

BA

BIBLE ADVOCATE®

October - November 2008

Breaking Our Sin Bonds

Two-step freedom (p. 4)

This and that on forgiveness (p. 12)

A pastor reflects (p. 18)





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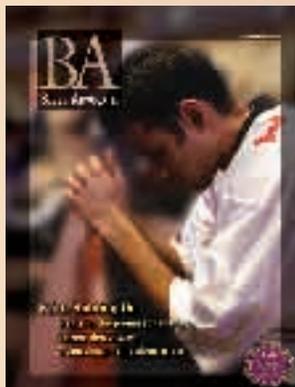
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Miss the last issue on reformation and revival? View it and the current issue, plus download the last eight BA's, at www.cog7.org/BA.

Coming in the December BA: annual prophecy issue; victory over death

In the October and November issues of *Now What?*: dealing with the loss of a husband and health, the challenges of an autistic child (<http://nowwhat.cog7.org>)

 When you see this symbol, visit www.cog7.org/BA for expanded material.



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Pastors and Presidents



With no national holidays for critique,
 October contents us with its agenda
 of fall foliage and pastoral apprecia-
 tion.

A month to honor pastors began when
 the esteem that clergy were usually granted
 fell in the last century. Frauds in our profession receive great notoriety
 these days. Did you hear about the Alabama evangelist who gave a
 revival sermon while seven of his eight children sat on the front row?
 After church he was arrested on charges of incest and rape against his
 eighth, a daughter who had gone to police just that day, and of mur-
 dering his wife, found frozen in the family home while he preached.

A Cincinnati preacher cursed a lady who cut him off in traffic,
 waved a gun at her, and was convicted of aggravated menacing.

Then there are pastors' wives. One shot her husband and was con-
 victed of manslaughter. Another was accused of assaulting an on-duty
 flight attendant and fined \$3,000, but was later cleared of the charges.

The moral? A few pastors and their families do embarrass the
 church, but don't believe everything you hear or read! The sordid stuff
 makes us thankful for faithful pastors and preachers we know (see p.
 18) who haven't made that kind of news. H. B. London, Focus on the
 Family's liaison to clergy, recently wrote to ministers, "If you're going to
 make news, make good news!"

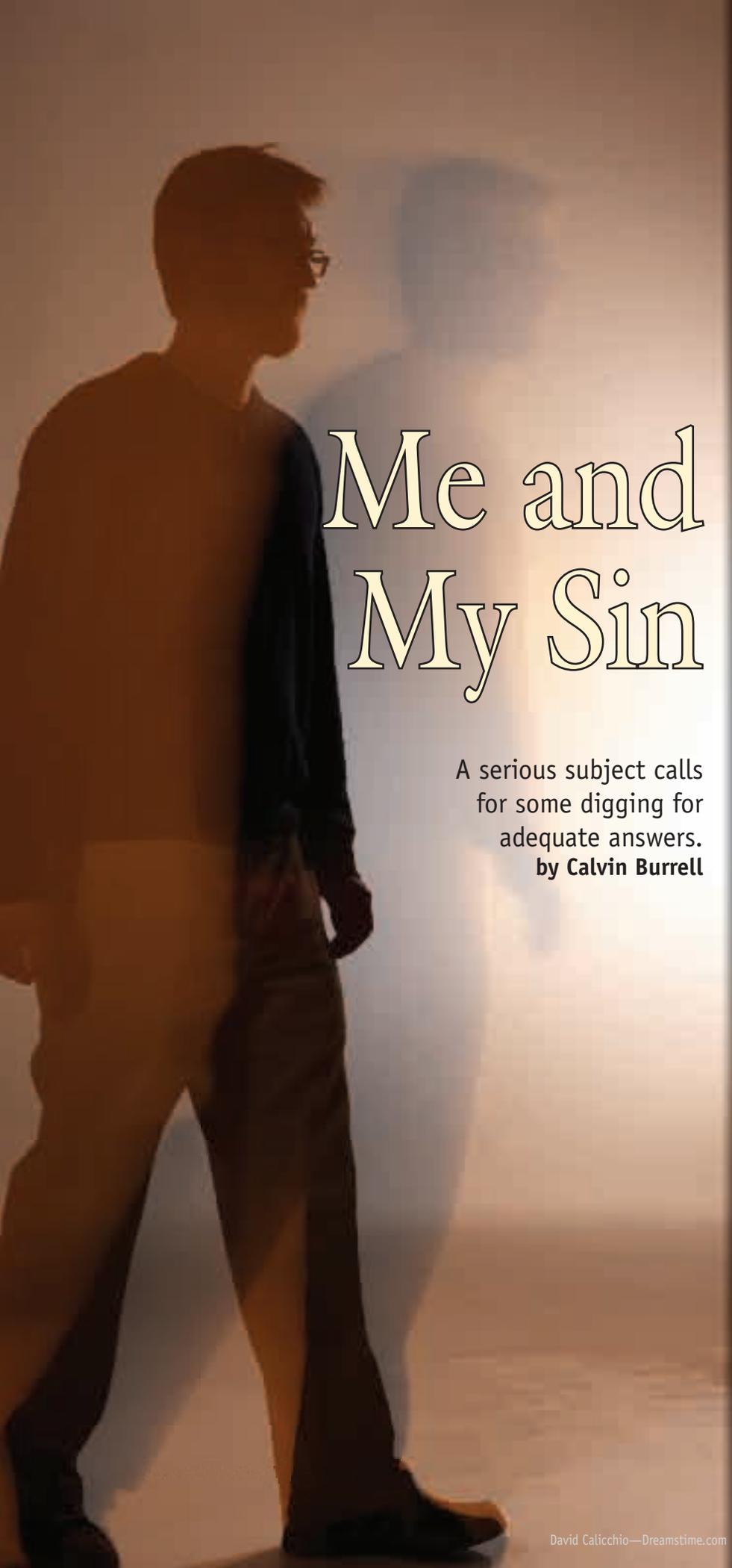
In early October, CoG7 pastors have a week together in Michigan,
 near where the Church got its start in 1858. One thing we'll address
 there is the lagging number of younger pastors entering vocational
 ministry in this generation.

This BA spans into November, the USA's month for voting and for
 thanksgiving. In recent twin interviews with presidential candidates,
 Pastor Rick Warren asked Senators McCain and Obama this question:
 "What's the biggest moral failure of your life?" How would you answer
 that one, with God and all the world watching?

Most Americans will have one common item on their thanks list
 come November 27: This endless election is finally over. We don't yet
 know who our new leader will be, but we're grateful we can vote our
 choice and then complain about the results. Pray for more pastors and
 wiser presidents? There's an idea.

Speaking of elections, you can count on this: God votes for you, the
 Devil votes against you, and you cast the deciding vote!

— Calvin Burrell



Me and My Sin

A serious subject calls
for some digging for
adequate answers.
by Calvin Burrell

The main problem with all of us is our sin. We were born in it. We live with it, to one degree or another. It stains and twists all our worlds.

Most of the sad facts about history and human failure are nicely explained by what the Bible says about sin. The Scriptures on this topic correspond with the reality of what is; thus, their teaching is true.

God's Word defines *sin* in different ways. Sin is the absence of faith. Sin is any foolish thought. Sin is missing the right mark — unrighteousness. Sin is the failure to reach God's standard, and the transgression of His law. Sin is not doing what we know we ought.

Blending these Bible definitions, we may say that sin is any thought, word, deed, or omission that disobeys the word and will of God for our lives. That covers a lot of territory! And it describes every human on earth at some time or another, including you and me.

In this introduction, I have described the nature and extent of sin. So far, not so good. My purpose, however, is to consider better things: the divine solution to this human predicament. If sin is the disease, what is the cure?

Four words in Scripture summarize the Spirit's solution to our sin problem. They will be easier to learn and embrace if we see them in pairs, as they are written.

Confess

The Bible word *confess* literally means to "speak the same thing with" another. In this case, "another" is God, and confession means to agree with Him about our sins.

God says we are all sinners and fall short of His glory. Do we agree? If not, we lose our chance to receive the salvation offered in

Christ, for the Bible says, “He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13).

Try this riddle: What is it that when you say it’s yours, you lose it, but when you deny it, you’ve got it for sure?

The answer, of course, is your sin.

To confess sins, then, means to say they’re yours. We’re talking more than one sin here, and confession means to admit them, lay them bare, name them and own them as your own.

David did this with these words: “I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me” (Psalm 51:3). Peter simply said, “I am a sinful man, O Lord!” (Luke 5:8).

What happens when you do the same by confessing your sins, trusting in the provision God has made through Christ? You lose them. They’re gone, in the bottom of the deepest sea, removed as far from you as the east is from the west and remembered against you no more. Go ahead — shout “Hallelujah!” for the Word says that when you confess, you will . . .

Be forgiven

The glory of God is to forgive a matter, and this He did for all that matters through Christ. Pardon becomes ours when we confess. As it relates to sin, the gospel says this: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

This truth is well illustrated in an exchange between David and Nathan. “I have sinned against

the LORD,” admitted the humbled king to the prophet.

Nathan replied, “The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die” (2 Samuel 12:13).

David confessed; God forgave (Psalm 32:5). And so can it be for us!

How can God complete this transaction as He does? First, it is His prerogative and His alone to forgive sins because all sins are, in the final analysis, against Him. Second, He has the divine right to forgive sins because Jesus Christ paid the penalty for them by His death on the cross. Human objections are often raised against both these propositions, but they remain as revealed truth. Believe them or not.

Another case of forgiveness is in Jesus’ parable of two men praying (Luke 18:9-14). “God, be merciful to me a sinner!” confessed the publican as he fell on his face in the temple. He, not the proud Pharisee, went home that day “justified” — that is, knowing he stood right with God, sins forgiven.

Confession of sins, says the Bible again and again, leads to forgiveness of sins. So what are you waiting for? Why not confess your sins to the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior today?

Repent

Repentance is closely related to confession, yet not quite identical with it. Confession refers primarily to words — what we say about our sins.

