gospel of Luke begins and ends with this expectation projected onto the life of Christ. In the birth narratives Zacharias proclaimed, “Blessed is the Lord

God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people,” and Anna declared Jesus “to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem” (1:68; 2:38).

Later, two disciples walked along the road to Emmaus, sharing their disappointment with a stranger and “hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel” (24:21) — which in fact, He did! They and others took that story to the world, teaching justification by grace through redemption in Christ (Romans 3:24).

As humans, we know a little something about slavery. Jesus said, “Whoever commits sin is the slave of sin” (John 8:34). This inescapable plight leads us inevitably to death. But as Christians, we also know something about freedom: The truth sets us free (v. 32). In Christ we are no longer “slaves of sin” but are set free from it and death (Romans 6:6-23). God created us for freedom, for Himself; but in our pride, we fell and fall still. In Christ God has acted to retrieve what was lost: the family He loves.

What the New Testament keeps telling us is that while grace is free, it is not cheap. Our redemption came at great expense to God: His only Son. What we could not do for ourselves He did for us: Jesus was a

“ransom for many. . . . [We were] purchased with His own blood. . . . In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 10:45; Acts 20:28; Ephesians 1:7).

Peter perhaps said it best:

You were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Peter 1:18, 19).

The mercy and the price that brought redemption in the Exodus, that was celebrated by the poets and promised afresh in the prophets, is now made known fully in Christ. Job saw from a distance what Peter handled in person: “I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth” (Job 19:25).


The moment

Like Israel on the bank of the Red Sea, Revelation describes the saints of the Apocalypse singing the songs of redemption: the song of Moses and of the Lamb (15:3). Gathered around the throne, they recall and break forth in singing:

“You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth” (5:9, 10).

The redemption revealed in Christ awaits its consummation at His coming. What He has accomplished in His body will one

continued on page 13



In Christ God has acted to retrieve what was lost: the family He loves.

Questions & Answers

Q What aspects of the old covenant are applicable to Christians today?

A Your question reflects the fact that Christians enjoy the new covenant – a new relationship with the Lord – and no longer live under the old. The nexus between old and new covenants leads to a complex Bible study.

First, let's distinguish between old covenant and Old Testament. The Old Testament (note the capital letters) refers to the first long section of our Bibles – the thirty-nine books from Genesis through Malachi, often called the Hebrew Scriptures.

The old covenant, on the other hand, is one of several agreements between God and men found in the Old Testament. Given through Moses to the Israelites at Mt. Sinai, it is also called the Mosaic, or Sinaitic, covenant. The old covenant proper unfolds from Exodus 19 to Numbers 10 – chapters that report Israel's yearlong stay at the holy mountain after leaving Egypt.

Omitting narratives, the main sections of the old covenant are as follows:

- Exodus 20:1-17: Ten Commandments. Also called the Decalogue (i.e., the Ten Words), this first section, essentially moral in character, is so basic to the old covenant that it can be used to stand for the whole (see 34:28).

- Exodus 20:22–23:33: Book of the Covenant (see 24:7). This section offers a sampling of all the civil and religious laws that would eventually be revealed to Israel, and it introduces results and remedies in case of their violation.

- Exodus 25-31, 34-40 and Leviticus: Levitical System, Holiness Code. This section deals with the tabernacle, priesthood, sacrifices, offerings, and the personal conduct required by a holy God.

The book of Deuteronomy repeats some laws

from Sinai and contains new ones often considered part of the old covenant. Other Old Testament books like Proverbs and the Prophets also instruct but are not a formal part of the old covenant laws. This highlights the extensive, multi-faceted nature of the old covenant “aspects” you ask about.

Second, your word *applicable* is important because many Bible teachings may apply in one sense but not in another. For example, every instruction in the old covenant is applicable in the sense that we can learn something from it. Jesus and Paul remind us that all God's words are valuable to Christians (Matt. 4:4; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

Another sense of *applicable* suggests a definition for sin and the consequent obligation to obey. The Decalogue serves as a summary of moral conduct expected of God's people in every age. Once written by His finger on stone tablets, it is now written by the Spirit on trusting, repentant hearts under the new covenant (Jer. 31:31; Heb. 8:7-13). No other aspect of the old covenant enjoys the same lofty origin, form, and content that is true of the Ten Commandments. In the sense of this paragraph, the Ten still apply (see Rom. 7:7).

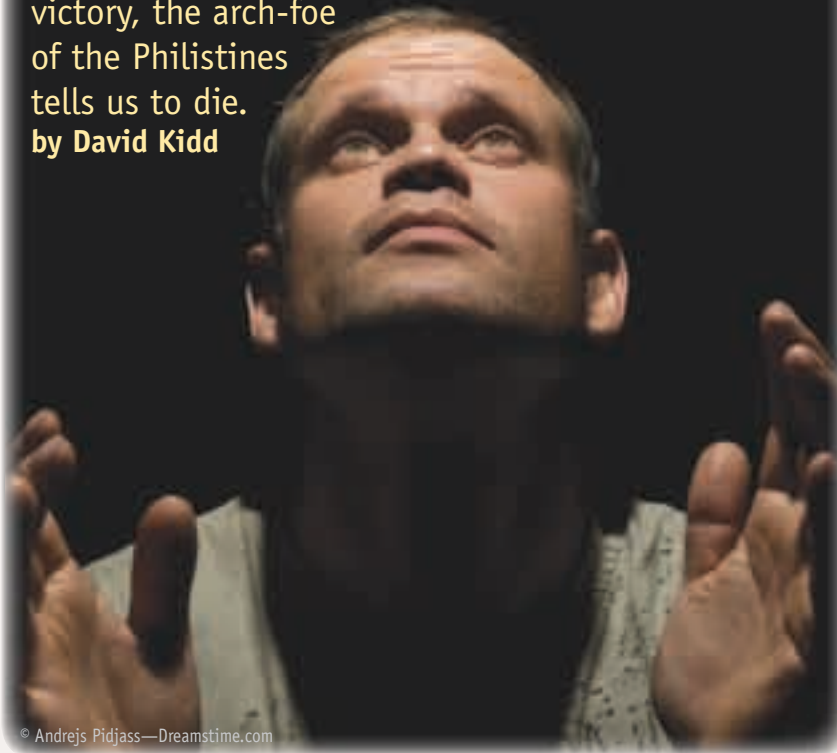
Applicable may also be understood as “full obedience required for acceptance before God.” In this sense, the short answer to your question is also sweet: “Not one.” No legal aspect of the old covenant applies today as a pre-requisite to receive God's gifts of love, acceptance, and forgiveness. His grace comes to those who embrace a faith that works through love, rather than to those whose basic response is outer conformity to a written code.

Finally, we affirm the obvious: that the elements of faith and love so vital to Christian life were also central aspects of the old covenant that went before. In a developing relationship between God and His people, some things never change!

– Elder Calvin Burrell

Slaying Sin Samson's Way

For our greatest
victory, the arch-foe
of the Philistines
tells us to die.
by David Kidd



Like me, you may find it hard to relate to a man who tore a lion apart with his bare hands, killed thirty men for their clothes to honor a vow, tied and torched three hundred foxes tail-to-tail, and killed one thousand men with a jaw bone. But that's exactly what Samson did. Judges 13–16 tells the story.

This guy had long hair and problems with ladies. When his latest sweetheart deceived him and cut his hair, Samson was captured by the Philistines — and died with them.

There's a deeper message here than dealing with secrets between lovers. Any of us who struggle against the grip of sin can relate to this Old Testament character. And we can find a path to greater victory in his story.

Conquering the Philistines

Read carefully:

And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of . . . Samson and . . . the prophets: who through faith subdued

kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens (Hebrews 11:32-34).

Samson did most, if not all, of the deeds mentioned in this passage. For us, the most relevant was to subdue, by faith, those who kept Israel in bondage. Truly, Samson's purpose was to "deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines" (Judges 13:5).

Samson troubled this war-like tribe throughout his life, but Judges 16:25-30 tells the greater havoc he wrought through his death. While about three thousand men and women, including the Philistine king, stood watching from the roof, blind Samson braced himself against two center pillars and pushed. Considering his God-given strength, it's no surprise that the building collapsed. "So the dead that he killed at his death were more than he had killed in his life" (v. 30).

Christians should never approve human slaughter to achieve spiritual goals. But think: To subdue a spiritual kingdom, the best place to start may be to kill the king of sin and his closest allies, as Samson did.

Act of 'violence'

Just as the Philistine kingdom kept Israel in bondage long ago, so an evil kingdom today keeps the majority of humanity in chains. Sin enslaves us with debt, violence, addictions, abuses, family clashes, disease, guilt, fear — the list goes on. If we are to

conquer these strongholds in Satan's kingdom, we can do so only in a "violent," or radical, way.

