

April-May 2008

BA

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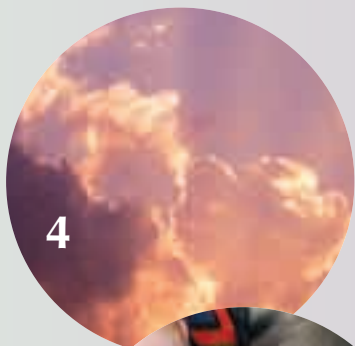
Newness of Life

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Time to transform (p. 8)

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Coming in the June BA: relationships; victory over loneliness and depression

In the April and May issues of *Now What?*: emotional struggles of a rape victim; conversion of a New Ager (<http://now-what.cog7.org>)

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



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This Time of Year



What do you expect on the editorial page of a magazine? An intro to its

articles? Some routine stuff about how fast time flies and that it doesn't seem possible that another editorial is due? The personal approach where the editor tells you everything you never wanted to know about his favorite sports teams and his grandchildren?

The best to be said about some editorials is that they take up space. Many readers skip this page to seek greener pasture among articles, "Q & A," and news photos. I'm glad you didn't do that today.

Each spring, seems to me, the Bible calendar is worth our mention and your attention. The religious year in old Israel began in early spring, within two weeks after the vernal equinox (our March 21). This floating date then governed the annual Hebrew holy days: Passover, Unleavened Bread, Pentecost in the spring; Trumpets, Atonement, Tabernacles in the fall. Since Scripture formulates no New Year's Day for this ancient calendar, we are left to other devices — like the modern Jewish calendar — to prescribe the date of any observance to which it is linked, like our annual Lord's Supper service.

The fact that the common Easter celebration this year came a month before Passover (fourteenth day of the first Jewish month) is due to differing calculations used by Latin churchmen and Jewish rabbis. And ponder this: The seventh-day Sabbath, a solar event, depends only upon the weekly cycle — constant rotation of the earth on its axis every twenty-four hours. It is not linked to the complicated lunar calendar by which the rabbis set Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles.

The spirit of sacred events is always a weightier matter than precise timing. This season we urge you to not forget such grace and truth as flow from our Lord's lips and His blemished hands. Give yourselves the more to love and forgive one another, to relieve the wants of people in every place, and to care for all things God has made.

Each local Church of God (Seventh Day) will gather on Friday evening, April 18, for the annual memorial of Jesus' death. This communion service, accompanied by washing of others' feet, demonstrates fellowship with our Savior until His return. All baptized followers of Christ are invited, and we extend charity toward those who observe Lord's Supper at other times.

— Calvin Burrell



When Defeat Spells Victory

The darkness and despair of crucifixion didn't end the story. by Richard A. Wiedenheft (1946-2007)

The hopes of Jesus' disciples were soaring. As they witnessed miracle after miracle, saw the power of His teachings, and exercised power themselves in His name, they became increasingly convinced that this Rabbi was the long-awaited Messiah of Israel, the one who would lead His people to greatness. What great expectations they had for Him and for themselves!

Then things began to go badly. Jesus spoke about falling into the hands of His enemies — betrayal, suffering, and dying. The disciples didn't want to hear it! They wanted nothing that would spoil the bright future they envisioned with Him (Matthew 16:21-23). On the night of His betrayal when Jesus predicted they would all desert Him, Peter boldly proclaimed his allegiance: "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same" (26:35).

Falling apart

But that very night when Jesus — their fearless, miracle-working Master — was taken into custody, His disciples fled in panic. The unthinkable was happening. Israel's Messiah, apparently as vulnerable as a common criminal, was brought before the Sanhedrin, condemned, and turned over to the Roman governor whose soldiers mocked, beat, and humiliated Him.

Caught up in the drama was Peter, who vehemently denied even knowing Him. Then the rooster crowed, and he remembered Jesus' prophecy that he would deny Him three times. His precious Lord was helpless in the hands of His enemies, and Peter, the bold one, had forsaken Him, contrary to his vow. He couldn't even muster the courage to acknowledge their connection. Peter went out and wept bitterly — an utter failure.

Jesus' tragic end was still unfolding. Weakened from beatings, He collapsed under the weight of the wood that was to be the instrument of His execution. He arrived at Calvary, was nailed to that wood, and was put

to death between a couple of thieves amid the taunts of jeering onlookers: “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One” (Luke 23:35).

What an ignominious end! How His enemies must have gloated over this “man” who aspired to be King of the Jews, this “son of David” who had claimed to be “I am” before Abraham (John 8:58).

For His followers, this was the end. They knew what everyone knows: Death is final. All their hopes for meaning and triumph in following Jesus had come to nothing. All their hopes for national restoration were replaced with total frustration and utter despair. They were nothing and had nothing — and their own lives were in danger (20:19).

Apparent defeat

At their point of deepest despair, the disciples heard reports of an empty tomb. Then came more such reports . . . one of Jesus being seen as alive. Then He appeared to some of them, then to all of them. Could it be true? Could it be possible? Finally they were forced to believe. Jesus had indeed risen from the dead, giving lie once and for all to the idea that death is final. Now their fear and frustration gave way to joy and hope.

It didn’t matter anymore that Peter had denied Jesus in His darkest hour. This was an entirely new day, and Jesus was telling him, “Feed my lambs” (21:15-18). It didn’t matter that the disciples had fled in fear of the Jewish leaders. Now they were filled with confidence in this Rabbi, whom the grave could not

hold. Their dreams for a future for themselves were revived, but in an entirely new way. They knew the Power of the universe was with them, the One who laughed in the face of what men consider final. Some fifty days after their darkest hour, they stood boldly to proclaim this gospel in the temple, empowered by the Holy Spirit. Gone was the fear, the frustration, the futility. Now there was power, strength, achievement, and the anointing of God.

Victory from defeat

The events that had seemed the worst of their lives, that appeared to spell the end of their hopes and victory for their enemies — those very events spelled triumph for Jesus and His disciples. Now they could see that in subjecting Himself to death, their Master was conquering sin, death, and the Devil. In laying down His life, He was gaining victory for Himself and for the disciples as they too came to believe that persecution, suffering, and death would mean ultimate victory (Acts 5:41; Romans 8:17, 18; 1 Peter 4:13).

The Jewish leaders thought they were getting rid of a prob-

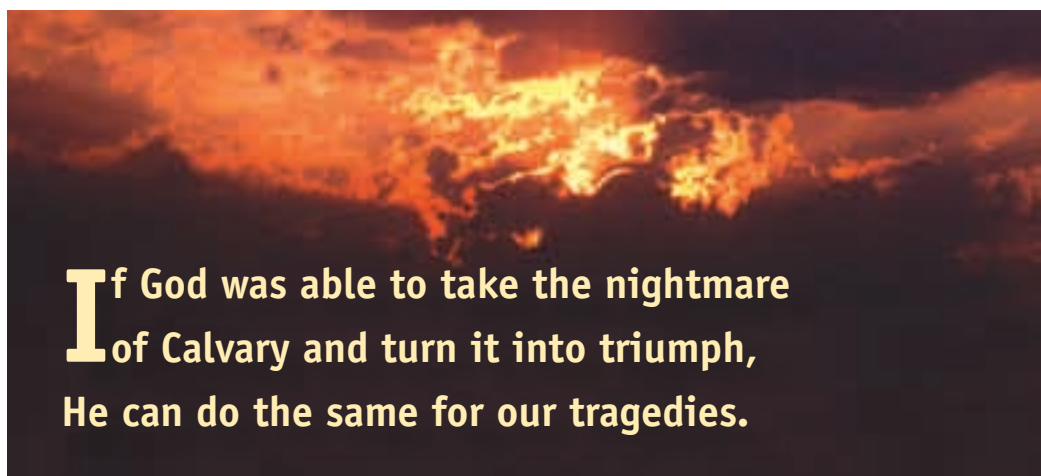
lem by crucifying Jesus, but they were really providing the means whereby they could be saved from eternal death — and not just they, but the whole world. No wonder Jesus could say of His tormentors, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).