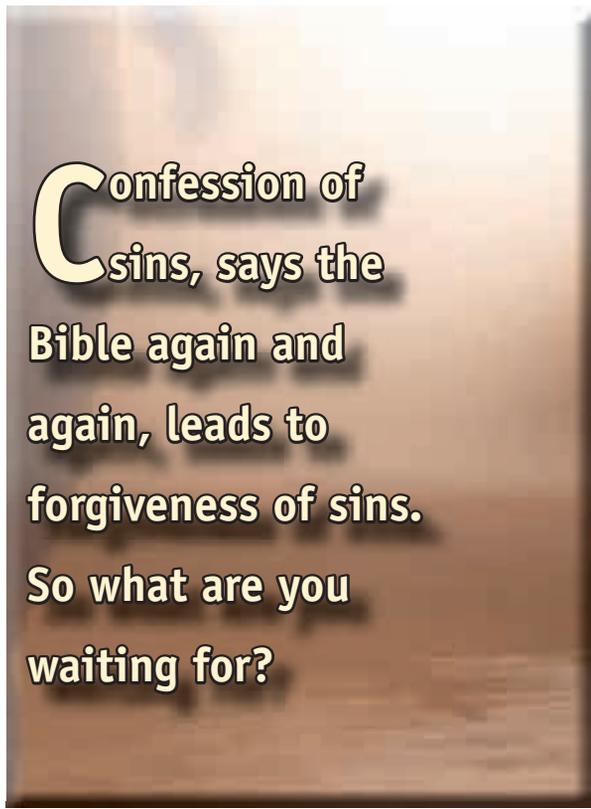
Repentance, on the other hand, refers primarily to thoughts and feelings about sin — and what we *do* about it. It is the response of the whole person, starting with the heart and mind.

In repentance, the way we think and feel about our sins transforms from the previous posture of approval and embrace to that of hatred and refusal.

Nothing describes the change of repentance more vividly than Jesus’ picture story of the prodigal son. Stuck in his sins and the slop of a pigsty, this young man finally came to his senses and returned to his father’s farm, willing to do a servant’s work. In a word, he repented!

In this parable, the phrase “he came to himself” may also be read as “he came to his senses.” Hence, repentance is sometimes described as a mostly mental affair that involves no great emotional element. Perhaps the simplest and best biblical definition of *repent*, after all, is simply to “change your mind.”

There is much truth here, but we should not miss the fact that other passages prescribe repen-



Confession of
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So what are you
waiting for?

	Human Choice: "If we ..."	God's Promise: "... then He"
OBJECTIVE: sin's guilt and penalty	Confess sins →	Forgives us
	Key text: 1 John 1:9	
SUBJECTIVE: sin's grip and practice	Repent of sins →	Converts us
	Key text: Acts 3:19	

Word Check

When we confess our sins and repent of the same, the Lord promises that He will both forgive our sins and convert us from the error of our ways. Reflect on the analogies among these four terms:

- To be forgiven, we confess our sins. To be converted, we repent of them.
- The first pair (*confess, be forgiven*) deals with the guilt and penalty of sin: justification. The second pair (*repent, be converted*) deals with the grip and practice of sins: sanctification.
- Confession is primarily spoken — a verbal expression of the heart. Repentance deepens our words and is eventually transacted at every level.
- As confession of sins deepens into repentance, so forgiveness of sins is an objective fact that deepens into the subjective experience of conversion.
- Forgiveness refers primarily to blotting out the record of our sin in heaven. Conversion refers primarily to change within the believer as sins are overcome and the Spirit takes control.
- All of this comes only through our Lord, Jesus Christ.

If you've experienced the reality of these word-truths, by the Bible's definition you are a believer and a Christian. Have you confirmed this by a public declaration of your faith through baptism and church fellowship?

If you do not have assurance of God's forgiveness and conversion, you may have it by calling on the name of the Lord in confession and repentance.

— BA

To repent of sins in Jesus' name is to find our way out of the sin problem. To truly repent is to . . .

Be converted

One overlooked text pairs repentance with conversion in no uncertain terms: "*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).

Complete conversion, rightly understood, should be the hope of every earnest heart. The Old Testament Saul found conversion for a time: He was changed into "another man" when the Spirit came. The New Testament Saul found conversion for time and eternity: He counted all his achievements as losses for the greater gain of becoming a new man in Jesus Christ.

Conversion, let it be understood, is not a change we make but a change the Spirit of the Lord makes to us and in us. It happens as the promised response to repentance: You change your mind (repentance) and let the Lord change you (conversion). The solution to all our sin problems, even the toughest, comes through this transaction of grace.

Conversion, triggered by real repentance, deals effectively with the sin problem. Our sins are gone — forgiven and blotted out in the sense of their guilt and penalty. And in the sense of their grip and practice, our sins are going, going, gone — rejected and dwindling away. This is the time of our victory over, and freedom from, sin — the time of the Lord's refreshment. **BA**

tance in ways that contain substantial and sentimental expressions of contrition, passion, and zeal. For these, sample Psalm 51:17; Isaiah 22:12; Hosea 14:2; Joel 2:12; 2 Corinthians 7:10; and James 4:9.

It cannot be disputed that repentance is a core component

of the message of Jesus Christ and His apostles, beginning with John the Baptist. To confirm this, trace twelve texts: Matthew 3:2, 8; 4:17; Mark 1:15; 6:12; Luke 13:3-5; 15:7; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 11:18; 17:30; 26:20. The true gospel, then, calls sinners to repentance.

Questions & Answers

Q Is it true that the days of miracles have passed?

Your question might be answered with one word for some, but it needs more than that for discerning readers. Paul wrote, “Brethren, do not be children in understanding . . . be mature” (1 Cor. 14:20).

The short answer would be “No, the days of miracles have certainly not passed.” And why not? Because the God of miracles past never changes, and all things are possible with Him (Luke 1:37; James 1:17). So miracles still happen as they once did. Personal testimonies from many who live today confirm this truth.

On the other hand, some believing people say, “Yes, the days of miracles have passed.” These folks note that Bible miracles came in bunches: in Moses’ time and again with Elijah and Elisha. The last great bunch of miracles was during the ministry of Christ and the early apostolic church. This suggests to them that God does not always deal with people in the same way and that signs and wonders may accompany the transition from one era, or dispensation, to another. (First Corinthians 13:8-10 and Hebrews 2:3, 4 are used to support this position.)

The view that miracles have ceased is not often heard in our circles, and we’re not promoting it here. It does illustrate, however, that the whole subject is not simple. If genuine, indisputable miracles were everyday occurrences, would any honest Christian be trying to explain why there are none?

It is important to think what we mean by *miracles*. Some use the word loosely to describe any event that incites wonder, awe, or worship. A lovely sunset or sunrise, normal childbirth, recovery from serious illness, escape from pending disaster, or an accident with no serious injury: Each of these may be called a miracle, especially in the afterglow of

it happening. All of us appreciate these kinds of miracles, and we thank God for them.

For observers of a more rational mindset, however, these and similar occurrences are commonplace, easily explained by laws of nature or random chance. While gladly granting that God is ultimately responsible for all the everyday beauties and graces of life, such people suggest that it is unnecessary and unhelpful to apply the word *miracle* to them.

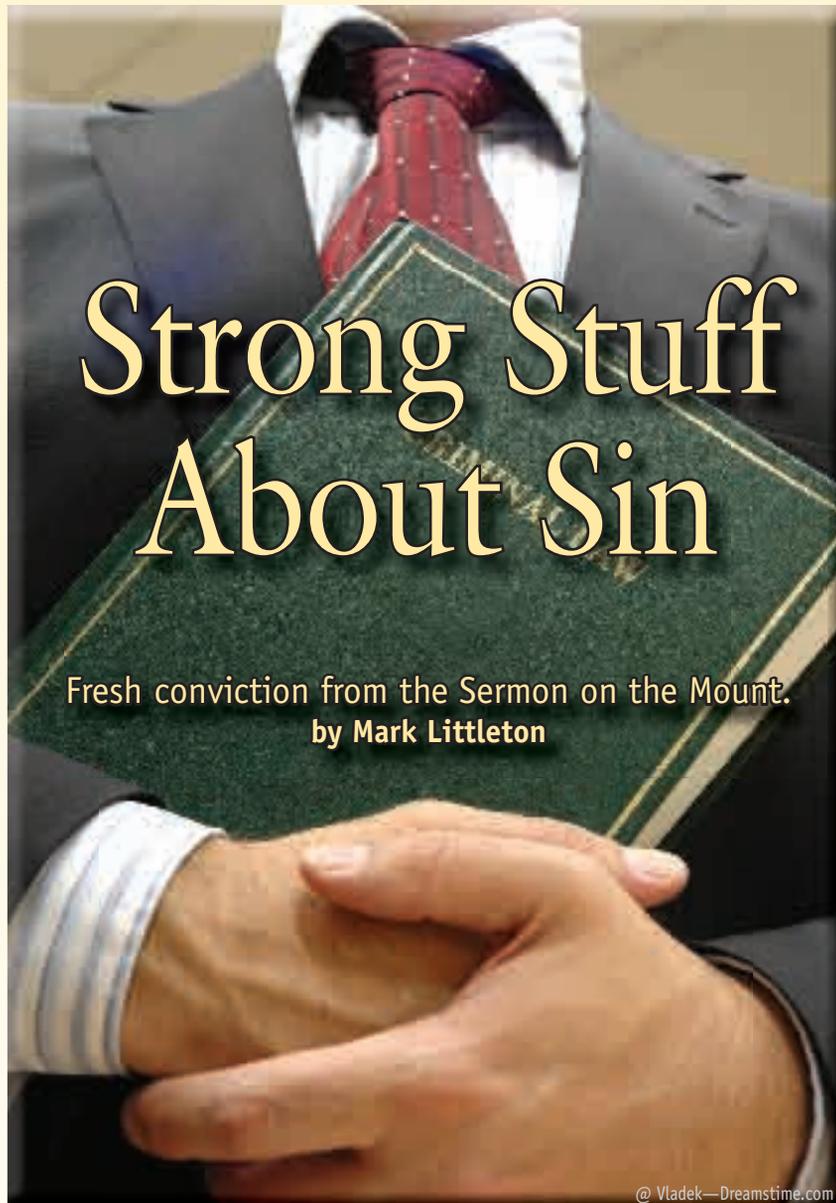
For them, the *m* word should be used in a more restricted sense. It applies to an event in which some natural law is suspended and a thing happens that cannot be explained by coincidence, luck, chance, or the law of averages — but only by the intervention of God. With this definition and caveat, real miracles are not as frequent as some religious people affirm.

Miracles are seen by eyes of faith and not easily proven to disbelievers, who can always find another way to explain an unusual event. Those who investigate miracle stories and claims of supernatural healing usually find that these are difficult to verify. The authenticity of any miracle from heaven is bound in the hearts and lives of those who experience it and is not easily demonstrated to others.

The perceptive Christ-follower should believe God’s Word about miracles, without necessarily believing every other claim and testimony about them. This answer does not doubt God’s ability; rather it raises the question whether every sensational story we hear or read is indeed a bona fide miracle.

— Elder Calvin Burrell

The editor invites readers to weigh in on this question. Responses of 300 words or less will be considered for publication in January-February 2009, and may be edited for length and clarity.



