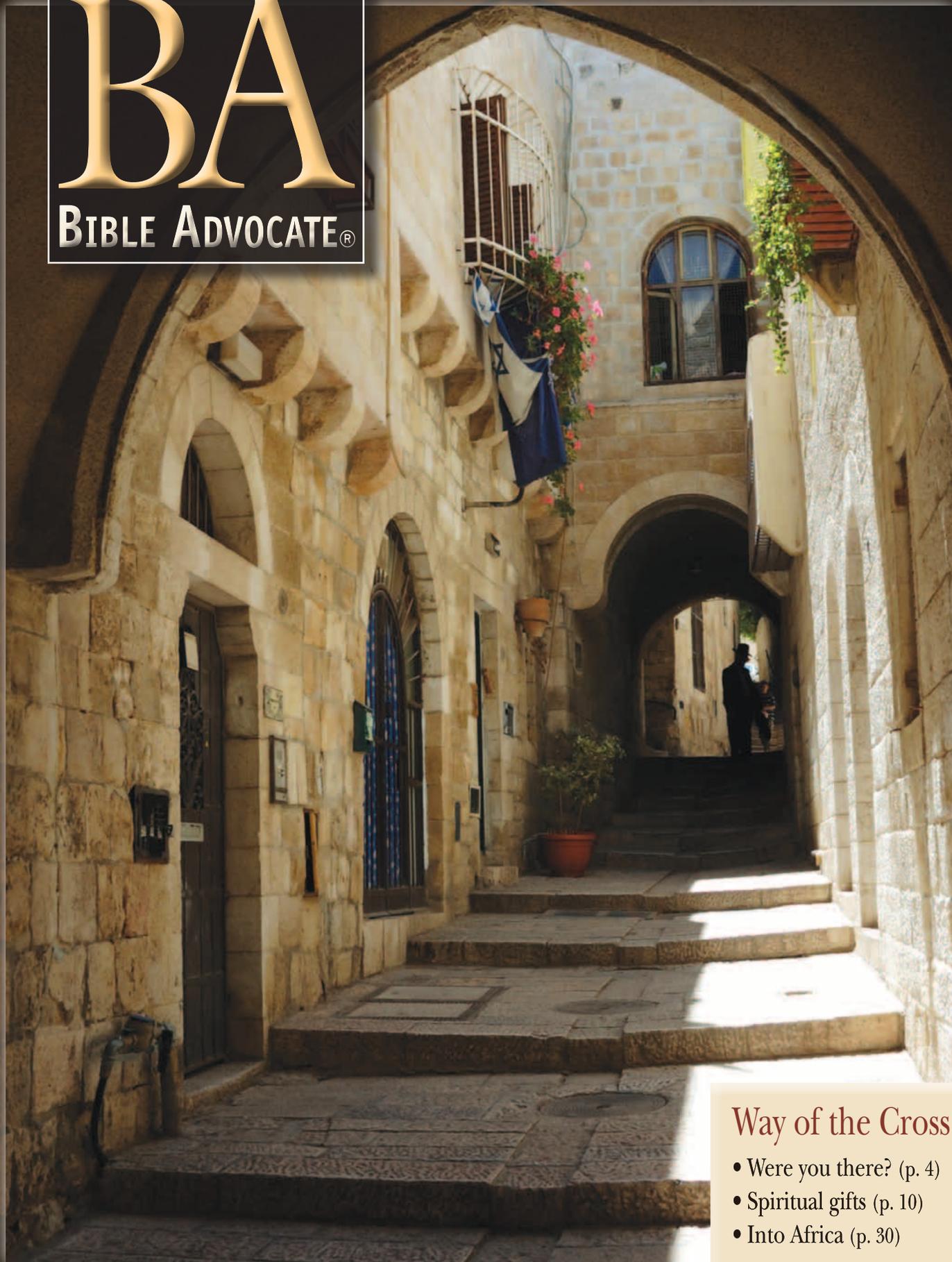


BA

BIBLE ADVOCATE®



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A publication of the

Church of God (Seventh Day)

This magazine is published to advocate the Bible, represent the Church, and glorify the God of grace and truth.

Volume 146 • Number 2

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The BIBLE ADVOCATE (ISSN 0746-0104) is published bimonthly by Bible Advocate Press, 330 W. 152nd Ave., Broomfield, CO 80023. Periodicals postage is paid at Broomfield, CO, and at additional offices. Subscription is free to any who ask. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Bible Advocate Press, Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233-0677.

Bible Advocate Press

Calvin Burrell: Editor

Sherri Langton: Associate Editor

Keith Michalak: Director of Publications, graphics

Sylvia Corral, Raul González: Translation, proofing

LeRoy and Hope Dais, Linda Michalak: Correspondence, proofing, clerical

Subscriptions and Orders

Bible Advocate Press
P.O. Box 33677
Denver, CO 80233-0677
phone: 303/452-7973
fax: 303/452-0657
e-mail: bibleadvocate@cog7.org
orders: bap.orders@cog7.org

Notice: Send all address changes and other correspondence to the address above.

Publications Agreement No. 40042428

The Bible Advocate Online appears at www.BAonline.org.

Cover photo: @ Luliia Kryzhevskaa—Dreamstime.com

The Crux of It All

How do we reduce Scripture's complexity to its essence and keep the main thing the main thing? I ask because I'm thinking BA should print large what the Bible prints large and make small what it makes small. Love is the best news we have. Here's why.

- Love never fails (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).
- Love identifies Jesus' true disciples (John 13:35).
- God is the greatest and God is love (1 John 4:8, 16).
- Love, the only valid debt, fulfills the law (Romans 13:8-10).
- Love, the duty above all others, covers many sins (1 Peter 4:8).
- Faith, hope, and love remain, but the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13:13).
- Loving God and others sums up the law: Do this and live (Matthew 22:36-40; Luke 10:25-28).
- Christ's love is the one thing that trusting Christians can never be separated from (Romans 8:35-39).
- Christ's singular, definitive command to His followers is that they love one another (John 13:34; 15:12, 17).
- Love was basic to the old covenant as it is to the new (Leviticus 19:18; Deuteronomy 6:5; 7:7, 8; 10:15).

Love is the great, two-way connector between heaven and earth. Though our love for God is a true response, His love is long prior and far superior to ours (1 John 4:19). His is constant and robust, while ours is inconsistent and frail by comparison. His kind care does its greatest work in us as we learn and practice the same unselfish concern for others — believers or not.

The crux of God's love is the cross of Christ — love printed large. Human depravity and heaven's devotion intersect there. The Bible's greatest text (John 3:16) names love as salvation's source. Jesus died for our sins: This is the main thing of our faith, written by love!

The climax of God's love is the empty tomb, where His light and life erase death and darkness. As the stone rolled back that evening, hatred died and Love arose! Because Jesus lives, we embrace life abundant and eternal. This is the vital essence of our hope, written in love!

God's love at the cross and the empty tomb is the main thing — the greatest news of all.

— Calvin Burrell





[Atonement]

United at

Christ connects unlike folks. Read this real-time account and rejoice!
by Kim Papaioannou, PhD

The death and resurrection of Jesus mark the foundation stone of Christianity, the triumph of good over evil, of love over selfishness. The universal impact of the cross was foreshadowed in the experience of three individuals who witnessed it firsthand: Simon of Cyrene, who carried the cross for Jesus; the thief, who was crucified with Jesus; and the Roman centurion, who led out in the crucifixion. All three became believers. By exploring these three Christ-encounters, this article will draw some conclusions on the impact of the cross.

Simon of Cyrene

Several details can be known about Simon, a passerby conscripted by the soldiers to carry Jesus' cross (Matthew 27:32). He was from Cyrene, a city in modern day Libya. The city was founded by Greeks, though the fertile countryside around it was inhabited by the ancient Libyans. The wealth of the area meant that Romans, Jews, and people from other nations also settled there in considerable numbers.

Most commentators assume that Simon was a Jew. Though a

Greek name, *Simon* was popular among Jews because of its similarity to *Simeon*, a pure Hebrew name. Furthermore, Jews of the Diaspora often traveled to Jerusalem for the three pilgrim feasts of the Hebrew calendar: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. That would explain why Simon was in Jerusalem.

The above notwithstanding, it is probable that Simon was actually a Libyan. The strongest pointer is the fact that among the crowd that followed Jesus to Golgotha, Simon was singled out to carry the cross. For a Jew, carrying an instrument of execution was ceremonially defiling and would disqualify him from the Passover meal just hours away. Romans, aware of such religious scrupulosity, probably picked Simon because he looked foreign.

When forced to carry the cross, Simon was coming "out of the country" (Mark 15:21), suggesting he was not a resident of Jerusalem. Later we will see that Simon also had connections to Rome. His ability to finance and undertake travel between distant provinces implies that he was of considerable means, possibly a trader.

Finally, two facts make it almost certain that Simon became a Christian. First, three of the four Gospels record not only his carrying the cross but also his name. This makes most sense if Simon was known to the Gos-

pel writers. Second, Mark who wrote his Gospel for the church in Rome, mentions that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus (Mark 15:21). In Romans 16:13 Paul sends greetings to "Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine." If the two men named Rufus are the same person, then not only Simon but also his wife and children became Christians and associates of Paul. The encounter of Simon with Jesus on that fateful morning changed his life forever.

The thief

When Jesus was crucified, two men were crucified with Him. Luke calls them *kakourgoi* (Luke 23:32) — "criminals"; Matthew and Mark, *lastai* (Matthew 27:38; Mark 15:27) — "thieves," "bandits," or possibly "revolutionaries." It is often assumed that they were rebels against Rome, because Barabbas, released in place of Jesus, was a rebel (Mark 15:7), and Jesus was accused of being one (Luke 23:2, 14). Conversely, neither of the above Greek words naturally defines a rebel. So it is more likely that the two men crucified with Jesus were common criminals or thieves.

Initially both men mocked Jesus, but something happened that changed the outlook of one. Like Simon before him, he witnessed the calm demeanor

the Cross

of Jesus under intense suffering, saw Him forgive those who were crucifying Him, saw His tender care for His mother. Convinced of Jesus' innocence, he rebuked the other criminal, acknowledged his own guilt, and turning to Jesus, said, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom" (Luke 23:42). In turn, the thief received the assurance that he would be with Christ in God's kingdom.

The Roman centurion

The third person to come to faith was the centurion in charge of the crucifixion. Centurions were the backbone of the Roman army, an integral component of the might of Rome.

The Roman army was initially made up only of Roman citizens. As Roman rule expanded and the need for soldiers increased, non-Romans were accepted into its ranks, and auxiliary forces were hired from the conquered peoples. Most centurions were Roman citizens and received excellent pay – up to ten times the salary of a soldier.

Being a commander in the forces of occupation in Judea, the centurion held a high-profile position. Some Romans were benevolent to the Jews, trying to understand and respect their religious and cultural sensitivities. Others exemplified the arrogance of the occupier over

the occupied. In the crucifixion of Jesus, the soldiers exhausted their brutality in violence.

