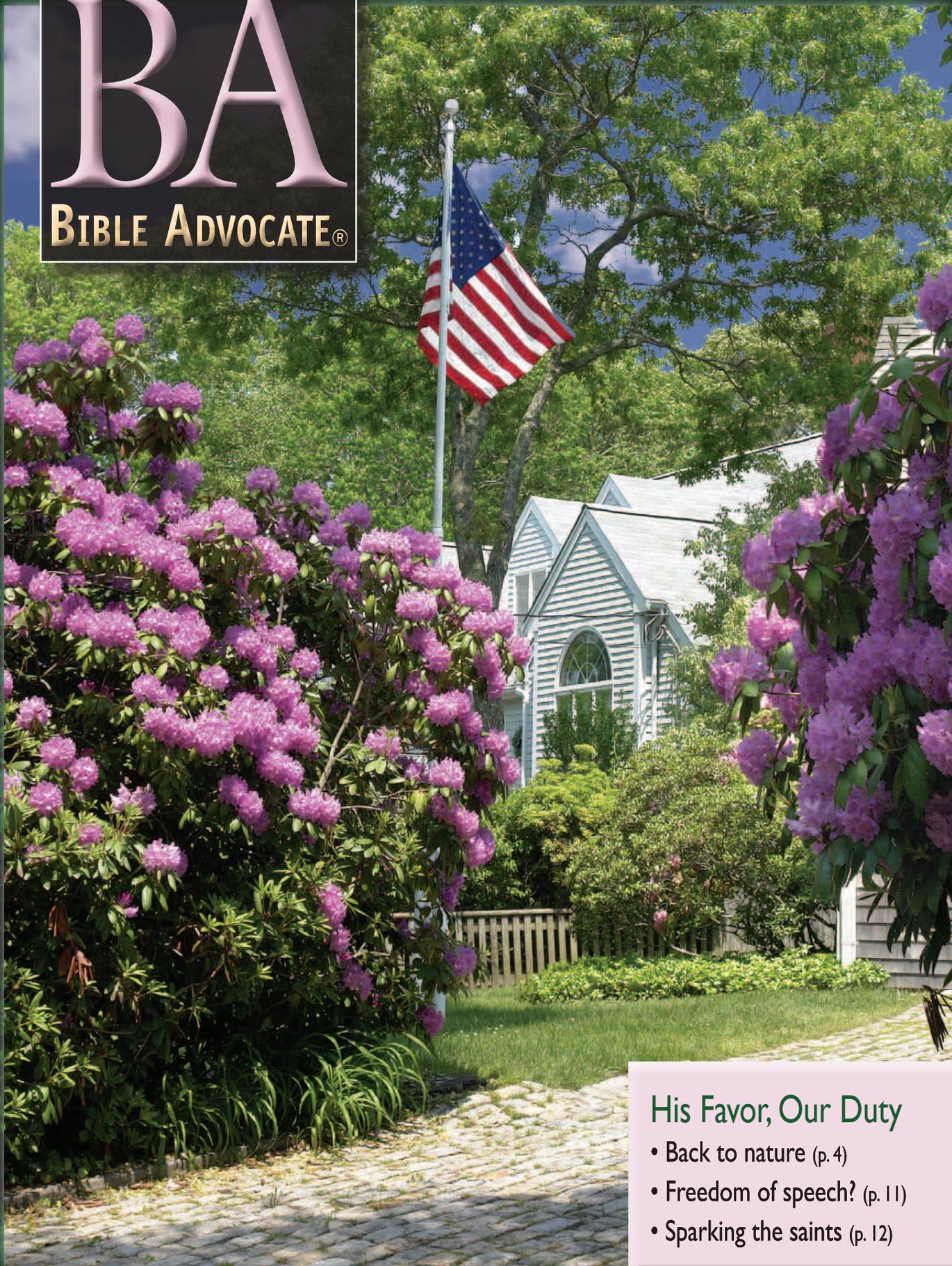


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BIBLE ADVOCATE®



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In the July and August issues of *Now What?*: an unwanted pregnancy, freedom from pain of childhood abuse (<http://nowwhat.cog7.org>)

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Anabaptist Who?

Lecturing to a group of CoG7 students, a Baptist minister-teacher advised us, “Be distinct. Nothing is guaranteed to reduce your influence more than giving up all your distinctions.”

One piece of faith-practice we have in common with Baptist friends is liturgy, our public worship style with its centrality of the spoken word. This traces, in part, to the fact that CoG7 and SDA churches share some common heritage with many Baptists.

Anabaptist is the name given to sixteenth century Protestants who carried reform further than their brethren who began the Lutheran, Anglican, and Reformed churches. They did this, for one thing, by insisting on a church composed of believers only — no mass conversions or infant baptisms. Meaning “baptize again,” *Anabaptist* was the tag given those who insisted on re-baptizing (by immersion) believers who were previously just sprinkled.

Another element of Anabaptist faith was rejection of the “state-church” practice that prevailed across Europe both before and after the Reformation. Anabaptists opposed the role of civil governments in supporting Christianity, especially through established churches. Some Anabaptists of the Mennonite variety went further by refusing to participate in state-sponsored military force, regardless of the cause.

It’s no surprise, then, that Baptists and Adventists are among Christians who promote religious freedom in today’s world. As examples . . .

- The Baptist Joint Committee is a seventy-four-year-old, Washington, D.C.-based organization that works to defend and extend God-given religious liberty for all, bringing a uniquely Baptist witness to the principle that religion must be freely exercised, neither advanced nor inhibited by government (www.bjconline.org).

- *Liberty*, published by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, says in its declaration of principles:

The God-given right of religious liberty is best exercised when church and state are separate. . . . Religious liberty entails freedom of conscience: to worship or not to worship; to profess, practice and promulgate religious beliefs or to change them. In exercising these rights, however, *one must respect the equivalent rights of all others* (www.libertymagazine.org, emphasis mine).

The first Anabaptists were radical in their commitment to basic Christian faith and discipleship, distinct yet diverse in their secondary views, and mostly peacemakers toward their adversaries. As carriers of several pieces of Anabaptist tradition, we do well to investigate and imitate more of that heritage (Google “Anabaptist”).

— Calvin Burrell





Soaking in this trilogy of topics believed by more and more Christians, think deeply and gladly about creation.

God's Caretakers

by Karen O'Connor

Not long ago I bought my first new car in twelve years. I wanted a model that's environmentally friendly and more economical than one powered exclusively by gasoline, so I selected a hybrid. The salesman congratulated me, saying, "You're being kind to the environment."

My grandson agreed; he too congratulated me for taking care of the earth by selecting such a car. His mom reported that this twelve-year-old is the resident environmentalist in their family. That made me smile. I love knowing he cares about God's green earth and is paying attention to

how he and others can preserve and enjoy it.

Purchasing this car got me thinking again about taking care of natural resources — the water, air, land, forests, fish and wildlife, topsoil, and minerals God intended for all His creatures to enjoy. For me, this interest started one weekend about twenty years ago when my husband, Charles, and I decided to recycle our magazines, newspapers, cans, bottles, and used clothing.

In the midst of clearing a closet and de-cluttering a storage area, I said to him, "It feels to me as though we're coming down where we ought to be — to a life of simplicity and stewardship. We're taking care of business in our corner of the earth."

In the Book

This business was what God had in mind, I think, when He said to the first humans: “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground” (Genesis 1:28).

In this primary text, God establishes the relationship between Earth and humans as one of stewardship, dominion, and responsibility to Him, our Creator. We’re to look after creation not as it suits us but as God would care for it. Just as important, we are examples to unbelievers who look to Christians as God’s caretakers.

Sadly, not everyone has accepted this mandate. Some have used land, water, animals, plants, and minerals for selfish purposes without thinking how their actions will affect supplies and species in the future. In recent years, Christian voices have risen to defend the earth and remind believers of our responsibility as stewards.

Keith Miller, professor of geology at Kansas State University, taught a class at his church, titled *Stewardship as a Worldview*. “Fully living a Christian worldview involves a Christian stewardship of everything in life, including time, opportunities, relationships, knowledge, money, abilities, resources, and environment,” says Miller.

The Judaeo-Christian tradition teaches this relationship in the story of Adam and Eve, who were placed in Eden “to work it and take care of it” (Genesis 2:15).

Our dominion from the Lord

over the earth entails these responsibilities:

- to maintain the earth as a place of beauty where features and foliage are lovely and people are inspired and blessed by nature’s wonder and magnificence (Psalms 104 and 148).

- to learn and apply knowledge for the good of humankind; to use the earth’s water, land, plant and animal species, and minerals to create opportunities and inventions that add health, beauty, wonder, and enjoyment to our lives (Genesis 1:26).

- to keep the garden in good condition for the benefit of our heirs; to pass a better earth to our children than the one we inherited. As a grandparent, I think about this a lot.

Our experience with stewardship and simplicity led to new discoveries that influenced our shopping and eating habits and the use of possessions we already had.

Freedom

At the end of that weekend we loaded the car with bags for the recycling center and clothes and kitchen items for the Salvation Army. We also decided to buy less, share more, and purchase with thought for the long haul. Today’s treasures will be tomorrow’s trash.

Taking care of natural resources can be an exercise in freedom as well. I’m now recycling some of our used water in the garden. We’re eating vegetarian meals a couple of times a week, and we’re walking more places than before. Even the new car stays in the garage several days a week.

I’ve talked to people who’ve started a small garden in their yard, in a kitchen window, or in pots on a patio. We’re using fewer paper products, thus preserving more trees, and we’re interested in sharing a lawn mower, wheelbarrow, or shovel with neighbors instead of buying our own. Each small step is a positive one.



Satisfaction

Being a caretaker for God is not always convenient or easy, but it is satisfying. It leads to a simpler life and wiser choices. Do we really need ten pairs of shoes, or two cars with a truck and an RV, or a television in every room?

Can we enjoy our clothing for several seasons rather than answering the call of fashion trends? Are we willing to live in a modest, affordable dwelling that is friendly to the environment, using recycled wood, solar panels, and low-energy appliances, rather than a showplace that drains our earnings and our natural resources?

Contentment

Being a caretaker for God is a spiritual discipline that begins with a decision. Like Paul, we're learning — slowly at times — to be content. Distractions and desires no longer rule.

When we're content, we're more likely to make our lives a chain of prayer, each link a hymn

of praise throughout the day as we notice and appreciate God's gifts and make responsible choices about how we use them.

"Lord Jesus, thank You for the beautiful sunset."

"Father God, may I fill my soul with the majesty of Your mountains and meadows instead of fulfilling my every want and desire at the mall."

"Holy Spirit, please guide me in treating the earth with respect and responsibility."

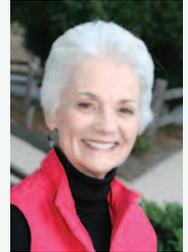
Being aware of God's gifts and living within the His boundaries leads to spiritual contentment. "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you'" (Hebrews 13:5).