Pattern of hope

To be sure, Jesus’ death and resurrection are for us the means to reconciliation with God, forgiveness of sin, and the promise of eternal life. But they also provide a pattern of hope in whatever difficult circumstances we find ourselves.

For if God was able to take the nightmare of Calvary and turn it to triumph, He can do the same for our tragedies. If He was able, through the Resurrection, to turn the disciples’ failures, fears, and frustrations into hope, joy, and power, He can do the same for us.

The very circumstances in our lives that seem like utter defeat can, in the providence of God, spell victory. Whatever failures we’ve experienced in our lives — dissolved marriages, dead-end vocations, collapsed businesses, flawed child-rearing, animosity



If God was able to take the nightmare of Calvary and turn it into triumph, He can do the same for our tragedies.



Remembering His Death

Unlike most world religions, biblical Christianity is not big on ceremony. A ritual the New Testament clearly commands is one that commemorates the death of Jesus Christ. Jesus hinted of this ceremony:

“I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:53, 54, NIV).

His disciples thought He intended them to consume literal flesh and blood, and many stopped following Him (vv. 60, 66). But Jesus was referring to something much more profound — something spiritual: We must accept His broken flesh and shed blood as payment for our sins and as the only means to eternal life.

We may eat and drink Jesus’ body and blood in another spiritual sense: by reading and meditating on His teaching and example so that we imbibe and digest His very nature, becoming like Him in character. Christians do not live by bread alone but by the very words of Christ (v. 63).

Our eternal relation to God, however, is based on one thing only: our purchase through the broken body and spilled blood of Jesus Christ. Because of His sacrifice, we stand before God not as sinners to be judged but as beloved children, declared by God’s grace to be righteous even though we are not.

Thus it is fitting for us to focus on the significance of our Savior’s death as we prepare for and participate in the Christian rite of the Memorial Supper. Do we recognize our continuing need for forgiveness? Do we believe in Christ’s atonement as payment for our sins, both past and present? Do we continue to accept Him as Lord and Master, seeking to obey His will in all aspects of our lives?

To be sure, of and by ourselves, we are unworthy to eat and drink this supper. But through Jesus Christ, and only through Him, we become worthy in God’s eyes. What a wonderful blessing! And what a wonderful opportunity to reaffirm our commitment as we eat the bread and drink the cup!

— Richard A. Wiedenheft

The full version of this article may be read at www.cog7.org. An alternate version was printed in the April 1995 BA.

among brethren, loved ones who despise our religion — can be turned to triumph because Jesus is alive. Whatever pain and despair has entered our lives, Romans 8:28 assures us that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

The current chapter of the book of our lives may appear bleak, just like that of the disciples at the time of Jesus’ crucifixion. But there’s a new chapter coming, and it may well bring good things we cannot now see. That’s God’s specialty: taking what appears like utter defeat in the physical realm and turning it into victory.

And even if this is the final chapter of the book of our lives, there’s still hope. There’s a whole new sequel coming! For if the death and resurrection of Jesus prove anything, they prove that nothing in this life is final. What is final for believers is being with Jesus in eternity, an eternity wherein all tears and suffering and dying will be completely eclipsed by the exquisite joy of eternal fellowship with Him and His people (Revelation 21:1-4).



BA staff writer **Richard A. Wiedenheft** died on March 23, 2007. His widow, Darlene, lives in the family home near Scranton, PA, and assists with a new Sabbath fellowship at nearby Mount Pocono. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



Questions & Answers

Q Doesn't Colossians 2:16, 17 speak against Sabbath observance?

A These verses read: "So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ." If this puzzling text opposes the weekly rest day for Christians, it is the only one of sixty Sabbath references in the New Testament to give a negative witness to the seventh-day rest of creation and of Christ.

A closer look, however, shows that this text is not against Sabbaths any more than it is against food, drink, or festivals. No day is the problem here but the misuse of days for un-Christian purposes.

Exploring the background of this epistle, we learn that the first century church in Colosse was troubled by teachings that later became known as Gnosticism, a heresy that troubled the church in the first centuries after Christ. Gnosticism borrowed from Judaism, paganism, and Christian doctrine, combining them into an amalgam in which the person and work of Jesus were no longer central.

A reading of Colossians 2 suggests that the false teachers (early Gnostics) taught a philosophical form of faith (v. 8) that mixed worship of angels (v. 18), ascetic practices of the body (vv. 20-23), and Jewish holy days, with the weekly Sabbath (v. 16). Some of Jesus was surely sprinkled in for good measure, but the resulting spiritual soup was actually a toxic mixture of man-made religion upon which repeated warnings are pronounced: "Let no one cheat [judge] you . . ." (vv. 8, 16, 18).

Speaking positively, Paul urges that Christ be preeminent in all things (vv. 2, 3, 6, 9, 10ff, 17; also 1:13ff). These verses are the heart of the apostle's argument in this chapter. With our Lord at the church's head and reigning in our hearts, the weekly

Sabbath and every other proper teaching can assume their rightful place.

Taken in context, then, the message of Colossians 2:16, 17 is that the church must not elevate anything above the Lord Jesus Christ: not angels, not dietary practice or other forms of self-denial, not Hebrew festivals, and not even the weekly Sabbath. All are subordinate to Him who lived, died, and rose again for our eternal redemption.

— Elder Calvin Burrell

Q Looking at Mark 16:9, was Jesus resurrected on a Sunday?

A Mark 16:9 can be a problem for those of us who teach that Jesus was more likely resurrected late on the Sabbath day rather than on Sunday morning. But it is also a problem for those who teach Christ's resurrection on Sunday, in that verses 9-20 are absent in early manuscripts and considered doubtful Scripture by most textual scholars.

Even if we admit the verse into inspired evidence, it is possible that the phrase "first day of the week" tells when "He appeared first to Mary Magdalene," not when He was raised. This syntax of the verse harmonizes well with the KJV rendering of Matthew 28:1, 2 (that places an earthquake and the Resurrection "in the end of the Sabbath") and with John 20:1, 11-18.

Based on Jesus' prophecy that He would remain three days and three nights in the tomb (Matt. 12:38-40), a strong case can be made for Christ's crucifixion on Wednesday and resurrection before sunset on the weekly Sabbath. A thirty-page study of this topic is available from the Bible Advocate Press. Contact the editor and ask for a copy of *The Duration of Jesus' Entombment*.

— Elder Calvin Burrell

Lifelong Makeover

Spiritual growth, unlike birth, is mostly measured in millimeters.

by Jason Overman



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On any given night, my wife and I climb the stairs to the twins' bedroom. Drawn by their cries, we sit on the edge of their bed, rubbing their sore legs. "It's just growing pains," we whisper. "You're growing up."