Against this backdrop stands the behavior of this centurion in stark contrast. In charge of the crucifixion, he had opportunity to observe Jesus' demeanor throughout the ordeal all the way to His death. Amazed at what he was witnessing, he made a profound declaration of faith: "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Matthew 27:54). Evidence suggests that the centurion eventually became a Christian, and later tradition even gave him a name – Longinus.

Living prophecy

Simon of Cyrene, the crucified thief, and the Roman centurion: very different men who all came to faith at the cross. Were they the only ones? Probably not. Perhaps these three are mentioned as representative of the great expansion of Christian faith that followed throughout the world. First, they represent the three known continents to which the gospel spread: Simon of Cyrene from Africa; the thief from Israel in Asia; the centurion, a Roman from Europe.

Second, they represent different social classes: Simon, the wealthy businessman; the thief, part of the oppressed; the centurion, one of the forces of oppression. Third, they represent

different nationalities: Simon, the Libyan; the thief, a Jew; the centurion, a Roman. One could even take it a step further and suggest that the three represent the tribes descendant from Noah: Simon the Libyan, a descendant of Ham (Genesis 10:6, 13); the Jewish thief, a descendant of Shem (vv. 21, 25); the Roman centurion, a descendant of Japheth (vv. 1-5).

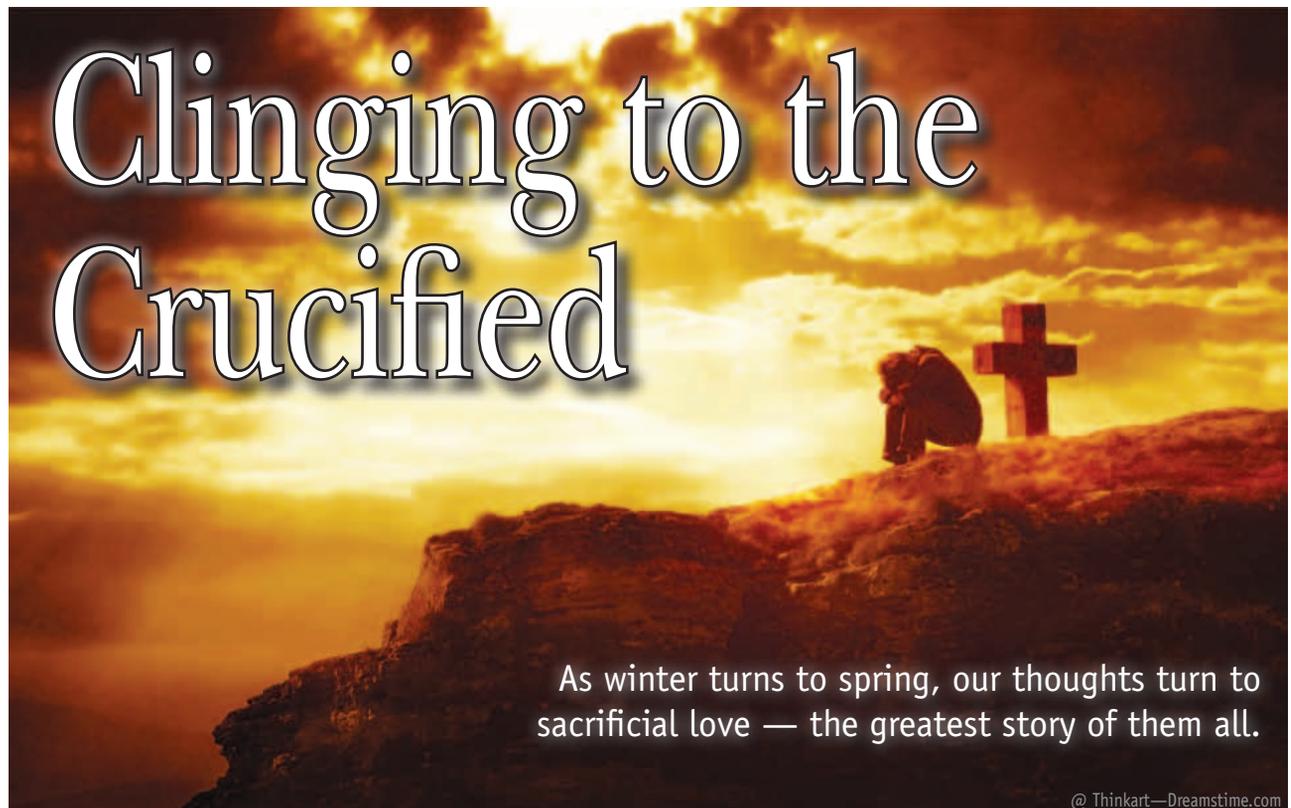
These three men represent the divergent geographical, racial, linguistic, social, and economic classes of the world. They all came together and found peace and salvation at the cross.

This fact highlights important truth: Sin and human selfishness divide people into opposing camps, turn fellow humans into enemies. But the power of the death and resurrection of Jesus can bridge every dividing line and unite humanity under the banner of love.

The three men who came to faith at the cross are a call to true believers around the world to bridge social, national, racial, and other gaps and unite as one faithful family in Christ. **BA**

Dr. Papaioannou heads the PhD program and teaches New Testament at Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies in The Philippines.





Clinging to the Crucified

As winter turns to spring, our thoughts turn to sacrificial love — the greatest story of them all.

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Of Suffering and Silent Heavens

I despise clichés. And yet, clichés are all that those who have not suffered seem to offer. Their words of encouragement, their offers of hope and attempts at understanding may be well-intentioned, even scriptural. But these words sometimes ring as hollow as a store-bought card.

It is hard for those who have not been deeply hurt to truly comfort. I don't need a reason for the suffering I experience in this world; I need someone who has suffered.

The truest comfort comes from those who have been comforted, those who have doubted and cried deeply, only to discover at their lowest points that the depth of God's love is deeper

still. Only in these moments of anguish are we invited from the valley to join Jesus on a garden mount so personal that even His disciples must keep their distance.

We enter into the Garden of Gethsemane.

Here we find Jesus not resurrected or glorified, not exalted or praised. He is not surrounded by legions of angels or throngs of followers. He is alone, and He cries. He doubts. He who prayerfully entered the garden expecting a glimpse of heaven walked instead to the brink of hell.

As He prays to a God who is able but not willing, Jesus experiences the tragic disconnect of humanity.

It is into this garden of doubting despair that Judas enters with the appearance of a friend and the intentions of an enemy. Jesus, still shaking, is bound. Jesus, still

doubting, is tortured. Jesus, still desperately alone, is crucified. His friends have failed Him, and His God is absent.

"My God! My God! Why have you forsaken Me?"

The heavens are silent, but I am not:

"Jesus, you have become fully human! And it is as a human that You have won my trust. Your words are life, not divine clichés disconnected from the mortal experience. You have suffered, and You now have permission to speak into my suffering. You offer comfort as only one who has hurt can. You have encountered the silent heavens and the hostile earth. You have experienced loneliness, doubt, and fear. You have felt the Father's absence. You have asked unanswered questions. And you have shown me that what I truly long for is not a reason for this suffering but

a companion through it.”

So I cling to that crucified Man. The incarnate God has chosen to suffer so that He may speak into my sufferings. The words He speaks from the garden and from the cross resonate with the deepest emotional needs of my wounded heart

— James Tilton
Palmdale, CA

“Cross” in the Bible

The Greek word *stauros* occurs 28 times in the New Testament. It is most often translated as “cross” or “stake.” Consider its shades of meaning and its message for Christians.

- Cross is the wooden stake, or pole(s), of uncertain shape on which Jesus was executed (Matthew 27:32, 40, 42; Mark 15:21, 20, 32; Luke 23:26; John 19:17, 19, 25, 31).

- Cross is the instrument of hideous death by crucifixion. Christ suffered that lowly death, but did not count its shame something to be despised (Philippians 2:8; Hebrews 12:2). Like the word *blood*, the word *cross* is used as a near equivalent for Jesus’ sacrificial death.

- The death that Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, endured on the cross won the peace. It reconciled Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free, citizen and foreigner, the near and far, heaven and earth — God with the whole human race (Ephesians 2:13-22, especially v. 16; Colossians 1:20; 2:14; see also Galatians 3:28).

- To “take up the cross” is a phrase Jesus often used for the

full commitment of a disciple to follow Him, even unto death (Matthew 10:38; 16:24; Mark 8:34; 10:21; Luke 9:23; 14:27).

- “The preaching of the cross” is powerful good news for some, yet foolishness for others (1 Corinthians 1:17, 18). That message brought offense, persecution, and suffering to Paul, yet it became his only boast (Galatians 5:11; 6:12, 14; Philippians 3:18).

— Calvin Burrell

Missing at the Table

I have a heavy burden, seeing loved ones and good friends either absent at the Lord’s table or completely falling away from following Jesus. Many reasons — better called excuses — are given by various ones as to why they’re gone.

Some are like Judas: They are deceived (Matthew 24:3-5; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 4:3, 4).

Some prefer to be popular and not so different from others they associate with. Some are offended by something somebody said. Refusing to forgive, they just quit. Some are afraid of losing their jobs. Some prefer to be entertained and enjoy the pleasures of this life and sin. They let other people and things stand between them and God.

The disciples must have grieved over losing Judas. My dear ones, will you be like him — one of the absent, of those who are falling away? Do you care enough for Christ and your eternal welfare to earnestly contend for the faith and live it? Will you be one whom Jesus spoke of when He said, “Depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7: 23, KJV)? Or will you be one of those to whom He says, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant . . . enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (25:21, KJV)?

— Wilma Ling
Meridian, ID

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Heart Wash

My knobby, crusty feet. How could I allow Jesus to bring the basin and towel to bathe those cracked and misshapen extremities?

Then I hear Peter’s sincere cry: “Wash me all over,” as our Lord rinsed off the road dust, dried that disciple’s feet, and smiled up at him.

I remember my inner beating organ that He had cleansed; the thought of its former twisted, filthy condition fills me with gratitude for God’s heart wash.

Gail Denham



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On Global Christianity

The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life has reported its findings on the present size and distribution of Christian faith around the world, and compared it with a century earlier (1910). We share several features of this informative report here:

- Christianity embraces about 2.18 billion people around the globe, nearly one-third of the world's total population. This compares with about 600 million Christians in 1910. The percentage of population that is Christian, however, remains nearly unchanged in a century.
 - Of all Christians, roughly half identify with the Catholic faith (Roman Catholic, Orthodox, etc.) and half with Protestantism in some form.
 - Christians remain the largest religious group in the world (Muslims are next, with about 1.6 billion), but no single continent or region can now claim to be the center of global Christianity.
 - In the last 100 years, Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa has grown 60-fold and now makes up a majority of the total population there.
 - In the last 100 years, Christianity in Asia has grown tenfold. Still, it is a minority faith in most of Asia, the most populous continent.
 - In 2010 approximately 5 percent of the population of China is Christian. These 50 million believers give China the seventh highest number of Christians in the world.
 - By 2010 Christianity was the majority faith in North, Central, and South America; in Africa; and in Australia. It was a minority faith in Asia (except for South Korea and The Philippines) and in North Africa and the Middle East, the regions of its birth and early strength (less than 3 percent of total population in those two regions today).
 - Europe's share of global Christianity has diminished, from about two-thirds of the world's total in 1910 to around one-fourth of the total today. About one-third of the world's Christians now live in the Americas.
 - Ten countries with the largest number of Christians are the US, Brazil, Mexico, Russia, The Philippines, Nigeria, China, D.R. Congo, Germany, and Ethiopia – in that order.
- Pew Forum's statistics use a broad definition of Christianity, including in their count all who identify themselves as "Christian." No attempt was made to measure anyone's level of faith and practice. Readers interested in more will find it under "Global Christianity" at www.pewforum.org.