However, if we go to the opposite extreme by renouncing all possessions as detrimental and denying ourselves the healthy pleasures of life, then we become legalistic — taking pride in turning away from earthly things. The Bible is consistent in its teaching that Earth and

its gifts are good and to be enjoyed (Genesis 1:31; 1 Timothy 6:17b)).

Let us thank the Lord for His gifts, take care of them in every way we can, and pass them on to our children and our children's children with joy and gratitude.

Karen O'Connor writes from Watsonville, CA. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



The Globe Comes Together

by **J. Grant Swank, Jr.**

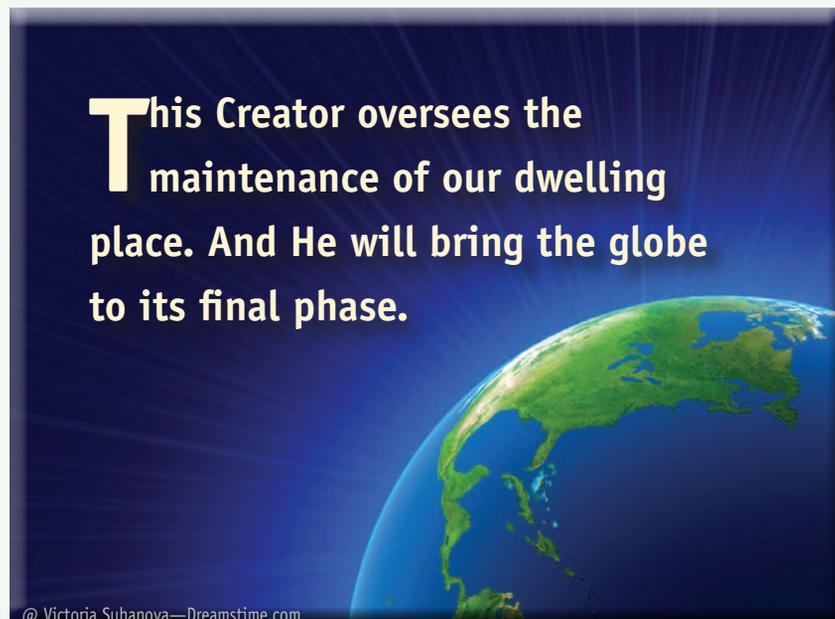
Since the nuclear age began, the globe has been threatened with extinction. Evil men would wipe out our very existence.

Why has this not happened? There is a reason we have not disappeared.

It is not because of our civil defense systems or international protective shields. Mortals are not capable of securing the planet.

It is because God in Christ created this sphere. This Creator oversees the maintenance of our dwelling place. And He will bring the globe to its final phase.

No other explanation can be given, considering mortals' intent on destruction. And with our tendencies to err, there's no reason something should not have gone



awry in the nuclear systems to blow up the world.

Nevertheless, the earth continues to spin upon its axis. Day follows night. The seasons succeed. And our earthy home remains intact.

The factual answer to all of this is in the Bible. God in Christ who created this sphere informs the disciples of data related to it. Look to the Word of God.

Genesis sets forth information concerning the earth's start. Then throughout Scripture more detail is revealed, even that relating to the sphere's destiny.

The Bible states: "At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ — everything in heaven and on earth" (Ephesians 1:10, NLT).

Such a simple statement, yet so profound. And how comforting to believers. Mortals cannot destroy what is under Christ's care. We wait for Christ's moment when He will bring under His power both the globe and atmosphere (heaven) surrounding it.

In the meantime, believers thank God in Christ for His authority. That surveillance provides our earthly abode. And that power will bring all things to their appointed end.

J. Grant Swank, Jr. pastors and writes from Windham, ME.



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Sabbath is about taking our hands off the controls one day a week and letting God be God.



Sabbath Quiet

by Nancy Sleeth

When people ask me about the first thing they should do to care for the earth, I give an answer they don't expect: Start observing the Sabbath. The intent of the Sabbath laws is restraint. We are not supposed to do it all just because we can. Sabbath is about taking our hands off the controls one day a week and letting God be God. Go on walks. Take guiltless naps. Share meals with family and friends. Cultivate a 24/6 life. If we all started honoring the Sabbath, we'd save 10 to 14 percent of our resources. But even more important, the Sabbath creates a space to get to know our neighbors, spend time in community, and be still with God.

My second priority for 2010 is to tune out the noise and tune in to God. A decade ago, most of us could barely find the on ramp to the Information Highway.

Now our lives are a noisy blur: chat rooms, C-SPAN, satellite TV, triple-digit cable options, e-mail, instant messaging, cell phones, text messaging, YouTube, iTunes, Bluetooth, Facebook, Twitter, RSS feeds. There is a loneliness and desperation that accompanies such noisy lives, and the temptation of false pride — an "iGod" mentality. All this noise is unhealthy; it stresses our bodies, our emotions, and our relationships. Most important, it takes us away from God. Let's create a space where we can once again hear the voice of Adonai and cultivate a culture of quiet. **BA**

This article originally appeared in Comment magazine, the opinion journal of CARDUS: www.cardus.ca/comment.



Questions & Answers

Q What is the Church's position on falling from grace? Some say that backsliders were never saved in the first place.

A The Church of God (Seventh Day) does not promote the doctrine of eternal security. This teaching affirms that those who enjoy true forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ can never lose this favored status before God.

In its classical form, this doctrine equates with the last of the five points of Calvinism, a system emphasizing God's choice (before the world began) of certain persons to be saved through Christ (see p. 7 of the May-June BA). For Calvinists, the divine selection is confirmed by Christ's limited atonement on the cross, by the Spirit's irresistible call to the elect, and finally, by the perseverance of those elect saints in their faith to the end.

Perseverance in faith and holiness (i.e., eternal security) is the logical conclusion to Calvinism's first four points. It supports the second sentence of our question above: Those who abandon faith merely show that their profession was always counterfeit, that they were never among the truly elect. If God predestined them to eternal salvation at the start and His grace toward them is ultimately irresistible, how could they ever finally lose it?

CoG7, however, has never embraced the model of predestination attributed to John Calvin. Rather than atonement being limited to the elect, we understand that Christ died for every man (1 Tim. 2:6; Heb. 2:9b; 1 John 2:2), that salvation is had by anyone who trusts Him and follows on via repentance to obedience. All gospel hearers are free to choose their response, as the "whosoever" verses of the New Testament suggest (Luke 12:8; John 4:14; Acts 10:43; 1 John 5:1; Rev. 22:17). We also understand that

those who once freely chose Christ remain free to choose whether they will, or will not, continue to trust and obey Him, and that God honors their choice.

Our answer thus far has been mostly related to the theoretical issues of Calvinistic thought and human freedom. Now we turn to a more directly biblical answer. The most compelling arguments against the doctrine of eternal security are the several scripture texts that warn against the loss of right standing with God.

Each of the following texts states or strongly implies the possibility of persons dropping out somewhere along the way from initial saving faith to final redemption:

- Matthew 24:13; Luke 9:62: Final salvation involves endurance unto the end.
- John 15:2, 6: Some who are "in the Vine" will be removed, burned.
- 1 Corinthians 9:27: Even Paul might have become a castaway.
- 2 Corinthians 6:1: God's grace may be received in vain.
- Galatians 5:1-4: Entanglement with legalism (the attempt to become or remain justified by the law) separates from Christ and grace.
- Colossians 1:22, 23: Final salvation comes to those who keep the faith by not being moved away from the gospel.
- James 5:19, 20; 1 John 5:16: Even a brother can wander from truth and sin unto death.
- 2 Peter 2:20-22; 3:17: Knowing Christ, then returning to the world, is worse than never knowing Him at all.

These warnings are unnecessary and would be misleading if a fall from grace were impossible.

The strongest New Testament alarms against departure from the faith are in the epistle to the Hebrews.

That writer's main purpose is to plead with Jewish Christians not to turn back from following the Savior in whom they had come to trust — even Jesus. Note the ways that the writer urgently expresses this caution so these Christians might avoid the disaster of unbelief:

- Give . . . earnest heed . . . lest we drift away (2:1-3).
- Beware . . . an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God (3:7-19).
- Be diligent . . . lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience (4:11).
- Falling away and willful sin mean no sin sacrifice remains (6:4-6; 10:26).
- Don't cast away your confidence or draw back to perdition (10:35-39).
- Look carefully . . . lest anyone fall short of the grace of God (12:15-17).

These warnings are addressed to those whose walk with the Lord Jesus has been deep enough to arouse bitter opposition from their foes (10:32, 34; 12:1-13). The writer of Hebrews assumes that His readers are genuine believers, that they are in danger of retreating from their faith in Christ and from the eternal salvation that such faith affirms. If the readers were not true believers or if there was no bona fide possibility of their departure from Christian faith, then the message of Hebrews makes little sense.

The possibility of once having, then losing, the forgiveness and eternal life promised to those who trust God's grace through Jesus Christ, is authentic. The Scriptures report persons whose faith once flowered, then faded and fell. Kings Saul and Solomon are prime ancient examples, though we are not told either's eternal fate. In the New Testament, Hymenaeus and Alexander both suffered the shipwreck of their faith (1 Tim. 1:19, 20), and Demas also was a dropout

(2 Tim. 4:10). The case of Judas Iscariot is also relevant.

Still, the loss of salvation is probably not as common as many think. Those who are "in Christ" by faith do have considerable security there. What they have in Him — forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Spirit, the promise of eternal life — is not easily lost, certainly not as easily as a wicked thought or even a long struggle with besetting sin.

How may it be lost? If salvation is gained only by personal faith in the Word of His grace, then it is lost only by reversing that freely chosen personal faith — that is, by willful disbelief in the Word that offers salvation through Christ alone (Heb. 3:6—4:11).

Saying it another way, salvation is maintained in the same manner it was first received: by continued, trustful leaning on Jesus, *not* by the merit of our obedience or good works.

If it were true that salvation is lost by a failure in good works or by falling short of perfect obedience (i.e. by personal sins), then we would need to admit that salvation is not by grace alone, through faith in Christ alone. It would be necessary to add "human achievement" to the list of salvation credits, alongside what God has done for us.

If salvation can be gained only by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, then it can be lost only by a denial of what we once believed: God's grace in Christ. The true test of being God's elect is not a one-time profession of faith but perseverance and patient continuance in that faith.

— Elder Calvin Burrell

Readers are invited to submit questions for this page. Mail them to Editor, P.O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233, e-mail bibleadvocate@cog7.org, or share them on Facebook.

On Religious Freedom



BA Interview with Jordan Sekulow of the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ, www.aclj.org).

In view of the recent Wisconsin court ruling that our National Day of Prayer is unconstitutional, are American religious liberties in danger? What should we do?