Growing up, indeed — and right before our eyes. It seems like yesterday that I first held their barely five-pound bodies. Now they're ten times that size. Someday they will be mature adults. The amazing physical and mental transformation I see my children undergo is not optional.

To be a Christian is to submit to a similar process. As born-again children of God, we are called to "be transformed," to "grow up" (Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:15). But to what are we being transformed, and just what

are we growing up to be? The apostle Paul gives an astonishing answer:

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Corinthians 3:18).

This verse is not an isolated thought. As we follow its central themes — the image, the Lord, the glory, and the Spirit — we shall see that its truth abounds in Scripture. It is the goal to which the Christian life aims, the prize for which the church presses (Philippians 3:14).

The image

The idea of bearing *the image* takes us back to the beginning. The crowning of creation was

God's breathing life into mere clay, calling it "son" — one like Him, created in His image (Luke 3:38; Genesis 1:27). Like any father, God desired children who would reflect His own nature. But selfishness betrayed that image, and Adam and Eve forfeited their destiny. Now lost and darkened, the image remains but shimmers faintly in their offspring to this day.

From the moment we were expelled from Eden, God began to seek and save His own. As story after story reveals, His grace found men and woman like Noah, Abraham, Ruth, and Esther who would respond to His love, relinquish the wanton conformity of this world, and recover the transforming life that comes from being image-bearers of a heavenly Father.

No Old Testament story illustrates this paradigm better than the Exodus. After Israel was rescued from slavery, her redemption moved inexorably toward regeneration. At Sinai she learned that holiness follows deliverance as sure as adulthood follows childhood. Israel is called to “be holy; for I am holy” because she is “My firstborn” (Leviticus 11:44; 19:2; 20:7, 26; Exodus 4:22). She, like any child in the natural realm, was to develop and grow by imitating her loving Father.

The New Testament is patterned on the same logic: “Having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6:18). The gospel is both: “Neither do I condemn you” and “go and sin no more” (John 8:11). Being holy as He is holy (1 Peter 1:16) is a faithful command just to the extent that we stand in relation to Him who begat us. So we must imitate God as His children and be perfect as He is perfect (Ephesians 5:1; Matthew 5:48).

The Lord

Outside of Christ, this call to holy image seems overwhelming. Indeed, the story of Scripture — not to mention our own lives — is littered with evidence that we have failed, like Adam, to reflect His image. The good news, however, is that *the Lord* Jesus, the Son of God, being “the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person” has become the “last Adam.” He has succeeded in bearing the image where all before Him failed (Hebrews 1:3; 1 Corinthians 15:45).

But the good news continues, for now in Christ genuine transformation is made available. We

are pursuing, attaining, God’s nature as we stand in relation to Christ, the true image-bearer. He becomes the focal point of our transformation:

The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. . . . And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man (1 Corinthians 15:47, 49).

The ancient church taught that God became like man so that we could become like God. It is a staggering proposal and, of course, impossible but for *the Lord*. Knowing our nature, we cannot but sit humbly before the extraordinary implications. From the foundation of the world, God’s purpose has not just been to save us from sin but to make a way for us to “be conformed to the image of His Son” (Romans 8:29).

This marvelous promise of being conformed to Christ’s image must not languish in the periphery of our faith; it must be ever before our eyes as our great hope and destiny. It is worth getting excited about. Is there anything more awe-inspiring than knowing that through the “divine power” we have become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:3, 4)?

The glory

This partaking calls to mind all the wonderful Bible stories of divine encounter, those mountaintop experiences where God is found and His glory experienced. These introduce us to a God who would be known. They usher us into His boundless mystery and launch us on our own quest to partake in *the glory*. Our transformation is in part a measure of our hunger for Him, our yearning for Him above all else, wanting, like Paul, to know Him (Philippians 3:10).

Moses was such a man. And when Paul talks about our transformation “from glory to glory,” Moses’ great encounter with the divine lies close in the background (2 Corinthians 3:7-18). Trudging back up Sinai after the terrible disappointment of the golden calf, he arrived at the summit with a similar plea: “Show me now Your way, that I may know You . . . Please, show me Your glory” (Exodus 33:13, 18).

As God responded in self-revelation, something fantastic happened: After forty days facing *the glory*, Moses descended the mount radiating the very God he desired to know. So resplendent was the sight that he veiled himself from the frightened people. This veiled reality represents

**We are pursuing, attaining,
God’s nature as we stand
in relation to Christ, the true
image-bearer.**

Every day my kids remind me of my own journey as they accomplish today what they had not even considered yesterday.

the limits of the old covenant, but Moses' own unveiled and transforming view of God serves as a powerful metaphor for the new covenant experience — just as Isaiah foretold: “Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you” (60:1).

Paul writes that what we suffer now can't compare with the glory to be revealed in us (Romans 8:18). Since Jesus is bringing “many sons to glory” (Hebrews 2:10), those who crave, like Moses and Paul, to know Him will, by the grace of God, reflect Him. “Christ in you, [is] the hope of glory” and “we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (Colossians 1:27; 1 John 3:2).

The Spirit

The Spirit mediates this great hope of transformation into our lives. The self-same Spirit that was sent at Pentecost, that brings gifts and bears fruit, that leads into all truth and unity, this Spirit is the means by which we are being transformed “from glory to glory.” The promised coming of the “Spirit of holiness” has always been bound up in the “hope of righteousness” (Romans 1:4; 8:1-14; Galatians 5:5).

But the phrase “from glory to glory” provides an important

clue as to the nature of the Spirit's work in us. Like all transformations, it is more a process — a moving from degree to degree — than a singular event. It is not that we *were* transformed or that we *will be* transformed. The tense in this verse is present: We are *being transformed*.

That it is the nature of the Spirit to transform through time is illustrated paradigmatically in the story of Creation. “In the beginning” the Spirit moved between darkness and deep, and over the course of seven days it led creation to its intended fullness. Similarly as we enter the life of the church by the blood of Christ, the Spirit moves upon us as it did then replacing the darkness of sin with the light of Christ, the chaos of the deep with the beauty of truth. We are indeed a new creation, putting on “the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him” (Colossians 3:10).

Proverbs describes this upward process eloquently: “The path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day” (Proverbs 4:18). The road may be long, but it has a beginning, a middle, and an end: “He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ”

(Philippians 1:6). Since the author of our faith is also its finisher, we may run the race with joy and endurance (Hebrews 12:1, 2).

Going for growth

Every day my kids remind me of my own journey of regeneration. As they eagerly race to do more and be more, I am reminded to keep pressing toward the goal of growth (Philippians 3:14). As they accomplish today what they had not even considered yesterday, I remember “to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever” (Ephesians 3:21).

Recently I heard a wonderful sermon on this promise of transformation. At its conclusion, the minister illustrated the divine process with a small toy. Reaching into the lectern, he took out a racecar and slowly began moving this part and that until it was transformed into a super-hero.

The children sat up, transfixed. “Cool! It's a transformer, Dad!” my son commented enthusiastically. After the closing prayer, he rushed up to the altar with the other boys to get a closer look.

Kids get all excited about transformation. Do we? **BA**

Jason and Stephanie Overman and their twins call Jasper, AR, home. Jason serves the church there as pastor.