How do we break the bondage of sin so that it no longer rules over us? For starters, we engage in the violent act of repentance. In this, we use the most effective spiritual weapons at our disposal: confession, use of the Word, anointing of the Spirit, prayer, fasting, and an accountability partner. The violence of repentance must continue until every stronghold of sin is brought down. Paul instructs us: "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds" (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

When the ongoing work of repentance bears its fruit, a radical change has taken place: We have turned 180 degrees from serving self to serving God.

The most effective strategy against the minions of sin is to die to ourselves. "Let me die with the Philistines!" (Judges 16:30) is the same as saying, "Let me die with the sin!" In other words, we renounce our allegiance to the world, the Devil, and the flesh — our old sinful nature. We crucify our "old man . . . that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin" (Romans 6:6).

A level of spiritual violence permeates this verse. The old lords of our life — self, me, my, and mine — must be slain, just as Samson sacrificed himself and killed the lords of the Philistines.

Many of us long for this victory over sin and its terrible effects. Perhaps a particular sin has plagued us for years. Our

attempts to overcome may succeed for a while, but the problem has returned. Is it not time to deal with it in a more extreme way, as the Scriptures teach?

Too often we treat the sin as our friend rather than as a mortal enemy. The truth is, sin not only causes us potentially fatal harm now but also ultimately destroys our soul.

If we have been failing miserably against sin, perhaps now we can see why. Maybe we have been trying to defeat it too gently or piecemeal. We try to gradually cut back our excessive drinking from once a week to once a month, to once a year, and then hopefully give it up. Instead of removing ourselves from the temptation that causes us to stumble, we just pray for more strength to overcome it. In reality, we prefer this peaceful coexistence with the enemy.

The key to a drastic change is in our minds — "What do I want?" — and in our hearts — "What does the Lord want?" Jesus says the enemy must be banished. "If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off . . ." (Matthew 5:30).

Earnest prayer

Before Samson pulled down the temple pillars, he cried, "O Lord God, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God . . ." (Judges 16:28). In this instance, one

prayer was enough for Samson to receive the strength he needed to defeat his enemies. Many of us, however, have prayed or been prayed for countless times about our sin, but to no avail.

In Samson's case, his final prayer may have been greatly effective because he was totally earnest. He was ready to sacrifice himself completely to fulfill his mission of subduing the Philistine kingdom. He knew, in fact, that if his prayer were answered, he would die with his enemies. It was, and he did!

Final victory

By sacrificing himself, Samson subdued the king and struck a lethal blow against Israel's enemies. We too can win the victory over sin by dying to self.

Once we realize the wickedness of our sin, truly repent, and desire to be free, God can impart to us His strength through the Holy Spirit. Let's take out the pillars and lords of sin in our lives, pulling down strongholds, just as Samson did. We will be set free from our sin-bondage as slaves from an old master, and we will find new power. ■■

David and Angela Kidd attend and serve in the Adelaide church in South Australia.



Sin not only causes us potentially fatal harm now but also ultimately destroys our soul.



Corel Photos

The Scourge of Slavery

A BA exclusive interview with Deann Alford.

The March '07 Christianity Today featured a cover story about slavery in today's world (read it at www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/march/13.30.html). Here, the author of that story responds to our questions on this critical topic.

You wrote that there are 27 million slaves in the world today, more than any other time in history. Who are they?

Slaves can be found doing anything that an exploiter can make money doing – even touring a gospel choir. In the USA, we're hearing of sensational trials involving enslaved domestic workers, exposing what's out there. Recently, there was an undercover video of exploited children producing garments for a world-famous clothing retailer. These children, who should have been in school, were paid slave wages, if paid at all.

Many of us think of twenty-first century slavery as addictive habits, spiritual bondages, and so on. What are we missing here?

Those addictive vices are what fuels the fires of slavery. Sexual addiction, for example, is the root of pornography and prostitution. And greed is the root of the demand for household slave labor. The hellish lie is that porn and prostitution are "victimless" crimes. Instead, they prey on women and children – those by far most exploited by slave trafficking. I've seen many articles about rampant pornography addiction within the church, fed by enslaved and exploited women and children. Ultimately, of course, porn and prostitution destroy their own consumers.

The root of the root, if you will, is "freedom," defined as "have it your way," where personal desire trumps morality and ethics. This philosophy gives rise to legalized abortion and recreational drugs. Even the Netherlands, among the world's most secular and permissive societies, is now asking itself whether "anything goes" is a truly noble concept.

Christians know that "There but for the grace of God go I." Before we point fingers at another,

we must remember that each of us is vulnerable to addiction. This is not just my neighbor's problem; it's mine too.

How has the church responded to your article?

The church is growing in awareness that slaves are everywhere around us, such as the enslaved Zambian boys choir members. These boys were actually guests in homes of members of U.S. churches where the choir performed. One reader wrote to express shock that she had hosted the choir in her home for a day, completely unaware that the choirboys were enslaved.

The story made Christians aware of this heinous, abominable, ongoing scourge. Believers are becoming more involved on the front lines combating slavery and human trafficking. Several groups were mentioned in the article: International Justice Mission, Salvation Army, World Vision, Project Rescue, Free the Slaves, Make Way Partners.

If more Christians take the struggle for human freedoms into the socio-political arenas, as William Wilberforce did two hundred years ago in England, how might this affect traditional gospel missions?

Wilberforce had an integrated vision of Christian mission. His vision was about introducing people to the saving Christ and meeting their temporal physical needs on earth. Wilberforces today need to put their soul-winning efforts into the contemporary context of people who are oppressed and needy. James 2:14-18 addresses this.

continued on page 25

An old Yiddish proverb says, “Life is the greatest bargain — we get it for nothing.” Job said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there” (Job 1:21). If we put these two sayings together, here’s what we learn: We didn’t have to pay anything to get here, we didn’t have anything when we got here, and we will have nothing when we leave here.

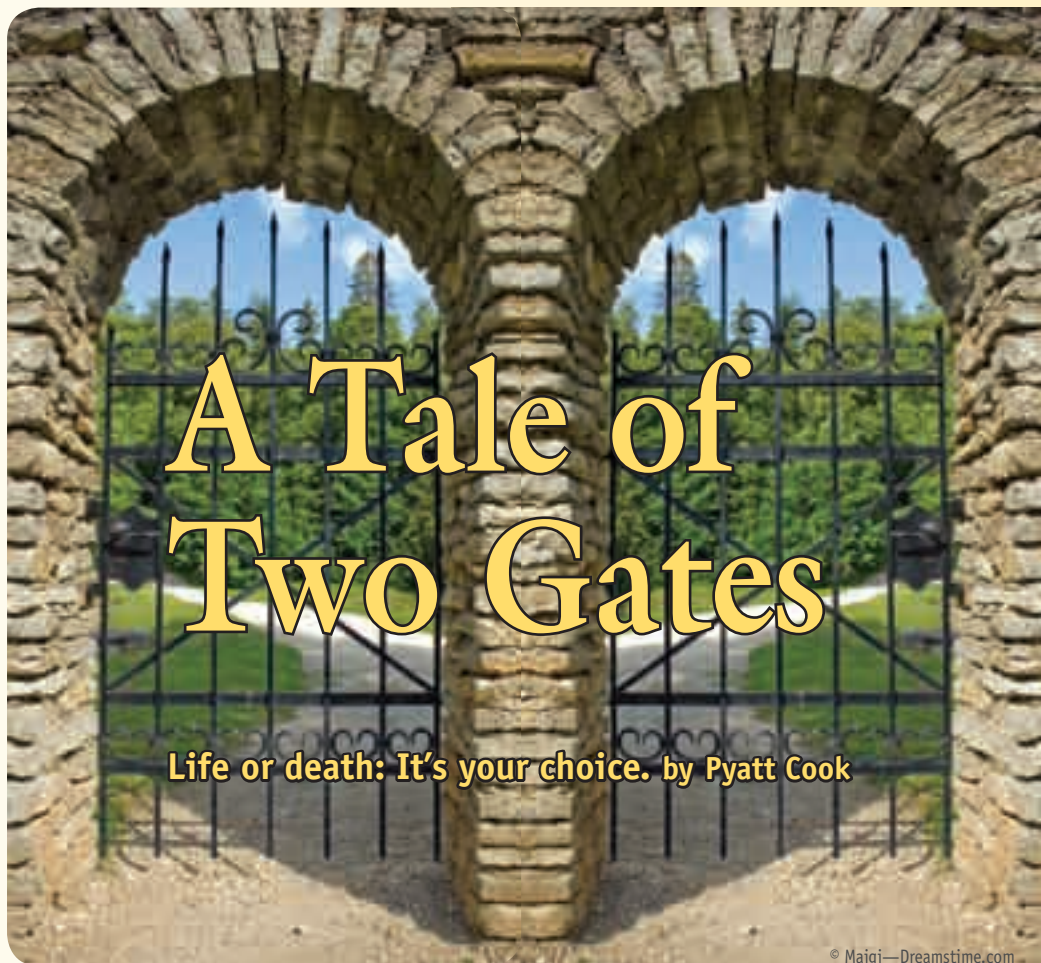
It makes perfect sense, then, to ask, “Why should we do anything to better ourselves?” We could just do as an old country-western song says: Live fast, love hard, die young, and leave a beautiful memory.