Activist judges and politicians who appoint them are the greatest threat to religious liberties in the United States. For instance, the Wisconsin judge who unilaterally declared the National Day of Prayer unconstitutional violated her role as a federal district court judge by not applying the correct tests and standards formulated by our Supreme Court. The fact that Judge Crabb was nominated in 1979 underscores the impact these nominees have long after the President who appoints them leaves office.

To confront judicial activism, religious people must take aggressive action to defend our constitutional rights. ACLJ was founded to perform that duty, but we can't continue the fight without support from concerned citizens.

The first amendment of our Constitution prohibits the establishment of a national religion and guarantees citizens the right to freely exercise their faiths. Should we be more concerned about the erosion of religious freedoms or about the rhetoric calling for return to some mythical Christian promised land?

The Establishment Clause you refer to has evolved, judicially, so that religious speech in the public sphere and government recognition of religion are mostly silenced. With a diversity of judicially crafted tests in the history of Establishment Clause jurisprudence, no one can predict which test will be applied to an action being challenged or what the outcome of that chosen test will be.

Erosion of religious freedoms should be of concern to all religious people and even to those with no faith. This isn't a debate about Christianity; it is a debate about the right to publicly recognize the judicial heritage of our country with regard to religious expression.

A recent Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life ranked the U.S. near the top of most populous nations (only Japan and Brazil ranked higher) in facing little or no governmental restriction or public hostility toward the free exercise of faith. Comment?

In the U.S., we're blessed with a Constitution that clearly protects the right to believe or not believe whatever one chooses. The real issue is whether faith, even non-sectarian expressions of it, can still be recognized in the public sphere by governments, graduation speakers, and even military chaplains. Groups like Freedom From Religion

Foundation may be attacking the National Day of Prayer today. If they are victorious in the appeals court or Supreme Court, which I doubt, their next assault will be on crosses marking graves at Arlington National Cemetery, Thanksgiving Day, and public acknowledgment of Christmas. Although our private rights may be protected, our public rights are still under attack.

How would you counsel readers in other nations about obtaining and maintaining religious freedoms?

The ACLJ has affiliates around the world: the European Centre for Law and Justice in France, the Slavic Center for Law and Justice in Russia, ACLJ-Jerusalem, Center for Law and Justice-Pakistan, East Africa Centre for Law and Justice in Kenya, and the African Centre for Law and Justice in Zimbabwe. We understand the need to not only fight for religious freedoms here at home but also empower attorneys in many countries to protect the rights of our persecuted brothers and sisters. In the United States, we battle religious discrimination. Internationally, many people face real persecution for their faith, something that cannot be tolerated. **BA**

Freedom of speech: It's a quintessential liberty of Americans and citizens in most other democracies on Earth.

We were born with the constitutional right to criticize our leaders, and we exercise it to the hilt! But in demeaning those we have elected to represent us in government, do we also demean ourselves?

What do the Bible writers and teachers say about the attitudes and actions of God's people toward local, state/provincial, and national officials? Let's see.

By direct instruction or command:

- From Moses: "You shall not . . . curse a ruler of your people" (Exodus 22:28).

- From Solomon: "Do not curse the king, even in your thought" (Ecclesiastes 10:20).

- From Jesus: "Render . . . to Caesar the things that are Caesar's" (Matthew 22:21).

- From Paul: "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. . . . supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks [should] be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority. . . . be subject to rulers and authorities . . . speak evil of no one . . ." (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Timothy 2:1, 2; Titus 3:1, 2).

- From Peter: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors . . . Honor the king (1 Peter 2:13, 14, 17).

By example or indirect instruction:

- Even among the heathen, it is God who sets up kings and dethrones them (Daniel 2:21). David refused to harm or speak

The Bible and Civil Authority

by Calvin Burrell

against disobedient King Saul. To do so would have been to stretch out his hand (or tongue) against the Lord's anointed (1 Samuel 24).

- By seeking the welfare of even pagan nations, the welfare of God's people may be safeguarded (Jeremiah 29:7). Joseph and Daniel respectfully served ungodly heads of state in Egypt and Babylon.

- Under Pilate, Herod, and Caesar's rule, Jesus uttered scarcely a word of personal criticism — except His reference to Herod as a "fox" (Luke 13:32). And Paul apologized for his harsh response to an erring Sanhedrin leader (Acts 23:1-5), recalling the law that said, "You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people." This implies that our criticism even of ungodly authorities should be restrained.

But tradition grants us the right, seen by some as duty, of denouncing elected officials who displease us and of complaining against those who serve the pub-

lic. Should we not, in this matter, obey God rather than man?

Summarizing the texts above, here's how:

- **Obedience:** God's people should practice submission to civil authorities.

- **Respect:** God's people should honor civil authorities, speaking no evil of them.

- **Taxes:** God's people should pay their share to support the work of civil authorities.

- **Prayer:** God's people should intercede for civil authorities, that peace might prevail.

- **Wisdom:** God's people should discern their duty to God and man, discharging both.

Four of the last five U.S. Presidents — two from each political party — have been roundly despised and constantly attacked during their terms of office.

Christians should ask themselves whether such politics-as-usual reflects the true Spirit of Christ and of Scripture. **BA**

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How to Revitalize the Church

Expert advice for pastors, lay leaders, and others.
by **Dr. Tom Cheyney**

God loves the local church, and it is His desire to see it grow. Every church concerned about growth must be committed to revitalization. If you are a church leader and are not extremely devoted to the time required to achieve renewal and health, then another member ought to lead the process. Not every church that renews its fellowship and moves forward is led through that process by its lead minister. Yet this minister must be part of the revitalization assistance team and participate in training the laity for that work, regardless of who leads the effort.

An estimated 177,000 Protestant churches in America have an average attendance of less than 100.¹ Research tells us that more than 80 percent of U.S. churches are plateaued or declining. With another 50 to 75 churches closing their doors every week, we soon realize the importance of revitalizing the local church.²

It is impossible to turn any local church around until a group of individuals within that congregation becomes so steadfastly involved in its ministry that they will surrender almost everything for the eternal good of that church. Accept the fact that revitalization is often painful and difficult. If you are serious about it, you must be willing to invest a minimum of 1,000-plus days in the effort to achieve lasting success.

All who work in church revitalization will need the encouragement in these verses:

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

Beyond acting in love, the revitalization leader must be willing to make the necessary changes in ministry style to help the church revitalize. While teaching on this subject in Kansas City recently, we considered some of the vital skills and traits necessary for pastors or church leaders when working in church renewal.

Skills and traits

Prayer. Too many leaders ignore prayer in their personal lives, as well as in leading the church to be a people of prayer. Personal prayer and drawing other prayer warriors around you is vital to renewal! Only prayer can confront the reality of original sin in the church, through the Holy Spirit's guidance.

Spiritual authenticity. A shoot-from-the-hip type leader can lead a new plant or go to some church and pull out his bag of tricks all over again. It is entirely different for a revitalization leader to stay with a difficult mission and see it through to the best days of that church's life. A shoot-from-the-hip style doesn't make a strong leader for church revitalization.

Enabler/encourager. Realize that the goal is not to win all the battles but to enable a congregation, as much as possible, to move as one into its new future. The enabler has that wonderful gift of getting a church working together again.

Initiator/energizer. The initiator demonstrates that it is a new

day for the church and that victory can be achieved. He and the energizer can bring people together by creating "nudge" activities. Nudges are those little things that eventually build upon one another to create big things for church revitalization (see sidebar).

Facilitator/catalyst. Give people some tools, then get out of the way and watch God work! The facilitator/catalyst doesn't look for plug-and-play solutions (programs) but looks for ideas that will work in his setting. Begin asking God for guidance, instead of asking Him to bless your ideas only after you have thought it all out.

Transformational leader. Momentous church troubles may be faced and overcome by a single confident, unrelenting leader. The best solution to a predicament or a long-term issue that threatens any church is understanding the issue and its need for a change agent. This leader has the ability to anticipate resistance and sabotage. He can tell the difference between the stuff people are arguing about and

The Nudge List

These activities have been used to nudge a church into renewal:

- facility improvement (a little paint, rearranging the mess, cleaning up, etc.)
- the pastor sharing his dreams for the church
- disciple-making and discipleship emphasized
- a new music team
- visiting every member and prospect
- practical evangelism through community events
- new members class

— Dr. Tom Cheyney

Church revitalization is not about finding the “magic pill” or “sure to succeed” programming. It is about discovering God’s vision for the church and practicing it!

the emotional reality of the case.

Coach for success. Teach the importance of persistence and remaining calm in the midst of turmoil. The ability to stay connected with everyone during these hard times is part of coaching your congregation for success. Members are watching you and your ability (or lack of it) to be an anxiety shock absorber and to display healthy emotional Teflon as you lead the church through the course of revitalization.

Manager/director. Think about ideas and ways that will send a message to the community that you are doing something new. How can you share the dream using short-term, mid-term, and long-range ideas and goals for renewal? But remember not to force things. Impatient revitalization leaders push too hard and seek quick fixes over steady wins.

Growth ambassador. Numerical growth is the least certain mark of church revitalization, yet the local church is not renewed without some numerical growth. The leader must be intentional about growth and health; these do not come by accident. Re-

vitalized churches begin with a spiritually revitalized laity. If growth is measured in people getting involved in church ministries, then ministry must be made simple and the ministry teams easy to join.

Caregiver. Hurting people are not healthy people. Unhealthy people make for an unhealthy church. We need to bring people to health before we can begin to renew the church. Caregivers are wired in ways that will assist you in working toward health. They are glue that keeps your participants together and engaged.

Partner/friend. Revitalization begins with you, the lead pastor. Learn from others early and often. A pastor must earn love and respect before he earns the right to lead in renewal. Be the congregation’s friend and partner. Pastoral recluses are hard for the laity to feel connected with and supportive of.

Visionary. Leading through the change needed to un-stick a stuck church is part of the visionary revitalization. Communicate early and often how renewal will take place and be implemented. Prepare yourself spiritually as

the visionary and prepare your leaders spiritually. Then begin preparing your church spiritually. Seek God’s guidance and power. Church revitalization is not about finding the “magic pill” or “sure to succeed” programming. It is about discovering God’s vision for the church and practicing it! Instead of forcing your vision, help members discover their own for the local church.

Personal commitment

To succeed in revitalization, the church must stop allowing a vocal minority to dictate what the church will or will not do. Utilize your caregivers to help keep the place firmly connected and glued as one.

Everything that must be done in revitalization cannot happen in two or three hours on Saturday! We must change and grow as individuals if the church is going to change and grow. And in the end, God will receive the glory, not us. **BA**

Dr. Tom Cheyney is the co-author of *Spin-Off Churches*, a conference speaker, and a frequent writer on church planting, church health, and church revitalization. Contact him at Tom@Revitalization101.com or visit www.BoomerangChurches.com.