My son and I play a game in which we pick a color, then list everything we can think of in that hue. It's surprising what we've uncovered. Like spring, for instance. In April our harsh Minnesota winter retreats, and lush growth supplants the white season. Trees bud, tulips bloom, grass sprouts. Everywhere you look it's green. Living in Texas taught me to appreciate winter — not for the subzero temperatures, heaps of snow, or icy roads but for the deep-rooted growth that brings about our intense spring.

Recently a harsh season descended on our family. Within months, cancer ended the lives of my mother and mother-in-law. Emotional and spiritual fatigue threatened to send me into hibernation as our young children wrestled with realities not taught in Bible school. In the past I'd have ignored the pain and waited for hurt to disappear before getting back to life.

This time, though, I'm leaning into the pain. I used to seek out activities that validated my existence and made me feel like a doing-machine, hiding my soulful side. It's uncomfortable owning up to fear, doubt, and loss; but the other options provided only shallow relief — not lasting restoration.

Denying or minimizing the destructive power of pain doesn't heal any wounds. On the contrary, stuffed suffering tends to mimic Texas cockroaches: they skulk about in unknown places, showing up when the lights go off. Likewise, pain festers and grows, lurking about the soul, seeding apathy or anger. Then when life gets hard, the forgotten suffering can lurch for-



Seeking Green

by Ann Vande Zande

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ward, compounding the strain of immediate struggles.

When anguish is concealed behind work, busyness, and activity, we end up subsisting in bleak blandness. The abundant life is traded for an abiding winter-like season, with the relief of spring all but forgotten.

It doesn't take a trauma as drastic as death or disease to send a person running for cover. Loss can come as strain at work, unmet expectations, or our children's constant needs. Even daily disappointments can challenge our trust in God. If He's in control and able to help my family, my church, and me, why is life so hard?

Some believers advocate solution-style Christianity: Pray this prayer for immediate results. In my experience, formulas don't work. Worse, when the prescription fails, who's to blame? The hurting person is left deeper in anguish than before and carrying added shame for not having enough faith. In reality, the hindrance rests not with God but with the quick-fix solution itself.

God's promises remain trustworthy, but that doesn't mean life never becomes messy or even overwhelming. As destructive as they seem, tough times

can be overcome. Releasing my desire for self-sufficiency forces me to face my people-pleasing faith — religion that's more about me than about God. That's when I can express myself honestly to God — a conversation that's not pretty or pious, but profitable. Prayers wrapped in vulnerable confusion, confrontation, and cries don't send God away; they strengthen our relationship. In those times I get a glimpse of what God's grace means: being loved, just as I am.

Then hope arises.

Hope reminds me to hold on because new life will bloom soon — life that's green, abundant, and rooted deeply. Hope teaches me that my spirit will be renewed, that I'm more than what I accomplish. Hope assures me that God hasn't forgotten; it coaxes me to believe that my tears matter to God. Clinging to the hope that doesn't disappoint (Romans 5:5), I find the courage to trust God and, once again, seek green. **144**

Ann Vande Zande writes from Minnesota.





Praying for Israel

Sixty years ago, an old nation was reborn.
by Mike Dizon

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
“May they prosper who love you”
(Psalm 122:6).

Look at a world map, and you will see that Israel is at the crossroads of three continents: Europe, Africa, and Asia. Note how her centrality is confirmed in the Word: “Thus says the Lord God: ‘This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the midst of the nations and the countries all around her’” (Ezekiel 5:5).

Israel was established at the center of the world as a light to the nations for the knowledge of the one God. This would contribute more than anything to the world’s progress and peace. It matches the promise to Abraham: “I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:3).

Israel is the Lord’s portion, the apple of His eye (Deuteronomy 32:9, 10), a nation chosen by God (Isaiah 44:1). The prophets saw that in the last days, nations will go up to Jerusalem to seek the ways of God, acknowledging His presence there (Isaiah 2:2-4; Micah 4:1ff).

Twice, Israel’s holy temple was destroyed by invading armies: Babylon in 586 B.C. and Rome in A.D. 70. Both times the Jewish people were dispersed among the nations, yet the Lord God had promised they would be re-gathered (Isaiah 11:11, 12). And they were!

Historic proclamation

On Sabbath eve, May 14, 1948, David Ben-Gurion, a Jewish farmer-turned-prime minister, declared the reestablishment of the State of Israel after the nation had lived nearly two millennia away from the land or under foreign rule.

Part of the Proclamation of Independence reads:

The Land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious and political identity was shaped. Here they first attained to statehood, created cultural values of national and universal significance and gave to the world the eternal Book of Books.

After being forcibly exiled from their land, the people kept faith with it throughout their Dispersion and never ceased to pray and hope for their return to it and for the restoration in it of their political freedom. . . .

This right is the natural right of the Jewish people to be the masters of their own fate, like all other nations, in their own sovereign State. . . .

Accordingly we, members of the People's Council, representatives of the Jewish Community of Eretz-Israel and of the Zionist Movement, are here assembled on the day of the termination of the British Mandate over Eretz-Israel and, by virtue of our natural and historic right and on the strength of the resolution of the United Nations General Assembly, hereby declare the establishment of a Jewish state in Eretz-Israel, to be known as the State of Israel. . . .

Placing our trust in the Almighty, we affix our signatures to this proclamation at this session of the provisional Council of State, on the soil of the Homeland, in the city of Tel-Aviv, on this Sabbath eve, the 5th day of Iyar, 5708 (14th May, 1948).

— *The Knesset online*
www.knesset.gov.il

No sooner had the nation been born on one day than she was attacked the next by four


neighbors who did not wish her to live. To this day, hard-line Arab states and fanatic Islamists want Israel pushed into the sea, wiped from the map.

In modern wars against Israel — 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, and 2006 — she was usually attacked first and was forced to fight for survival. From the ill-equipped Haganah Brigade (1948), she now has a well-established Israeli Defense Force (IDF). Her very existence against such heavy odds for sixty years suggests to many that heaven itself is in the fight (Zechariah 12:2, 3).

World peace

Why should we pray for the peace of Israel? Because of the crucial world-role played by this tiny nation and those who share the “crossroads of continents” — the Middle East — with her. Whatever happens to Israel affects all nations.

There can be no lasting peace in the world as long as Israel remains under dire threat. Conflict in that region always has the potential to escalate into major war that could destroy much of the earth. The destruction of Israel could be the destruction of the Middle East and, consequently, the whole world.

To save humankind from nuclear war and global disaster, pray for Jerusalem. The peace of Israel is the peace of the whole world. 

Mike Dizon

serves the Church of God (Seventh Day) as a pastor and evangelist in and around Manila, Island of Luzon, Philippines.



And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it (Zechariah 12:3).

Israel is the only nation in the world whose existence is threatened. Should Israel lose but one war, it would mean her end and ours as well.

— Elie Wiesel, *Night*, p. 120

God deals with the nations as they deal with the Jews. . . .

— Winston Churchill, quoted in *My People*, by Abba Eban, p. 425



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Repentance: Escaping the Darkness

A BA interview with Brian Knowles.

“Repent” was a central command in the ministry of Jesus and His apostles. Why?

Spiritually speaking, the world lies in darkness and under sentence of eternal death. But God sought to end that darkness by sending His Son into the world. As the sun is the physical light of the world, so Jesus is the spiritual light (John 1:4, 5). Except for a few people, sinful men did not grasp the real significance of Jesus’ coming. That’s still true two thousand years later, though up to a billion of the earth’s population claim allegiance to Christ.