— BA

Clinging to the Crucified

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Powerful Passings

The most heroic and powerfully transformational deed in human history was the willingness of an itinerant rabbi in the decadent Roman Empire to suffer betrayal, public torture, shame, and excruciating death high upon a pagan cross for the sake of humanity. He had claimed, and a tiny but growing core of His followers believed, that He was the prophesied Messiah and King of Israel. His sovereignty was spiritual, not to become literal until He died, was raised, ascended into heaven, and then returned in almighty superhuman form.

Leading religious figures, who hated Him because His existence threatened their beliefs and careers, insisted to the Romans that He was an insurrectionist, one who wanted to take over Caesar's rule of Judea. For these causes, He was executed.

This rabbi, Yeshua the Messiah, whom English-speaking Gentiles call Jesus Christ, suffered and died as though He had been a lifelong rebel against God, paying the price we owe for our sins. His death paid for the sins of all who repent and are converted, because He created the whole human race, thus worth more than all of us.

The untimely death of the good does have holy meaning. Yeshua's death has given eternal life to those who endure in faith.

— Howard Mesick
Lewes, DE 

Questions & Answers

Your church doctrinal statement suggests to me that salvation requires faith plus works. Do you believe that good works are required for saving faith?

Teaching truth on this topic requires more than a simple verse or paragraph. Accuracy and simplicity don't often come in the same package.

On one hand, Christian salvation comes by God's grace to humble (repentant) sinners who call upon the name of the Lord in faith — before they respond with good works. This fact is found in many texts, like Luke 18:9-14; Acts 16:31; Romans 3:20-28; 4:1-6; 10:13; Galatians 2:15, 16; and Titus 3:4-7.

In this sense, saving faith does not require us to produce good works nor attain a minimal level of obedience in order to be fully pardoned for our sins. We stand righteous before God — justified — ever and always by His grace through faith, not by our works (Eph. 2:8, 9).

On the other hand, those who've known and trusted God's free gift of grace do give evidence of their saved condition by obeying God's Word and doing good works. This fact too is taught in many scriptures, like Matthew 5:16; Titus 2:14; 3:8; Hebrews 11:23, 24; James 2:14-26; and 1 Peter 2:12.

In this sense, we who are forgiven embrace good deeds as the natural twin and outgrowth of saving faith, but we never endorse works as the cause or source of our salvation (add verse 10 to Eph. 2:8, 9).

The two truths outlined above find classical expression in the New Testament. Paul states the first like this: "A man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ . . . by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified" (Gal. 2:16).

The second truth comes from James' pen: "A

man is justified by works, and not by faith only" (James 2:24).

These two quotes offer clear contrast: James says both faith and works are required to be justified, while Paul says works justify no one. This is a paradox, as is the ambiguity noted in our doctrine — but not a contradiction!

Further study shows that Paul's and James' unique emphases fit their respective audiences. Writing mostly to Gentiles, Paul chooses the word *works* (Gal. 2:16) to preserve the simple gospel from legalistic pollutions. James (2:24) uses the same word in rousing complacent Hebrew Christians to put their faith into action. Similarly, the word *justified* has the technical meaning of "salvation" in Paul and a more general sense in James — that of supplying evidence. Thus we see how the two apostles wrote harmonizing truths, not contradictions.

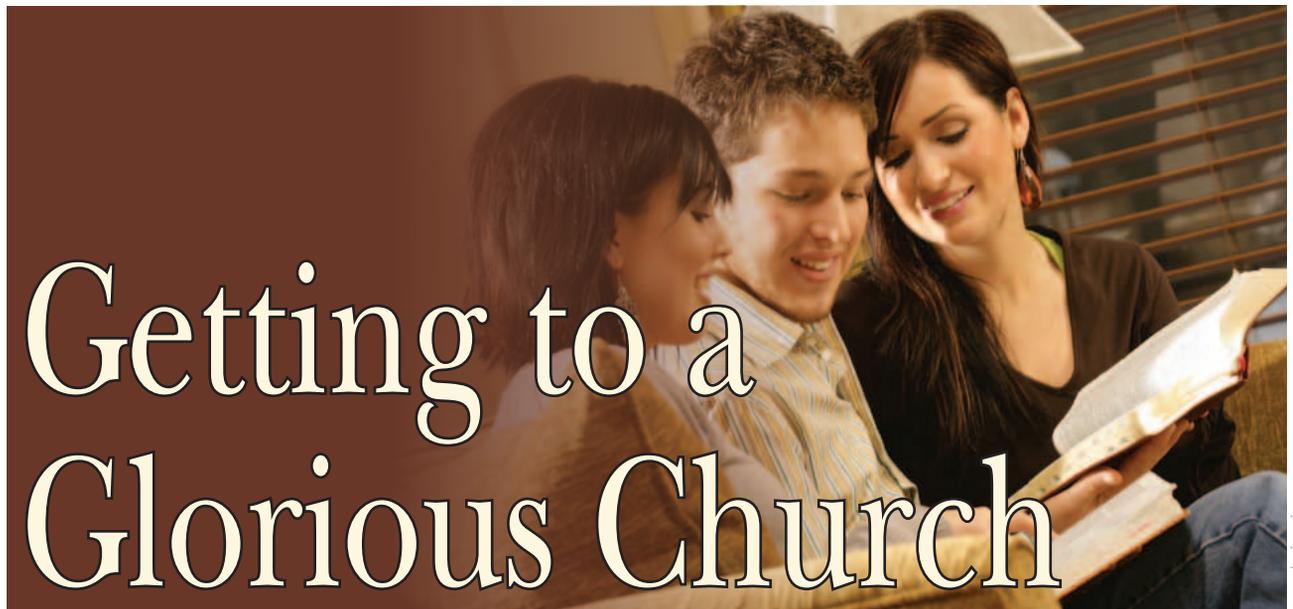
Combining Paul and James into a single, not-so-simple sentence, we may say this: *Works do not save a man, but a saved man works*. Or this: *We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone*.

A third attempt at synthesizing Paul and James is this: *We are not saved by faith **and** works, but by a faith **that** works* (see Gal. 5:6).

No, we do not believe that saving faith requires faith and works. Sins are forgiven and eternal life bestowed by God's grace alone, in response to faith. This simple gospel comforts the afflicted and reassures every struggling soul who truly trusts!

Yes, we do believe that good works and godly obedience are present to some degree in every Christian life. Those who stand right with God by faith in Christ do have a growing desire and commitment to follow their Lord and Savior in all that's good and right. This truth afflicts the comfortable and points us ever to Jesus, who alone can save.

— Elder Calvin Burrell



Often-overlooked answers are sandwiched in a lovely text. **by Israel Steinmetz**

Looking at today's church, it's easy to feel discouraged. With immorality, division, immaturity, and a host of other problems, we sometimes wonder, *Will the body of Christ ever grow up into the image of Christ as Paul envisions that it should and would?*

In Ephesians 4:1-16 Paul describes a strong, glorious church body summarized here. It enjoys the reality of a sevenfold unity by God's grace (vv. 4-7). And it grows toward a fully united practice of faith and knowledge, toward the measure of the stature of the fullness of God's Son (a perfect man) — no longer children tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine or the trickery of men. By speaking the truth in love, the church will grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ (vv. 13-15). A

beautiful vision indeed!

What would it take for Paul's vision to become reality? What part can we play as individual believers and local congregations? These questions haunt those who long to see the church become all God intended it to be.

Thankfully, Paul answers these questions in this very passage. A mature, Christlike church, he says, begins with an all-out commitment to unity, which must be defended by using spiritual weapons (the Spirit's fruit!) of humility, gentleness, longsuffering, and love (vv. 1-3). Christianity is not for the proud or the easily offended. To become the church Paul describes, we'll need to be committed to one another every step of the way.

Paul's contention is that a mature church starts with unity of commitment and confession. We are part of one body, enlivened by one Spirit, sharing a common hope. We serve one Lord, share a common faith, and were initiated by the same baptism. We recognize one God and Father of

all, who is above, through, and in us all (vv. 4-6). But it doesn't end there.

Grace gifts

Paul goes on to say that when Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to heaven, He gave each of His followers a gift of grace (vv. 7-10). In particular here, Paul lists five leadership gifts for the church: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Why did Jesus give these gifts? So that those who receive them will use them to equip the saints. What are the saints being equipped for? For the work of ministry. And what is the purpose of this ministry? That the church would grow to maturity (vv. 11, 12).

Thus Paul's answer to our question of how we become a mature, Christlike church is "Through the *unity* of our commitment and confession and through the *diversity* of our individual gifts and ministries." When all are mutually committed and all use their God-given gifts to

benefit others, the whole body grows and becomes like Jesus.

This happens only as every *part does its part* in love (v. 16) — that is, as we lovingly use the spiritual grace gifts God has given us through Christ and the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Corinthians 12–13; Romans 12:1-8). Often called “gifts of the Spirit,” these are a major means by which we become the church God calls us to be. By discovering and utilizing our gifts, we edify the body and glorify God.

All too often, discussion about the gifts and their use bogs us down in controversy. Some insist that certain gifts have ceased, while others claim that baptism in the Spirit must include speaking in tongues. Christians and their churches take up sides under labels like Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Cessationist. Clamor and confusion can rule the day as accusations swirl.

Many Christians remain ignorant of what Scripture teaches about gifts. Others are skeptical of ever finding the truth about them. With so much controversy surrounding this topic, how do we ensure that our discussion and use of spiritual gifts will build up, rather than tear down, the body?

Source and purpose

We can begin by recognizing God as the source of these gifts. God is good, and He gives good gifts to His children. Whatever abuse or misuse has occurred in the past, remember that God has a good plan for His gifts to benefit the church. As we submit ourselves to Christ as our head and embrace the manifestation of the Spirit in our midst, we can

see these gifts at work among us as God intends.

We can also realize that God gives these grace gifts so that we can, like Jesus, accomplish His purpose in the world. The church needs to be empowered by God in every aspect of its communal life. The various gifts enable us to do everything we are called to do, from preaching the gospel to showing mercy, from leading effectively to serving, from teaching to working miracles.