Unfortunately, millions of people do just that. The god of this world, Satan, supplies the pleasures they enjoy during their brief stay on this planet. In truth, these pleasures aren’t pleasant at all; they’re called sin. And they carry a hefty price tag: death (Romans 6:23). All those who follow Satan and his ways will pay this penalty.

But those who follow Christ have a wonderful future waiting — so wonderful that Paul reached back to the prophet Isaiah to put it into words: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Eternal life, however, isn’t widely accessed by living any way we want. It’s a select way, a narrow way, that gets us there. And that narrow way is Christ. Jesus urged:

“Enter [life] by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because



narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:13, 14).

We all must choose which gate we will enter and continue through the rest of our lives. Those people who follow Satan have entered life through the wide gate. But those of us who follow Christ have entered life through the narrow gate.

Yes, we will all have trials during our lives. But at the end of life, both these groups will stand before God to give an account of why they chose the gate they did, and each will receive their reward. Those who have followed Satan will receive eternal death. But those who have fol-

lowed Christ will receive eternal life and be with God in His kingdom throughout eternity.

As Moses told the Israelites: “I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19).

Have a great life in the Lord!



Pyatt Cook and his wife, Jackie, attend services at the Triple Trees church in San Antonio, TX, and the Come as You Are church in Austin, TX.





Breaking the Chains

**Freedom from
addictions doesn't
come easy but is
assured through
encountering
Jesus Christ.
by Michael Flores**

He came out of the caves at night and cried in agony among the tombs. He cut his skin with stones and wandered through the cemetery, divorced from society. In this story of a man suffering brokenness and bondage, we may see our own bondage to habitual sin.

It begins with something small: a daily drink, a racy TV show, a single shopping spree. Then that one act turns into two or three and becomes a habit that our survival depends on. In reality, it can ruin us.

A habit takes something from us. An addiction detracts from God-orientation and refocuses us on objects of earthly satisfaction. It becomes a form of idolatry, fueled by greed, gluttony, lust, pride, wrath, sloth, or envy.

Such bondage keeps us stagnant, oppressed, and dissatisfied. It robs us of free will, strips us of dignity, and leaves us crying alone, in agony. Sometimes we forget how we got there.

I have struggled with addiction. I have spent countless hours looking for my next fix. I know the frustration of constant failure, the pain of self-loathing, the isolation of oppression.

Thanks to God, I have also learned the beauty of "Amazing Grace," the joy of deliverance, and the truth of what Jesus said: "If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36).

Sane choice

The possessed man wandering naked through a cemetery (Mark 5:1-20) illustrates sin's ruinous effects. When Christ comes near, the evil spirit begins to lose its power. In the light of Christ, depravity becomes obvious; God's

holiness opens us to see the evil in our lives. "There is none righteous, no, not one," proclaimed Paul (Romans 3:10) — another whose eyes opened at Christ's approach.

Both Paul and the demoniac experienced a conversion that brought freedom. Once they truly encountered the Lord, drastic change was the only sane choice.

Conversion is always the cure for those in bondage. It happens the day Jesus calls your name. Despite your struggle and failure today, just the hope of experiencing Christ's conversion should make your heart leap. Everyone is called to belong to Jesus Christ (Romans 1:6), so conversion may be only an instant away. In this moment, you may realize that Jesus is always standing by, ready to help.

Entering community

The stories continue. Both the possessed man and Paul were commanded to enter community (Mark 5:18, 19; Acts 9:6). Deliverance comes through conversion, but living in freedom means overcoming everything that would keep you oppressed, like your previous environment.

The demoniac returned to his family to repair broken relationships, amend bad behavior, and contribute to his community. Bondage-breaking is seldom done in isolation. We must humble ourselves and repair whatever damage we have wreaked on others.

Since we have hurt others in our bondage, humility requires transparency. When I confessed to my wife, my stomach churned and my body trembled. Here I

was revealing my life of bondage. Likewise, both Paul and the possessed man returned to communities they had previously damaged. A person affirms his conversion by willingly proclaiming Christ's work in his life, not by hiding what he was before.

Transparency involves accountability — submitting to a relationship that practices honest dialogue with another. In confessing our sins to someone else, we forgive and are forgiven. We receive and give kindness. Helping another to maintain temperance, chastity, and diligence in an accountability relationship, we practice charity.

Way to freedom

Every time I failed, I committed myself to living rightly, only to fail shortly after. I could never stop the cycle. The problem with bondage is that we forget how we got there. The way to freedom is to remember how these chains got on our hands, how we ended up alone, hurting, and empty. Then we must look upon the radiance of Christ and, like Paul, come away transformed.

I don't know your problems, your fears, or your story. But I do know that the same Jesus that confronted Paul and the demon-possessed man wants to confront you. Bondage isn't a life sentence; it's an opportunity for freedom — if you allow it. **✠**

Michael Flores attends and serves at the Willard St. church in San Antonio, TX.



Redemption

continued from page 6

day reclaim all the earth. In this time between, the creation still groans to be released from the effects of sin and death, and we likewise anticipate the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:22, 23). Like much else in the New Testament, redemption is both now and not yet. For it is by faith and in union with Christ that we hold the earnest, the down payment, of that full redemption that remains. It is with confidence that we now hold what will be realized on that day (Ephesians 1:7, 14). Jesus bids us to watch and pray as that day approaches, for when it appears, "Lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21:28, KJV).

This hopeful possession is expressed on a simple headstone in Bridgeport, Connecticut. There, at Fanny's Crosby's grave, is another of her cherished lines:

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
O, what a foretaste of glory divine!

Do we love to proclaim it?
"Let the redeemed of the LORD say so" (Psalm 107:2). **✠**

Jason Overman serves the Church in Jasper, AR, and works for a local newspaper.



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Everyday Redemption

by **Lennox W. Abrigo**

How do you picture redemption? For me, it helps to relate it to everyday life.

My native Guyana mines and exports large quantities of gold annually. Fortunately, her distribution of the precious metal is not limited to commercial buyers. In keeping with our heritage, most Guyanese possess many beautiful items of gold that may be used as jewelry and/or handed down to offspring at birth or on their wedding day.

These items are often sold or used as collateral for expensive acquisitions (cars, homes, land). The owner takes the gold to a jeweler or lender, who assesses its value and gives the cash equivalent in exchange. The owner may reclaim (redeem) the gold items within a specified time by repaying the cash loan to the jeweler-lender.

Another life experience that stages the idea of redemption is salvaging sunken boats. Some vessels containing valuables or ancient treasure are refloated and even refurbished to sail again.

Posting bail to obtain release of someone imprisoned on suspicion of a crime also drama-

tizes this concept, as do many human rescue stories: hikers lost in the woods or buried beneath avalanches; persons abducted for a ransom; helpless victims of crimes rescued by saviors.

Taken together, these experiences recall the force of the noun *redemption* — providing the means to reverse adverse conditions that victims cannot extricate themselves from. Furthermore, redemption is the state of being reclaimed or salvaged or freed, mainly upon payment of a ransom. The objects needing rescue are, by definition, incapable of bringing about their own redemption.

When Adam first sinned in the garden, all human beings became sinners through him as the representative man (Romans 3:23). Being sinners means we're all under God's wrath, the sentence of eternal death (6:23). In addition to this condemnation, our carnal nature separates us from God and rebels against Him (8:7). In both instances, we're without self-help or hope either of commuting God's death sentence or of being subject to His law to please Him.

Essentially, this is the two-edged doctrine of original sin,

our natural standing before God. And like sunken ships or impounded gold, none of us, the Bible shouts, is able to rescue himself from this human plight. In a question-and-answer exchange with himself, Paul nailed down the single solution: "Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God [such deliverance, such redemption, is] through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (7:24, 25).

By sacrificing His life as the ransom price, Jesus accomplished our spiritual release, both from the penalty (wrath) of our sins and from the practice (carnal nature) of the same. "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all . . ." (1 Timothy 2:5, 6).