Jesus is the central figure in the divine plan. He alone opens the way for people to move out of darkness into the light. The portion of the world that refuses Him will continue to languish in darkness and the shadow of death. To believe in Jesus is to obey Him; to obey Him begins with repentance.

Jesus calls the world to repentance (Matthew 4:17). Paul told the Athenian philosophers on Mars Hill that God “commands all people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30b). Why? “For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead” (v. 31). Here Paul refers to Jesus the Messiah, whose just judgment is coming. In anticipation of that day, it behooves all of us to repent.

Repentance sounds so churchy. How do we grasp its practical sense?

A sinful person moves away from God through his behavior. He drifts farther from the light and deeper into the darkness of sin. We repent once at baptism and on an ongoing basis as the sinful self is shed and the nature of Christ is formed in us.

The resolve not to recommit a given sin is the beginning of a process of repentance — but only the beginning. Repentance, to be real, has to have legs.

Our initial repentance is the first step in a lifelong spiritual makeover. We commit our lives to Christ, and He begins working on us. It’s a good work — a work of redemption — and starts with a rebirth. Little by little, the Lord makes His children over in His image. The work continues until we die or Christ returns, whichever comes first.

Repentance, then, means change — turning back to God after we have turned away from Him. It means being extracted from the darkness that we have allowed to overtake us and embracing once again the light of God.

Repentance is a multifaceted expression of conversion and of one’s willingness to imitate Christ and His original imitators. A repentant person comes to a conviction that he is headed in the wrong direction. He stops, turns around, and heads back in the right direction — toward God. He stops doing what he was doing wrong and starts doing what is right.

When we repent, we throw ourselves on the mercy of God, who alone can remove our guilt. He does this by applying His gracious forgiveness and the sacrifice of Christ to our personal situation.

How does repentance relate us to the person of Jesus?

Shedding the filth of the past and becoming more Christ-like in behavior, outlook, and character are mammoth tasks.

“How do you make an elephant?” someone asks.

The answer, you may recall, is “You get a big rock and chip away any part of it that doesn’t look like an elephant.”

That’s essentially what repentance involves. We hold up Christ as the standard and then jettison any part of our character that doesn’t look like His. We learn to think like He thought (Philippians 2:5) and behave as He behaved (1 Peter 2:21ff.). We begin, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to replace the “works of the flesh” (Galatians 5:19-21, KJV) with the attributes imparted by the Spirit (vv. 22-26).

Our journey back to God involves ongoing transformation that begins in the mind (Romans 12:1, 2). Incrementally we become a new person, made over in the image of the Messiah himself — the paragon of virtue and spirituality. Piece by ugly piece, our old spiritual self drops away and is replaced by Christ-like qualities.

Though it has become a cliché through overuse, it is always legitimate for the Christian to ask, “What would Jesus do?”

What about the role of emotion in repentance?

Real repentance involves passion — the whole being, the heart and soul. But there are times when repentance involves no emotion whatsoever. In some instances, it simply means a course correction. It may or may not involve emotion, but feeling itself is not repentance; change is. If there is emotion involved, it is a byproduct of repentance.

Can there be corporate repentance for a church?

Throughout church history, denominations and their leaders have changed their official teachings, doctrines, and dogmas to comply with a better, more mature understanding of Scripture. This represents a form of corporate repentance. To be alive, the church must be a growing, dynamic entity — not just in numbers but in spiritual maturity. Collectively we are animated by the Holy Spirit, which leads us progressively into truth (John 14:26). Growth in knowledge and understanding is mandated in Scripture (2 Peter 3:18). This requires ongoing repentance of inferior understanding and the adoption of better understanding. Such repentance is a function of leadership. Instead of endlessly rehashing the basics, we should be going deeper into more mature understanding (Hebrews 5:11–6:3).

What are the fruits of repentance?

Repentance disarms the Devil. Our Adversary has three actions: He seduces us into sin (Genesis 3); he accuses us before God (Job 1; Revelation 12:10); and if we are unrepentant, he destroys us (John 8:44). Repentance silences his accusations against us, and God wipes our sins off the record (Psalm 51:7). Repentance restores that relationship with our Creator that sin has damaged (2 Corinthians 5:19). Repentance unravels the work of the Devil in our lives.

Repentance can restore damaged human relationships. If we have sinned against another

and seek forgiveness through confession and repentance, the other may not grant it. No matter whether others forgive, if we have truly repented of a sin, then God has forgiven it. The unforgiving brother or sister will simply have to learn to play catch-up.

Repentance stops the damage done by sin from worsening. Prior to his repentance, Saul of Tarsus attacked the fledgling church “unto the death” (Acts 22:4, KJV). His conversion to Christ stopped that persecution and presented some believers with a new problem: how to forgive Paul for what he had done to the brethren. The fruit of repentance is always good even when it generates challenges for others.

Repentance on a grand scale has the potential to change the world. It can drive back the spiritual darkness and flood the world with light. Any one of us, if we choose to repent of whatever sin the Holy Spirit brings to our notice, can become a point of light in a spiritually gloomy world.

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

Brian Knowles writes from Monrovia, CA. Scripture quotations are from *New International Version*, unless otherwise noted.



A Church Takes Shape:

The Michigan churches of Christ, founded by Gilbert Cranmer in the late 1850's, and the Marion, Iowa, Church of Jesus Christ, founded in 1860, soon learned of each other and began to publish *The Hope of Israel* in 1863. With a firm stand for premillennial adventism, Christ's reign on earth, and weekly Sabbath observance, those Church of God (Seventh Day) pioneers opposed the "revelations" of Ellen White in favor of full loyalty to Scripture. How successful they were in this noble enterprise will be considered here.

Two questions guide the doctrinal development of any group: 1) What is truth? and 2) How is it determined? For Christians, the answers require a scriptural approach and correct methods of interpreting the Bible. Properly guided, in-depth studies of God, redemption, the church, and even history will lead to certain conclusions and doctrines. Good methods in theology must generate conviction, not vice versa.

The new CoG7's attempt at systematic doctrine is found in the first *Hope* (1863). Our pioneers' affirmation of "no hope of eternal life but through Christ" is gratifying to all who love the gospel, even as we recognize their conflict over the key issue of Jesus' nature and identity.

Most of our early pioneers espoused the Arian view of Christ. Named for its defender at

the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325), Arianism holds that the Father alone was truly God (a co-equal Son would make two Gods!); that the Son was created by the Father in time; and that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are separate — not uni-plural — entities.

Apart from lacking good biblical support, this view of the Godhead has serious implications for the gospel of eternal salvation. It also shows that for the first one hundred years, our concept of Deity was more Old Testament and Jewish (monadic) than it was New Testament and Christian (dyadic).

An Old Testament emphasis was also seen in our pioneers' thought and practice about Lord's Supper. While the Michigan churches are reported to have observed communion monthly in some cases, annual observance at the time of Passover gradually became an important norm for the evolving Church. Later generations often placed as much emphasis on Hebrew regulations for the "Christian Passover" as they did on the meaning of Christ's sacrifice.