Many people regard the Bible as archaic, idiotic — a book written by people with snowplow-sized axes to grind. Consider some of its statements about sin. Surely no human would require these things of anyone. But God apparently does.

I grew up going to church but lived for years in relative ignorance about sin as sin. During my senior year in college, I began a deeper search to answer questions that kept popping up in

my mind: Why was I alive? What would happen when I died? Was there a God? What was life all about? No one I knew could give answers, even though I studied under some intelligent professors.

That winter I visited a friend who, to my surprise, had become a raving, lunatic Christian. She believed God was real. She believed she knew Jesus personally. She believed you could be sure of salvation when you died. She went on from amazement

to amazement. Eventually I decided to begin reading the Bible and praying every night, thinking that's what I should do.

Easy lies

Then it started happening — first with “little white lies.” Like never before, I noticed how often I whipped those lies out when convenient.

“No, don't think I'll go with you. I don't feel good.”

“Made over a 3.5 last semester. Yeah, I really did.” (It was a 3.0).

Dateless on party weekend: “Oh, I have a date. She's somewhere around. Went to get us some beers.”

Why did I do such things? I didn't know. Yet each time I slung one of those babies out, some little voice inside me peeped, *That was wrong. Why did you say that? It was a lie.*

Other things started to hit too — about sexual sin, pilfering money from others, and telling grandiose stories about my past that weren't true.

The truth about sin

In time, I learned to trust Christ and devoured the Bible like a starving man. I began to discover the real issue of sin from Jesus. Here's a statement from His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7).

About murder:

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is

answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell" (5:21, 22).

Take a hard look at that.

Anyone who is angry with his brother is "subject to judgment"? What normal person would consider that worthy of a court trial, besides an ambulance-chasing lawyer?

Look further. Calling someone "Raca" (think "jerk," "idiot," or "moron") means you could be dragged before the Sanhedrin for a major trial. That's the same group that sent Jesus to the cross. Didn't even Jesus meet a few numbskulls in His short life and call them that?

Then we come to the last line. Calling someone a fool could win you the "fire of hell." Surely you jest! Most of us utter such words every day in traffic! Had Jesus at that moment gone nuts?

But let's go on. Notice what Jesus says next:

"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (vv. 27, 28).

Whoa! Haven't most guys looked on pretty women nearly every day and felt that twinge of sexual interest in our hearts?

Just one more:

"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery" (vv. 31, 32).

Face it: Divorce in our society

is rampant, in every sector. I have personally been divorced once, and not even for "marital infidelity."

What's going on here? If this is what it's about, you can count most of us out. Our first day after deciding to follow Him, we'll be back to square one on all three issues.

Impossible perfection

But is Jesus really trying to make us feel bad — like dirt?

Not at all. He's showing us just how difficult it is to attain the perfection God requires for us to enter His heavenly kingdom. God is holy, just, righteous, perfect. Infinitely perfect. Jesus says God requires the same of us.

"But it's impossible!" you cry. And you're right!

You see, with the words in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus shows us how messed up we are in God's eyes. That's why He will later tell us, "I lived a perfect life for you. Come to Me, take My perfect life by faith, and give Me all your sins — past, present, and future. Then you will receive My perfection and God's forgiveness forever. I'll also throw in eternal life with all God's riches, peace, love, joy, Me with you every moment, and everything else to sweeten the pot."

That's what faith is all about.

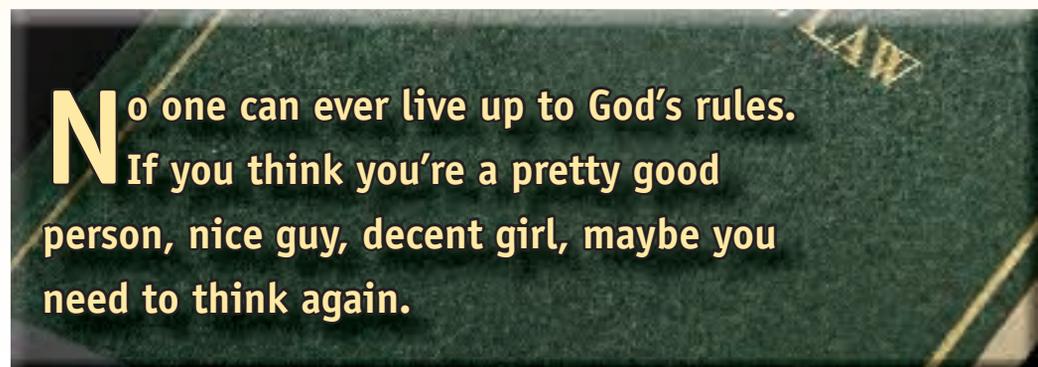
No one can ever live up to God's rules. If you think you're a pretty good person, nice guy, decent girl, maybe you need to think again. Not even Mother Teresa could have done these things. Yet this is what God expects of you if you want to "deserve" eternal life. So why not just give up now and give it all over to Him?

Lift-off

Believe me, when you feel that gigantic burden to be perfect lift, you'll lift off with real joy, hope, peace, and gratitude. That's how it was for me. I felt lighter not only physically but also mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. For the first time in my life, I could easily admit I was a sinner and that I had sinned. Multitudes of times.

Now I knew the full extent of God's forgiveness and why Jesus' death was so necessary. It took that much to make it possible for God to wipe it all away. In my case. In every case. **BA**

Mark Littleton writes from Gladstone, MO. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



Readers Respond

We asked: “In view of all the bad stuff going on, how do we know God loves the world?” (July-August ‘08, p. 8).

I first struggled with this question when my seven-year-old son was diagnosed with obsessive-compulsive disorder. His inability to control his thoughts and actions challenged my long-held belief that all of us are free to choose our destinies and that God would never usurp that freedom. Concern for my son’s eternal future prompted me to cry out to God, “How could You hold him accountable when he has no control?”

Certain scriptures began to resonate with my spirit: “An evil spirit from the LORD came upon Saul . . .” (1 Samuel 19:9, NIV). The prophet Micaiah warned King Ahab that “the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouths of all these prophets . . . the LORD has decreed disaster for you” (1 Kings 22:23, NIV).

Other stories exhibited striking similarities: Job’s self-righteousness deflated by God’s sovereignty; Jonah’s reluctance overwhelmed by Him whose will cannot be resisted; and Pharaoh’s stubbornness subordinated by an inventive and invasive Creator who inspired the doctrine “In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will” (Eph. 1:11, NIV). His plan, it appears, includes using evil to accomplish His goals (Isa. 45:7).

Since “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,” can there be any limit to what He will do to save His children? Sacrificing His Son through an evil and tortuous death to redeem all who were condemned by one trespass: This was the one right act needed to bring life for all (Rom. 5:18; 11:32).

— Jim Ramsay
Mobile, AL

When I wanted to know something as a young boy, I always turned to old men. Even later in life I made a habit of asking fellows older than myself. One was a wharfie on the Tasmanian waterfront. Born and bred nearby, he had never left the island. I was a migrant from Europe and forever the sojourner. Yet we clicked the moment we met.

We soon got into some deep questions like “How does a loving God put up with all the misery and cruelty people inflict on one another?”

“Well,” my older friend said, “when I was four, I cut my hand, and I ran to my mum, and it was the worst thing that had ever happened to me. But when I’m ninety-four — if I live that long — I’ll smile about it if I still remember. And I’m smiling about it now.”

We were both Bible readers and had learned to turn to Someone much older and wiser than ourselves for answers. He inspired an old man named John to write: “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4).

There was the answer, and together we said: “You can’t get any better than that.”

— Ernie Klassek
Perth, Western Australia

Our Father loves us and wants us mature, which doesn’t come from an easy life. God’s love doesn’t mean He will say, “Yes” to all our requests. If you are His child, He will chasten you and see if you endure (Heb. 12:6). This is proof of our Father’s love.

God’s loving discipline is only one reason that suffering exists. We overcome suffering by adopting God’s attributes of loving and giving in spite of pain.

— Wily Elder
Ocala, FL

For another response, visit www.cog7.org/BA.org

Set Free in Jail

Nikhil Gangavane—Dreamstime.com

by Abigail Swindle

You never know how God will get your attention. I was divorced, and my four children were living with their dad. In 2005 I moved to Seattle, on the opposite side of the state from my children. I tried to get back to see my kids as much as I could. I missed them terribly.

The guilt about not being with my children weighed so heavily upon me that I began to hang out with the wrong kind of people. Soon I found myself abusing drugs and alcohol, trying to numb the pain. My new boyfriend was dealing drugs and beat me. He even shot the windows out of my car once. I didn't know what to do.

My dad wired me \$300 for a plane ticket and told me to come home. Through everything, my dad stood with me, prayed for me, and tried to help me find God.

I did well for a while, but in October 2006 I began a downward spiral. I got into drugs again — even meth.

One night my best friend, Dean, called and pled for me to see him. Coming down from a high, I didn't want to go anywhere.

I should have seen Dean that night. Three days later, his body was found in his apartment — dead from diabetic shock. No wonder he wanted me to come.

With my best friend dead, I sank into a dark hole. I was high for a month and didn't care about anything. I was mad at myself, mad at God, and so empty and hopeless. I didn't even care about my kids.

I was arrested and spent a couple weeks in jail. My dad bailed me out again, but after about a week, I went back to drugs.

I was eventually arrested and failed one of my drug tests. This time I spent 93 days in jail and had to attend five or six court hearings. My dad and grandmother faithfully visited me and always tried

to help me. They wanted me to come to church and maybe live with my dad.

During his visits with me in jail every Sabbath afternoon, Dad loved me, encouraged me, and told me God loved me. He never forced God on me. Still, I didn't want anything to do with God.

One day I decided to go to a church service, but I determined not be one of those people who "found Jesus" in jail. I kept attending those services and got a Bible so I could disprove it to everyone. But when I read it, the words came alive. I began to talk with my dad and grandma about what I was reading. Paul's letters especially spoke right to me. God was changing my heart, and I began to cry out to Him.

The judge let me out of jail before my sentencing date in July 2007. By now I was a changed woman and wanted to live with my dad. I couldn't wait to go with him and my grandmother to the Church of God (Seventh Day) in Spokane, Washington.

I wanted to be baptized, but my sentencing was scheduled for the day before my baptism. So I asked God to let me be baptized. At the hearing, the prosecutor asked for a two-week continuance, and the next day, Sabbath, I was baptized.

Two weeks later, the judge sentenced me to a six-month prison term. My grandmother cried as they put the handcuffs on me, but I knew that though I'd be in jail, I was set free from my past.