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You have a new church facility and plans for more. How did this happen?

My dad, Martin Luevano, was a minister in Juarez before coming to El Paso. With the help of several brothers, Sparks church was established, first in a home, then a small building they constructed. After a few years, the members joined forces to construct a bigger church. Working diligently day and night, they saw this project completed and dedicated in July 2002. We've bought another acre on which to build an auditorium/gym facility, with more parking.

My father is no longer the pastor but still supports the church and helps it grow spiritually. I am proud of my father's accomplishments and his dedication to continuous spiritual growth.

Besides a new building, what are you doing to influence people for Christ?

Sparks church has various events and campaigns that influence people for the gospel. We provide pamphlets, Bibles, and invitations to attend our church. We follow up by providing home Bible studies to those who visit or call us. We praise the Lord for multiplying our members.

Every six weeks we have evangelistic services where we invite friends, family, and church neighbors. We also invite our brethren to join us in worship and to hear the guest preacher. We always end these services with a special prayer inviting the congregation to renew its commitment to God.

Our youth and young adults together are about one third of our total congregation of 140. The youth coordinator, the president, and I work constantly to



Meet Sparks CoG7, El Paso, Texas

BA Interview with Pastor Rogelio Luevano

create activities to motivate and enhance the spiritual life of this group. Every Sabbath morning we have a "Chat with the Pastor" when they ask questions and share thoughts.

In an annual service called "You Are the Greatest," youth are awarded recognitions for their work. The congregation chooses one Youth of the Year, based on certain standards. And the life of an exceptional youth is exemplified to show how our Lord worked and helped him/her that year.

Youth are also involved in the music ministry and in community service. They present plays during our evangelistic services, provide help to anyone in need, and assist in spiritual camps and social gatherings.

El Paso is just across the Mexican border from Juarez, where much drug trade violence hap-

pens. What are churches doing to help in this tragic situation?

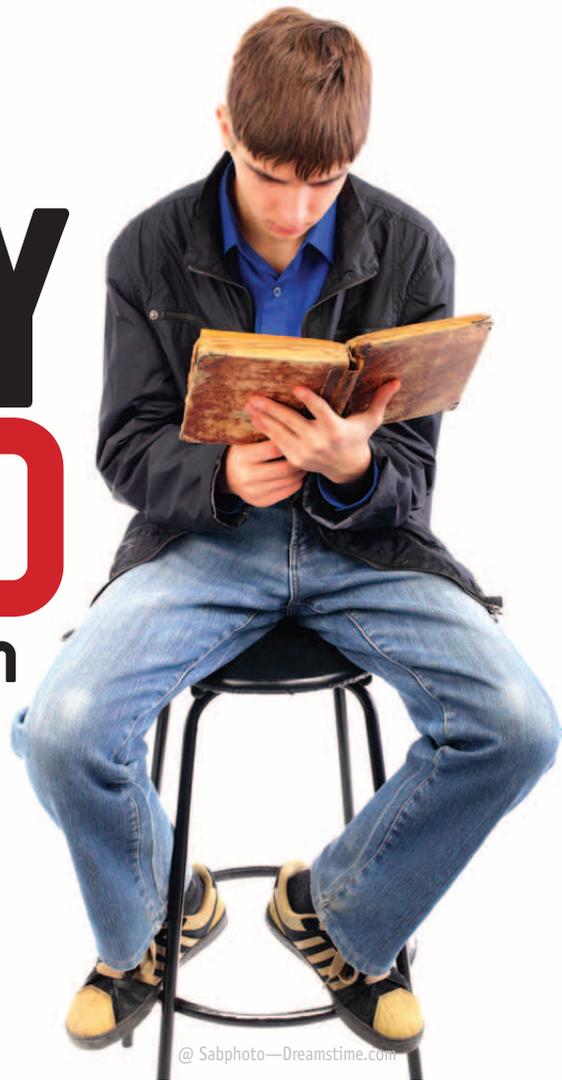
The violence in Juarez has had an incredible impact on our congregation. Violence has increased recently, causing several members from there to cross the border and join the churches in El Paso. Many of our members have family in our sister city and constantly cross the border to visit.

The five congregations in El Paso have a program called Adopt a Church in which each of the five help one of our sister churches in Juarez. Our church assists the church of Barreales, which has suffered greatly due to illegal drug traffic and lack of jobs. We help with blankets, jackets, clothes, food, and school supplies. Our church is in constant prayer and fasting for the peace of our sister city.

DAILY BREAD

What does that mean anyway?

BY MICHAEL MANCHA



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Remember this story in the Bible of God sending manna (food) from heaven to the people of Israel as they made their way through the desert to the Promised Land. He told them they were to take only one day's worth of food for each person in the house — no more and no less. And they were to eat it all, leaving nothing for the morning.

So the people went out and gathered, but some of them didn't eat all they had. They left some for the next day, and in the morning it was rotten and filled with worms.

I wonder sometimes why they left some manna after they were told not to. I can only think that maybe they didn't trust that God would actually provide more the next day. Maybe they felt they had to take matters into their own hands and care for themselves.

Fast forward 1,500 years, and you have the disciples walking with Jesus and asking Him to teach them to pray. This is what He said:

"Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:9-11).

Wait, did He just say . . . "our daily bread"? Did Jesus make a connection back to the Old Testament manna?

He did!

But I'm still wondering . . . what does that really mean? Honestly, it's still a struggle for me to truly believe what I'm saying when I ask God to give me daily bread.

The world offers many different ways to meet your needs. For example, a good job. If you work hard, you'll earn a good paycheck that will, in fact, pay for what you need and even for things you want. Or an education: If you go to college, study hard, and get a degree, that can lead to a job, a good paycheck, and — well, you understand.

When the Israelites were wandering in the desert, they didn't

have other ways of support. It was either God's provision or nothing. That's probably why they kept extra manna. But in our generation, if we choose to trust in our job or education, or even in our parents, instead of in God, we'll probably still have our needs met.

Asking God to be my provider in a world that offers many other provisions is tough. It's much easier to go get what I want than to ask God and wait. What if He says no?

Jesus teaches us a valuable lesson in Matthew 6:

"That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life — whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?" (vv. 25-27, NLT).

Worrying about what they would eat the next day, the children of Israel took matters in their own hands and failed.

I too have done that. I put my dependence on my paycheck, and that failed me, too.

Sure, we can provide for ourselves. We can go to school, get a good job, buy a nice house, and save money. But God wants us to know that His plan is greater than we can imagine.

And you know what? He knows it's not easy to trust Him when there are things out there that sound easier. Just try. Ask God to supply your daily bread and see if what you get isn't better than what you could have gotten for yourself.

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A LETTER FROM MALAWI, AFRICA FOR YOU

Dear CoG7 Young People:

This is a special message for you, more than two-thirds of our membership. I want to open my heart to every one of you, to let you know that I love you very much. I cherish your presence in the Malawi church and value your contribution to it. I am thrilled to know of your involvement in church life; you are indeed the church of today and tomorrow.

What is the secret of spiritual victory to keep you going? Joseph comes to mind here; his life is so rich in lessons.

Being sold by your brothers into slavery would discourage almost anyone. Instead, Joseph surrendered himself and his future to God. For him, trials were a call to prayer. In the same way, the trials of life can deepen our relationship with God and lead us to victory, rather than discourage us.

Genesis 39 reports Joseph's success in overcoming temptation and reveals the keys to his victory. When tempted by Mrs. Potiphar (call it sexual harassment), his response to her tells his formula for victory: "How . . . could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" (v. 9, NIV).

"Against God" is the first clue to Joseph's victory. God was not just a concept for Joseph but was very real in his life. The Lord was with Joseph, and he prospered (v. 3).

From this we learn that the key to success in our Christian walk is the Lord's presence in our lives. We receive and begin to use that key when we accept Jesus as our Savior and practice regular prayer and Bible study. We may have everything, but without Him, we are the poorest of the poor.

The second clue to Joseph's victory is how he regarded sin. Joseph shunned it because he knew sin separates us from God. By making it clear to Potiphar's wife where he stood, he gave us a great example. When we face temptation, let's not say, "Let me think about it" but "No!" We should say it so loud that the one who's tempting us will leave!

Let the young remember that you are in the presence of God wherever you go and whatever you do. Every thought, every word, every act is as distinctly marked as though there were only one person in the world and the attention of heaven is centered upon him or her.

Success in any endeavor requires a definite aim. He who would achieve it must keep steadily in view the worthiness of his goal. Following Christ and giving the gospel to the world in this generation are the noblest endeavors for any human being. It opens the field of effort to everyone whose heart has been touched by God. With such an army of workers as our rightly trained youth might furnish, soon the message of a crucified, risen, and returning Savior can be carried to the whole world.

My dear youths, model the example of Joseph. The promise of God is clear to those who overcome.

Mussa Kwese Ng'ambi
Youth Leader, Malawi CoG7



Message From

by **Steven C. James**

SAD. This acronym stands for *seasonal affective disorder*. It can also represent other problems in a person's life: *sex, abuse, drugs* or perhaps *sarcasm, alcohol, deception*. I battled all these issues unsuccessfully in my younger years; today I sit on death row.

The roots of my SAD began before I was even born. My biological dad was a junkie and thief; my mother, an alcoholic barfly prostitute. Both abused everything and everyone in their lives. My biological mother tried to smother me to death. That's understandable: Anger ruled my parents for the way they were abused as children, and they passed that anger on to me.

My parents put me up for adoption, and the Jameses took me in when I was almost five. They religiously believed "Spare the rod, spoil the child." Well, the rod wasn't spared, and it wasn't always a rod. My adoptive father beat me with anything he could find. I came to that family with more problems than they knew; he only exasperated them.

The day the Jameses said I was their son and my adoptive father tried to hug me, I spit in his face. He didn't understand that I didn't like to be touched. That drew my first spanking from him, but nowhere near the last. After some of his punishments, I was black and blue and bloody.

Come Sunday morning, we all went to church — boring to me. I had to memorize a lot of Scripture, but I didn't believe any of it. Folks there talked about someone they called God the Father. From what I knew of my two fathers, I had no need or want for another. I rejected God from the start and rebelled against the church. For eleven years I was forced to go where I didn't want to go.

As I got older and bigger, I could get anything I wanted. What I couldn't steal, I bought with money I stole. At fourteen I looked to be at least twenty. I could buy alcohol, drugs, and cigarettes without being carded. And with that, I could get women.

Things got worse. By the time I was sixteen, my sixty-year-old adoptive parents with no children of their own had to deal with the total teenage terror I had become. The more I drank, the more enraged I became for being who I was. I discovered that no amount of sex, alcohol, or drugs could take away my hate and rage toward everything and everybody — most of all this God the Father!