Furthermore, just as precious possessions (collateral) are released when loans they secured are repaid, so did Jesus set us free from spiritual captors when He paid the price of our sin in full by dying on the cross. In other words, He redeemed us with His blood (Colossians 1:14).

Yes, Jesus' sacrifice sets us free both from the wrath of God to come and from dominance by the sinful nature here and now. We don't lose the carnal nature, but through impartation of the Holy Spirit, the flesh no longer governs our lives. Christ does! **RA**

A traveling evangelist and Christian apologist, Pastor **Lennox Abrigo** enjoys reading, recreation, music, conversation, and his family at their Maryland home.



Eight Years' Worth of Love

by Carol Davis Gustke

The troubled eyes of my eight-year old son stared up at me as I tucked him in bed for the night. Often at these times we shared the day's events and ended with a quiet prayer. "Why the serious face, Luke?" I asked. "Did something special happen today?"

He nervously bit the corner of his lip and snuggled further down into his covers. "Mom," he began hesitantly, "is it OK if I don't love Jesus a lot?"

His question startled me, and for a moment I didn't answer. But I knew he needed more than a mother's pat on the head or kiss on the cheek to cure his uneasiness. As I settled myself on the edge of his bed, I prayed silently that God would give me wisdom. "Luke," I began slowly, "when you were born, did you know your daddy and me?"

"No," he murmured softly, shaking his head.

"Do you remember us taking care of you?" Again, he shook his head.

I gently squeezed his hand and smiled. "Of course you don't, and that's the way it's supposed to be. But your daddy

and I knew you and loved you very much. When you were hungry, we fed you. When it was cold outside, we wrapped you in warm blankets. Some nights we rocked you to sleep when your tummy hurt. We didn't ask you to love us back; we just loved you. But do you know what began to happen?" I asked.

Luke had been listening closely from the beginning. Now his curiosity was stirred even more. "Tell me," he urged.

"Well," I continued, "as you grew older, you learned to recognize us. You would hold out your arms when we walked into your room, and your first words were *mama* and *dada*. It wasn't long before you were giving love back to us, even though it was just a baby's worth of love. The longer you knew us, the more you loved us."

I could feel a familiar hush within my own spirit. I often felt it when the Lord was teaching me something. "That's how it is in loving Jesus," I explained to Luke. "When you are born into His family, you know very little about Him. But He loves you anyway and takes care of you

like a newborn baby. Then as you pray to Him and read His Word, you begin to know Him and love Him back. The longer you know Him, the more you love Him."

Luke cocked his head to one side and gave me a long, thoughtful look. "Then it's OK if I only love Him eight years' worth?" he asked.

"That's just perfect, Son," I answered, blinking back the tears.

Luke heaved a sigh of relief. "Mom, you sure know how to answer my questions good."

As I left Luke's room, I was deeply moved. I knew the answer I gave him was not my own. Someday when he was old enough, I would explain that to him. But for now I could only marvel at the honesty of a little boy's question and the beauty of God's wisdom in answering it. ■

Carol Davis Gustke writes from Battle Creek, MI.



The Great Disappoint

William Miller, a New York farmer, army captain, and Bible student, is best remembered as the leader of an early American groundswell of enthusiasm for the truth of Christ's second advent. This grassroots stirring of souls, known as the Millerite Movement, unsettled the established churches of the 1830's and 40's, mostly in the northeastern United States.

Church members from all denominations and doctrinal persuasions were attracted to the movement, expecting that the Lord Jesus would soon return in person to judge the nations and bring eternal righteousness. From the time Miller's public ministry began in 1831, large numbers attended the crusades, camp-meetings, and conferences that expounded the Second Coming message. Groups of Millerite Adventists, as they were called, sprang up in several states, and whole Adventist denominations later appeared. William Miller never observed the seventh-day Sabbath, however, nor did many Millerites before 1846.

The movement led by Miller was one of several to appear on the religious landscape of mid-nineteenth century America. Two new sects of that era were much further from the Christian mainstream than Miller: the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), founded by Joseph Smith, and the Christian Science

Church, began about 1870 by Mary Baker Eddy.

In mainline churches too, waves of renewal swept over much of the young nation as its population spread further westward. Itinerant Baptist and Methodist preachers made their impact on the untamed frontier, and a campmeeting movement further east saw many conversions, along with unorthodox elements of devotion. The fervor swept on to the Atlantic, climaxing in the noon-hour prayer meetings of 1858-60 in New York City. All these elements taken together are called America's Second Great Awakening.

Energized by early waves of this national revival and contributing to it, the Millerite Movement reached its zenith around 1844. For some time, leaders and preachers of an imminent Second Advent had urged William Miller to announce a date when the Lord would appear in clouds of glory. Miller finally yielded, saying that Christ would come within a year of March 1843, based on his study of the 2,300-day prophecy in Daniel 8.

When the year came and went without Jesus' return, Miller and his associates identified their mistake in calculating the year zero between B.C. and A.D. The new date for the Second Advent was fixed on the seventh day of the seventh Hebrew month that year: October 22, 1844.

Now the fervor of hard-core

Adventists intensified. As the countdown continued into the summer and early fall of 1844, more individuals and families left the normal pursuits of life to prepare for the marriage supper of the Lamb. By the dozens and hundreds they gathered on October 22, in obedience to the Bible call: "Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him" (Matthew 25:6, KJV).

They came in the evening with intense holy anticipation of seeing the Lord. They returned home the next morning, disheartened and crushed. This was the night of the Great Disappointment.

In the months that followed, the movement led by William Miller crumbled. Some hopeful Adventists were disillusioned and ceased to practice their faith. Many returned to their previous churches. Others retained their confidence that the Second Coming was near, in spite of the Great Disappointment, and continued to carry the Advent message. From the latter, four denominations soon sprang: Adventist Christian Church, Church of God of Abrahamic Faith, Seventh-day Adventist Church, and Church of God (Seventh Day).

The God who brought light from darkness also beams His truth from the errors of men. One lasting benefit from Miller's movement was that the blessed hope of believers, too often dimmed in orthodox faith, re-

ment of 1844

gained a position of prominence. A revival of Bible teaching on the Second Advent was needed, and it came!

Further, the Holy Spirit used the intense study of this time to reveal other long dormant Bible truths. In 1846 a Seventh-day Baptist named Rachel Oakes shared her conviction about the weekly Sabbath with a group of Millerites in New Hampshire. About the same time, many Adventists learned sleep-of-the-dead teachings, coupled with focus on the resurrection and establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth at His return. Interest in other Bible topics waxed and waned during this period.

With the benefit of hindsight and inquiry, we now recognize the much ado that brought disappointment to Adventist Christians in 1844 was based on error. The prophecies of Daniel 8 and 9 had been misread by William Miller and pressed into a function never intended: setting a date for the Lord's return.

We need not maintain any Bible significance for the 1844 date. Attempting to reclaim one faulty interpretation by imposing another does no service to the cause of ultimate truth. Neither should we commit the proverbial error of throwing out the baby — Christ's imminent return — with the bathwater of 1844. There is an entire vein of rich biblical truth to support the Second Advent, and its ore loses

no value merely because some nuggets were misused for a time.

As heirs of the Millerite Movement, of the Protestant Reformation, and of the apostolic church of God, we concede the error of 1844, and we move on. Jesus will return to this earth, though no man knows the day, hour, or year of that event. The time for

the end of this age is concealed in the mind of God and is not for us to know. In our confidence that the awesome Day of the Lord is still ahead, we remain Adventist Christians.

Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus.

—BA

2,300 Days of Daniel 8, in Shorthand

1. In vision, Daniel sees a he-goat (Greece) with a prominent horn defeat a two-horned ram (Medo-Persia) in battle (vv. 3-7, 19-21).
2. When the prominent horn (Alexander the Great) is broken, four smaller horns (his four generals) replace it (vv. 8, 22).
3. One of the four successors of Alexander's Grecian empire (Antiochus Epiphanes) grows mighty to oppress the people of the holy temple (Jews) and to take away their daily sacrifice (vv. 9-12, 23-25a).
4. It is explained that the daily sacrifice would be restored after 2,300 days (or 2,300 evenings and mornings): "then the sanctuary shall be cleansed" and the oppressive, evil king be broken (vv. 13, 14, 25b).
5. From this, William Miller calculated the year of the Lord's return. He began with the year 457 B.C. (based on Daniel 9:25) and added 2,300 years (using a year for each day, Numbers 14:34) to arrive at A.D. 1844.
6. When Jesus did not return in 1844, some Millerite Adventists explained that He entered the heavenly sanctuary then, cleansing it by applying the merits of His sacrifice on the cross to those found worthy by a pre-Advent, or investigative, judgment.
7. Time and Scripture suggest a better explanation. The 2,300-day prophecy was fulfilled in the desolation of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes around 170 B.C., a desolation that lasted 1,150 days, or 2,300 morning and evening sacrifices.