Avoiding pitfalls

As we study, discuss, observe, and employ the gifts of the Spirit, our imagination may be aroused, our emotions evoked. The gifts call us to explore unfamiliar territory and examine our personal experience in the light of Scripture. This emotionally and existentially charged experience can lead to disagreement, and even conflict, as we share the journey with others. Since the gifts are designed to foster unity and growth, how do we avoid these destructive pitfalls?

First, we must commit to humility, gentleness, and love as described in Ephesians 4. Gifts of the Spirit are typically sidetracked when we lose sight of these values. Strive to avoid

pride, harshness, and unloving attitudes and actions — at all costs.

Second, we must always commit to unity, recognizing our shared confessions. While we may disagree about specific issues regarding the gifts, we are united by the same Spirit. If our comments or attitudes divide us as believers, they are not of God.

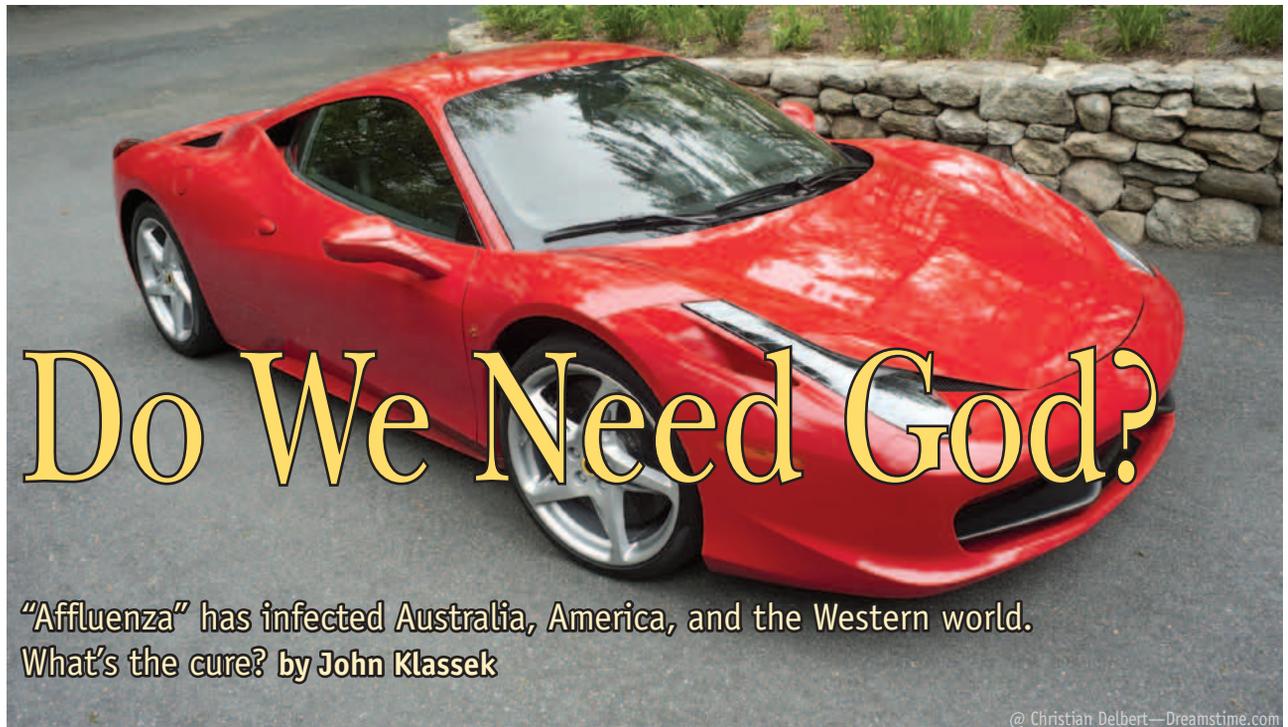
Third, we must commit to Scripture as our sole authority for faith and practice. Personal experience is invaluable. Without it, religion is nothing more than an old book and sterile tradition. But personal experience is not our standard. Whatever our experience with spiritual gifts, positive or negative, let us strive to let Scripture be our guide.

We have embarked this year on an exploration of the Holy Spirit, including the gifts of the Spirit. May God bless us as we study, discover, and put these gifts to work in a greater way. May we continually become a church where spiritual gifts work powerfully for church growth and for the glory of God! **BA**

Israel Steinmetz serves the church from his home in Kansas City, MO.



The church needs to be empowered by God in every aspect of its communal life.



What does it take to know the God who created everything and knows you personally? What factors or circumstances can prevent or dissuade us from finding Him?

The Western world has enjoyed some fifty years of relative peace and prosperity. Never before have so many been so well off. We have more of everything available to us now than ever before.

The “resources boom” here in Western Australia has made the past decade most prosperous. Gold, copper, iron, nickel, gas, and oil are abundant. Unemployment is virtually nonexistent. Our social services have afforded the poorest among us a reasonable, if not enviable, standard of living.

Our country’s outlook has also shifted. No longer do our school assemblies feature the Lord’s Prayer. Instead, schools now teach the *theory* of evolution as established fact. In this

equation, there is no room for God.

Society has changed. Our televisions now offer nudity, explicit crime, and other scenes of simulated violence as the centerpiece of our prime-time lounge room viewing. Our levels of tolerance have imperceptibly changed over time. The surreptitious influence of media means that our conventional wisdom no longer emanates mostly from Christian terms of reference. Many popular movies nowadays feature wise Buddhist sayings instead.

Then there’s the issue of infanticide. The altar of abortion in this society would horrify our forefathers. Every year, we sacrifice 42 million humans worldwide, and eighty thousand of those are Australians.*

The moral compass that

* Centre for Bioethical Reform (abortionno.org)
Australia Life Network (lifenetwork.org.au)

once guided our politicians and religious leaders has changed. Even Christian theologians tout that the Ten Commandments were “nailed to the cross,” their relevance applying only to an ancient people and not to us.

The issue we’re really getting at is whether a biblical faith in God is all that relevant anymore. Do we need God in today’s society? Or, sufficiently enlightened for the better, have we weaned ourselves off that crutch?

Unpopular God

Far from being dead, religion and superstition are alive and well. New retail shops now offer products never before seen in Australia — not amazing technological innovations, but rather the gods that originate in neighboring Asian countries. Shops in prime suburban locations offer hundreds of Buddhas, Hindu gods, and other eastern religious statues of varying sizes and shapes.

Our problem with the God of the Bible is that He tells us things we don't want to hear. He tells us how to live and warns us of the consequences if we don't listen. God asks for our attention, then tells us that He made us and that we're prosperous because He blesses us.

The gods we have substituted, however, whether a statue of Buddha or the sports car we shine every weekend, remain pleasingly silent on those issues.

Memory loss

God also warns us about the danger of riches. Wealth, it seems, obscures our understanding of how needy we really are. It gives us a false sense of security. A wise man once prayed, "Don't let me be so poor that I would steal for food, or let me become so rich that I would forget you" (Proverbs 30:8, 9, paraphrased).

There's something in that prayer that we've neglected. In becoming affluent, we've forgotten the core values that set us on this journey. We have failed to be thankful for what we have, and we've neglected to "connect the dots" between our prosperity and the providence of God.

A few years ago, the Australian government endorsed a National Thanksgiving Day with a motto like this: "Say thanks to God and to each other." Because Australians no longer see themselves as a Christian-based society, a direct attribution to God seemed almost out of touch with mainstream thinking.

When the government recently awarded pensioners a one-time large sum payment, we heard mostly criticism. It was a waste of taxpayer funds. It would

hurt the economy. It wasn't enough to really help. Are we becoming more ungrateful the richer we become?

Thankfully, history speaks for itself of a people not so dissimilar to us. Throughout the Bible, the prophets warn that if people moved away from the one and only God to "worship things made with hands," the consequences would be dire: prosperity to poverty, freedom to captivity, health to disease. And in due course, those people learned some painful lessons. No wonder so many prophets were killed or imprisoned.

Remnant

Despite our modern failings in this regard, a silver lining runs concurrent with the trends of affluence, greed, and unbelief. No matter how decadent a society becomes, there has always been a God-loving, faithful remnant, a percentage of people who have not traded their faith for "the lie" — evolution or eastern gods or whatever. This remnant people genuinely seek God for changed lives. They are in the world but not of the world, keeping the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus.

Their lives of faith are all the more accentuated in an "edu-

cated" society that says, "We evolved. There is no God."

So if faith in God is preserved and nurtured among the faithful in the midst of a wicked and perverse generation, with Him at the center of their life compass, what are the odds of anyone else finding this God?

It's a good question. The good news message proclaiming the heritage and promises of God is there for us in the Bible. It comes down to a specific calling by God, similar to what you're reading now, coupled with the willingness to listen and respond.

Toll of affluence

Still, riches and wealth make it so much harder to hear and understand the message these days. We become distracted and comfortable, and simply fail to perceive just how needy we are. To an unresponsive people, God said, "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' — and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked . . ." (Revelation 3:17).

Has anything changed from that? Affluence takes its toll, sadly, in ways that are more harmful than helpful. The signature of human nature is the same as it has

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We have failed to be thankful for what we have, and we've neglected to "connect the dots" between our prosperity and the providence of God.

Living With Less



@ MorganOliver—Dreamstime.com

Even in a time of recession, most of us still live in the age of plenty. **by Jan Johnson**

Carol decided to try an experiment. Several of her friends at work were giving up things for Lent, and she decided to join them (even though her church didn't practice Lent). To her husband's surprise, she gave up shopping. Once a week she did grocery shopping for her family, but for forty days she never bought anything for herself.

When Carol thought about something she wanted to buy during that time, she said to God, "I'll let it wait. You are enough." By the end of the forty days, she'd forgotten about most of the things she wanted.

Such experiments with simplicity (frugality) are about learning to be content with whatever

we have (Philippians 4:11). They help us redefine the good life as "the life that is truly life" (1 Timothy 6:17-19). They teach us to live with less rather than satisfying every desire for more. We learn to ask ourselves, *What can I get rid of?* rather than, *What do I want to buy?* As a result, when we have a little more, we don't think of how we can spend it but of how we can use it to help others: a flat-screen TV, or helping our friends with their mortgage payment?

Heart exam

Practicing frugality means making intentional choices to keep or let go of our posses-

sions (clutter?) and what we acquire. This begins as an issue of stewardship but becomes a revealer of what's in our hearts. How does it feel to pass up buying a shirt that would make you shockingly attractive? Why is it not OK to use yard tools that are older than dirt but still work well? Why do I resist getting my sofa repaired instead of buying a new one? Such challenges help us look deeply within ourselves.

When we want to buy something (or acquire it another way), it's wise to consider our motives. We'll discover feelings and desires we didn't know we had, such as

- inadequacy (having to prove myself by owning certain items);
- people-pleasing (getting others' approval by staying in style);
- perfectionism (making sure I have just the right high performance rims for my car's tires, or buying my kids everything they need because I want to be a good parent).

Recognizing these and other motives moves us to ask God, "Why am I so needy? How will I learn to let You be enough?"

Once a month I have an appointment not far from a large college-slanted bookstore. I used to drop by there on my way home every month, coming away with at least one purchase.