By the time I was eighteen, my SAD behavior was out of control. In my rage, I broke all Ten Commandments. I had sex with hundreds of women, including married and single ladies in church. I was angry and full of hate for people. My plan was to be dead by age thirty. Instead I landed in

My Journey

Death Row

prison, on condemned row, convicted of beating a man to death because he wanted to have sex with a fourteen-year-old boy.

In November 1981, twenty-three years old, I began doing straight time. Prison hardened me. In July 1997, I saw a man and his wife killed while in the prison chain gang, and it didn't bother me in the least. What did bother me is that I wasn't bothered by the killings.

Still, God worked on me while I was in prison, from 1982 to October 1997, and I remembered some of the things I had heard in church years earlier. Then He worked *in* me.

I kicked my smoking habit of twenty-five years and decided to fast so I wouldn't start eating heavily. One night in October 1997, while I slept, my TV came on by itself on a channel I didn't watch. When I awoke, a preacher-biker announced that he had written a book, so I sent for a free copy.

With all the alcohol and drugs out of my system, my mind was clear and I could read. However, I didn't think much of the book, so I sent for a study on the Seventh-day Adventists. As I began reading their study, I shook my head in disagreement. *This is not what's taught in Sunday school*, I said to myself.

I decided to wait and read the Bible first, beginning in Genesis. After some time, I sensed an inner voice telling me, "Repent and be forgiven." I did, and have

been listening to that voice ever since.

I began searching the Word of God compulsively to disprove the SDA studies. I received books, four or five at a time, and read them. Many things I still disagreed with, so I went searching for another church. That's when I found Church of God (Seventh Day), listed in a writer's market guide. In 1998 I started corresponding with editor Calvin Burrell, and he explained the teachings of CoG7. While I still disagree with some things, I agree more with this church than with any other I've found.

I have spent over a quarter century locked in prison — more than half my life — as the result of my own SAD. Guards or other inmates prepare my food and bring it to me in solitary confinement. Though I don't know much about the world outside, I do know I have new life from Christ on the inside.

Prison is hard under any circumstance. Add the religious factor, and many people will call it weakness — a crutch. The majority of so-called Christians on the inside use religion for self-serving reasons and never experience inner life change or work for God's holy purpose in others.

I was recently advised to turn away from another man, to have nothing more to do with him. He is black and I am white, and someone doesn't like him. The root of the hatred is not skin but spirit. I refused to turn away from



Steven C. James

my Christian brother. He is not a pretender; we worship together in daily fellowship with Jesus, passing notes of psalms and other Scripture. It took eleven years for him to see that my walk was true, for he had known my previous hatred and anger; some of it was directed toward him.

The daily choices we make dictate the lives we live, and we must accept the consequences of those choices. Genuine godly love in prison is when you put your honor into action for one another, regardless of the cost. The way you think and speak must hold true in your actions.

One cannot force others to hear God's Word, so when they requested I not speak openly for more than ten years, I humbly agreed. That has changed in the last year, as I now live in another area. I still do not force my faith, but I preach and teach openly as the Spirit leads. I truly enjoy sharing and rejoice in all things (1 Peter 4:11).

Grace and peace in Christ Jesus to all His children. Amen.

If you want to write Steven James, please send your letter to Bible Advocate, P.O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233. Or e-mail it to bibleadvocate@cog7.org.

Churches Are Different by Calvin Burrell

Exactly a third of New Testament books — nine of 27 — are written by the apostle Paul to congregations he cared for. We learn much about them and about the broader body of Christ by studying those letters. Here, we introduce four.

Galatians: Resist Legalism. Churches in Galatia, begun by persons who trusted Christ and received the Spirit, were later misled. Some Judaizing teachers had visited them, saying that even Gentiles, to maintain the salvation received through grace, now needed to be circumcised and obey the whole law. Such a perversion of gospel truth aroused Paul's indignation to a higher pitch than seen in any other epistle. This letter's apex comes early in chapter 5, where Paul urges believers to stand fast in Christian liberty, lest they fall from God's grace. In other letters, Paul upholds the law of God, when properly used (see 1 Tim. 1:8-11). Galatians stands out as the epistle of freedom from law — any law — as a means of justification before God.

Philippians: Rejoice Always. Facing conflicts within and persecution without, the church in Philippi had cause for celebration when this affirming letter came from Paul. Of the churches he founded or visited, this one may have provided his fondest memories (see Acts 16:12-40). Two classic passages highlight the letter: the familiar cadence of the humiliation and exaltation of our Lord Jesus Christ (2:5-11) and Paul's personal testimony in trading his confidences in Judaism for the excellence of knowing Christ (3:3-14). Though written from a Roman jail, Paul persists in encouraging Philippian believers in their struggles by repeating the word *joy* (or *re-joyce*) 16 times.

Colossians: All About Him. Never having visited the church in Colosse, Paul writes because he has heard of false *isms* threatening its spiritual welfare. These heresies involved pagan elements like worship of angels, Jewish elements like new moon festivals, and philosophical elements, along with Christian components. To counteract this syncretism (compare New Age thought of our day), Paul presents Christ's deity, preeminence, and headship; His suffering-saving work; His indwelling presence; His sufficiency and superiority over the angels; and His destiny to appear and share His glory with believers. This marvelous portrayal of Jesus fills the letter's first half, followed by practical implications of the gospel in the latter half.

Thessalonians: He's Coming. The church in Thessalonica, not far from Philippi, received Paul's warm affection, similar to that expressed to Philippi. Regarding doctrine, this church was confused about Jesus' return. Perhaps they had written to the apostle, asking about prophetic issues. Chapters 4 and 5 of the first epistle contain Paul's simple and explicit teaching regarding the blessed hope of every Christian: the second coming of Christ and the resurrection of the righteous dead, to His glorious presence (with saints alive when He appears). In the second epistle, Paul corrects wrong impressions that some evidently received from the first letter. Jesus will return, he insists, but not until a great apostasy from the faith happens first.

Reader response: Which of these four church types have you been part of? What truths need to be re-taught to correct or encourage each of these churches? E-mail us or share your thoughts on Facebook!

Have you ever yielded to or been held captive by the ideas and prevailing mood of others?

When those around you assent to one opinion and you're still not convinced, where does that leave you?

Peer pressure. We're not affected by it, are we?

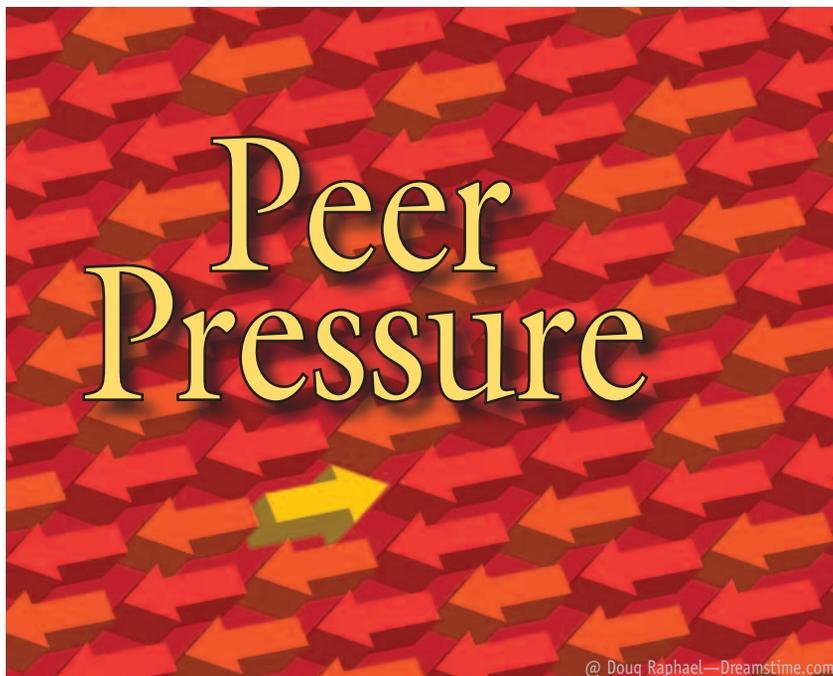
To varying degrees, we have all experienced it. There's good peer influence and not-so-good peer pressure.

It's not just a "youth" thing either. Many adults have yielded to peer pressure, with results that they too have come to regret. This subtle kind of social pressure dictates what we wear, how we talk, and what we do. Do changing fashion trends, for example, affect your purchasing habits? Or on a more serious note, are you afraid your friends will find out that for the first time in your life, you're asking questions about Jesus?

Perhaps you feel the opposite as a resourceful individual whose life's course has allowed you to think independently. Peer ideas have had little effect on you. You don't need religion, for example, to be told what's morally right or wrong. The last thing you need now is a Savior. Or do you?

Whether you lean toward a faith-based belief or are affected by an increasing secularism, could your position be a result of those you associate with? If so, you're not alone. A lot of people are, to one degree or another, affected by peer influence.

Let's look at an example of an intelligent man in leadership, recorded in Scripture, who privately wrestled with the very same issues.



A minor player in John's Gospel offers a character study in standing for Christ. by John Klassek

Night meeting

A man named Nicodemus came to Jesus by the cover of night. You can read what happened in John chapter 3.

Nicodemus was a part of the influential Jewish sect called the Pharisees, who, according to the Gospel accounts, opposed Jesus on almost everything He did. It was a power struggle that played itself out in their many confrontations.

The Pharisees' role as ruling council in Jewish society dictated almost every facet of their daily lives, from ritual washings and fastidious observance of trivial matters to the oral traditions surrounding Sabbath observance. It's no wonder Nicodemus didn't want to be seen fraternizing with non-conforming Jesus; it would have been politically incorrect, risking his standing among his fellow Pharisees.

John gives us some insight into

what was really happening when he wrote about those events:

Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God (John 12:42, 43).

Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus that night is a subject by itself. Nicodemus asked Jesus about His identity, and Jesus discussed rebirth. Later, as the two men parted, it's anybody's guess as to the turmoil turning over in Nicodemus' heart.

Sometime later, when Jesus was again hunted by the Pharisees, Nicodemus' ambivalence is reflected by his probing question to them: "Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?" (7:51).



Nicodemus was gripped by a curiosity and an irrepressible interest in this Jesus, but he didn't want to be "seen" being true to his inner convictions.

Thankfully, there's more to the story. After Jesus had been crucified, Nicodemus appeared again, this time with a Joseph of Arimathea. These men, not among Jesus' public disciples, courageously asked governor Pilate for the body, and together they buried Jesus according to the Jewish customs (19:38-42).

This raises a question: Did it take this brutal death for Nicodemus to finally break free from his Christ-rejecting peers? The evidence suggests as much.

Troubled man

Jesus noted that Nicodemus was a "teacher in Israel." As a rabbi in the tradition of the Pharisees, he would have been well schooled in the Scriptures. Privy to "in house" discussions among the Pharisees, he was also well aware of all that Jesus was becoming known for. Nicodemus must have been troubled by this "Messiah" business.