The time of Christ's return remains unknown and unknowable.

Seeking Truth by Bob Fogarty

At age twelve, I began my Christian adventure at a local altar service. A sense of holy relief came over me as I summoned the courage to walk to the front of that church. The preacher assured me that Jesus had forgiven me and everything was okay. Still uncertain where the path would lead, a small, quiet voice asked, *Will you trust Me?* and I said, “Yes.”

Some things about the church, however, I didn't understand. Why did those older in the Lord seem to be missing something? Some of them didn't appear very happy, or even friendly. Since I came from a poor family and had a bad reputation, maybe it was only my perception. But for some reason there was disconnect between what I felt in my heart and what I saw in other Christians.

Search and return

I reasoned that whatever was lacking in me couldn't be found in the church. Within a year after my conversion, I left church to search for “it” in the world.

For the next decade I experimented much and experienced more, but could never find the right “high” to fill the void inside. Ironically, what drove me from the church eventually drew me back to it. What I thought others had on the outside, they didn't. They had only quit searching.

In one denomination I finally found a small group of believers excited about their faith. They sang upbeat songs saturated with the joy of the Lord. They told stories of God's work in their lives and in the lives of others.

They adopted me into their spiritual family. I began playing guitar in the praise group and teaching the new converts class — even preaching on occasion. I felt happy, valued, and complete. Almost. There was still a puzzled piece lying uneasily within.

Sabbath and more

Preparing for class one week, when we were to study the Lord's Day doctrine, something — or

Someone — stopped me. Much earlier in life I had questioned why church was on Sunday, not Sabbath. Now needing to teach the church's explanation, I hesitated. I skipped that study and started digging on my own. What I ended up with were two lists: Sunday Bible verses on one side of the sheet and Sabbath texts on the other. Which was right?

After some time, this thought finally came: *After all I've done for you, would you do this one for Me?* I would.

I decided to leave that church. Instantly, the praise team broke relationship with me, and I entered a season of questioning the reality of this journey. Were Christians and Christianity for real, or were they just another pseudo-spiritual control group, still desperate for the real answers? In my hurt and rejection, an inner voice whispered again, *Do you trust Me?*

I joined a church in another denomination. Many of us shared similar stories of searching and rejection in the name of truth. This wasn't the sort of free-thinking group I had left. These people claimed to believe in spiritual gifts, especially prophecy, but often built walls to protect what they believed. I noticed fewer smiles, less joy and inner peace than my previous fellowship had. But the group *did* observe Sabbath, so I continued.

Soon I was back to my music and teaching. I also found Kim, a true, spiritual soul-mate. We fell in love and eventually married.

Deeper adventure

I felt the Spirit calling me to a deeper adventure: full-time ministry. In a church we attended earlier, I had been impressed with a pastor who truly loved God and cared for people. Now it seemed I was being called down the same path — a daunting thought. Again, that familiar impression and challenge came: *Do you trust Me?*

With a wife, two children, and a church ministry, I began studies toward a theology degree. At the same time, I was more troubled over a few founda-



Nikhil Gangavane—Dreamstime.com

tional doctrines of the denomination I would represent. I tried to put these feelings off, but the knot in my stomach only grew.

Doors of opportunity swung open, however, and we moved in 1997 to assist in a church plant. Soon both Kim and I were working with new converts to this movement, as well as veterans of it. I was chosen company leader, then head elder, and was given charge of this little group on alternating Sabbaths.

Everyone learned and grew in the Lord. He blessed the work, and we quickly outgrew first the chapel and then the church basement we were leasing. We found and purchased our own building on a beautiful lot on the outskirts of town. Within months, we approached capacity and started an expansion project.

In this local church, I felt fulfilled — almost. Its doctrines and my studies continued to bother me. I decided that I couldn't, in good conscience, teach these "truths" to others. For a short time, I compromised: I would avoid teaching what I wasn't convinced of. I continued in my studies, hoping for a deeper revelation that could adequately explain the teachings I struggled with.

Church search

Eventually, I reached the impasse of conscience and found myself, with my family, on the outside looking in at people we had diligently labored with the past several years. We were suddenly alone and adrift, hurt and directionless — my wife more than I. The only church she had known was no longer hers.

When I left one church earlier, the pastor's wife told me, "Do you know what your problem is, Bob? You are a seeker of truth. Because of that, you will always have problems." Her parting words once again proved true.

Weeks turned into months and years, and still we couldn't find a church home that fit. The Sabbath-keeping churches we visited were mostly legalistic and cold. One Sabbath morning, a friend and I

found a small congregation nestled deep down in Kansas City. A visiting pastor preached on wounded warriors — Christians hurt in the battle.

I left the service encouraged. Maybe the past two decades were part of a training camp — a bigger, God-sized plan. I began trading e-mails with Pastor Lynn Taylor, a big man with a huge heart for God and people. Ironically, Lynn received a call to the same little Kansas City church I had visited months earlier. After a time of "Lynn-coaxing," we moved with him into the fellowship of the Kansas City Church of God (Seventh Day).

Again, Kim and I mustered the courage to get involved. And again, a still, small voice began whispering about ministry. Calloused and wiser, I tried to ignore it, but the voice was insistent: *Do you still trust Me?*

Perpetual adventure

I was in Maryland when Lynn Taylor called and said he had been diagnosed with cancer — one of the most treatable forms. Just days later, it seemed, I held his hand and listened to the hum of the respirator keeping him alive. Then he was gone.

In the spring of 2007 I was granted a ministerial license, authorizing me to continue my ministry either in the Kansas City church, where we usually attend and serve, or wherever God may lead.

When I was only twelve years old, the Lord invited me into a life-long journey with Him. I would have never guessed where that road would take me. He still asks, *Will you trust Me?* If I keep answering "Yes," my adventure with Him will never stop.

Bob and Kim Fogarty are the proud parents of Brianna, 15, and Jon, 12.



Got a spiritual trip story to tell? Send to BA, and we'll consider using it in a future "My Journey."

Guideposts for the Journey

What are we leaving for others to follow as they come along behind? by Roger C. Palms

Some years ago, when I was facing depression, a missionary doctor home on leave counseled me and prayed for me. God used the time spent with that man to set me free, enabling me to get back into the race God wanted me to run. Once again, I moved out into life newly encouraged and newly equipped. Now it is my turn to do the same for others.

Some years later, when my prayer life became dull and listless and I was not seeing the hand of God on my life, another man talked with me and prayed with me. It was liberating for me. That's a help I can now pass along to others.

These men, and many other men and women like them, have invested themselves in me. God used them as they set out guideposts for me to follow. Now I have to ask, "What guideposts am I leaving for others to follow as they come along behind me?" Does it matter? Should I care?

I am called to help, to teach, to encourage, to give to others what others have given to me. I have been helped to run my race. It isn't enough that I finish well; I must help others finish well too.

Four guideposts

Four guideposts have helped me along the way. I'd like to leave them on the road, in clear view, for others.

I Know that God is God and I am not. God knows my today and He knows my tomorrows. He knows how to direct me in ways I cannot even guess. The wisest thing I can do is not to struggle with God but to

be submissive. He has the best in mind for me. That's a guidepost I want to leave on the road for others: Don't try to be God yourself.

2 Be certain that God's Word, the Bible, is inspired; it is God-breathed. But be equally certain that my personal theology is not.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting [not that I correct it but that it corrects me] and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

Even though God's Word is inspired and I try to live by it prayerfully, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, I know that I will never know everything about the Bible with absolute understanding. Why? Because I am not absolute. That guidepost says to all who pass by, "You don't know everything, and you don't have to." I hope this guidepost will take a lot of pressure off people.

3 Grasp the significance that the church, the body of believers, is bigger than my view of it. Christ is the head of the church. It isn't my church; it is His.

Christ is central. As a member of the larger body and of a local church, I am to worship Him, learn from Him, and encourage others to follow Him. But the local church I know, even my denomination, is not the whole church. God's church, the universal church, is greater than my small understanding of it. Because He is Lord of the church, He will keep it. The survival of the church does not depend

solely on me or on what I do as a member of it. This guidepost I leave on the road will tell others, "You are important to the church, but its success is not based on what you alone are doing."

4 Always acknowledge that the Holy Spirit is here to help me understand and discern what is truth. He is the Counselor, the Friend who comes alongside. I don't have to depend only on myself. The Spirit helps me in my praying, in making decisions, and gives me words to say when I speak to others about saving faith in Christ. This guidepost I leave behind will say to those who come after me, "Always look to the leading of the Holy Spirit. When you do, you will never think of yourself as the only infallible teacher of truth."