My dad gave me one of his fa-



continued on page 13



Forgiveness Sampler

Nothing empowers people for spiritual freedom and victory faster than knowing they are loved, accepted, and forgiven. Here, three BA readers shed light on this key gospel theme — by personal experience, by principle, and by poetry.

National Forgiveness Day: October 25

BA reader Robert Moyers of Liberty Center, Ohio, writes that the last Saturday of October is the National Day of Forgiveness. We asked Bob a few questions about it.

BA: What do you tell people to do on National Forgiveness Day, and why?

Moyers: We ask people, personally or in groups, to hold a Power of Forgiveness moment. As we seek God's forgiveness and extend it to others, we remove bitterness (unforgiveness) from our hearts and repair, restore, rebuild, and revive damaged relationships with God and other people.

BA: Should we forgive those who've sinned against us even if they don't admit and ask for it? Does God forgive us only when we confess?

Moyers: We are called to do God's will and to love one another as He loves us. Although we ask God's forgiveness often, God forgives His children in Christ immediately when they sin, without waiting for us to ask. We may imitate God by loving, accepting, and forgiving people even if they do not ask for it. This is unconditional love — a wonderful way to live!

BA: What's the most important thing people should know about forgiveness?

Moyers: When we forgive others, we set ourselves free from the emotional control of others. As we realize the wonderful realities of God's forgiveness of us and our forgiveness of others, we permit the power of unconditional love to produce good health and happiness in our lives. The Lord's Prayer really asks us to do only one thing: Forgive those who have sinned against us.

For more information on Bob Moyers' ministry and October 25, go to www.unconditionallovelive.com and click on National Forgiveness Day.

Devil and the Deep Blue Sea

Meandering aimlessly along memory lane, I thought back more than six decades when we boys enjoyed carefree summer days swimming in the large ponds at the nearby gravel pit. Rumor had it that one of the ponds was over thirty feet deep. We never reached its floor because the frigid water we encountered on the way down spooked us. We came right back up.

Reflecting on this teenage experience, I realized that Satan

runs a 24/365 deep-sea diving service open to all. Whereas professional divers locate a sunken ship using only modern equipment and much effort, Satan often leads us to the moral shipwrecks (sins) of others right on target, the first try. These are buried sins, confessed and forgiven sins — sins our gracious Father has forgotten, cast into the depths of the sea, to be remembered no more (Jeremiah 31:34; Micah 7:19).

To forgive and forget is divine, the standard to which we are called. The Devil, a master of deceptive disguise, tries to lead us into all manner of situations

and places absolutely off limits to God's people. Descending into the depths with him to locate and resurrect the forgiven and forgotten sins of others can never be the practice of a Christ-occupied heart. **BA**

— Lowell F. Padgett
Manassas, VA

Set Free in Jail

continued from page 11

favorite psalms to read, and I read it every day. I determined not to be angry or bitter. I cried out to God to do a work in my heart and use the prison time for good. I got my GED and attended various classes and programs. During the 18 hours I was locked in my room, I devoured the Bible, and God continued His work in me.

I was released February 22, 2008. I don't see any of my old friends now, and I stay away from negative influences. I'm still living with my dad and hope to start a business law program in the fall. I begin my day with God in His Word and am in church every Sabbath.

I had always tried to change myself by either changing my surroundings or running away. I now realize that true and lasting change comes from allowing God to transform me from the inside out. I am free now — really free!

Abigail's father, Dwayne Ley, who had such a positive recent influence on her (and on others in the Spokane area), passed away on August 22.

Within This Wall

I built a wall around my all

to keep the wicked of the world out.

Carefully I laid brick by brick and

kept them out.

No evil will pass this wall, I said.

And no evil ever did,

**for evil did not come from outside but
from within.**

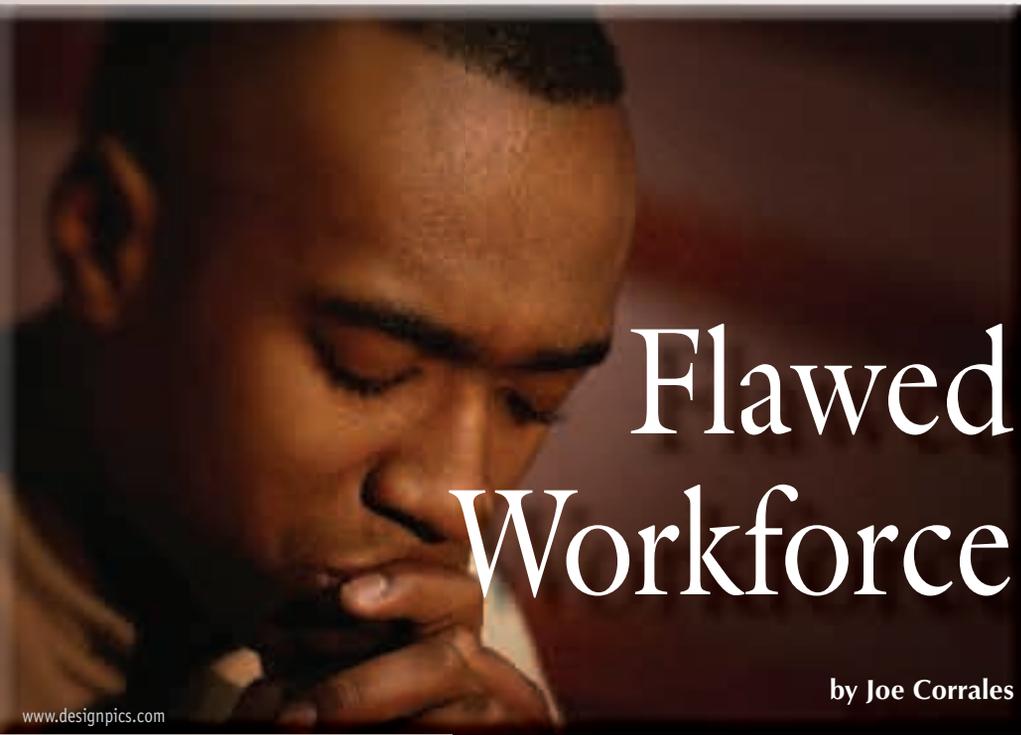
**Anger turned the love I had for others to
hate, and it stays.**

**Now I pray God to take each brick apart
and break the wall I built —**

to let the love in and keep the evil out.

Diana Solis Gonzalez

@ Ivan Kmit—Dreamstime.com



Flawed Workforce

by Joe Corrales

www.designpics.com

What sort of person does God use?

Imagine a group of people gathered before you. It is your job to select from among them those most likely to play a pivotal role in God's plans for humanity. Because these people know you well and are at ease, they open up and share their darkest secrets. One tells you that after a night of heavy drinking, he was sexually abused by one of his own children. Another confesses that he gave his wife for another man to sleep with.

Yet another plotted to kill the husband of his mistress. Another murdered a man and is still on the run from justice. One is a prostitute. Another has a lifestyle marked by violence; he even killed people to impress a girlfriend and his prospective father-in-law. Yet another confesses that he cheated his brother out of his inheritance.

Would you use any of these in your ministry? If not, you would

lose the service of several heroes of faith described in Hebrews 11. Noah became drunk and was sexually abused. Abraham gave his wife to sleep with another man. David plotted to have his mistress' husband killed. Moses murdered an Egyptian and was never brought to account. Rahab was the prostitute, and Samson killed to impress his girlfriend. Jacob cheated to get his brother's inheritance and blessing.

Yes, God uses flawed people who are, in the eyes of man, imperfect resources.

We often expect that a person of great faith and good service will be relatively untouched by sin. These examples from the Bible show us that faithful people are also flawed people. They are resilient folks who have recovered from great acts of evil and disobedience to perform great acts of loyalty and faith.

Chances are that you may have a checkered past and are telling yourself that you've made

too many mistakes for God to use you. Bear in mind, however, that it is not about you but about what God can do through you if you let Him. He is far more patient and forgiving than we. God does not tolerate a refusal to stop sinning, but He gives grace to the humble and gladly uses a heart that has been broken for Him.

On occasion, I have heard people say that we should not let certain people take part in church ministry because they have been sinners in the past. The truth is that we have all been sinners at one time or another. And if someone has fallen into sin since he or she accepted the Lord, a process of restoration should be followed to bring this person back to God's saving grace:

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted (Galatians 6:1).

When you come to serve the Lord, come as you are! Don't let the errors of your past stop you, but let God begin the process of change in your life as He sees fit. He can convert you from an imperfect resource to a wonderful instrument of God. **BA**

Joe Corrales is a bi-vocational pastor of Heart of Worship congregation in San Antonio, TX. He also teaches and serves as head of the Computer Science Department at Palo Alto College.

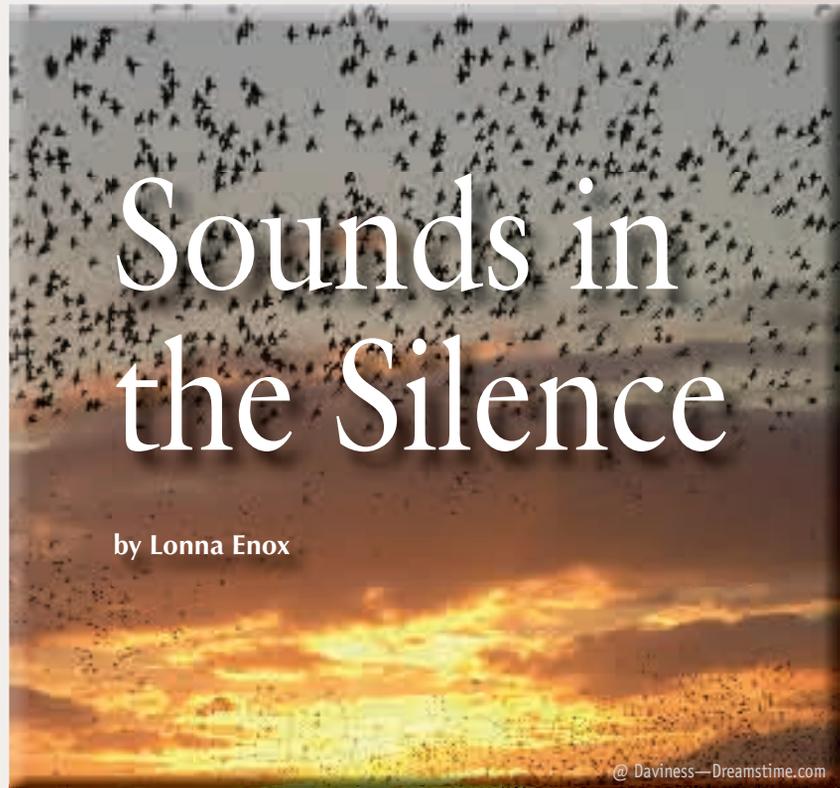


Dust billowed behind my car as I turned into the wildlife refuge. I knew we had been suffering from drought, but I had not realized how much it had affected my favorite retreat. Great dry stretches, with small patches of water, covered the former wetlands. I could not spot a single critter as I drove along the familiar path. Finally, a half-mile down, I spotted two lonely ducks paddling in a puddle.