Finally I asked God, "What's going on here? Is there anything unhealthy in this?" While some of it was my healthy desire to learn and grow, it was also about having "smart" books because I hang out with some smart people. It was also about my desire to cocoon away my life reading rather than reaching out and loving people. So I decided to see how many months I could

go without visiting the bookstore. It's been a good experiment.

This heart exam provides great fodder for reflection. We forego buying some little thing and say to God, "Would You help me understand that You really are enough?" Slowly we begin to look to God a little more as our companion and learn the joy of a simple, satisfied life.

Where to start

Consider the list below. (You'll probably think of ideas that suit your life and wants better.) If you did one or two of the following, how would your life be more focused on what you believe is important? How would it shape your character? What qualities might be built in you? What would you have more time and money for? How might it help you invest more in people and less in things?

- Refuse to enter any kind of store more than once a week.
- Buy a new compact car every ten years and not before.
- Wear the same shirt every Monday, the same shirt every Tuesday, the same shirt. . . .
- Move to a smaller home, condominium, or apartment instead of moving up.
- Live on a weekly allowance of ten, twenty, or thirty dollars.
- Eat out less than once a week.
- Limit time spent in stores and choose not to take children or grandchildren into stores.
- Give away a piece of clothing every time you buy a new piece (even from a thrift store).
- Prepare and eat an evening meal on Monday and eat it again on Wednesday. Prepare and eat an evening meal on Tuesday and

eat it again on Thursday (or prepare one large meal on Monday and eat the same thing all week).

- Give yourself a "favorite item" allowance, such as for a book or power tool (or computer gadgets, clothing, health and fitness aids).

- From your monthly or annual income, deduct what you need to survive, plus a tithe and some savings, then give away 50 percent of the rest.

When we do such things, we aren't practicing legalism. We don't want to create pride in how well we obey a set of

rules we've invented. The point is to make space for God in our lives, to love God with all of our selves, and to love others as ourselves. **BA**

Jan Johnson

writes from Simi Valley, CA. This article is adapted from her book *Abundant Simplicity*, with permission from InterVarsity Press. Scripture quotes are from the *New International Version*.



Hope for the Wealthy?

I first felt sorry for rich people when I came across these words: "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. . . . How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" (Luke 6:24; 18:24).

Later, I learned to read verses in their context and in recent translations. I found that Jesus (and His disciples) had been just as concerned for the wealthy as I was:

And those who heard it said, "Who then can be saved?" But He said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God (18:26, 27).

What about all the wealthy people in times past and throughout the ages? Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Job were rich men, yet godly men of faith. Not to mention King David. Though many texts warn of the problems and pitfalls of wealth, read these for an alternate view: Deuteronomy 8:18; 1 Chronicles 29:12; and Ecclesiastes 5:19.

As I kept reading my Bible, I came across the description of huge calamities to come and what they will do to rich and poor alike (Revelation 6:15-17, for example). What a great leveler those catastrophes will be! No longer any distinction between rich and poor — all equally humbled before God and the Lamb.

Then I read Revelation 18:1-19, how the wealthiest and mightiest among men will lose it all. Who knows? Many of them just might become servants of God and learn to praise and fear Him (19:5).

Yes, there is hope for the wealthy.

— Ernie Klassek

Encounter With a Beggar

Fine dreams and focused worship can help heal our spiritual poverty and paralysis.
by Dirk Anderson



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Life begins to stir in the quiet streets of Jerusalem as the sun's early rays filter through the city. For the beggar, this is just another day in a seemingly endless cycle of pain and disappointment. His helpers deposit him in his usual spot at the temple gate, and he shudders in the morning coolness as the stones press against his frail body. Here he sits, where in ages past the glory of God once dwelt.

But those are long distant times, and he has not come here to meet God. No, he is here because this is where the pious come to pray. Experience has taught him the best places to beg.

He needs not say a word to

passersby; it's written on his face — lines of one who has battled poverty, pain, and despair for forty years. Sprawled on the ground with lifeless limbs, he is an object of pity. He has long been resigned to a life of misery, and his one hope is to attract sympathy and a few pennies from worshippers.

Two men make their way to the temple. The beggar notes their worn sandals and the plain clothing of the common man. Begging for years, you learn a sense of what a man will give. He soon sizes up that nothing very promising is to be gained here. These men can barely afford their own living! He turns his eyes away to see who else is

coming. Suddenly one of them speaks, "Look at me!"

He lifts his eyes. He has seen many sympathetic faces, but something's different about this pair. Unusual strength is etched on their faces. A glimmer of hope stirs in his heart. Perhaps he can glean a few pennies from these common men after all.

The one who addressed him continues, "Silver and gold have I none." The beggar's countenance falls. Is this just another person with caring words but no coins? He's heard it all before and would tune him out, but the man's next words grab him anew: "In the name of Jesus Christ, rise up and walk!"

Suddenly healing surges through his body. Strength and feeling return to his legs, and he scrambles to his feet, barely believing what's happening! Tears of joy well up in his eyes. He grasps at the smiling men to thank them. Unable to contain his joy, he runs through the temple leaping in the air, laughing aloud, and praising God. In one moment, his lost dreams are fulfilled and his long years of begging are over. He is a new man!

Without realizing it, we too may have given up on our dreams and settled for mere pennies when we can have so much more. Consider how each of these may apply to your life.

Recognize your finest dreams

The beggar was thinking little, his mind narrowly focused on getting what he needed to make it through another day. He was asking for pennies instead of for healing. We serve a big God, and we need to think big. Take your

mind off the daily hassles and focus on the dreams the Father placed in your heart, for out of it spring the issues of life (Proverbs 4:23b).

Have you given up on your deepest longings — for a heart brimming with love for others, for peace that passes understanding, for courage that cannot be defeated, for the sense that you are fulfilling your life's destiny, and for joy that brightens the world around you? Our Father places these dreams, ideas, and goals in every human heart. Often they are lofty, seemingly unachievable. Part of the human experience is for us to reach, to stretch ourselves, to grow to be more than what we started with.

The answers you seek may be closer than you think. Opportunities come every day. We either seize them daily, or they walk on past. As you step out and begin fulfilling your God-given destiny, He will often bring the right people and events into your life to realize your finest desires (Psalm 37:4).

Let Jesus make your dreams

The beggar had seemingly lost sight of God's power. Have you? In these days, self is the center and God is pulled from the shelf only in desperate times. Society explains away our special creation with evolutionary theories. The world tells us Bible stories are simply myths. We look to self-help gurus and books to teach us, instead of trusting our Father.

But this is all backward. Jesus should be the center of our lives. We do not witness the miraculous power of God because we have put Him in a box — and on

the shelf! When we follow the apostles' example, make God the center of our lives, and seek Him with all our heart, miracles can happen.

Christ came to earth to make dreams come true — dreams of eternal life, dreams of restoration, reconciliation, and wholeness. And He taught others how to be dream-makers. The apostles found great joy in helping make others' dreams come true. If you'd like to do the same, then link up with Jesus and be amazed at what you can do in His name (Acts 3:16).

Worship, don't beg

The beggar came to the temple daily, but he did not come to worship. He came to beg. Peter and John came to the temple to worship God, and they helped make dreams come true! The beggar was simply taking from others and giving nothing in return.

When you come before the Father, do you come to worship Him? Do you come with an attitude of gratitude, to praise Him and honor Him for who He is? Or do you come with a long "I want" list, to beg?

How do you view yourself? Have the challenges and struggles of life beaten you down into believing you are a beggar? How

incongruous that a child of the omnipotent God should lie impotent in his Father's house!

Once you adopt the right attitude toward God, approaching Him as worthy of worship and adoration instead of as a galactic Santa Claus waiting to fill your wish list, miracles can happen in your life. Then you will find He not only makes *your* dreams come true, but also uses you to make the dreams of *others* a reality.

New view

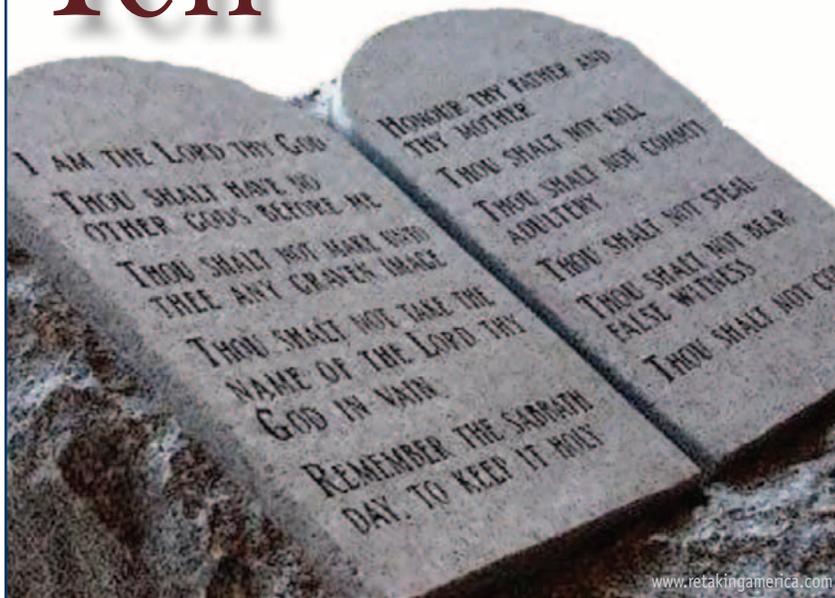
Stop settling for living off the tokens you get from others. Start looking at people and events through the eyes of faith and destiny. Stop asking life for mere pennies, or else that is all you will get. Be who you were destined to be. Jesus said, "I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of" (John 10:10, *The Message*). Why not take Him at His word? **BA**

Dirk Anderson is local leader of a CoG7 congregation in Jacksonville, FL, and the author of six books.



How incongruous that a child of the omnipotent God should lie impotent in his Father's house!

The Magnificent Ten



Impressive when first written, the Decalogue's second writing is far more enabling and reassuring.
by Ken Lawson

When our Creator delivered the Ten Commandments to Moses, He handed man a set of rules for life, written in stone by His own hand. These ten laws then became the touchstone and centerpiece for all other law codes. Keeping them

became the checklist of daily righteousness for Israel and for other peoples who wanted relationship with Jehovah.

All other human laws pale in comparison to the Ten. Other laws came and went, including those God told Moses to write in a book. But the Ten live on, clear and concise, having been known to some extent by cultures in every age.

As a way to obtain peace of mind before a holy and just God, however, Israel's history proves the Ten inadequate. The people's observance of the law for righ-

teousness fell woefully short. Attempted obedience, however energetic, can reveal the human heart's true condition, but it cannot correct it.

Isaiah gave us a Spirit-filled prophecy that revealed God's plan to make a better, more personal law. "The LORD is well pleased for his righteousness' sake; he will *magnify* the law, and make it honourable" (42:21, KJV).

How could something God himself wrote in stone be magnified? How could it become more honorable than it already was?