Fixing my eyes on Jesus

Having these four guideposts helps me on this journey of faith. Hebrews 12:1, 2 reads:

Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. . . .

Thanks to others who helped me, I can fix my eyes on Jesus and teach others who follow me to do that too.

I am today's missionary, today's counselor, today's evangelist with the good news of Christ. My investment, prayerfully made in the lives of others, will multiply in them as seed sown in good soil. God the master gardener will multiply it, sometimes thirty fold, sometimes a hundred fold.

Like that great cloud of witnesses spoken of in Hebrews 12, I want to be one of those who cheer on the next generation so that they too, in their day, will "press on toward the goal to win the prize . . ." (Philippians 3:14).

What difference will my life make? That depends on how well I keep the guideposts in sight and not get off the road. What I leave to those who are following behind me can be a good heritage. **64**

Roger C. Palms, former editor of *Decision* magazine, lives in Fort Myers, FL.

Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



I want to be one of those who cheer on the next generation so that they too, in their day, will "press on toward the goal to win the prize . . ." (Philippians 3:14).

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The Journey

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Reality Without TV

by Wayne Hrenyk

At least 40 major reality shows are on the networks, like **The Amazing Race** and **Last Comic Standing**. They supposedly portray real life, but many of them border on the bizarre.

Wouldn't it be cool if a spiritual reality program showed people's lives before and after they accept Jesus? But spiritual reality hasn't been addressed much on TV, especially the reality that we have fallen short of God's will. My concern for youth in our church is in the reality of repentance for sins. We may be confused about conviction and repentance.

Conviction is an early step of God's grace, stirring our hearts to His presence. Conviction shouts that our lives are not right with God. How does God convict us? Through gospel music, a pastor's message, a believing friend, or reading the Bible. Conviction helps us see the reality that we are sinners. Sin feelings come from our God-given conscience, revealing right from wrong. If our conscience has not been seared with a hot iron, as Paul wrote to Timothy, we will sense the spirit of conviction when we sin. Unless God draws us in this manner by the Holy Spirit, we really can't come to Him.

When God begins His work in us, we not only feel conviction but also realize that we need to repent. **Repentance** basically means change — more than saying, "I won't do that anymore" to feeling sorrow for what we've done wrong. Our hearts should convict us that we must change.

The Bible says that godly sorrow leads us to repentance — to real change. We change our mind about sin by admitting to God that we have been wrong and asking Him to forgive us. Somewhere in this process, He begins the change in our attitudes and behaviors.

If we do not accept the truth about Jesus and the work of His Spirit, we walk in fantasy, not reality. On that path, we end up fooling ourselves.

Your Journey

by Kurt Lang

National Youth Director

Life is all about journey. When God created the heavens and earth, the trip began.

Collectively, it's a journey of the human race: from our garden home through the dark day of our separation from God and along the path He cleared to bring us back. History is full of ups and downs.

Biblically, it's the journey of a single nation struggling to survive Egypt and the loving God who gave them a name and pursued their hearts. Many times they walked away, and many times they came running back at His nudge.

Personally, it's about you and me. This journey is ours; no one else can walk it for us, and there's no legitimate escape. Before birth, we were in our Father's thoughts, and we'll be on His heart until the end. This means purpose, a plan, and the Father's good pleasure with all His sons and daughters.

He mapped the journey for you because it is you He wants — to walk with you in the cool of the day, as He did with Adam and Eve. He designed you for relationship with Him.

Why can't life be so perfect, then? Why can't I know and experience my full purpose on the journey, as God designed it? For one thing, sin came alongside, gave us a flat tire, and pretty much destroyed our vehicle!

If you've seen the new Herbie movie (the car with personality), Herbie allowed himself to get all banged up until he found a reason to keep going. Then new life surged through him.

When God takes hold and breathes His purpose into us, He gives us a reason to keep going, despite the sin that tries to destroy us.

Life is not an easy road; it's full of curves, detours, crashes, construction zones, speed limits, stop signs, and hazards. Sometimes we have to hit the garage for repair. Sometimes our engine purrs and we feel the exhilaration of the wind in our faces. Sometimes we just need to stop and enjoy the scenery.

Here we are on the journey. It's all about finding life — all God created us to be in Him. Never gonna find it anywhere else. If you've already started with Jesus, hang on tight for the greatest ride you can imagine! If you haven't, then buckle up with Jesus' Word, and let Him share the journey with you (John 14:6).

Mission Possible Trivia!

Of places that hosted MISSION POSSIBLE, which one sported this sign in the downtown area?

- Denver, Colorado (1996)
- Kansas City, Missouri (1998)
- Owosso, Michigan (SVA - 1994, 2000)
- San Antonio, Texas (2002)
- Jasper, Arkansas (2006)

The first three correct answers e-mailed to nfyc@cog7.org will win a MISSION POSSIBLE T-shirt and \$20 off the MP '08 registration fee.

Please mark your calendars for MP '08 - June 22-29 in Conroe, Texas!



2008 Journey Theme

We're all searching for significance and for the heart of God. National Youth Ministry can partner in your journey this year by

- monthly youth-group devotions, exploring themes of our journey together
- weekly online/e-mail devotions tackling tough issues of the journey
- podcast devotions you take wherever your MP3 or iPod travels
- online blogs, or journals, to share your experiences with others on the journey
- large events such as the Lock-In, camps, and rallies
- video contests where you get to make a crazy video of your journey experiences
- Gimme Five as a record of your group journey
- and much more!

Join us on the journey. Let's travel together and help each other along the way!

For more events and pictures, visit <http://nfyc.cog7.org>

Mail Bag



Stale worship

Mr. Flores is right on about stale worship practices, the trap of ritualistic entertainment [“Viewpoint,” October-November, p. 15]. Two song sessions, offertory, requests and prayers, special music, meet and greet, welcome and announcements, a perfectly timed 25-minute sermon, the occasional five-minute play. Any deviation seems to unnerve the leadership. Nothing’s wrong with any of this, but we can practice the pattern with monotony and lose the “why” of worship.

A structured, scheduled church ritual does not arise from the Bible. We cry out for greater enthusiasm and participation, then limit people to the itinerary. The regular 20 percent do their weekly pre-set ritual while the rest of us watch. Holding to our itinerary, we can expect nothing new. The whole point is, we’re comfortable — afraid to change.

P. R.
Arvada, CO

Holy Spirit

It is imperative for the Holy Spirit to empower missionaries, whether serving around the world or around the corner [“Holy Spirit: Missions

Guide,” p. 8]. There is no other way to do missions God’s way. The author, however, seems to assume that the Holy Spirit is an individual rather than the power and presence of God. The last I knew, the Church of God (Seventh Day) taught that the Holy Spirit is God’s Spirit, not a separate individual. Is this changing? Is the Holy Spirit now being understood as a person?

Thanks for your good work. The BA is a missionary tool. May God bless it with much fruit.

S. P.
e-mail

The article is decidedly pro-Trinitarian. I thought, based on CoG7 history and your published statements, that the BA was not Trinitarian. Is the article an editorial oversight or reflective of BA policy? According to the CoG7 Statement of Faith, “The Holy Spirit is the promised divine helper **who** proceeds from the Father and Son.” Is this personification intentional or a poor choice of words to express your actual belief? What am I missing here?

G. F.
Vancouver, British Columbia

Editor’s reply: The article in question was not selected in any effort to stretch the Church’s doctrinal positions but to stretch our grasp and experience of the Spirit’s role in missions. We take seriously our responsibility to accurately represent both the Church and the Lord we serve.

The Bible’s doctrine of God — of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — has been a focus of the Church’s study for more than a generation now. Slowly but surely, we have changed: Explicit statements of Christ’s deity

were adopted in ‘94, ‘96, and ‘02, after decades of uncertainty and ambivalence. Our ongoing research in the matter has resulted in a less adversarial stance toward the Trinity doctrine than was once the case.

The Church and the BA remain non-Trinitarian, mostly because we do not view the Holy Spirit as a third person of the Deity. We may affirm all the Bible’s major teachings about the Spirit: its divine nature, its personal work of fruits and gifts in believers, its crucial gospel roles of convicting sinners and confirming saints, and so on, without endorsing all the details of Christianity’s historic creeds.

If the article in question reflects a softened stance toward Trinitarian teaching (its author holds a Trinitarian view), it nowhere addresses the essence of Trinitarian belief — i.e., that the Spirit shares all attributes of the Father and Son, including unique personality, and that these three symmetric, divine persons make up one God.