Reaching my favorite lookout point, I stepped out into the silence and gazed into the vast desert where wetlands had once thrived. Herons, egrets, ducks, geese, pelicans — where had they gone? I leaned against the car fender and waited. Once here, I would still wait for the sunset.

New Mexico sunsets take your breath away. They are a myriad of colors across a sky that stretches into “forever.” As it slides into the horizon, the sun transforms ordinary bushes and landscape into a colorful painting. Tonight it promised another masterpiece, minus the silhouettes of the geese and cranes returning from a day eating in the fields nearby.

Then I heard it. Had I imagined myself in silence? Everywhere around me, songs and chatter exploded. A distant coyote yapped and was answered. Red-winged blackbirds rose in a crescendo of twittering, flapping, and color — their red-orange forewings flashing, complementing the sunset. Rabbits scampered past a family of bobwhites, their soft whistles taking on a conversational tone. Doves cooed to each other, exchanging gentle gossip. These creatures harmonized in their natural setting,



providing background for their unusual guests: wintering snowbirds.

These are the “ordinary” critters. I have grown old living around them. And, like most things familiar, perhaps they have bred my contempt. In admiring the “unusual” critters, I have ignored them.

Ignoring the ordinary, taking the familiar for granted, is not new for me. During the year since burying my husband and my dad, I have allowed loneliness to engulf me. I have turned inward, abandoning the church that had no time to minister to my grief. I have ignored the gentle nurturing of the “ordinary” ones who have quietly helped me through each small crisis.

I have forgotten that God, to whom I have clung, is not restricted to any church body. He is with me always, in my heart. I only need an occasional silence

to appreciate the beauty of His presence.

“Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10a). In the dry stillness, I snuggled into the comfort of God’s presence. For the first time in a long while, I smiled.

When I left the refuge in twilight, I thanked God for the drought. In its ugliness, I had found great beauty. He taught me, along with His ordinary critters, that loneliness is an unnecessary feeling. All we have to do is open our hearts and ears to the simple companionship He has provided. **BA**

Lonna Enox
writes from
Roswell, NM.



1979-2008 — The Last

In the previous installment, the BA interviewed Elder Robert Coulter about the years he served as General Conference president, 1963-1987. Perhaps no single event captured the spirit and progress of those years as did the convention of August 1979 — a milestone event.

Gathering in a family-friendly convention facility called Glorieta in New Mexico, the Church manifested how it had matured in thirty years since the merger of 1949. It also caught a glimpse of how great would be the challenge of the next thirty. Memories of the conference at Glorieta include the lovely natural setting and facilities there, the excellent work of the program planning committee, the participation of fraternal guests Garner Ted Armstrong and Samuele Bacchiocchi, and the impact of the program on many within and without the Church. “Run With the Vision” served as our theme for that inspiring week.

Truth and mission

In three decades since '79, the Church has run with its task of worldwide mission. It has solidified its grasp on Bible truth through intentional and insistent grappling with issues that go to the heart of the written and living Word. “What is the gospel?” — the issue of law and grace — was the chief topic at a Glorieta ministerial council ('86). “Who is Jesus?” — the question of Christ's

deity — appeared on the agenda of the Boise, Idaho, ministers' meeting ('82) and remained central in council discussion until resolved in Beaver Creek, Colorado ('96), and confirmed in Tulsa, Oklahoma ('04). A third and closely related issue — “What is the Church and its mission?” — found increasing clarity as answers to the first two issues came into sharper focus.

To the Church's credit, the same generation that twice re-evaluated and restated its doctrine, while conserving most of its historic positions, also dared to engage in new efforts to share the gospel it claimed to embrace. These thirty years show increase in projects like MISSION POSSIBLE (teenage camps given over to service projects); Pioneer Missionary Training (young adults on short-term missions abroad); medical mission trips (professional medical-dental assistance to places in Mexico, Guatemala, and other areas); and the missionary projects that sprouted from various sources (Cristo Viente, Disaster Relief, and others).

The gospel's constant impact also produced the fruit of fresh service and mission efforts by the Church at home, in dozens of congregations across the continent. Although the goal to double membership in North America in the eighties was not reached, new momentum did develop within the CoG7's international community. Mem-

bership in the International Ministerial Congress rose from a dozen charter members in 1978 to nearly forty in 2008, and the number of souls participating with the Church grew from approximately 60,000 to five times that figure during the same period.

Diverse membership

In the last quarter of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first, the Church has seen an unprecedented ethnic diversification of its membership. Fueled by immigration from Latin America and the zeal of those who came, Hispanic congregations have cropped up in many parts of the country, especially from Texas to California and around major cities like Chicago and Washington D.C. So that the new wave of members would be fully served and incorporated into the body, the Church added Spanish language products and services to its efforts.

A similar phenomenon occurred along the eastern coasts of Canada and the U.S. with the influx of immigrants from the West Indies, especially Jamaica and Trinidad. This trend did not require the same language services as Latin immigrants, but it did present the need to recognize and adapt to traditional differences in Caribbean culture and faith.

Both Latin and West Indian im-

Thirty Years

migrants brought fresh faith and needed vitality to the Church in Canada and the United States, far outweighing any inconvenience that may have been associated with the trends.

Combating culture

Alongside the positive developments of this generation, CoG7 found it necessary to combat the same social and cultural changes that have shaken the stability and mission of all churches in our day. Materialism, secularism, hedonism, relativism, post-modernism, personal egotism (narcissism), anti-institutionalism, and new theologies are among the acids that have dangerously corroded the faith of many. This 150-year old Sabbatarian movement among God's people has not been exempt from these erosive forces in modern times.

Perhaps the most difficult challenge for the Church of this generation has been the aging and depletion of its vocational ministry. The number of men ordained by CoG7 has risen to around 140, but the percentage of these ministers in vocational ministry today has fallen to just over 30 percent. Less than a third of the 210 congregations are served by an ordained pastor in 2008, and the median age of the Church's ministry is above 60 years.

Next issue: The Journey Ahead

Major Events

- 1979 - Landmark conference in Glorieta, NM
- 1980 - Unity committee begins work with Meridian, ID, Council; new Media Outreach Agency supports growth goals
- 1981 - *Afterglow* first published by Women's Association
- 1982 - Spring Vale Academy enrollment peaks around 100
- 1983 - General Conference marks its 100th year in Manhattan, KS
- 1985 - Convention in Logan, UT, postpones unification vote
- 1987 - Unity vote approved at Denver convention, defeated in Idaho; Calvin Burrell selected as G. C. president
- 1989 - Leadership conference precedes Denver, CO, convention; Summit School of Theology enrolls high of 12 students
- 1990 - New York City Pastor Whaid Rose founds Church Renewal Ministries, urging spiritual life and evangelism
- 1991 - Little Rock, AR, conference approves major new financial option for local churches
- 1993 - Conference in Bloomington, MN, receives Worldwide Church of God leaders as convention guests
- 1994 - International Ministerial Congress meeting in Corpus Christi, TX, endorses full deity of Jesus Christ
- 1995 - San Diego, CA, convention amends bylaws to separate the G. C. president from its board chairman
- 1996 - Nearly twenty Hispanic congregations, with key leaders, exit the Church over political concerns
- 1997 - Whaid Rose selected G. C. president in Knoxville, TN
- 1998 - Disaster Relief Fund and SWORD (young adults) are born
- 1999 - National Leadership Conference in Glorieta; first Pioneer Missionary Training held in Monterrey, Mexico
- 2000 - Missions Abroad expands program under Bill Hicks
- 2001 - Faculty resigns; Summit School of Theology closes after 25 years and is replaced by Ministries Training System ('02)
- 2002 - First Medical Missions Project (Mexico City)
- 2004 - National Leadership Conference near Tacoma, WA
- 2005 - Issachar Forum, vision planning efforts launched
- 2006 - Restyled Statement of Faith adopted by Ministerial Council in Overland Park, KS
- 2007 - Sesquicentennial CoG7 event and International Ministerial Congress come to Kansas
- 2008 - Medical Missions to Nicaragua; Ministries Training reaches high of 58 summer students

Given to the

*P*astor Carl Palmer and his wife, Rowena, have served the Church in Spokane, Washington, for twenty-three years. We recently asked him these questions.

BA: In a congregation with many backgrounds and doctrinal perspectives, how do you manage differences and maintain harmony?

At conversion, everyone starts as a babe in Christ. At that point we begin our growth – spiritual and theological. It is unfair and illogical to expect everybody to be at the same level.

We ask each member to be open to growth and committed to unity in the body. With this in place, we can welcome people from differing backgrounds and lifestyles. Those with opinions that differ from official doctrine are expected to refrain from promoting their views in church settings or among members.

Given time, people of goodwill tend to grow closer emotionally as well as doctrinally. On issues where we can't agree, tolerance, love, and acceptance bind us together.

The Holy Spirit's role includes convicting and directing. I choose to allow time for this to be accomplished before intervening.

BA: What is your understanding of servant leadership in the church?

Though David was a good shepherd, Jesus is the ultimate Good Shepherd. A good shepherd, or pastor, cares for the sheep. Like David, he will defend the sheep from lions and bears. Like Jesus, he will search for lost sheep and even give his life for the sheep.

Those of us who represent Christ in leadership should strive to follow His example. When there is a dirty or distasteful job, do we excuse ourselves or do we jump in with the rest to get it done? This is one way we earn the right to lead. I can't picture Jesus sitting in the shade while His disciples set up camp and prepared the meal.

To be effective pastors, we must develop a servant's heart. Without a right heart, acts of service may be perceived as shallow and artificial. In his book *Leadership in Christian Ministry*, James Means says it so well: "The heart of spiritual leadership is service, not headship. . . . Spiritual leaders were never intended to be authority figures to followers, but fellow workers, servants, and colleagues in the work of the ministry" (pp. 46, 47).

BA: Reflect on what you've learned by serving in CoG7 for forty-four years and from your switch to the General Conference in 1987.