The Hebrew word for *honorable* means "To be great or magnificent" (*Strong's Concordance*). Did a change of this magnitude actually occur? Yes, it did. See the promise in another prophecy:

"This is the covenant I will make with [them] after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33).

Are these prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah now fulfilled? Has the Ten been made greater, magnificent, honorable, and even more glorious? Paul thought so when he wrote, "You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Corinthians 3:3).

Sometime between the law delivered to Moses and Paul's letter to the faithful, something happened to facilitate this amazing and honorable magnification of the Ten Commandments. How and when did the Ten get from

the two tablets of stone into the hearts and minds of church members in Corinth?

Magnifying the Ten

The answer is found in an amazing sermon of Jesus Christ. This sermon can be read in fifteen minutes, but its message is dynamic enough to reach from the day it was delivered through all time. The Sermon on the Mount fulfills the magnification of the Ten!

From a hillside along the Galilee shore, Jesus changed the law's application forever. After stating that He did not come to abolish the law and that our righteousness must surpass that of Pharisees and teachers of the law (Matthew 5:17-20), Jesus began to teach the Ten in the way God intended since He wrote them and handed them to Moses.

The law of the Ten said, "Do not murder." Jesus expanded its application by saying that unrighteous anger in the heart violates the law and will be judged equally to the sin of murder (v. 21).

The law of the Ten said, "Do not commit adultery." Jesus magnified this by teaching that anyone who gazes at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery in his heart (v. 28).

In this sermon Jesus improved our understanding and magnified the application of the law in our lives. He made right living a matter of the heart rather than just an external checklist of our daily behavior against a stone-carved list of rules.

Thus the magnification of the Ten is the historical work of Jesus Christ in His teaching and the present work of God's Spirit poured into the lives of believing,

repentant men and women. Now the magnificent Ten are in our hearts, firmly placed there by the work of God's Son Jesus, and a good dose of the Holy Spirit.

This prophesied-and-fulfilled package provides that I no longer live under the lens of the stone law as a checklist for my behavior but under the lens of the magnification! Same law, now written in my mind and heart. Same law, now seen through a redemptive relationship with God by faith in Jesus Christ and a Spirit-formed life of obedience and good works.

Keeping the Ten

It has always been impossible to keep the Ten perfectly, or even adequately in a way that makes us truly righteous. Now that this magnification has happened, can we keep the Ten perfectly? No, we cannot!

On our knees daily before the Lord, we make bare the real issues of our hearts. By the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit, by the life and sacrifice of Christ, and by the extension of mercy to sinners, the true condition of our hearts is exposed, forgiveness and grace are abundantly granted, and we stand righteous before God. Not by what we do,

not by any checklist, not by the law, but by faith, grace, and relationship with our Savior.

The Ten still reveal what sin is, but they cannot remove it. The inability of the law to cleanse us and change our hearts to be perfectly obedient makes us fully reliant, not on the law but on Jesus Christ and Him crucified (Romans 5:1, 2).

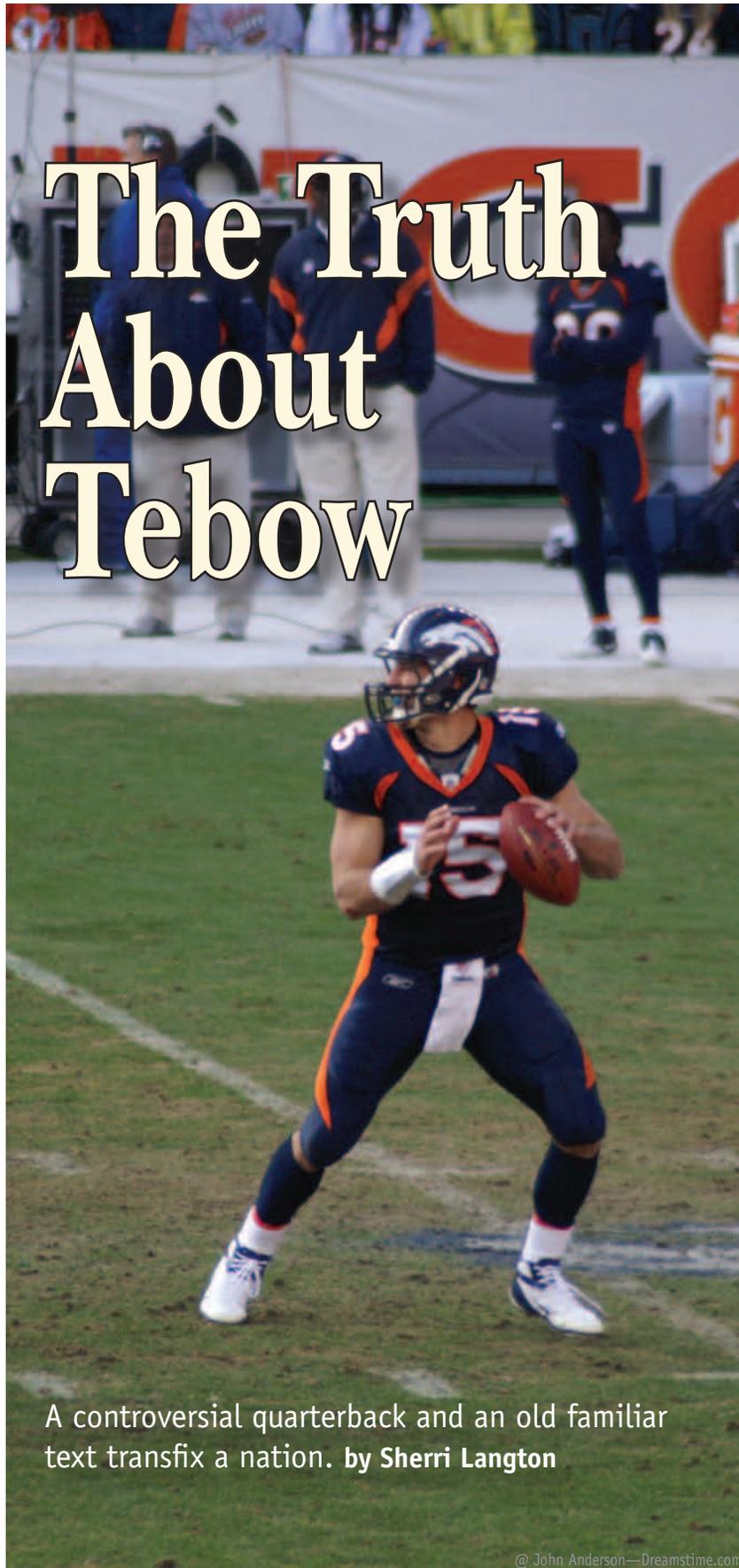
What happened to the law between Mount Sinai and the Church in Corinth? Calvary happened, that's what.

What happened to magnify the magnificent Ten and make them fully honorable? Let the writer of John's Gospel answer that question: "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). **BA**

Ken Lawson of Cottage Grove, MN, chairs the Church's License and Credentials Committee. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, except where noted.



The Ten still reveal what sin is, but they cannot remove it.



The Truth About Tebow

A controversial quarterback and an old familiar text transfix a nation. by Sherri Langton

@ John Anderson—Dreamstime.com

By now, the world champions of football have been decided in the Super Bowl, and the National Football League rests comfortably in its off-season. We've forgotten most of the players' stats, the fantastic finishes, the lame clichés recited in press conferences:

"We did what we had to do."

"We made some plays."

But one post-game statement we won't soon forget. It was anything but cliché and, in fact, a bit daring in our politically correct culture: "I'd like to thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."

Remember that line? It became the stock response of the Denver Broncos' Tim Tebow, anointed their starting quarterback in October 2011. With microphones shoved in his face, cameras clicking and rolling, this young athlete placed honor for his performance where it belonged: Jesus.

This made him both popular and polarizing, and for Christians in the stands, delightful to watch. Here was a missionary kid we followed from his Florida Gators days, when he smeared John 3:16 on his eye black and ran up and down the field. In Denver, he didn't slow down, displaying his faith as boldly as the No. 15 on his jersey. We cheered: Tebow was Apostle Paul in shoulder pads. On or off the field, one truth relentlessly pumped through his veins: "I am not ashamed of the gospel."

While this gospel didn't hold much pizzazz for many, they couldn't shake what they saw and sensed in Tebow. When he bowed in prayer after a game, they bowed too — in droves. But to them it wasn't praying; it was

“Tebowing,” and it popped up literally all over the globe.

While the press and Broncos coaching staff downplayed Tebow’s religion, they praised his high work ethic and positive influence in the locker room. Others weren’t as gracious. Tebow and his faith were razzed on *Letterman* and *The Tonight Show* and lampooned on *Saturday Night Live*. Some enterprising folks took their zeal to the point of sacrilege, manufacturing jerseys with *Jesus* printed above No. 15 and referring to Tebow as the “Mile High Messiah.”

They felt they had good reason to do so. Not long after Tebow started taking snaps full time, the Broncos logged six straight wins – two of them heart-stoppers in overtime. The word *miracle* became standard in game summaries, despite Tebow’s weak passing performance.

What turned heads, however, was the playoff game against the Pittsburgh Steelers on January 8. When the young quarterback led in a stunning overtime win, even doubters saw the light. John 3:16 “sightings” sprang up everywhere: Tebow threw for 316 yards and averaged 31.6 yards per completion. The Steelers’ time of possession was 31.6 minutes. CBS reported the game’s overnight ratings as 31.6.

Following that game, John 3:16 ignited into the most-searched item on Google – reportedly by 100 million people. For their viewing and reading audiences not familiar with the scripture, every reporter and writer repeated the words that most of us know by heart: “For God so loved the world that he gave his

one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (NIV).

Focus on the Family seized full advantage of the craze on January 14. Amid the pomp and pigskin of the Denver-New England playoff game that evening, Focus aired a thirty-second spot that featured children reciting John 3:16.

The Broncos’ season of miracles abruptly ended with that game; Tebow performed poorly. But John 3:16 scored again, sailing through the uprights and into the homes of millions. It quickly became the number-one trending topic on Twitter worldwide.

By now, much of the holy hoopla surrounding Tim Tebow has died down, but you have to wonder about the popularity of John 3:16. Perhaps people were just curious about it: Who is John, and why is “3:16” after his name? Or maybe the masses are hungrier than we think and responded to a commercial instead of to an altar call. Whatever the reason, the Word of God found the limelight – and it will not return void (Isaiah 55:10, 11).

One day heaven and earth – and football – will pass away. So will Tim Tebow. The highlights of his 2011 miracle season will age in the vaults of NFL films. But God’s Word will go on. Through other bold voices and different mediums, John 3:16 will find expression about a God who made His own plays and did what He promised to do: send His Son to die so we may live forever. **BA**



Do We Need God?

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been: greed and ingratitude.

The same, that is, until calamity strikes. Often in times of war or profound suffering, people turn to God in desperation. Stripped of material things that give us a false sense of security and power, we may then perceive our own inadequacies. The truth that only through suffering will human hearts turn to God may hang over us like an ominous cloud, but people will turn!