Our Statement of Faith (http://cog7.org/faith_statement.htm) about the Holy Spirit reflects what Jesus said in John 14:16ff. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion here that Jesus promised another divine one from heaven to interact with them on a personal basis, as He had. The Greek term for Comforter (KJV), Counselor (NIV), and Helper (NKJV) — paraclete — is masculine. Thus, personal pronouns (He, Him, His) are properly used in these verses.

On the other hand, the Greek term for Spirit — pneuma — is neither masculine nor feminine but neuter, a technicality that explains our its pronouns in the third paragraph above. This is only one of several biblical data supporting the idea that the

Holy Spirit is not a third person of the Deity, in the same sense that the Father and Son are “persons.”

If the article attributes a greater role to the work of the Holy Spirit than we have commonly recognized or emphasized, the author’s points in this regard are taken nearly verbatim from the biblical text — namely, the book of Acts. For the sake of Christ and the gospel, let us be willing to learn and grow in the teaching and ministry of the Holy Spirit.



Idol talk

Your response to T. A. — “The second commandment prohibits, not the making of, but the worship of any physical symbol of deity” [“Mail Bag,” December, p. 24] — doesn’t make sense to me. Exodus 20:4, 5 says, “You shall not make . . . you shall not bow down. . . .” Doesn’t this prohibit the making of an idol? Please shed some light on my confusion.

S. C.
Riverbank, CA

*Editor’s reply: The commandment (Exodus 20) states that we must not **make** any graven image of anything — any person, animal, mountain, tree, or flower (v. 4). If we stop there, no sculpture, portrait, image, or photograph of any object in the natural universe is permitted. Our children and grandchildren could have no dolls, stuffed animals, school photos, or most other toys. Some have taken it to that extreme.*

On the other hand, most Bible students see that the first lines of verse 5 actually control and explain the meaning of verse 4: We may not make any of these items **for the purpose of worship** — i.e., as an idol. As long as we do not bow and serve them, then, they are not idols, and it is not wrong to make them.

I wrote, “The second commandment prohibits, not the making of, but the worship of any physical symbol. . . .” Thinking only of the natural creation, this makes sense. Extending the sentence by adding “of deity,” as I did, complicates it, I admit. It suggests no limits on physical images of God and Christ, as long as we don’t bow down to them. Given our tendency to honor and adore symbols (parts of creation) rather than reality (the Creator), let’s not stretch the commandment too far by producing images, or symbols, of deity — especially of our Father God. They too easily become idols.

On the other hand, God, to make Himself known, came in the image and likeness of man: Christ. The worship Jesus received was not idolatry but reverence belonging to God alone. Is, then, the divine command violated by an artist’s conception of what the historical Jesus might have looked like? Or by a young man taking the role of Christ in a movie or play? Or by a children’s book using pictorial images of the Lord to illustrate familiar gospel stories?

I think not. Such symbolic representations of the divine-human Son may have more of the effect of making God real than of stimulating idolatry. Yes, idols are prohibited by the second command, but representations of our Lord Jesus Christ for godly purposes aren’t necessarily idols.

Reader responses to this fascinating topic are welcome and will be considered for publication in “Mail Bag.”


The Scourge of Slavery

continued from page 10

How might the church’s younger generations prepare themselves for the long fight against slavery?

Five-year-olds can understand slavery is wrong. Help them know that slavery isn’t just history. It’s now.

Staying clear of vice — pornography and prostitution — is the single biggest way for everybody, young and old, to fight slavery and a host of other evils. Ridding ourselves of addictions of all sorts breaks the back of evil. It’s well established that cocaine and other illicit drugs are funding terrorism, civil wars, gang wars, mafias, and other horrors that lead to even more poverty, crime, hunger, illiteracy, domestic abuse, street children, disease, broken families, homelessness, joblessness, indebtedness, and other manifestations of hopelessness.

If there were no demand for slaves, there would be no traffickers supplying these markets. Always pay your workers fair wages. We must ask ourselves what the human cost is for such cheaply produced goods. How can strings of handmade Christmas tree twinkle lights be sold for 99 cents? If it sounds too good to be true, there may be unpaid, forced labor behind it. We will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give account for our actions. 

**The cold white beauty of the falling snow
warms my heart as though to say
it does not matter that my steps are slow.
We often fail to see what beauty
God desires to share.**

**Not only beauty of the outdoor view
is lost, but tender deeds of loving folks
are thwarted too.**

**Oh, take the time, I pray,
to see and feel the beauty
of each day — before it slips away.**

Carmen F. Hicks





Did you know . . .

. . . that the North American Women's Ministry was formed in 1939 and that Myrtle Davison was its first president? For nearly seventy years, the NAWM's main goal has remained the same: to unite the women of the Church to further the Lord's work. An offering to women's ministry in January will help them achieve this goal.

. . . that the young adult ministry of our Church, SWORD, reaches its tenth birthday in February and that Becky Carr (Riggs) was its first director? A SWORD offering this month will encourage those who lead young adults.

To learn more, go to <http://cog7.org/> and click on Ministries.

SWORD

Christy Lang, Director

A young woman wonders how to motivate SWORD-aged people in her church (only three or four of them, ages 18-35) to get together. A man asks how he can activate young adults of the Church. Another brother requests ideas to inspire young married couples with children.

It seems everybody has an idea about youth ministry, but no one knows much about serving young adults. If a SWORD group is to awaken in your local church, this may help you see it happen:

1. Ask God to break your heart for young adults. Do you long to see college students passionate for Christ? Are you pained that your 18-35-year-olds hang out in clubs? Do you have a burden to serve and encourage young moms and dads? You can't make an effective SWORD group happen, but God can (Zechariah 4:6b).

2. Plan a SWORD night at somebody's house. Select a topic, provide food, and arrange for someone to share a testimony or lead a study. Or show DVD's on interesting subjects and then discuss them. Here's what I recommend:

Creation seminar (7 DVD's and notebook): www.drdino.com

Love Won Out – Testifying to God's Grace (homosexuality study): <http://resources.family.org>

Song of Solomon Series (on love and sex): www.tommynelsononline.com

Marriage God's Way DVD set: www.nogreaterjoy.org

Underground Reality – Vietnam (missions): www.vombooks.com

3. Keep in touch with your pastor, church board, and SWORD coordinators. Most important, listen to your young adults, and check out any resource they recommend. Incorporating as much of their input as possible, you will have a happier and livelier group.

– Jacqueline Melgoza
San Antonio, TX

**One picture can be worth
1,000 words . . .**



**. . . if it's clean, clear, and high
resolution! When you submit digital
CoG7 photos, give us your best shot.
Tips on taking and submitting photos
are at www.cog7.org/BA.**

Mission Cuba 2007

After two years in which, due to other pressing needs, our little sister community in Cuba was not visited, ministers Ariel Bazaldua Alcazar and Ramon Ruiz Garza of Mexico made the journey November 8-12 to view and encourage the missionary work that began six years ago in this beautiful Caribbean place.

At Jose Marti Airport in Havana, the visit began with a long interrogation of Brother Ruiz, who had identified himself as a Christian pastor at the time of his visa interview. After more than two hours of



questioning, authorities seized a box of twenty-four Bibles (despite having made declaration of them in advance), and the brothers were finally admitted to the country.

Visiting Church families, they witnessed the use of a new facility for holding meetings, purchased with the help of IMC members and called in Cuba a "worship house." The Sabbath meeting, attended by thirty-six people, was surrounded with great joy and celebration, typical of the Cuban culture. Brother Bazaldua preached a message on the goodness of the Lord, with a call to persevere in God's grace. The next morning a service of baptism was held for one brother who responded to the gospel call.

Daily workshops were conducted with Pastor Carlos Velazquez to define strategies for the Church's growth, to train leaders, and to achieve legal recognition. Economic aid was distributed: medicines, food, clothing, and personal items — all from the Mexican church. Let us ask God in His infinite grace to continue helping our Cuban church and the entire population of this needy country.

— Ramon Ruiz Garza
IMC President

BA Print or Online: Your Choice

Tired of waiting for the BA to arrive in your mailbox? Now you can download each issue in PDF format with the click of a mouse. Just visit www.cog7.org/BA and click on the latest PDF or on any of the past eight issues.

Online BA has these two benefits: 1) Time: The latest issue can be downloaded and read before the print version arrives by regular mail. This option may appeal most to overseas readers whose magazines take weeks to reach them. 2) Cost: The BA saves postage when the names of those who opt for online reading are no longer on our print-version mailing list.

If you choose to read the online PDF of the BA each issue, please contact bap.orders@cog7.org so we can adjust the mailing list accordingly. Or contact bibleadvocate@cog7.org for more information.

Annual Lord's Supper Service

This special service will be conducted in local churches Friday, April 18, 2008, throughout the United States and Canada.