What shaped our early pioneers' thinking in these regards? A plausible answer is that they, to some degree, stumbled into some potholes strewn along the road of anyone who would be guided by "the Bible and the Bible alone" — equivalent to the Protestant motto of *sola scriptura*. Students who stay isolated

from the best of historic Christian thought, from generally accepted rules of interpretation, and from other lovers of the Word often find themselves adopting views that later prove deficient (see 2 Peter 1:20b).

We should not be shocked or embarrassed that our founders missed a few marks along the way, even as we celebrate most of the doctrinal heritage they bequeathed us and continue their disciplined search of "the Bible alone" as our final word in faith and practice.

Our pioneers, fully committed to scriptural authority as they were, did not study in a vacuum. Each of them was undoubtedly influenced by the church of his youth. Evidence also shows that several of them learned from, if not joined for a time, a nineteenth century sect called Christian Connexion. Of this group, the *Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* says:

Their leading purposes, at first, appear to have been, not so much to establish any peculiar and distinctive doctrines, as to assert, for individuals and churches, more liberty and independence in relation to matters of faith and practice, to shake off the authority of human creeds and the shackles of prescribed modes and forms, to make the Bible their only guide, claiming the right for every man to be his own expositor of it, to judge, for himself, what are its

1863 to 1914

doctrines and requirements, and in practice, to follow more strictly the simplicity of the apostles and primitive Christians. . . . No member is subject to the loss of church fellowship on account of his sincere and conscientious belief, so long as he manifestly lives a pious and devout life. . . . Each church is considered an independent body, possessing exclusive authority to regulate and govern its own affairs. . . . The education of many of the ministers of the connexion, who universally preach extempore, is defective. . . . They have considered the preparation of the heart more important than the embellishment of the mind. (*Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*).

The influence of the Christian Connexion upon our founders, including Gilbert Cranmer, may help explain why CoG7's early years were often characterized by a local autonomy, anti-organizational sentiments, and rejection of historic Christian teachings. (To read more on Christian Connexion, visit www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/jvhimes/CC-ERK.HTM).

The change of the Church's name reflects the Connexion's emphasis on "Bible names for Bible things." Congregations in Michigan were first organized under the name Church of Christ. The switch to Church of God started in Iowa, the Missouri churches adopted the new name

in 1875, and the choice became unanimous in 1884. *Seventh-day* was added in 1923. The term *church of God* in the Bible is usually seen not as prescriptive usage but as generic reference to all God's people in Christ.

We continue to respect the Church's emphasis on the authority of Scripture and salvation only through the Lord Jesus. Reading our history helps us accept the fact that a full range of biblical scholarship and Christ-centeredness did not quickly accompany the efforts of our pioneers. They understood the importance of Christ and the cross, but they often viewed the New Testament through the lens of the Old. As new covenant believers, we have learned to reverse that, understanding the

Old Testament through the lens of our Lord's death and resurrection.

The Church has been described as "a moving movement." Like a train, its landscape and passengers change. Some get off and new ones come onboard as it moves down the track of time. We have much to learn and appreciate about our church's history, about the faith – and foibles – of our fathers. May we, the current passengers, be inspired to even greater commitment to Jesus and the values of His kingdom.

– BA

Pioneer churchman Jacob Brinkerhoff



Fifty Years in Focus

1860's - CoG7 expands south from Michigan and Iowa into Missouri

1874 - Sabbatarian Adventist Conference organizes in Missouri; S. C. B. Williams, president

1884 - Michigan, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, and Nebraska leaders form the first General Conference; A. C. Long, president

1888 - After twenty-plus years under Christian Publishing Association in Marion, Iowa (H. E. Carver was a key leader there), the *Sabbath Advocate* magazine moves to Stanberry, Missouri

1895 - CoG7 expands into Oklahoma territory after land rush there

1899 - General Conference incorporates in Gentry County, Missouri

1905 - CoG7 suffers in dispute over *Bible Advocate* editor W. C. Long

1914 - Upon retirement of Jacob Brinkerhoff, Andrew N. Dugger of Nebraska becomes BA editor and G. C. chairman

Answering the Call

**by Ruben, Ernesto, and Raul Frausto
with Bev Brenneise**

We Frausto brothers — Ruben, Ernesto, and Raul — were three of eleven children born to a poor family in Aguascalientes, Mexico. As youth we didn't always make wise choices, but we determined to live life to the fullest. And we did — *after* we allowed the Lord Jesus Christ to direct our course!

Today we serve on the CoG7 medical missions team, a group of doctors, dentists, and other medical personnel that has made three mission trips into Latin America. We give aid and medications to those who cannot afford it. The team was formed because people listened to the Lord's prompting. For us to listen to Him was a miracle.

We grew up in a Catholic family with six boys and five girls. Our father worked hard as a baker and at a gasoline station. In addition to caring for our family, Mother took in extra laundry to help with expenses. It was a crowded household, but we didn't experience a lot of arguing, as in some friends' houses. In our home, we saw a lot of love.

At age 17, I (Ruben) felt my parents had suffered enough from my wild and rebellious lifestyle. Engaged and needing more money, I left home in 1979 for Tijuana and struggled to survive. Three months later I pushed on north to Los Angeles, rooming with several young men. When my fiancé married one of my friends back home, depression set in. Some of my roommates attended CoG7. I was drawn to a youth program at the church.

Soon I was troubled by the guilt of a double life: attending church on Wednesday evenings and Sabbath, yet partying at other times. Trusting the Lord as Savior, I gradually gave up drinking, and my relationship with God deepened. My wife, Dolores, whom I met in the church, deserves much of the credit for my spiritual growth.

In 1983 I (Ernesto), though just 16, was a promising athlete. But I also hung with the wrong crowd and got involved in the same lifestyle that Ruben had once chosen. So Ruben invited me to return to Los Angeles with him and his wife. I refused at first but changed my mind the day before he left.

Thus I came to live with my older brother in the U.S. Several stormy years of arguments, rebellion, and discussion followed, while the Lord slowly penetrated my life. Eventually I married a strong Christian woman, Sandra, and my love for the Lord really blossomed.

We (Ruben and Ernesto) had now given our lives to the Lord and were working in the Church. In 1989 both families moved to new job opportunities in Sacramento, where a Sabbath school teacher challenged us: Would we work for the Lord? We began thinking about the Bible's instructions to Christians, and these thoughts kept returning.

Then I (Raul, the third brother in Mexico) faced a crisis. I was two years younger than Ernesto and attended dental school in Aguascalientes. My wife and I had just learned that our one-week-old son, Diego, needed open-heart surgery. Devastated and without funds, I turned to Ruben and Ernesto for financial help. My brothers, their churches, and even the schools where they worked rallied around the family in Mexico and gave love offerings for Diego's operation that took place in Mexico City.

To see our son so small and hooked up to machines and tubes caused us great pain. But soon after the operation, the baby began to thrive. Today we are happy because he is in good health. Thank God for the love He has shown to us and to Diego.

A woman from the CoG7 in Mexico City provided my wife and I a place to stay during both surgery and recovery. When I voiced my gratitude to her, she in turn mentioned that the Lord might have a mission for us and that I should be ready.

"I hope to one day be able to respond to the great work and effort you were able to realize for



Nikhil Gangavane—Dreamstime.com

us,” I wrote to Ruben. “We owe you a debt of gratitude. The stone on our back was big, and you were able to help us support it.”

The idea of a mission now began to occupy our thinking, especially mine (Ernesto). On a visit to our parents in Mexico, Raul and I held long conversations about helping others. I knew these things were coming from God. There is a time to wake up and do something for the community – for somebody else.