Personal choice

God doesn’t force His will and way on us; He simply asks us to choose. In doing so, we also choose the consequences. To an ancient people, not unlike us, God spoke: “I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the LORD your God” (Deuteronomy 30:19, 20).

The choice is ours. Will we hear, today? Can we recognize that the abundance we have isn’t ours because we’re smarter, but because God loves us and has blessed us – not because we deserve it, but because He is faithful? **BA**

John and Rebecca Klassek live in Western Australia and have six children. John works as an IT technician and film producer for MessageWeek Ministries (www.message7.org).





Finding Treasure

by Matthew Minica

When I first saw an advertisement about the National Bible Bee in 2009, the prize money intrigued me, but I wasn't that interested in participating. My mom saw the advertisement as well and thought this would be a good summer project for our family.

I was astonished at what she said next: I'd have to memorize *twelve hundred verses!* In just four months? Who could do that? I agreed to participate, though I didn't know how I would actually do it.

Once our family joined the Bible Bee, we had a memorization session together daily. At first I got excited, using my chore time to memorize, but it quickly became boring. Before long, I committed only two or three verses per week to memory. No surprise that I didn't do well in the local competition. Watching the winners called up to the stage at the awards ceremony, I

thought, *I'll never do this again.*

But then, something happened: My sister, Courtney, qualified for nationals! In the next several weeks, she memorized verses like crazy. In early November, she and Mom went to Washington, D.C., where the nationals were held. Courtney won third place in the primary division — \$5,000! *I wish I'd worked harder during the summer,* I scolded myself. I resolved to work much harder in 2010.

Our little sister, Brianna, joined us in the Bible Bee the next year. Eleven years old by the end of the year, Courtney moved up to the junior level with me. The competition was a lot different in 2010 than in the previous year. Headquarters drastically reduced the number of verses to memorize — for juniors, down from twelve hundred in four months to five hundred in twelve weeks. Headquarters also put a lot more focus on studying the Bible. The first year, we studied six large books of the Bible. In 2010 and 2011, however, they

chose only one shorter book and made a Sword Study for us to go through during study time. In it we learned such things as Greek word meanings and cross-references.

In 2010 all three contestants in the family made it to the national competition in Chicago. Though none of us progressed to the semifinals or beyond, we all made several new friends and had tons of fun!

In 2011 Courtney and I made it to nationals again, this time in Nashville, and had another terrific experience. Some of our new friends won prizes, and our disappointment in not advancing was drowned in their victory. The nationals is so much fun that I've decided to study hard enough to go every year until I'm too old to participate.

The Bible Bee has had such an impact on my family. Before, we tried to memorize verses, but we never thought of doing something like this! We learned that memorizing verses and studying a book of the Bible for twelve weeks is not hard, if you put your mind to it.

But the real treasure is every verse we learn. This treasure is everlasting, and no one can take it from us. If you learn just one verse, you're already a winner in God's eyes. Those prizes are exciting, but when you look at the wisdom you can gain by studying God's Word, thousands of dollars is nothing in comparison. **BA**

Matthew Minica, 14-year-old son of Nelson and Brenda Minica of San Antonio, TX, wants us to know that National Bible Bee requires fewer memory verses this year. Check it out at www.biblebee.org.

Remembering Richard

by Joseph M. M. Howard

Richard Wiedenheft was an intelligent, multi-talented, deeply committed minister who taught with excellence the gospel of God's grace and mature Christian living. He led interactive Bible studies every Sabbath in the big living room of the house he built. Some weeks I took my family on the two hundred-plus mile roundtrip to that house near Falls, Pennsylvania — not far from the Mt. Pocono Church he'd served until he was expelled for speaking an understanding of prophecy different than Herbert Armstrong's.

As a confused and insecure former Armstrongite, I benefited not only from Richard's teaching but also from the rich atmosphere of love and joy in the home he shared with his wife, Darlene, and their children. In my times of distress and wondering if God loves me, I've remembered the comforting love of the Wiedenhefts. Since God apportioned even to the most spiritually gifted humans only a sliver of His love for others, I remember the joy of that wonderful sliver and realize that God loves us all more than we imagine.

Later, Richard served with the Church of God (Seventh Day) and encouraged his brethren to do the same. His CoG7 work included serving in its schools, Spring Vale Academy and Ministries Training System (now LifeSpring School of Ministry); assisting congregations in the Chicago, Illinois, area; writing for the Bible Advocate Press; and ministering as superintendent of the Church's Northeastern District.

Richard ate wisely, consuming healthful and delicious food. Yet in this haphazard world subject to disorder (Ecclesiastes 9:11), he got cancer anyway.

His deathbed messages in the BA revealed his sterling attitude of faith and courage, though he saw his life and plans for greater service coming to an end. He spoke of his joyful appreciation for time to study, reflect, and gaze out on God's creation — the evergreen and deciduous woods surrounding his home.

As he faced impending death, Richard Wiedenheft's joy in Christ was that of a modern man, not that of someone far removed from the immediacy of present-



March 23, 2012, marks the fifth anniversary of the passing of BA writer and CoG7 pastor-administrator Richard "Dick" Wiedenheft.

day life. His death was traumatic to his final caregiver — his wife — to his friends and fellow ministers, and to many others.

No one person can continue all the good things Richard did. Yet all of us working together can fulfill his legacy. Though Richard's thought-provoking articles are no longer available in the *Bible Advocate*, this writer — a mixed-up, spiritually shaky novice when he first began attending Richard's services — now writes an occasional article or commentary for this magazine. His words have been strength to me as I contemplated my own death after suffering encephalitis and two brain hemorrhages. He also provided a powerful witness to the gospel in the way he faced and endured death. **BA**

Joseph M. M. Howard is a pen name of a writer from Lewes, DE.

A photograph of a meadow at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm, golden glow over the scene. The sky is filled with soft, colorful clouds in shades of orange, pink, and blue. The meadow is lush with green grass and numerous small, white and pink wildflowers. A path of slightly taller grass leads from the foreground towards the background, where a line of trees is visible against the horizon.

*In the meadow lies resurrection,
flat as the water four inches down.
No hot explosion of angels here,
sitting on a smoldering stone,
just lowly mushrooms,
grasses and gray beetles,
acorns rooting under damp leaves,
everything brown and dead yellow
yet breathing, as the earth
rolls in its sleep toward April,
toward endless resurrections
and His promise of our own.*

*Marianna Busching
Reprinted from Times of Singing, 2004*

March Emphasis

Publications



Keith Michalak, Director



Denver BAP staff (L to R): LeRoy Dais, Calvin Burrell, Sherri Langton, Kyle Michalak, Linda Michalak, Keith Michalak, Allan Stroupe.

Publications

Keith Michalak, Director

Modest beginnings: *A Bible Advocate*, a piece of literature, a Gospel Light (teaching tool no longer in print), and a staff going the extra mile to correspond and encourage people at home and abroad led to the start of the Publications agency. Today we send multiplied thousands of BA's, tracts, and quarterlies into nearly a hundred countries around the world. Our successes are not because of us, but because of the many who have come before, paving the way to the world.

It's been quite a journey. The first small steps our brethren took some 150 years ago to spread the Word of God through print have led us to today and have given us the means to impact more and more people. The digital age has changed how we reach our world. Through social media and an online presence, we have opportunities to impact people we never imagined.

Today we need your help to keep the momentum going. With your offerings and prayers, Publications will continue reaching out to our world, proclaiming God's Word, and helping people to the next level of their spiritual walk.

Join our ongoing journey by visiting us on the Web at cog7.org/publications or baonline.org. Become friends on Facebook, and check out *Now What?* (nowwhat.cog7.org). And please give generously so Publications can keep on preaching the gospel of Christ.

April Emphasis

LifeSpring



Richard Jensen, Director
See page 29

SHINE Prepares for Next Mission

by **Bev Brenneise**

June 22 is approaching, when the 2012 SHINE Medical-Dental team will leave for El Salvador. We're putting components in place for another successful mission: selecting a team from the applicants; planning our hotel, transportation, food, medications, dental equipment, paperwork; and doing promotion and fundraising to cover costs.

This team will include retirees, mid-career people, and increasing numbers of college students and other young adults. With many qualified applicants, it's a challenge to keep the team right-sized and fully cohesive. Veterans help our newcomers adapt and discover their niche amazingly well. The team, in turn, benefits from the younger people's eagerness, energy, and fresh ideas. Some are excellent interpreters. At least three members from previous missions are studying to become doctors.

SHINE clinics provide for unique medical experiences and the blessing of helping others. In six years of these missions, nearly 15,000 people have received medical-dental services without charge. As our teams gain experience, we learn to adapt, to work more efficiently, and to solve problems — all under the Lord's leading. We give thanks for the privilege of sharing the gospel with those we serve in other lands and seeing many trust Christ as Savior — a great blessing! We are assured that the Holy Spirit works to produce the fruit we have seen.

To be effective in El Salvador this month, SHINE needs your prayers, donations (reading glasses and medications), and financial support (www.shinecog7.org). Thank you! A SHINE fundraising dinner is scheduled for North Fellowship CoG7, 5501 Dewey Avenue, Fair Oaks, California, 6:00 p.m., March 10.

SHINE Director Ernesto Frausto recently revisited the site of the team's 2006 mission in Chiapas, Mexico, where 8-year-old Cecilia suffered from a cancer in her eye.

SHINE arranged for surgery to remove the tumor and replace her eye with a prosthetic eye. This is Cecilia with Ernesto, five years later.



NYM News

2012 theme. National Youth Ministry has chosen "Not A Fan" as its theme for this year. Based on Kyle Idleman's book by that name, our goal is to motivate youth in becoming completely committed followers of Jesus. Fans sit on the sidelines; followers invest in the game. As Jesus said, a follower must "deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (NIV) — only possible by the work of the Holy Spirit within. Together, let's learn what it means to truly follow Jesus!

2012 registration. NYM asks all youth groups to register each year so we can better communicate and serve. Those who do will receive registration cards, *Youth Flash* e-newsletters, text communications, and event discounts. Register your group online at youth.cog7.org/register, or use the form in the Gimme Five materials.

National Youth Week / Hunger Lock-In. National Youth Week is an excellent opportunity for youth to gain leadership experience in designing and implementing a Sabbath worship service. It is also a chance to participate in a 24-hour famine to take focus off our material blessings and put it on those with much less. Hunger Lock-In supports a foreign missions project. If all youth groups send \$50 or more, we can provide a huge blessing for a worthy cause. Let's meet the challenge! **April 13-15** are the suggested dates for this weekend of service and spiritual growth. — *Kurt Lang*

2012 Calendar

March 10 - Pacific Northwest
Super Sabbath, Jefferson, OR
March 16-18 - Spring Vale
Alumni Weekend, Owosso, MI
March 30 – April 1 - National
Women's Retreat, Portland,
OR
April 5 - Annual Lord's Supper
service in every church
April 13-15 - National Youth
Week and Hunger Lock-in
(see related item, p. 26)
April 20-22 - Florida Ladies
Retreat, Canterbury Confer-
ence Center, Oviedo, FL
April 28 - Oklahoma quarterly
meeting at Wister church
May 25-27 - Spring Vale gradua-
tion weekend, Owosso, MI
June 10-16 - Dover Family Camp
at Camp Cimarron, near
Kingfisher, OK



At a recent CoG7 conference near Adelaide, South Australia, Elders David Kidd, Phil Kordahi (obscured), and John Klassek (L to R) pray over John's daughter Hannah following her baptism in the Southern Ocean.