Nicodemus could have just as easily come to Jesus by day, but he was afraid of the consequences. Jesus didn't meet his worldview of the Messiah, nor did He adhere to the oral Jewish "traditions of the elders." The impact of Jesus on the lives of

common people, let alone His perceived threat to Nicodemus' priestly standing in society, was too great to ignore.

The evidence points to the fact that Nicodemus was gripped by a curiosity and an irrepressible interest in this Jesus, but he was also stymied by peer pressure. He didn't want to be "seen" being true to his inner convictions.

Turnaround

In the end, Nicodemus, in his own time and with his own story, made a complete turnaround. He repented. He was no longer afraid of what his peers might think. It no longer mattered to him that he had "defiled himself" by handling the corpse of Christ. It would have been a sad as well as defining act to physically handle that dead, bloodied body. As a Pharisee, Nicodemus was not permitted to touch a corpse, yet he broke all convention by joining Joseph of Arimathea in wrapping the crucified body of Jesus and placing it in the hewn tomb.

Nicodemus had finally overcome the adversary of negative peer pressure. In coming to faith in Jesus as the Messiah, his experience may have been just as

personally difficult as anything we might face today.

For the rest of his days, Nicodemus would have become a devoted part of the early Christian community, possibly among the five hundred people who witnessed the resurrected Jesus.

Honest look

Considering the story of Nicodemus, where are you on your journey?

Can you relate to Nicodemus' experience? Is peer influence holding you back from coming to a covenant relationship with Jesus Christ? Are you worried about what your friends or family might say, or how it might affect your corporate or political status?

Nicodemus took that tentative step by going to Jesus. In the weeks and months that followed that secretive visit, having weighed in on the debates and seeing the Messiah killed, he could no longer deny the overwhelming evidence.

It's time to take an honest look at where you are in relation to Jesus. It's time to examine what the Scriptures really say about Him. It's time to put God to the trust and, coming to Christ, publicly embrace Him at last. **BA**

John Klassek produces short gospel films for television (www.message7.org) from his home in Perth, Western Australia. Scripture quotations are from *New International Version*.



No other paragraph in the Gospels portrays our Lord with the breadth of view and depth of hue as John's prologue, the first 18 verses of his opening chapter.

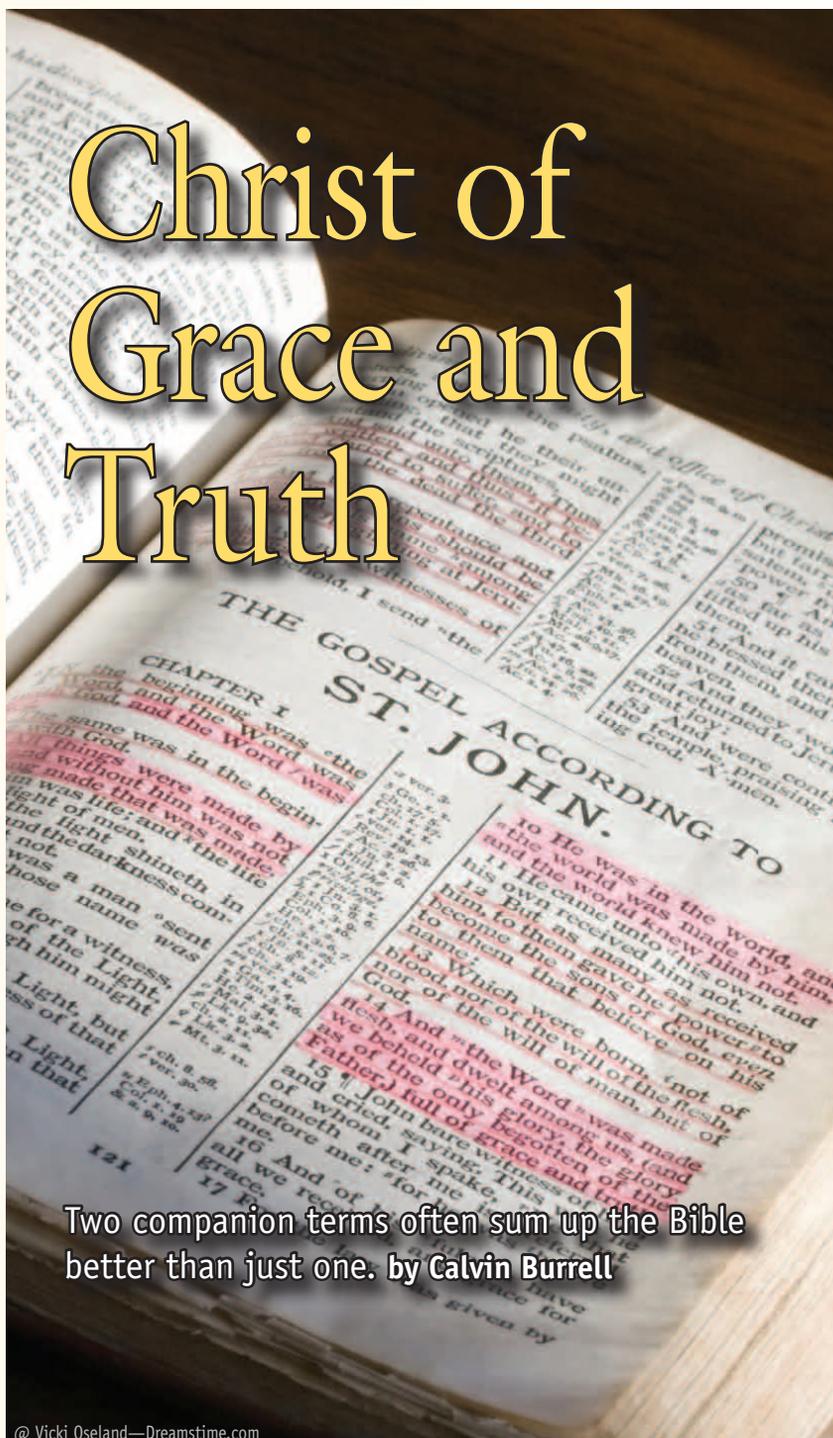
Here we meet, and are met with, *the Word*. When time began, says the prologue, *the Word* was already *with* God – this inspires us; and it was God – this puzzles us. *The Word* powerfully produced the universe and everything in it: God spoke and bang! It happened (vv. 1-3).

Another primary quality of *the Word*, according to John, is the life that resides in Him. This life provides light for all to see so they might believe Him, receive Him, and become the children of God through spiritual rebirth (vv. 4-13).

The zenith of this lofty, lovely text is reached in verse 14: "*The Word* became flesh and dwelt among us . . ."! Meditate on what it says: He who was *with* the Creator and was the Creator, He who provides light for life to all who believe and receive Him – He became the incarnated One and pitched His tent with us humans. This is Eternity entering time, Heaven visiting earth, God becoming man! The Father's glory was seen and savored in the only begotten Son!

Heaven's glory came compactly to Earth and to men in Jesus Christ, this text announces, and yet there is more. Verse 14 concludes with five neglected words, trailing as they do at the end of the astonishing first 24: *full of grace and truth*.

Just two small words, *grace* and *truth*; their letters total ten. But what's expressed in those two words must free the souls of men!



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Two sides

Grace points us to the loving side of the gospel. Because God is love, we may find unmerited favor/grace in His eyes. *Grace* means that He loves, forgives, and accepts us – just as we are. It takes a lot of grace to save all

the world's sinners, and that's just how much we find in God's Son. Our Savior has His Father's eyes; He is full of grace!

Truth, on the other hand, points us to the gospel's living side. Because God is holy, He will not leave us just as we were, to live as we did previously. The

Beyond John's Prologue

Chapter	Grace	Truth
1	God's lamb removes sin (v. 29)	Follow Him (v. 43)
2	He manifested His glory (v. 11)	Respect God's house (v. 16)
3	Verse 16	Verse 21
4	Verse 14	Verse 24
5	Believe in Him, have life (v. 24)	Honor Him as the Father (v. 23)
6	Eat Bread of life, don't die (vv. 48, 50)	His Words are life (v. 63)
7	Come to Me and drink (vv. 37, 38)	Will to do His will (v. 17)
8	I don't condemn you (v. 11a)	Go, sin no more (v. 11b)
9	I was blind; now I see (v. 25)	Work while it is day (v. 4)
10	Verses 9, 11	Verses 27, 16
11	Verses 25, 26	Verses 10, 11
12	He is the light (v. 46)	Become sons of light (v. 36)
13	You are clean (v. 10)	Blessed are the doers (v. 17)
14	Verses 1-3	Verses 15, 23
15	Verse 5	Verse 6
16	Verse 22	Verses 7-13
17	I keep Mine; none is lost (v. 12)	Your Word sets them apart (v. 16-18)
18	My kingdom is from above (v. 36)	Hear My voice of truth (v. 37)
19	They crucified Him (vv. 16-18)	Scripture was fulfilled (vv. 24-37)
20	Peace to you (v. 21a)	I send you (v. 22b)
21	Come and eat (vv. 5, 12)	Feed My sheep (vv. 15-17)

truth is that when we believe and receive, we are changed to begin walking with the Lord in the light of His Word. It takes a lot of truth to procure the freedom and abundance He intends for us, and that's just what the Spirit teaches and imparts to us in a lifetime. Our Lord brings the Father's Word; He is full of truth!

The grace of Jesus gazes at the gifts of forgiveness and eter-

nal life, given to us through His death and resurrection. We don't deserve these favors, but we get them at the cross. The acronym **God's Riches At Christ's Expense** captures this thought in memorable form. The fullness of saving grace is in Him, the crucified and risen One.

The *truth* of Jesus, on the other hand, extends beyond His death and resurrection (though

it includes them) to embrace His entire life from glory to glory, especially His teachings and example while on Earth. The truth is that all of life is guided by a set of divine rules and principles that we ignore at our own peril. We learn these from Him whose life and words were full of truth.