One day our Sabbath school class read James 1:22. “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only” Greatly affected by this verse, I felt that God was sending me a message. It became so clear that I had gone to church for ten to twenty years, knew what the Bible said, but had still not *done* the word. With this revelation straight to my heart, I now knew that *I had to do God’s word*.

We (Ernesto and Ruben) began discussing a possible medical mission, talking with pastors and leaders in various churches. We became convinced that the mission should include doctors from the Sacramento area. The name Dr. Eduardo Bermudez was suggested.

When I (Raul) heard about what was going on, I wrote a letter to my brothers in Sacramento, saying that I was willing to help the Church and wanted to be involved. Five friends from my dental school in Mexico also volunteered to become part of a mission team. Ultimately most of the dentists on the mission team came from this connection.

Doctors, nurses, and medical people volunteered from across the United States and Mexico and came together to form the rest of the team. The Medical and Dental Mission team was begun – the largest group of doctors, dentists, and staff to form such a group within the CoG7. Necessary funds were raised to pay for our first mission trip in 2006 to Chiapas, Mexico, promoted both by the General Conference Missions Abroad and by North American Women’s Ministries. Donations and fundrais-

ing breakfasts and dinners, put on by many good people in the Sacramento area churches, supplemented the funding.

A second mission team traveled to Guatemala in April 2007. A third mission team went to Nicaragua in March 2008.

The Lord is working. He is taking individuals who listen to His call and using them to minister to people – sometimes in third-world countries. May His ministry be blessed, and may His name be glorified.

Bev Brenneise and her husband, Don, retired school-teachers, attend the North Fellowship congregation in Sacramento, CA.

Been on a spiritual journey? Want to share it? Send your story to the BA, and we’ll consider it for a future issue.



Ruben, Ernesto, and Raul Frausto

Friend of Sinners

by David Kidd

There once was a man who wanted to catch fish, so he spent lots of time with other fishermen. He loved talking with them and learning from them. He loved singing fishermen songs and admiring fishing equipment, but he didn't go to the fishing spots because he hated the smell and feel of fresh fish. Day after day, he came home to his wife without fish for supper and no benefit from being a fisherman.

Jesus, unlike this would-be fisherman, was friendly with those He came to "catch" — even being accused of hanging out with thieves and prostitutes. When He dined with sinners at Levi's house, the Scribes and Pharisees complained, "How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?" (Mark 2:16). Again, Jesus ate at the house of Zacchaeus, and some said, "He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner" (Luke 19:7).

Jesus spoke strongly to such criticism. To those who asked, "How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?" He said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician,

but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance" (Mark 2:16, 17). And to the complainers who said, "He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner," Jesus explained, "The Son of Man has come to seek and save that which was lost" (Luke 19:7, 10).

Most of us are not very good imitators of Christ in His friendship with sinners. Before following Jesus in this way, we might reflect on the potential consequences. We might receive criticism for it, as Jesus did, or even hate mail. Our friends and kinfolk could distance themselves from us, and we might be tarred with the same brush as our sinner friends.

Jesus suffered such indignity. His reputation was called into question because He befriended people of poor reputation. But none of this stopped our Lord from His mission, nor should it stop us from the same.

Jesus was not just an acquaintance of sinners but their friend — someone who loved them. Nor was He just their friend in secret, but in the open; He was known

for it. Not too many Christians I know have a similar reputation.

Several scriptures offer caution about how we choose our friends (Proverbs 12:26). We are warned about making friends with fools (13:20), with angry persons (22:24), with those given to rebellion (24:21), or with gluttons (28:7). We are not to be enticed into sin by either relatives or friends (Deuteronomy 13:6ff).

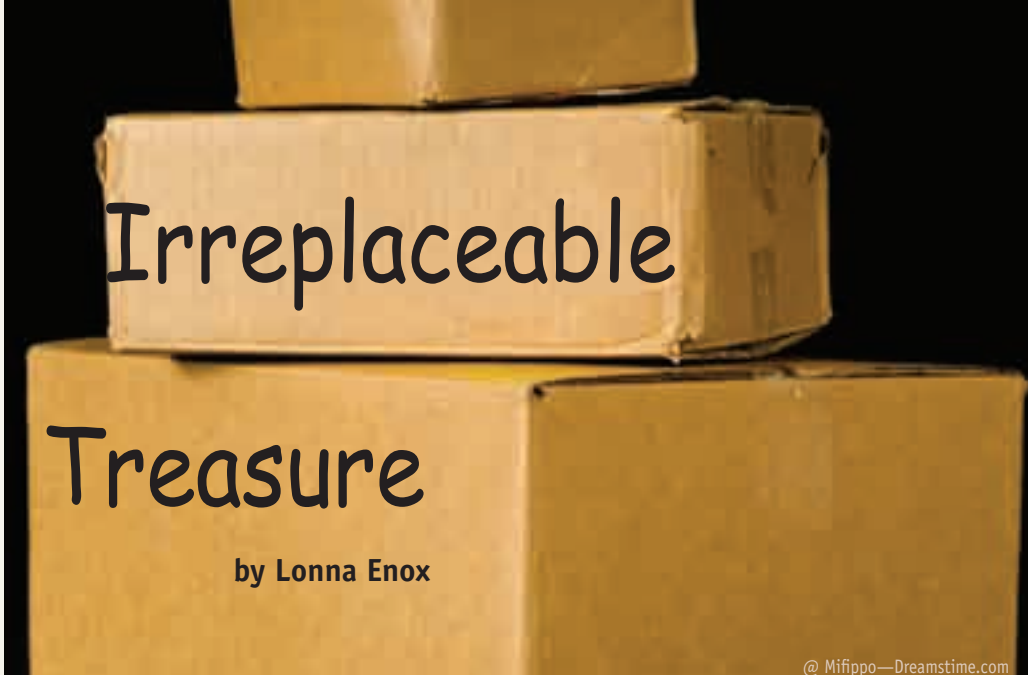
In light of these warnings, we must relate to our sinner friends with wisdom and discretion. Being the Jesus kind of friend to sinners means that we openly show them real love. We can do this without associating in ways that will lead us astray. We need to know our own strengths and weaknesses and be careful, relying upon God at all times.

Sometimes Christians are like the would-be fisherman. Called to be "fishers of men," we spend most of our time huddling with the righteous, learning their righteous lingo and singing righteous songs, while spending very little time with the sinners whom Jesus came to seek and save. Too many of us don't have the concept of a fishing spot, and end up fishing nowhere.

Let's practice friendship with sinners in the way Jesus did — even to those who have personally offended us. The marvelous hope we have in Christ is for them too, if they could only see Him in us and repent. ■■

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





I can procrastinate no longer. Even when I close my eyes and reopen them, the double garage, the shop, and the upper storage area are stuffed with boxes, cartons, and plastic containers. We moved into this house ten years ago — five of us.

Today it is I. The three children have grown up, and Garry, my husband, has died. The task of clearing out for the realtors overwhelms me. Should I toss these boxes? *No!* my “pack rat” inner self gasps. *They may contain irreplaceable treasures.*

Some of the boxes hold my children’s memorabilia, so I move them to the rented storage unit for them to look through when they visit. I also store the boxes containing their father’s memorabilia, which they will want to look through. Finally, all that remain are my boxes. I am surprised that they do not intimidate me; it is what they represent that I avoid.