I began pastoring in Portland, Oregon (1965), and returned to my home area of Meridian, Idaho, seven years later. There I taught at Maranatha College and worked as general secretary for the General Council. God blessed our campmeetings in Meridian, and many friendships I developed then still remain. My family was Church of God before the 1933 split, when our family remained with Stanberry, but many relatives went with Salem. My father dreamed of the time when the Church would again be united.

Dad attended the unity meeting in 1949. I heard him say on several occasions that he voted for unity because he believed in a united church. But even while voting "yes," he knew he was voting himself out.

As other ministers and laymen found they could not remain in the united church, the need for a branch in which they could function became apparent. The General Council was formed at Meridian to accommodate that need. But the desire for a united church remained.

I served on two unity committees covering twelve years. When the 1987 unity vote was taken, the Conference approved, but the Council fell just short of the required two-thirds majority. I was among several ministers and members who moved their membership to the Conference at that time. We had spent too many years working toward that

Gospel

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goal to walk away from it. If the Conference had been as tolerant in 1949 as it was in 1987, I don't believe there would have been a General Council.

As general secretary of the Council, my task had been to pay the bills. Raising funds was a constant struggle. To no longer have to worry whether or not the bills would be paid was a relief. But the greatest change was the increased potential in resources and personnel. During my time with the Council, I often felt like a fisherman in a leaky boat, and I spent most of my time bailing water to keep the boat afloat. Now I don't worry so much about the boat, and I have time to "fish."

Those of us who transferred our memberships in '87 are grateful for the warm and immediate acceptance we received. Over the years I had found that there was little difference between the Conference and the Council. For me, both groups were part of the Church of God (Seventh Day), so I felt right at home.

BA: Tell us about your birth family, and your present family.

I am the fifth of thirteen children born to Luvelt and Bernice (Sheffield) Palmer. My father was converted in his teens, with no church background. My mother was granddaughter of Elisha S. Sheffield, an early Church of God minister. My siblings all married in the Church and remain active in it.

My parents left a spiritual heritage by instilling in us a love for God, the Bible, the family, and the Church. Those remain my priorities today, in that order. Rowena and I have three children (David, Carla [Decker], and Karen [Edwards]) and nine grandchildren, all who are active in the Church.

BA: Carl and Rowena, our thanks to you — and to all pastors and their families — during Pastor Appreciation Month.

I feel honored to be in the Church's ministry and for the privilege of working alongside my fellow pastors. We have the greatest calling in the world.

To my colleagues who may not feel appreciated, I say, "Don't be discouraged. Most of the Bible prophets were not appreciated in their generation. Elijah felt alone. Jeremiah complained that nobody took him seriously, that everybody mocked him. He told God that he no longer wished to be His messenger. But time has shown him to be one of God's greatest spokesmen. God will be the ultimate judge as to whether we've been faithful to our calling. Stay true, and time will vindicate you. Never give up!"

In my years of ministry, there have been difficult times with pain and loss. The satisfaction comes from being part of what God is doing. I would not trade vocations with anyone I know.

BA: A word to those who sense God's call to prepare for ministry?

One lone boy had a unique part in Jesus' feeding of the multitude in John 6: He furnished the loaves and fishes. This event was not about him. The other Gospels record this miracle but don't even mention the lad. I can hear him arriving home: "Mamma, Jesus used my lunch to feed five thousand people!" He carried that memory the rest of his life.

To be used by Jesus: No other experience can compare! To be present when God works is great; to be a part of His work is even better. Our contribution may not be noticed, but that's OK. It's not about us; it's about Him. He watches, and He will give the final credits.

If you hear God saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" just say, "Here am I! Send me." **BA**



YOUTH REACH

Bizarre Driving Laws

Alabama

- It is illegal for a driver to be blindfolded while operating a vehicle.

California

- No unoccupied vehicle may exceed 60 miles per hour.

Massachusetts

- You will be ticketed if you drive with a gorilla in the backseat of your car.

Nevada

- It is illegal to drive a camel on the highway.

Reprinted with permission from The Good Clean Funnies List, www.GCFL.net; e-mail info@gcfl.net. Original list at www.dmv.org/fun-stuff/bizarre-driving-laws.php. For a complete list of laws, visit the NFYC site.

Who's Driving?

by Brianne Feigum

West Coast District Youth Officer

Driving is a different deal for every teenager. Some of us prefer to take over the wheel and drive ourselves, while others like settling in the passenger seat to see where the journey leads. Personally, I like to take over the wheel.

Not long ago I was riding with a family member who was driving too slow and taking a route longer than the one I normally take. Frustrated, I wanted to push the driver aside and take over. I could do it so much better, right?

Have you ever felt that way about God? The route He has you on in life is not where you want to go. It is long and curvy, and you can't see what's around the corner. If only you could drive yourself and have your life turn out exactly how you've always dreamed.

At times we all want to do things ourselves so they turn out the way we want. But God has a better idea: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11, NIV). God wants what is best for you so you find His special places of surprise and delight (see Psalm 119:35).

Carrie Underwood made popular the song "Jesus, Take the Wheel," about a lady who has a near-accident. There's not a thing she can do — except call out to Jesus. He is her only hope.

Jesus is our only hope, too. Trying to live on our own terms and map our own journey — that's the real dead end. When a tragedy is about to happen, it takes only a split second to hand the wheel over to God. Why isn't it as easy to give Him control when things are going well?

So who's driving your life? Will the road you choose get you to a good destination? Or will you feel the excitement of the unexpected with Jesus in the driver's seat? Before you can experience the joy of the journey God created you for, you've got to let go of the wheel!



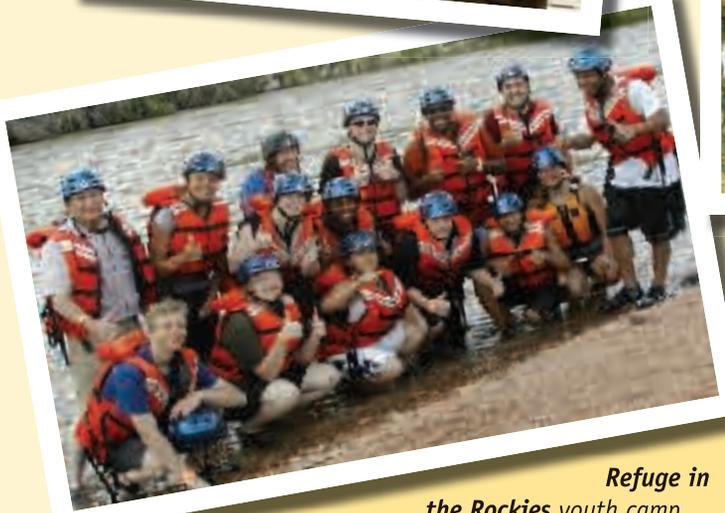
"Overcoming Obstacles" was the theme at the Michigan Youth Camp July 13-20, with seven people overcoming their greatest obstacles by accepting Christ and receiving baptism.

Top: Paul Heavilin (right), assisted by Dan Coulson (left), baptizing Jeff Crawford

Bottom: Melanie Draves and Bianca Larsen, ready to be baptized by Tim Hinds



Fifty-two youth attended the first youth camp held in the Texas Valley near McAllen, July 31 - August 3. The camp was led by Daniel Flores (front, center).



Refuge in the Rockies youth camp, near Colorado Springs, lived up to its name during its inaugural year, June 22-29. It was a spiritual refuge in time and space: a refuge from the wicked world, a time to recharge and reconnect with God and meet new brothers and sisters, a week of amazing activities.

Ninety-six youth attended SIS-Q Meadows Senior Youth Camp in southern Oregon July 20-27. Its theme followed the NFYC theme for 2008, "What's Your Story?" Seven people began their life story with God and were baptized at camp.

Fall Frenzy Youth Rally
October 24-26, 2008
CoG7 in Harrisburg, OR
Contact: Kurt Lang (kurt@cog7.org or 541-517-1079)

Santa Ana Youth Rally
October 25, 2008
Santa Ana, CA
Contact: David Sandoval (951-250-6098 or cogdsdelgado@yahoo.com)

Pharr Youth Rally
November 1, 2008
CoG7 in Pharr, TX
Contact: Janna Reyes (956-483-5532)

Youth and Young Adult
Retreat
November 21-23, 2008
Camp IO-DIS-E-CA near Cedar
Rapids, IA
Contact: Abe Endecott (abe@cog7.org or 319-210-1658)





Showers of Blessings

How to avoid a “dry” Thanksgiving.
by Donna Smith

Dawn arrived sans sunrise. Intermittent lightning sliced a dreary, gray sky. Gusty winds whipped the mimosa tree in our back yard to a fury.

Popping and cracking like corn in a microwave, the bones from my toes to the base of my skull threatened to lock in place. I crept around the kitchen, buttering toast, setting the breakfast table, and hurting.

Summer vacation ended in three days, and I dreaded thinking about classrooms, students, and staff meetings. This summer had not been the vacation we needed. After a long struggle with brain cancer, my mother passed away in the spring. A siege of surgeries soon erupted, and my summer was spent recovering. My daughter-in-law had her gall bladder removed, and I had just returned from Texas where another daughter underwent surgery for diagnosed thyroid cancer.

Pete came into the kitchen,

smoothing strands of white hair over his bald spot, squinting at the steaming coffeemaker

before getting his mug from the cabinet.

“Wind a-blowin’, lightnin’ a-flashin’, but you are my sunshine,” he said, pulling me close.

“I hate *happy* this early in the morning,” I grumbled, twisting away and slamming the oven door.

“Well, maybe you’d better sit down and count your blessings!”

“Please don’t preach,” I said. “School starts tomorrow, my arthritis is killing me, and I’ve gained seven pounds.”

“I don’t mean to be preaching,” He traced a finger down my arm. “But if you count your blessings before breakfast, you’ll beat the blues right out of your day.”

I rolled my eyes. “Sure.”

“Come on.” Pete held up his hand, fingers spread wide. “Give me five blessings — that’s all. Just five.”

“I can’t,” I said, smiling in spite of myself. “I plan to spend this day moping.”

A sudden flash of lightning accompanied a growl of thunder.

“See,” Pete said, “God says you can count, so come on.”

He pulled me to my feet, steering me toward the computer. “Write out five things — they don’t have to be biggies — and tell me why you’re thankful.” He massaged my shoulders before kissing the top of my head. “I’ll clean the kitchen and keep your coffee cup full.”

I stared at the blank screen. This was so silly. I needed to change bed sheets, fold laundry, and get to the grocery store. I didn’t have time for this.

The whistled strains of “You Are My Sunshine” drifted from the kitchen, punctuated with a low rumbling of thunder.

OK, OK.

Blessing 1

I’m thankful for a husband who doesn’t see “woman’s work” as beneath him.