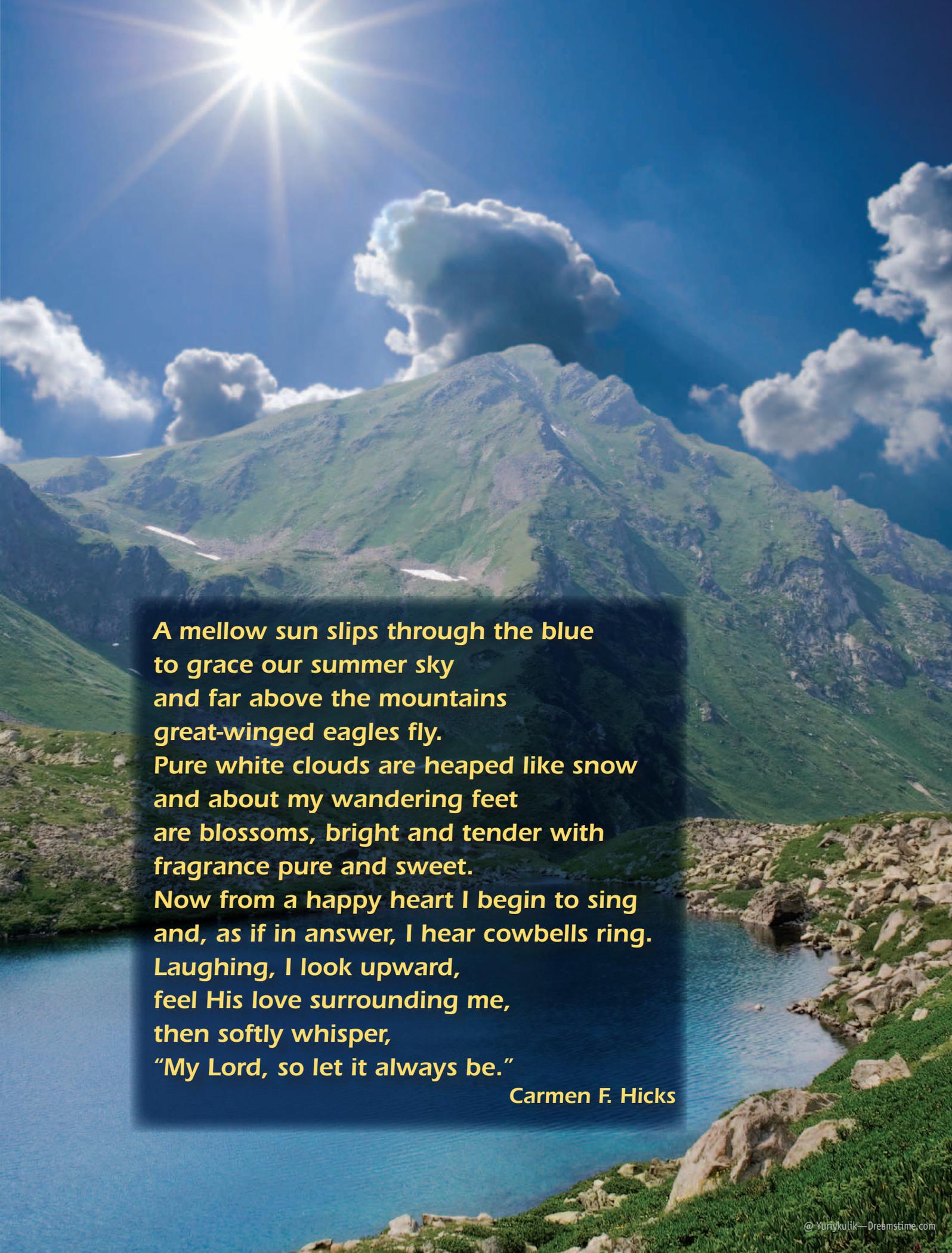
Fuller meanings of *grace* and *truth* may be apprehended by how those concepts are used and "fleshed out" in all John's Gospel. The word *grace* is not found in John after 1:14-17, but the thought is in his every chapter. The word *truth* is a staple of the entire book (study the sidebar).

And nothing more!

John's prologue introduces powerful words and phrases to enhance our grasp of the Bible's central message: *Word, life, and light; believe and receive; Word became flesh; and only begotten Son of God*. Many more good words and terms appear in the balance of the book: *I Am, love and keep, bread and water, above and beneath, shepherd and sheep, vine and branches, abide and bear fruit*.

The last verse of this Gospel (21:25) supposes that the world itself could not contain all the books that might be written about the things Jesus said and did. That is probably true, but every word in all those books would fit somewhere under one or both of these headings: the *grace* of our Savior and the *truth* of our Lord.

If we have the grace and truth of Jesus Christ and the gospel, my friend, we have it all! **BA**



**A mellow sun slips through the blue
to grace our summer sky
and far above the mountains
great-winged eagles fly.
Pure white clouds are heaped like snow
and about my wandering feet
are blossoms, bright and tender with
fragrance pure and sweet.
Now from a happy heart I begin to sing
and, as if in answer, I hear cowbells ring.
Laughing, I look upward,
feel His love surrounding me,
then softly whisper,
"My Lord, so let it always be."**

Carmen F. Hicks

Did you know . . .

- that among the twenty-one 2010 seniors, Alex Rincker and Brendon Noble tied for the Academic Excellence award and Alex also received the Spiritual Leadership and Student of the Year awards? Recipients were honored during graduation festivities at Spring Vale the weekend of May 29.
- that LifeSpring School of Ministry selected SVA's campus for its two-week Summer Session in June this year, with about 50 ministerial students attending?
- that the academy's energy team plans to apply new exterior insulation with a bright, durable finish to both Spring Vale dorms in July and August? If you can volunteer a week or more to assist with labor, contact Ken Riggs at 1mobileken@gmail.com.



Photo: Jesse Edwards, SVA alumnus (class of 2007)

Spring Vale Academy

Mark Caswell, Director

Our legacy: 62 years of faithful ministry.

Our mission: "To disciple young people to Jesus Christ, the Master Teacher, preparing them to be Christian leaders and workers. . . ."

When you read *Already Gone*, by Ken Ham, and learn that 76 percent of youth in today's churches will stop attending as young adults, you can't help but take notice. Spring Vale Academy recognizes the need for a biblical worldview; we're upholding the Genesis account and the authority of Scripture by teaching and defending the Bible from its very first verse.

- All science is approached from a creationist perspective, with a creation segment in each course.
- An Earth Science course explains 17 significant geologic features from a creation and worldwide flood perspective.
- TrueU, an apologetics curriculum, supports the truth of creation and the authority of Scripture.
- Emphasizing the truth of Genesis reinforces all Scripture as God's inspired Word.
- Biblical Interpretation class, required of all juniors, establishes the Bible from a historical and evidentiary perspective.

- The Truth Project emphasizes God as the ultimate source for truth.

Spring Vale Academy is on the front lines of the culture war, battling for your youth. In no other place in our church does a group of adults gather daily to mentor and invest in our youth than right here at SVA.

But we can't fight this battle alone; we need your help! Sponsor a student today and help build leaders for tomorrow. Will you join us in the fight?

Now enrolling for the 2010-2011 school year. Dorms open August 18, with first day of school on August 19.

Students eighth grade and above, call 989-725-2391 or download application information from www.springvale.us. Send your application today. See you this fall!



Facebook and 'Flip' BA Online

Connect with the BA and General Conference on Facebook! Post questions and comments on each issue, and get the latest on Conference news, events, publications, and more. Become a fan!

Also look for the new "flip" version of the BA at www.cog7.org/BA.

Convention in Africa

The first general convention of the East and Central African churches will be held December 1-5, 2010, at the Good Samaritan Auditorium in Nakuru, Kenya. This event is an opportunity for CoG7 representatives from ten or more countries to meet, worship, and learn together, using the theme "Celebrating our Diversities Through Christ."

For more information, contact Robert Crawford at 07864290466 or e-mail robertashcrawford@hotmail.com.

Golden Anniversaries

Congratulations to . . .

- Jesse and Delia Gallego, of the Willard St. Church in San Antonio, Texas, who celebrated 50 years of marriage on February 28, 2010.

- Dennis and Lou Wallen of Milton-Freewater, Oregon (Walla Walla, Washington, church); they'll celebrate 50 on July 16, 2010.

Please notify the editor of other CoG7 golden anniversaries this year.



Pastor Dedication

Sabbath, May 1, Brother Oscar Mata was dedicated as pastor of a new congregation in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Shown here with Central District Superintendent Tim Endecott (left) and Ministerial Representative Steve Kyner (right), Mata and his family emigrated from Guatemala earlier this year. He also assists with groups in Worthington, Minnesota; Schuyler, Nebraska; and Mitchell, South Dakota, in addition to Sioux Falls.

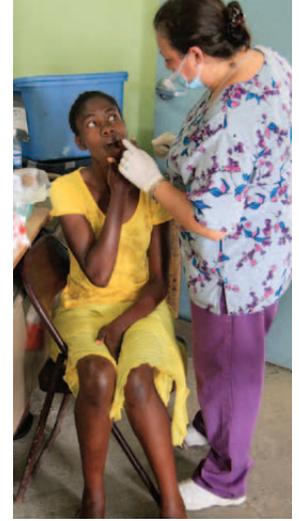
NW Regional BLOOMSDAY Retreat

The Spokane, Washington, SWORD group hosted a youth/young adult retreat at historic Zephyr Lodge on beautiful Liberty Lake, the weekend of May 1, attended by about 77 youth. Nampa, Idaho, Pastor Monico Muffley spoke on the theme "Bloom!" Kurt Stranberg and Jesse Hicks led the SWORD class, and Johnny Hicks and Adam Stranberg led the FYC class. This weekend was filled with inspiration, challenge, worship, fellowship, and fun. On Sunday a.m., 18 young folks ran in Spokane's Bloomsday Race.





2010 SHINE: Serving Him In Nations Everywhere



Miracle of Medications

by **Bev Brenneise**

God tells us to trust Him in all things. The SHINE Medical and Dental Mission team practiced this on its April 1-7 trip to Jamaica. Our clinics were held in Spanish Town (near Kingston) and at Paradise CoG7 church (in Montego Bay). Glasses – 300 pairs – were distributed. Nearly 1,800 total patients were seen; seven people are doing follow-up work. Yet perhaps the most touching event was the miracle of medications.

Preparations for the Jamaica mission were difficult: mountains of paperwork to approve doctors, dentists, nurses, and assistants and rigid regulations for medications. We decided to purchase medications in Jamaica rather than try to carry them through customs.

SHINE missions provide four basic benefits: free medical clinics, free dental clinics, free medications (about \$20,000 per mission), and follow-up help for a few special-needs cases. This year's funds just wouldn't cover it all.

When earthquakes struck Haiti, more problems popped up: We couldn't buy medications in Jamaica, and secure hotel accommodations for our largest team yet (45) were scarce. We determined to forge on with what funds we had, knowing we couldn't follow up special needs.

At the last minute, \$30,000 worth of medications was donated by King's Way Charities International Medical Ministry and mailed with only five days to reach Jamaica and be approved by its Ministry of Health. Two days later, mission families mailed an additional \$1,400 worth of medications.

On the flight, two doctors carried large bags filled with medications. Thanks to team prayers, these bags were not confiscated, so we had enough for the first day! Donated medications arrived the next day and were used for the remaining clinics. At the final clinic, doctors wrote several prescriptions purchased by a local pastor. The medications sent by the two mission families were not released by the Ministry of Health until after SHINE left Jamaica.

Money that SHINE had planned for medications paid for follow-up cases, so SHINE *did* provide its four basic benefits, thanks to God's efficiency.