Veracruz, Mexico Missions



Pioneer Missionary Training (PMT) is hosted by the Mexican Conference of CoG7 and facilitated by Missions

Abroad, SWORD, and National Youth Ministries of the US and Canadian Conference. Participants learn concepts of evangelism through classroom training and real time with the unsaved, all the while living and serving with brethren in another country.

The latest PMT team traveled to Veracruz, Mexico, December 20-30, 2011. Members were Jake Brand and Joshua Lemley (Washington); Kris Tuller (Colorado); Godwin Prospere (Florida); Carlos Solano (Texas); Kelsey and Patrick Fleming (Idaho). Monico and Martha Molina Muffley (Idaho) led this team, joined by their three daughters, Melissa, Karina, and Erica.

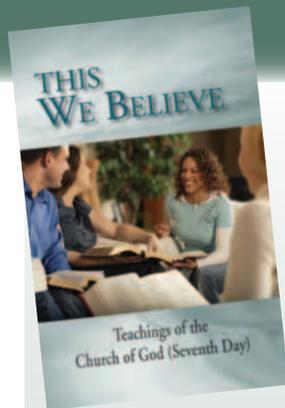
The leader in Mexico was district overseer Juan Manuel Jimenez, with his staff of Elda Molina de Ventura, Abner Ventura, Sarita Lopez, Gamaliel Rosas, Elizabeth Rodriguez, Gamaliel Garcia, and Eder Alvarez. The Mexican team had eleven members from Veracruz and one from Baja California. Mexican young adults also led worship and did other jobs. Our base church Cuauhtemoc provided a kitchen staff, led by Elizabeth Roman, and many delicious meals.

The trainers taught aspects of fellowship, discipleship, service, evangelism, and worship – showing the richness and application of each and the harmony among them all. For practical experience, we visited a congregation of children with their parents, a convalescent home, and a church under construction. While we were digging a cistern for the bathrooms, a worker there received Christ. PMT participants also visited sites and shops around Veracruz. The Lord cared for us in many ways and allowed for the purpose of this PMT1 trip to be so greatly and satisfyingly accomplished.

– Pastor Monico G. Muffley

To Kenya, with Pioneer Missions

If you are a former Pioneer Missionary Training team member (and 18 years old), you may be eligible for PMT2 in Kenya, planned for July 14-30, 2012. For more information and an application, e-mail pastormonico@juno.com.



This 217-page book on CoG7 doctrines is off the press and available. Get your copy now, or get several for family and friends. Order from Bible Advocate Press, P. O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233; call 303-452-7973; or e-mail bap.orders@cog7.org.

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These young adults enjoyed SWORD retreat in the California mountains over New Year's weekend. A well-written report of the event is at baonline.org.



These Sacramento area folks provide board oversight for SHINE ministries. Front (L to R): Maria Valencia, Gloria Marquez, Maria Navarrete, Terri Adame, Bev Brenneise. Back: David Kaufer, Don Brenneise, Ernesto Frausto, Eduardo Bermudez, Ruben Frausto, and Rudy Valencia. See SHINE report on page 26.

June 22 – July 2 - SHINE missions trip to El Salvador (see related item, p. 26)
 August 25-29 - International Ministerial Congress at Kents Hill Park Conference Centre, Milton-Keynes (near London), UK; contact office@cog7missions.org

Camps and Retreats

Central retreat (youth, young adults) - April 6-8, Camp IODISECA, Solon, IA; contact: abe.endecott@gmail.com

NW Regional Bloomsday (youth, young adults) - May 4-6, Spokane, WA; contact: Joe Larson (509-879-9535 or joebenlar@gmail.com)

SW SWORD Retreat - May 25-28, Brookhaven Retreat Center, Hawkins, TX; contact: Danny and Jacqui Melgoza (210-900-9889)

Refuge in the Rockies - June 27 – July 1, in the Colorado mountains; contact: Troy Gedack (office@cscog7.org)

Molalla Youth Camp - June 28 – July 2, Cascade, ID; contact: Allison Boone (allienicole89@hotmail.com)

Michigan Youth Camp - July 8-15; contact: Aaron Coulson (a_e_coulson@hotmail.com)

Sis-Q SWORD Camp - July 20-22, Cave Junction, OR; KurtStranberg@Comcast.net

Central California Youth Camp - July 16-21; contact: Larry Zaragoza (zman52@msn.com)

SIS-Q Meadows Senior Youth Camp - July 22-29, Cave Junction, OR; contact: Harold/Vona Ogren (HOgren@msn.com)

LifeSpring School of Ministry

Richard Jensen, Director

LifeSpring is on a roll! More students are enrolling, and we have a comprehensive slate of courses to get them through their certificate and license programs in timely fashion. Scholarship funds are available too from LifeSpring and from districts. Students have given positive feedback about our new hybrid simulcast system. Here, two students share their experiences:

I had considered myself well-versed in all areas of biblical study, but LifeSpring has shown me there is always more to learn. After two years of study, I can honestly say that I am a new person in terms of Church leadership and Christian theology. Studying CoG7 history, I was overjoyed reading about early leaders like Gilbert Cramner and his "The Bible and the Bible alone" crusade. As a lay pastor, I was encouraged by those who demonstrated their resolve to follow Christ come what may.

The courses may be long and require dedication, but I enjoy every class and assignment. Not only am I understanding my pastoral role more clearly, but also am aided to be a better defender of the faith.

– Aubrey Williams,
lay pastor
Etobicoke, Ontario



Being certain that full-time pastoral ministry was my primary calling, I became concerned about education and my level of confidence about the Bible. As a pastor's son, I expected that I should know all there is to know. But I had little formal Bible training, was never taught how

to read it for understanding, and didn't know what hermeneutics was. Not to say that I didn't read the Bible or wasn't encouraged to study it, but to know how to read and study was another story.

When I heard of LifeSpring's plans, I became excited about the option of learning from home rather than going to a far-off school. Since I am not a techie and had never used a laptop, I was nervous about studying online. I prayed with my wife about this – and registered for classes.

Man, am I glad I took that step! It was an adjustment at first, relearning to type, study, prioritize my time, and commit to school. Being a person-to-person guy, I didn't think I would learn much from online conversations, but I was wrong. It is pure joy to learn alongside my brothers who are also committed to ministry as we build relationships and experience God together. With my Lay Pastor Certificate, I can't think of a better way to stay on target for my continuing education. LifeSpring helps me learn the Word and connect with the Lord. I highly recommend it.

– Aaron Henderson, lay
pastor and first elder
Marion, Oregon



Thanks to those who've contributed to our scholarship programs! Your generosity is a huge help to our students. And to all, please remember that your donation of just \$35 per year, directly to LifeSpring, will make a dramatic difference. This is *your* school.





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International Congress

No Ordinary People

Whaid Rose reflects on his recent trip to Nigeria for dedication of a new church facility and Rivers State campmeeting in Omoku. IMC Zone 5 Representative Robert Crawford (UK) and John Njogu (Kenya) also attended.

I've never seen anything like it. Strong Christian faith mixed with elaborate display of rich cultural heritage, colors, pageantry, ceremony, and hilarious giving — all in the context of a well-organized church where leadership and spiritual authority matter.

That's my description of the thriving Church of God (Seventh Day) in Nigeria, observed during a recent visit there. With membership exceeding 100,000, it's the largest conference of our International Ministerial Congress.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria is in West Africa, sharing borders with Benin (to its west), Chad and Cameroon (to its east), and Niger (to its north). Its southern coast is the Gulf of Guinea and the Atlantic Ocean. The nation is almost evenly divided between Muslims and Christians, with a small minority practicing traditional religion.

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, has a long history. Its three largest ethnic groups are Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba. The area around the Benue and Cross River is thought to be the original homeland of Bantu migrants, who spread across most of central and southern Africa in the two millennia before Christ.

Nigerians are noted for their strength of will and indomitable spirit. Such characteristics, combined with the saving power of the gospel, result in strong faith and conviction, evident in the lives of our Nigerian brethren. Love for the Lord translates into contagious joy and uninhibited worship, beautifully balanced by reverence and an awareness of the holy. Church is serious business, and so is the Bible. Hearing it equals hearing God.

And what shall I say about the festival of choirs, the colors, the pageantry, the ceremony? The gospel transcends culture, but it isn't anti-culture. According to Dr. R. C. Sproul, God cares deeply, not only about the good (He is the source of all goodness: Genesis 1:31; James



Top: Crowd gathers for church dedication. Center: Ribbon-cutting ceremony. Bottom: Whaid Rose delivers dedication message.



1:17) and the true (He is the essence of truth: Isaiah 65:16; John 14:6), but also about the beautiful.

God's elaborate instructions for building the Old Testament tabernacle (Exodus 25:2-8) and weaving the priest's garments (28:2) illustrate this, revealing His concern not just for functionality, but also for beauty and detail. Similarly, the church should give more attention to beauty and good taste as visible expressions of its love for God. Thanks to the Nigerian church for this timely reminder.

And talk about hilarious giving. Some give out of their abundance, others out of their need. All give joyfully! No plates are passed; givers walk to offering stations, dancing as they go! No attitude of "Let's get this out of the way." Giving is worship; worship is giving. During choral anthems, during the spoken word, the Nigerian brethren rise quietly and give. The new state-of-the-art church facility in Omoku is a gift from philanthropist and member Prince Felix Obuah. A culture of giving is everywhere evident.

Respect for leadership and spiritual authority are high priorities, underscored by the inscription of Acts 20:28 on their church logo: "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers."

Being there reminded me of our years of literature-sending; the efforts of our foreign missions work; the labor of indigenous leaders there, among whom Benjamin Tikili, founding elder of the Nigerian church, deserves mention. Indeed, Paul plants, Apollos waters. Thank God for the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6)!

There are no perfect churches; this one too has struggles and needs. But it exudes uncommon aspirations. The Nigerian church knows it is no ordinary people because it serves no ordinary God and has been called to no ordinary task. May God continue to bless the church in Nigeria in extraordinary ways.

— Whaid Guscott Rose
General Conference President

Top: Church leaders pose following dedication. Center: Whaid Rose and Robert Crawford pose with Prince Felix Obuah (center), church member and donor of the new facility. Bottom: Pageantry and ceremony, regular features of campmeeting.





GOD, SUNSHINE, AND FRIENDS WELCOME HERE!

Youth season started January 1 this year, with a crowd of 300 at winter retreat near Dallas, TX (planned and led by SWD youth coordinators Jason and Rose Rodriguez). A list of spring and summer youth and SWORD events is on page 28 of this issue.