Pete retired early because of poor health and had taken over most of the housework and cooking. Even when I’m home, he insists on doing the chores so

that I have time for what I enjoy: writing.

More than once over the years I have looked at my love and been reminded of Adam's words when he accepted God's gift, Eve: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:23).

Blessing 2

I'm thankful for a daughter who has great courage and unlimited faith.

Misty's thought-to-be thyroid cancer proved benign. During the weeks of waiting between the diagnosis and surgery, I prayed day and night. At least I thought I was praying. It wasn't until I had the courage to talk to her about her condition that I realized my prayers were probably lost somewhere in the attic, for my trust had given way to fear.

"Misty," I asked, "are you worried?"

"Should I be?" She laughed. "Mother, whatever happens will happen. God's taking care of it."

After that, I could pray without fear. God had a plan, and it would be a good one. How could I have forgotten for a minute the words of Romans 8:28: "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

Blessing 3

I'm thankful for a career that provides me a way to carry out the Great Commission.

When in college, I chose world history as my major, hoping to teach at the secondary level. During my junior year, however, a counselor advised me

to change majors.

"Coaches," he said, "usually get the history assignments. If you want to get a job, you'd better get into another field." Since history can be taught through literature, I switched to my second love: English.

Now, after twenty-three years of teaching literature to high schoolers, I feel God led me to this choice. Because of the literary content of the course, I begin each year by telling my students that literature, from Chaucer and Shakespeare to the near-modern works of T. S. Eliot, is a written account of man's search for and interpretation of God.

Over the years, biblical themes, symbols, and allusions have been the basis for many of my students' research papers and in-depth classroom discussions.

Several years back, on the last day of semester, one young man came back into the classroom, shook my hand, and said, "Thank you, Mrs. Smith, for teaching God without preaching God" — a treasured memory!

* * * *

Pete interrupted my thoughts. "Hey, babe," he yelled, "I'm going to the post office."

Good, I thought, now I can put up my feet and take a real coffee break.

My mind a blank, I had two more blessings to go, and I knew my taskmaster would not let me quit short of the assigned quota.

Soon Pete was back. "Well," he said, hanging his cap at the back door, "you don't have to look at this now unless you want to."

With sympathetic eyes, he held out three manila pouches — returned manuscripts I'd

submitted — and one square, white envelope. Disappointed, I reached for the pouches, ripping them open one by one. One held the standard rejection slip; one, though rejected, had an encouraging note from the editor; and one offered a contract for publication.

Blessing 4

I'm thankful for editors who jot encouraging notes to struggling freelancers and for editors who publish stories.

Oh, and the small white envelope? The most wonderful blessing of the day: a birth announcement of my first great-grandchild.

Blessing 5

I'm thankful for a daughter who, as a teenage mother with no education, no job, and no way to care for a baby, had the courage to give up her son for adoption so he could have the care of two loving parents.

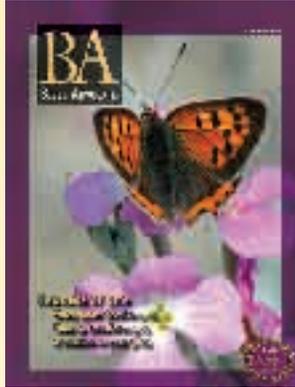
After years of prayer for the safekeeping of that precious child, not long ago the son and birth mother were reunited on Mother's Day. Now that son is happily married and the father of a beautiful baby girl — my great-granddaughter.

I held the pink and white announcement against my cheek. Pattering rain mirrored my tears of happiness. Pete was right: Begin your day counting your blessings, and no matter how gray the sky, the sun will shine in your heart. **BA**



Donna Smith
writes from Tipton,
OK.

Mail Bag



Encouragement and revival

Thank you for the magazines — rich in content. They should be called books. They have been a source of encouragement and revival to me. The May issue that deals with repentance, going near to sinners, blessed me immensely.

*C. A. (pastor)
Nigeria*

Reflections on July-August

Such surprises! Ron Saladin's writing was good to see [p. 14]. Then the article by Buzz Overman ["My Journey," p. 18]: We're acquainted with his daughter, Sarah, but I had no idea she is Jason's sister. God knows the end from the beginning, and Jason's scheduled abortion did not suit the end.

*G. F.
British Columbia*

I asked my wife for the BA and read page 13 ["American Forum"]. It is a Godsend! No doubt I'll be using it for guidance. I also read the article about separation and unification of CoG7 [p. 16]. I love reading about our history. As

youth, we used to do stuff with the Salem Conference CoG7 here. Mostly 'cause girls in their youth group liked the guys from ours.

*D. M.
San Antonio, TX*

A religious organization trying to use the political structures of this world runs the grave risk of prostituting itself to the whims of the state. History has not been kind to the illegitimate marriage of church and state that dominated Europe from the time of Constantine to the Reformation. And let us not forget that the Reformation saw Protestant unholy political alliances and atrocities that, to a visitor from Mars, would look just like any other garden variety Inquisition.

Theocratic governments in the hands of man become tyranny. The church becomes corrupted and drunk on its own power, and in the end the church prostituting itself to one political movement or another causes the church to suffer.

There is a place for religion

in politics. People of faith have served faithfully in government, from the time of Joseph in Egypt to the many fine public servants today. But their task is not to bring utopia to this earth. Rather, they serve to do what the Constitution says: "to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity. . . ."

*L. C.
Lees Summit, MO*

Ministry tool

We are diligently handing out BA's to all who will take them. We find this is one of our most effective ministry tools. I left one in a hospital waiting room, and four months later, it was still on the table for anyone to read. This made my day.

*B. C.
Mitchell, SD*

Good news gift

My beloved brethren, I thank God because I have the privilege of writing to thank you for sending the BA to me: Calvin Burrell, Sherri Langton, Keith Michalak, Sylvia Corral, Raul Gonzalez, LeRoy and Hope Dais, and Linda Michalak. Thank you all for your gift of the good news. May God richly bless your work. You are champions. I am enclosing a tract that we, Christian inmates, use here in jail.

*F. D.
Jamestown, CA*



*A chilling autumn wind
layers
leaves upon God's fertile earth,
aids in their disintegration.*

*The Creator of current and stillness
views our lifeless nature,
waiting to transform us . . .
ready to unveil a new season.*

Mona Hodgson



General Conference
Church of God (Seventh Day)



Did you know . . .

- the publishing house in Stanberry, MO, began its first Free Literature Distribution Program in 1959?
- the *Bible Advocate* was offered without cost to all who requested it in 1970, and subscribers increased dramatically? (The CoG7 newsmagazine, *Harvest Field Messenger*, had gone free to members in '69.)
- the press moved from Missouri to Colorado in 1972?
- subscription lists of the BA were computerized by 1974?
- the BA was first published in full color in 1998?



Publications: Our Past, Our Future

Keith Michalak, Director

This year, the Church reached a milestone: one hundred fifty years. What started with a declaration from Gilbert Cramner – “My Bible and my Bible alone” – has continued through teachers, board members, pastors, and lay people who did their part to promote the Word.

Publications played its part as well in the history of the Church. Through the Bible Advocate Press, we have printed and distributed literature, from a few hundred pieces at first to hundreds of thousands distributed throughout the world each year. Like those who came before us, we labor to get the message of salvation out to the unsaved and to teach biblical principles in our postmodern society. For some of our staff, it has been a lifelong commitment to fulfill God’s calling.

In recent years, Publications has branched out to the Internet in order to connect to faraway places and younger readers. Our hope for the future is to meet youth wherever they are – through their laptops and different media – and give them the good news of Christ.

The only way we can accomplish this is through your prayers and financial support. Please remember to pray for us and give generously to Publications.

Bible Advocate Press, P.O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233-0677

Death Notice

Elder Tom Allan passed away in late August in Branson, Missouri. Tom and his wife, Linda, served the North Fellowship in Sacramento, California, before moving to Branson a few years ago. He was 69. Our condolences to Mrs. Allan and the family.

Congratulations!

Cliff and Deloris Tuttle of Fargo, North Dakota, celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on June 30. Golden couples not yet recognized in BA are invited to contact the editor.

Michigan Super Sabbath

Gull Lake Conference Center near Hickory Corners will host a fall Super Sabbath on October 11, also the last day of the North American Ministerial Council and CoG7 Leadership Conference at that site. For information, call 303-452-7973 or 231-571-5047.

SED Retreat Report

A Southeastern Leadership Retreat in Alva, Florida (August 1-3), brought together men from Tampa, Orlando, Fort Myers, Lehigh Acres, Port St. Lucie, Bradenton, West Palm Beach, Homestead, and Haines City, Florida. Pastors Ezra Modeste, Al Haynes, and Jeff Endecott led worship and seminar sessions ("Nine Marks of a Healthy Church," "Eschatology"), and Darrel Walters provided the Sabbath evening meal that has become a staple for these meetings.

— Jeff Endecott
SE District Superintendent



CoG7 Sets Sail

The 150th anniversary cruise came and went with great satisfaction. What a thrilling journey into the magic of the Atlantic, August 4-8! Embarking from the Port of Miami on the Royal Caribbean's *Majesty of the Seas* was one of the ways the North American Conference of the Church chose to celebrate its 150th year. The ship itself was a breathtaking spectacle, beautiful to behold. But most exciting was the fellowship shared with brethren who represented various facets of CoG7's membership.

We met with those whose names we have become accustomed to through the Bible Advocate Press's publications. The artistic flavor of each morning's devotion led by Elder Whaid Rose took us on a journey into the heart and presence of God, with beautiful songs, personal testimonies, and encouragements from the Word. The various flavors of food and Caribbean delights were a taste of paradise and, by George, the food was plentiful! From thought-provoking conversations at the dinner table each evening to socializing afterward, we experienced brotherhood, family comradeship, and organization to the finest detail.

A highlight of the journey was the excursion hosted by the Bahamian church, affiliated with the Church for only a few years. Pastor Daniel Thompson gave 49 of us a guided tour to his Nassau church, where his wife and a few members provided refreshments. Some of us joined in trying to open coconuts with barely a stone. A few were successful.

An enchanting walk through Nassau's narrow streets, swimming in the deep blue Atlantic ocean, the white sandy beaches on Coco Cay, the beach barbeque organized by the ship's chefs, and seeing ship shoppers hunting for bargains as we walked through Key West — all were unforgettable experiences. We may produce something approaching the quality of the Bahamian experience, but I will need to see it first. My hope and prayer is to wish every one of you a similar experience — another such cruise to be organized very soon.