Season of Refreshing

“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19).

Women of the Church, come! Enjoy a three-day season of refreshing at the national women’s conference, Crowne Plaza Hotel in White Plains, New York, March 21-23.

Rates for two nights and five meals:

- \$200 each (four per room), \$220 each (triple), and \$260 each (double)
- \$50 registration due by February 8; balance due by February 22

Send payments (U.S. dollars) to Mary Ling, NAWM, P. O. Box 301, Amherst, OH 44001

Be partakers with faith-sisters, be exhorted by excellent speakers, be encouraged by prayers, and be energized by your own laughter. Come and be refreshed!

NAWM information contacts:

Mary Ling - 440-988-5278, maryling@ohl.rr.com
 Sylvia Corral - 209-869-0777, sylral869@aol.com
 June Bobcombe - 914-668-8667, jbobcombe@msn.com

CoG7 History in Advance

January 7 - Second semester begins at Spring Vale (grades 9-12), Owosso, MI; for enrollment, call 989-725-2391 or visit www.springvale.us

February 3-5 - Annual G. C. Ministries and district superintendents meeting (Denver)

February 16 – March 17 - Annual G. C. Prayer Initiative for a “New Season of Fruitfulness”

February 17-18 - Annual License and Credentials Committee meeting (Denver)

March 8 - Pacific Northwest Super Sabbath, Jefferson, OR

March 13-24 - Medical-dental mission to Nicaragua; contact Ernesto Frausto (916-422-1036); read Bev Brenneise’s story of the ‘07 medical mission to Guatemala at www.cog7.org/BA [.org](http://www.cog7.org/BA)

March 21-23 - National women’s retreat, White Plains, NY

May 23-26 - National SWORD Retreat, Jasper, AR (<http://sword.cog7.org/sw/>)

June 2-12 - MTS Summer Session for lay pastors and ministry prospects (Denver)

June 8-14 - Family campmeeting at Dover Camp near Kingfisher, OK

June 22-29 - NFYC MISSION POSSIBLE, Conroe, TX

June 22-29 - Youth Camp near Woodland Park, CO; contact Brian Franks at office@cscog7.org



Mission L.A.: More than 800 people from greater Los Angeles attended a missions Sabbath, September 15. Guest presenters for the day included Rafael Parra, director of Cristo Viene; WCD Superintendent Larry Zaragoza; Missions Abroad Director Bill Hicks; and worship leader Dr. Ross Jutsum. Kurt Lang and David Sandoval met with the 150 youth who attended, and the La Puente church ladies served lunch. People left the service excited about their global church.



International Tour

Canada

The Church of God (Seventh Day) in Canada began in the 1930's, through the migration of farm families from the U.S. to western provinces.

By the 1940's Elders E. A. Straub, Christ Kiesz, John Kiesz, and Henry Hoffman were making mission trips into Canada from the States. Also, Elder Peter Hrenyk, Sr. visited and held meetings across western Canada from his home in British Columbia. The first churches to be organized were in Acme and Calgary, Alberta; in Nipawin (later White Fox), Saskatchewan; and in Mission, B.C.

In 1952 the U.S. Church embraced the Canadian work as a district, no longer as merely a mission. As full participants in the General Conference, Canadian congregations have often been served by U.S. pastors such as Reuben Moldenhauer, Ray Moldenhauer, Archie Stiede, Nathan Straub, Wesley Coulson, Roy Keim, John Lemley, Jeff O'Haver, Daniel Camero, David Kauer, David Carson, Gary Riggs, and Jeff Jones.

Conversely, the Canadian church has generated several ministers who spent part or all of their careers in the States. Among these are Elders Marvin Keim, James Kuryluk, Edward Lewin, Nick Nimchuk, and

Wayne Hrenyk. Elders Paul Chalus and Adolf Dietterle are among lifelong Canadians who have served both as pastors and overseers for the work.

The Church in eastern Canada began to grow in the sixties and seventies, spawned mostly by immigration from the West Indies and Latin America. The long distance between members in the west and those in the east led to recognition of both Eastern and Western Canadian districts, around 1990.

Combined, the U.S. and Canadian churches form one member conference in the International Ministerial Congress.



Eastern Canada

The Eastern Canada District consists of six provinces: Ontario, Quebec, Newfoundland, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia. We have more than two hundred baptized members in four congregations (Lakeshore and Scarborough in the Toronto area and Hamilton, Ontario; Montreal, Quebec), served by one full-time ordained minister (Leslie DeSouza) and three lay pastors (Samuel Holland, Julio Martinez, Aubrey

Williams). Our goals are to plant new churches, including one in the Canadian capital of Ottawa, to strengthen our own churches (as well as our fellowship with churches of similar beliefs), and to encourage Church leaders to respond to God's call to ministry.

— *Julio Martinez*
Superintendent

Western Canada

The Western Canada District serves churches near Edmonton (Stony Plain), in



Acme, Calgary, Alberta, and Mission, B.C. The district remains an active participant of the Church, constantly encouraging various Conference programs and providing a strong contingent to attend G. C. conventions. The traditional FYC/SWORD winter retreat has blossomed into a family retreat with participants from the West Coast and Eastern Canada districts. With a strong belief in fellowship, the district tries to schedule three Super Sabbaths each year, often soliciting guest speakers from the U.S. Conference churches for these programs.

— *Orville Rose*
Superintendent

Right Now Counts Forever

The celebration of our church's sesquicentennial (150th) anniversary will take us down memory lane often over the next twelve months. I look forward to traveling these time corridors with you because of how the past is vitally linked with the vibrant future we visualize and work toward.

How about a quick stroll down CoG7 Court? William Miller and the Great Disappointment of 1844 helped shape the movement we know as Church of God (Seventh Day). When Gilbert Cranmer began his independent work in 1858, he was leading eight congregations in southwestern Michigan. The Marion, Iowa, church, founded in 1860, still exists. The *Hope of Israel*, forerunner of the *Bible Advocate*, was first published in 1863, making this magazine one of the oldest in the U.S.

The intrigue builds as we learn of the Church of God name replacing Church of Christ (1875) and the addition of "Seventh Day" (1923). Also worthy of mention: the era of expansion under A. N. Dugger's leadership; the subsequent schism (1933) and merger (1949); organizational advance under Robert Coulter's lead; creation of seven departments supported by United Ministries Fund; and International Ministerial Congress to coordinate a global fellowship of some 300,000 members.

Our history is not without its flaws. Did I mention schism earlier? In being Bible-based, our pioneers were on target, but they also missed the mark on some doctrinal counts. The ongoing struggle between local autonomy (independence) and greater accountability (centralization) exposes a fault line that goes back to the 1850's or before. Even so, I am deeply moved as I read our history and reflect on the dedication of earlier generations of the Church.

Lest we linger too long there, however, a sign, visible from the corner of my mind's eye, reads "Warning: Nostalgia can be harmful to your health." It's been said that nostalgia, like a grammar lesson,

finds the present "tense" and the past "perfect." While there is value in reflecting on the past, it is the present that provides opportunity for service.

Scripture affirms this through repeated use of the words *now* and *today* (Psalm 95:7, 8; Hebrews 3:7, 15; 4:7; 2 Corinthians 6:1, 2). These words emphasize freshness and relevance. The time to embrace God's gift of salvation is never yesterday or tomorrow, but always today. We need not live today on yesterday's blessings, for God is the "I AM" (Exodus 3:14), and His mercies are "new every morning" (Lamentations 3:22, 23).

God, who spans the centuries from wilderness wanderings in the Pentateuch to Davidic rule and the Psalms, from the manger to the cross, from the birth of the New Testament church to the founding of the Church of God (Seventh Day), from the nineteenth century to the present and for all eternity, lives in an eternal Today. He declares, "Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them" (Isaiah 42:9).

Few of us live well in the present. We'd rather remember what's gone or anticipate what's to come. But the future comes one day at a time, just as the Church's preceding generations lived and served day by day. Yesterday is a canceled check; tomorrow, a promissory note. Today is the only cash we have; spend it wisely. Embracing each moment and finding purpose in our daily assignments is to truly live in the present.

The next time you find yourself yearning for the good old days, unplug the refrigerator and turn off the air-conditioner. You'll be delivered from nostalgia and reminded that right now counts forever.

— Whaid Guscott Rose
General Conference President





Elder Gilbert Cranmer, 1814 – 1903

This year marks the 150th of the Church many of us know best. In 1858 Gilbert Cranmer set out to preach with “My Bible and my Bible alone” and reported eight congregations in Michigan. Read more about our roots on pp. 16-17 and 31 and in all BA’s of ‘08. Looking back at how we started, we’ll discern more of where we’re headed.

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