This year's team encountered many challenges. A young pastor was diagnosed with diabetes. Two team members fought depression. Individuals suffered severe back pain, shoulder pain, and family crises. A nurse broke her ankle. One couple's son had unexpected surgery the day before they left. Two people missed flights en route to the mission, and a member's sister had a heart attack.

Yet God sustained all 45 of us who participated, just as He had the mission.

CoG7 Events

Michigan Youth Camp, July 18-25 - Junior and Senior Campers, Hopkins, MI (Camp Mel Trotter); contact: Rex Miller (*kingmerex@aol.com*)

Dakotas Youth Retreat, July 23-25 - Devils Lake, ND (Lakewood Bible Camp); speakers: Tim and Debbie Steinhouser; contact: Steve Kyner (*tohiswork1@msn.com*)

SIS-Q Meadows Youth Camp (ages 13-18), July 25 - August 1; Cave Junction, OR; contact: Vona Ogren (*hogren@msn.com*)

West Coast (Central CA) Youth Camp (junior and senior campers), July 26 - August 1; Capital Mt., Weimar, CA; contact: Larry Zaragoza (*zman52@msn.com*)

Southeast District Youth Camp, July 25 - August 1 (**note corrected dates!**); Camp Lapihio, Umstead State Park, Raleigh, NC; contact: Sandy Jones, DYC (*june.bug810@gmail.com*)

Southwest Sword Retreat, September 3-6; Camp Cimarron, near Dover, OK; register: <http://bit.ly/yministry>; contacts: Ruben/Tatiana (405-371-5447) or Danny/Jacqui (405-473-7227)

Michigan Retreats, September 10-12 - women: - "Girls, Girls, Girls"; October 8-10 - men: "Transformers"; both at The Springs, Gladwin, MI; info: www.cog7thdaysaginaw.com

Michigan Super Sabbath, September 25 - Freeland, MI; contact: *bruce.noble@cog7.org*

What About "Change for Your World"?



Imagine what would happen if we all gave just a little to encourage the growth of our church around the world. Imagine all of us saving our pocket change to enable the administration of our global church for the organizational and leadership work demanded of it daily. With our heavenly Father's blessings, we could change our world!

Today we are trying to develop our staff and services to meet growing needs. New contacts come in from every inhabited continent nearly every day. You have been so generous in supporting Disaster Relief, orphans and widows, and other facets of our G. C. Missions Ministries; now we need support for your International Ministerial Congress (IMC) as well.

Every year in July we dedicate an offering to help our IMC cover its leadership and administration costs. These needs are not as apparent as those for medical missions, earthquakes, hurricanes, famine, and war; but without the work of our IMC staff, none of our other foreign missions would be as effective as they are. IMC is the track on which the train we call CoG7 runs around the world. Our missions ministries have grown in recent years, because IMC exists to bind our efforts together.

IMC coordinates evangelistic effort to encourage the work of preaching the gospel within our global conferences and churches.

IMC promotes doctrinal unity to bring us together doctrinally from our diverse international backgrounds.

This July please encourage your church to save their pocket change - and more - so that the IMC can reach the ends of the earth with the truth of Jesus Christ and His soon-coming kingdom. With your help, and God's grace, this Change for Your World can be the best offering ever and the cause of Christ will spread more effectively. Never forget that Jesus' cross makes change possible.

Thanks for your prayers and Change for Your World support.

Yours because of Calvary,

William (Bill) C. Hicks
IMC Executive Director
www.cog7missions.org

International Tour



@ Kalina Vova—Dreamstime.com

Africa

Church of God (Seventh Day) is officially recognized in eleven African nations. Affiliated churches are in Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, Cameroon, DR Congo, Malawi, Rwanda, Sierra Leon, Uganda, Tanzania, and Zambia. These compose Zone 5 of our International Ministerial Congress (IMC).

This continent's most populous place, in both citizenry and CoG7 membership, is Nigeria. The Church there has thrived under indigenous leadership, with the assistance of mission visits from U.S. and IMC personnel, including Charles and Eileen Adams, Roy Marrs, Robert Coulter, Victor Burford, Bill Hicks, and Ramon Ruiz.

In early spring of 2010, Pastor Robert Crawford, representing Missions Abroad and IMC, left his home in the U.K. for a planned 17-day tour in Nigeria, hosted by CoG7 leadership there. Despite hindrances of weather and travel, including the eight-day postponement of his return flight due to volcanic ash, the good hand of the Lord was upon this mission. Photos here tell some of the story, and written reports add much more (www.cog7missions.org; click on Missions Reports).

Thanks be to God for the recent visit of IMC Zone 5 Representative Robert Crawford to Nigeria and for the vitality of the Church in that great country.





Church and Culture

My “I Have a Dream” speech usually goes over well. But this time it prompted concern, based on the line “I have a dream of a Church of God (Seventh Day) that will seek not only doctrinal accuracy but also cultural relevance.”

Privately, I was quick to explain that balance, not substitution, was my objective. Focus on culture at the expense of truth dishonors God, but so does being “so heavenly minded that we’re no earthly good.” Our broken world needs the message and ministry of the church. Effective ministry in our world requires relating to it, feeling its pulse, and understanding its language.

Again, we’re faced with the need for balance. Major shifts in the culture since 1960 have resulted in “a brave new world” where pluralism reigns and all religious and political views are equal and must be tolerated. Exclusivity is unacceptable. There can’t be only one way to whatever we believe God is. World religions are just different paths to the same destiny.

Relativism is pluralism’s twin philosophy. The next natural step from “all views are equal” is to “all truth is relative”: We can choose our own truth as we like it. Such thinking comes at the expense of logic and laws of non-contradiction. In this scenario, the church, teaching a logical and consistent worldview, is at a disadvantage.

Accordingly, it is difficult to distinguish between a relativized church and the world:

As evangelical faith becomes secularized, its interests have been blurred with those of the culture. The result is a loss of absolute values, permissive individualism, and a substitution of wholeness for holiness, recovery for repentance, intuition for truth, feeling for belief, chance for providence, and immediate gratification for endur-

ing hope. Christ and his cross have moved from the center of our vision (The Cambridge Declaration of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, April 20, 1996, www.alliancenet.org).

When mainline evangelicals admit their failure in this regard, the rest of us would do well to pay attention. Emphasis on cultural relevance is needed in some churches more than others. I’m blessed with a pastor who regularly points our congregation beyond its walls. Jesus did not ignore culture; neither can a church that claims commitment to Him.

The critical issue is culture without compromise — not allowing culture to dictate or dilute the message of the cross, preaching a gospel that transcends culture. A signer of the Cambridge Declaration, Dr. R. C. Sproul, puts it this way:

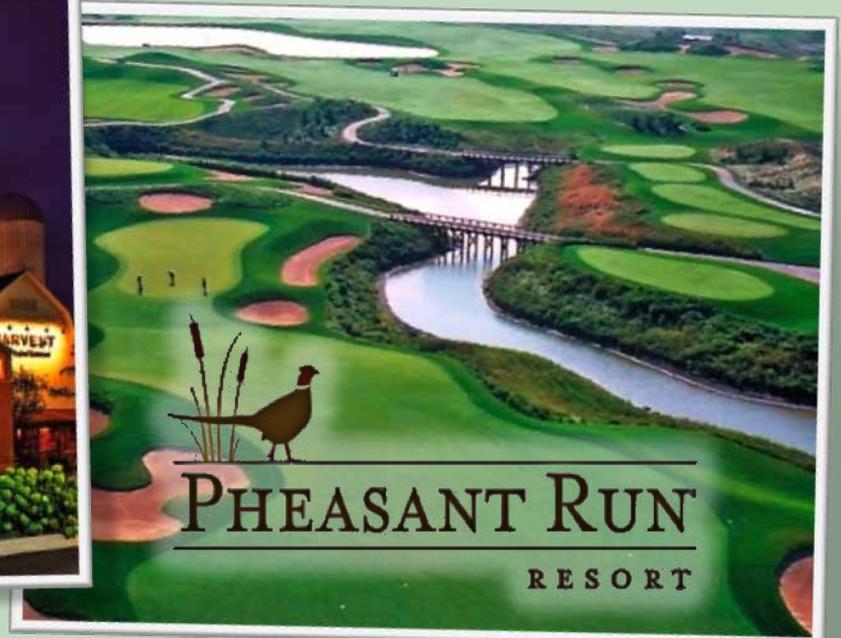
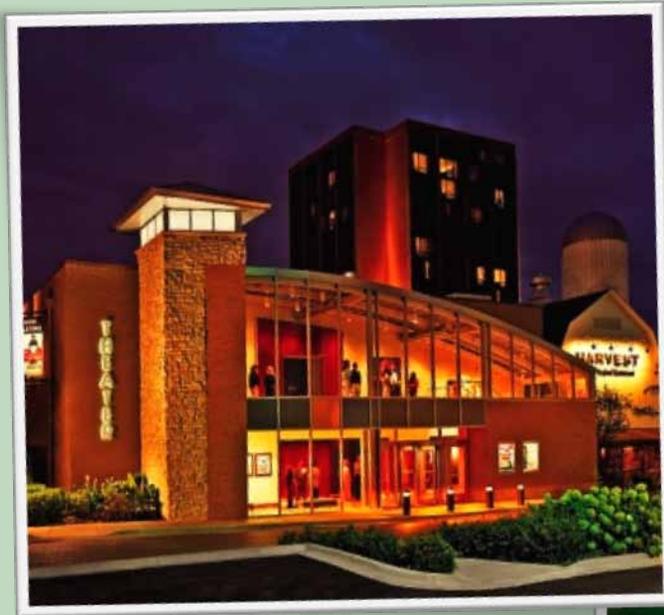
What is demanded by times such as ours is a church that addresses the temporal while at the same time remaining tethered to the eternal — a church that speaks, comforts, and heals all things moral and secular without itself abandoning the eternal and the holy. The church must always face the question of whether its commitment is to sanctity or profanity. We need churches filled with Christians who are not enslaved by the culture, churches that seek more than anything to please God and His only begotten Son, rather than to attract the applause of dying men and women (*Tabletalk*, April 2010, p. 7).

I have a dream of a church that will dare to represent God’s unchanging standards in changing times. Its ministry to the culture is neither antagonistic nor appeasing but rather, seasoned with gentleness and love (1 Peter 3:15, 16); declaring our God who is holy, just, and mighty to save; proclaiming Christ, clothed in majesty and plenteous in mercy. May this dream become reality, to the praise of His glory.

— Whaid Guscott Rose
General Conference President

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Mark Your Calendar!

General Conference Convention

July 18-23, 2011

Pheasant Run Resort
St. Charles (Chicago), IL



General Conference
Church of God (Seventh Day)

Come celebrate our fellowship,
conduct the business of the Church,
and worship our Lord Jesus.

More information:
convention.cog7.org