— Victor Harrison
United Kingdom



Sis-Q SWORD Camp

It happens every summer: instant serenity when the salty fragrances of the Oregon coast, a glimpse of the forever rolling hills of Southern Oregon, the comfort of reuniting with old friends, and the almost tangible presence of God blend, and I again realize I am at Sis-Q Meadows.

For a few short days, our complete attention is redirected from work, college, or any of life's worries to what matters most: relationship with God. My first experience of Sis-Q was attending junior camp at age twelve. I've been coming back every year since.

This year's SWORD camp was an incredible week of fun and fellowship. Nearly fifty young adults attended the camp. The theme was "The Next Generation," with classes and evening messages led by Rusty McCrea. He focused on the importance of our age group stepping up as Church leaders, support figures, and role models to the next generation. Along with Rusty's messages, Ben and Cassie McCrea led praise and worship services.

Camp week began with a hot dog roast on the beach. We also enjoyed paintball games in the camp woods, followed by refreshing plunges into its water holes.

Food at Sis-Q is always delectable, and this year's cook, Ben Edwards, went above and beyond that notion. Mary Sue Lawson put a sweet end to the week by cooking her signature maple bars.

Once again, this year's SWORD camp was the highlight of my summer. I look forward to next year when I can reunite with old friends and experience the presence of God.

— Jordan Towery
Madras, OR

Pioneer Missionary Training, Anyone?

Through October 31, you may have time to reserve a spot on the '08 PMT team that trains in Monterrey, Mexico, December 21-31. Participants will learn basic evangelism through classroom training and hands-on experience, while living among CoG7 brethren in another country. The cost is \$400, plus airfare. To apply, call 541-517-1079 or e-mail carlylehix@aol.com today.

English Experience, Ladies?

Women from the U.K. invite North American ladies to their 2009 conference on the theme "Elect Lady" in Manchester, England, May 23-26. Mary and Margy Ling attended last year and had a wonderful experience. If any NAWM women wish to attend next year, contact Mary Ling: maryling@oh.rr.com or P. O. Box 301, Amherst, OH 44001.

Celebrate Now!

Before the year's end, you may consider celebrating the Church's 150th birthday with a major contribution. Generous and sacrificial gifts, encompassed by the Lord's gracious blessings, have empowered the Church of God (Seventh Day) to share the gospel with the lost and to nurture followers of Christ for many years. You can help assure the continuation and growth of this work in 2009 and beyond by sharing the resources God has entrusted to you.

Contributions can be in cash or in some other form. When giving stocks or other property that has appreciated for more than a year, you can give more with less cost. You avoid paying 15 percent capital gains tax due if you sell.

For example, if you were to sell \$10,000 worth of stock for which you paid \$3,000, you would owe \$1,050 in tax on the \$7,000 gain. By donating the stock to the Church, you would not only save that tax but also receive a deduction for the entire \$10,000 gift.

To explore your options, contact the Office of Planned Giving, P. O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233 or plannedgiving@cog7.org.

Missions Ministries

William C. Hicks, Director

A World of Thanks . . . For Your Growing Support of Missions Ministries!

As we draw to the close of another year, it's time for us to say, "Thank you" for your prayers for and financial support of Missions Ministries. We've seen growth into new areas, like medical and dental missions and orphan sponsorship in several countries. Our heavenly Father, working through His children, is reaching around the world sharing the good news of humanity's only sure hope, Jesus Christ. Take a moment to read the opportunities available and consider how you can partner with us.

- Establishes and encourages new churches in the U.S. and Canada through missionaries to America.
- Encourages local church growth through personal evangelism and training resources.
- Supports our missions and sister conferences on every inhabited continent. Missions Abroad can help your church partner in various projects to bless those in need.



Managed Project Funds

International Ministries Disciples; Christ is Coming! (Cristo Viene) sends evangelists around the world. With 500 associates giving \$20 per month, we support workers in some 17 countries. More associates are needed so we can reach out to waiting countries.



Change for Your World. Annual offerings of pocket change helps change the world through our growing International Ministerial Congress. Your response is growing too. Place your pocket change in a jug, box, or drawer daily, and let it be sent and dedicated every July-August in support of your church around the world. Amazing how just a little pocket change from each of us can actually change our world!



Disaster Relief Fund. Relieves those affected by natural or manmade disasters when, not if, they strike. Thanks for your support of this ministry that responds with your love in times of great need – recently, in Kenya and Myanmar.



Medical/Dental Missions. Missions Abroad and North American Women's Ministries began our first medical mission in '02. By God's grace, we will see future growth in this area where our health-care professionals reach out with their talents for the cause of Christ.



To our Father in heaven, our Lord Jesus Christ, and to those of you inspired by His Holy Spirit to faithfully support these ministries, we extend a world of thanks and pray for His continued blessings throughout the coming year!



International Tour

Europe

July 26-29 in Manchester, England, the convention of the Church of God (Seventh Day) occurred under the theme “Empowering for Change.”

“The perception that conditions in the world have changed significantly in recent years challenges us greatly in the twenty-first century. If it were not for the opportunity to change and grow, the Church might cease to exist. Through the driving force of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is empowering His disciples to preach the gospel until His return. We must seek to make our church more accessible to those not now following Christ and to manage the process of change so that current members are not alienated. Let us remember that His grace is sufficient and that our strength is made perfect in weakness. May we be empowered for change so that the great church of God will rise!”*

The convention had a high spiritual level, with more than three hundred present. It was opened by Pastor Erlo Hendricks and moderated by Pastor Kevin Anderson. The program consisted of worship, prayer, studies on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, periods of friendship, and many songs in a strong English-Jamaican style.

*Adapted from convention brochure



Leaders of the Church in England gathered in Manchester are shown here, along with representatives from Spain (top, right) and Portugal (kneeling).

Delegations from Germany, Jamaica, Portugal, Spain, and the United States attended the convention. Robert Jacobs (Jamaica), Nicasio Martin (Spain), Teddy Burton and Robert Crawford (England) preached. Paulo Coelho (Portugal), Leszek Kocjan and Simon Choruda (Germany), and John Lemley (U.S.) also addressed the group.

International Ministerial Congress (IMC) representatives of Zone 7 met during the convention. Their resolutions were

- to realize that Europe and all of Zone 7 are heterogenic regarding language and culture. This could be a source of problems but also an opportunity to spread the Church’s message.
- to realize that the IMC conferences in Europe are small and that to progress, they should work together for God’s glory.
- to increase information

given by Zone 7 conferences to members about its work, using tools like a newspaper in PDF.

- to give attention to the possibility that groups with the same doctrine exist in other countries.
- to consider use of the Centre for Theological Studies (developing in Almeria, Spain) to increase the theological formation of our members.
- to create a special Sabbath of prayer for IMC and its work.
- to understand that Zone 7 cannot be closed and blind to the humanitarian and evangelistic needs of other IMC zones. We should improve our regular assistance to this global work.

Please pray for the empowering of the British Conference and all conferences in this European field.

— Paulo Coelho, Portugal
Zone 7 Representative

Saved by a Hymnbook

I love to sing. Along my Christian journey, the historic hymns of the church have given hope during dark nights of the soul and have added substance to times of worship and joy. Jack Hayford wrote: “The secret of song is the Church’s most distinctive resource, not because music is more powerful than the Word or the Spirit, but because song is a means by which both can become so joyously conjoined – by ALL the people of the Lord!” (*The Celebration Hymnal*).

Among the things we celebrate this year is *Worship in Song*, our church’s beloved hymnal, published in 1967. The absence of many classics from this volume has sometimes frustrated me, but my appreciation for it has grown over the years. I see it in the pew racks of many churches as I travel. By serving the needs of varied groups and congregations within the wider CoG7 movement, the hymnbook transcends differences. In foreign lands it is treasured nearly as much as the Bible.

But a greater testimony to the value of our hymnal was given by a watchdog organization some years ago. Curious about our unique doctrines, it sent observers into our churches, disguised as seekers. These observers later confessed that they were quickly disarmed by the Christ-centeredness of the songs they heard. Their doctrinal concerns were not necessarily alleviated, but our songs and hymns gave compelling evidence that we are, in fact, a people of Jesus. They left us alone. We were, you might say, saved by our hymnbook – by our singing!

As the debate over traditional and contemporary music continues, younger believers, regrettably, are less familiar with church hymnody. History shows that each generation composes fresh songs and new art forms to meet the challenges of ministry in its current culture. I applaud those who minister on the cutting edge and are passionate about doing whatever it takes to reach the unchurched. The spiritual impact of contemporary worship choruses upon the church in recent decades is undeniable.

New wine requires new wineskins, and because His mercies are ever new, we can “sing to [the Lord] a new song” (Psalm 33:3).

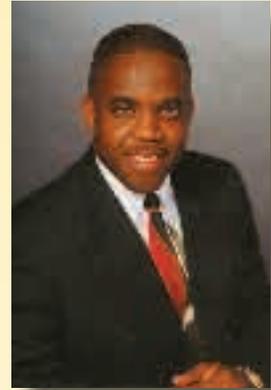
But if music is the food of life, a balanced diet is essential. Contemporary choruses have greater appeal to the younger generation but mainly focus on praise and adoration – only part of the gospel equation. On the other hand, there is something about the historic hymns of the faith – their inspiring melodies and rich theology; their beautiful expression of biblical themes such as life, death, suffering, salvation, and resurrection – that makes their message timeless. A good understanding of the value of each hymn and its appropriate place in private and corporate worship can bring balance.

Job tells us that the Morning Stars sang at Creation (38:7), a reminder that music is not a new invention but is as old as the universe. It has always played a central role in the lives of God’s people. The Psalms mark the devotional center of the Bible, and worship is central to the life and ministry of the New Testament church.

Historically, CoG7 has defined itself as a people of the Bible, and we must not lose hold of our hymnbook. Preaching the Word is most effective when it is accompanied by the best music, beautifully rendered. Well-ordered worship reflects our grasp of God’s love and holiness; it gives our utmost for His highest.

So may we find balance between traditional and contemporary. May our songs reflect sound theology. And may all who enter our doors, whether sincere seekers or watchdogs in disguise, find unmistakable evidence of our love for Christ and devotion to His cause.

– Whaid Guscott Rose
General Conference President



Octoberfest in the Ozarks

October 17-19, 2008

The Jasper, Arkansas, church invites you to its twentieth annual Octoberfest Family Retreat at the church's campgrounds. Mid-fall is a cool and colorful time in the Ozarks. Great music, Bible study, food, and fellowship are always on tap. Bring your Bible and bedding; the folks at Jasper will provide the rest!

Contact Jason or Stephanie Overman for more info and to let 'em know you're comin' (870-446-5736 or 870-577-3647).



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