One box is filled with letters and old cards, passed to me from my dad. Another contains “collections” from loved ones over the years that Dad had stored. Like Dad, I feel a certain responsibility and ambivalence about tossing the bits and pieces of my ancestors. How does one determine the value of a napkin upon which Grandma wrote, “From the restaurant where I met the love of my life”? How can you toss cards that have nestled in a box for over fifty years? Boxes filled with loved ones’ pasts make me fear losing them forever.

Other boxes represent promises unfulfilled: the paperwork or photos from a former life. They hold the clothes that no longer fit (some never did). Needlework and woodworking projects,

partially finished or never started, remind me of all the plans I’ve made but never carried out.

I remember the money spent on the cake-decorating course; I attended only a few classes. The hours spent on unfinished projects are hours I will never retrieve, and they taunt me now that more of life is behind me than I can imagine ahead. I see dreams deferred and little hope of finding new ones.

My most difficult boxes are those containing my teaching supplies. I have only recently decided to leave a familiar career and step into another. The change ahead is daunting.

A cowardly voice inside whispers that I should close the boxes and put them in storage, where my own children can deal with them someday. But my sense of fairness pushes me to sort through the boxes again.

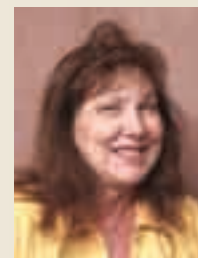
The clothes, unopened projects, and dishes are donated to thrift shops. Paperwork is shredded except for necessary documents. Photographs are sorted into photo boxes. Objects from my bygone days are tossed into the garbage or donated to the neighbor’s garage sale.

Finally, I approach my father’s and grandparents’ boxes. I find a treasure of letters written inside cards. I sort them into a picture/card file box for my children. In these, they can see their great-grandmother, their grandparents, and their mom as ordinary human beings, with the foibles and emotions they have experienced or will experience. Maybe I will look through these again when I need to “touch” my roots.

When I view my empty garage, I feel free. Life without so much useless “stuff” entices me, and I grasp it greedily. My irreplaceable treasure — my life — can’t be stored in a box. “We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure” (2 Corinthians 4:7, NLT).

Instead of holding onto these earthly treasures, I can now appreciate the treasures I hold inside. **✪**

Lonna Enox
writes from
Roswell, NM.



APRIL-MAY 2008



WINTERFEST 2008

YOUTH REACH

National Youth Week/ Hunger Lock-In

*Suggested dates:
April 18-20 (or any
time before June 30)*

*Foreign emphasis:
Youth of the India
CoG7*

*Information pack-
ets available online or
may be sent to your
church*

*Contact: Kurt Lang,
NFYC Director, nfyc@
cog7.org*

Let's Dance

by Kurt Lang
National Youth Director



My son and I were going to town to get fuel. I asked him if we should stop by the Bi-Mart store, since it was Lucky Number Tuesday, and see if we had won anything.

Guess what? Our membership number had been drawn, and we won a Dirt Devil! Since thousands of numbers could have been drawn that day, the odds of ours being chosen was pretty small. The odds of our going to the store on the day our number was drawn was even smaller.

Was it luck or the Holy Spirit that made me think about the store — and on the same day we won a prize? How about the fact that we won a vacuum cleaner and one of my jobs for that day was to vacuum the church van?

Motoring to Washington for the Toppenish Church's WinterFest youth weekend, our youth group stopped in Hood River, Oregon, for fuel. I tried to move the shuttle, but it wouldn't start. The battery cable had seemed loose, so we had a new connector put on. Still nothing. Even jumping it didn't help.

Here comes the fun part. Noticing the Church name on our van, a young man named Tracy offered help. When he found no solution, he said he would call a friend, Gussman, who just happened to own a towing company and repair shop. Gussman came and, within five minutes, had our shuttle running — and didn't charge us a thing!

We left Hood River that evening with no doubt that God orchestrated our meeting with Tracy and his friend. Earlier that day our pastor put this message up on the church signboard: "Coincidences are when God chooses to remain anonymous."

In Acts 8:26-38 God tells Philip to go hang out on the desert road. While there, Philip meets this eunuch who just happens to be stopped at the side

of the same road, reading a puzzling scripture. Philip explains the text from Isaiah about Jesus. At that moment, they pass by some water, and the eunuch is baptized.

How about you? Are you looking for those "coincidences," the things that happen when you're not sure why but later recognize as "guidance"? Ever wonder why you prayed for a friend, then find out she was struggling with a problem at that very time? Or when you decided to go home a different way and ran into someone who needed help?

God is more involved in your life than you think! As you journey on, try to spot those ways, then give Him the credit. Don't chalk it up to just luck or coincidence but to divine guidance.

Look at the letters it takes to spell **guidance** — **G**od, **Y**ou, and **I** **d**ance —and then do a little jig right where you are. I hope you see His guidance often cuz it is so awesome when you do!



Summer Fun

Refuge in the Rockies Youth Camp

A week in Colorado's pristine mountains, including plenty of time to grow spiritually, make new friends, and enjoy a rafting adventure. Sponsored by the Central District and Colorado Springs church.

June 22-29

Near Woodland Park, CO

Contact: office@cscog7.org

NFYC News

Have you . . .

- registered with the NFYC for 2008? Have your youth worker sign up your group at <http://nfyc.cog7.org/register>.
- signed up to receive the Youth Flash e-newsletter? Go to <http://cog7.org/mailman/listinfo/youth>.
- logged on to the NFYC home page (<http://nfyc.cog7.org>)? Create an account and post a comment on our site!
- gotten your youth group together to plan your involvement in the National Youth Week/Hunger Lock-In?
- checked out the contests on our Web site? April 15 is the deadline for the chance to design the paint scheme for Stellar Kart's guitar!

Northern California Youth Rally
April 12, Luther Burbank High School, Sacramento
Contact: Jorge Perez, nazaritemex@hotmail.com

"The Spring Thing" Youth Rally
April 12-13, Nampa, ID
Contact: Laura Perez, lperez40@hotmail.com

West Coast Youth Camp (South Region)
May 9-11 at Cedar Pine Campgrounds,
San Bernardino, CA; contact: David Sandoval, cogdsdelgado@yahoo.com

Michigan Youth Camp
July 13-20, Long Lake Outdoor Center, Middleville, MI
Contact: Rex Miller, kingmerex@aol.com

SIS-Q Meadows Senior Youth Camp
July 20-27, Cave Junction, OR
Contact: Harold Ogren, hogren@msn.com
or Greg Haffner, haffnerg@earthlink.net

Northern California Youth Camp
August 11-17, Mt. Hope Campgrounds, Forbestown,
CA; contact: Jorge Perez, WC DYC, nazaritemex@hotmail.com

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

Mail Bag



Calculating Christ's return

The article on the Millerite Movement ["CoG7 Journey," January-February '08, p. 16] is one of the best I have ever read. The author is to be congratulated. One CoG7 spin-off is the largely defunct Herbert Armstrong Movement. He predicted Christ's return in 1972, calculating this as being two times 19, or 38 years from when he began his work in 1934. Your article correctly notes that as to the day and hour, no one knows.

G. C.
Phoenix, AZ

More on idols

Exodus 20:4 forbids making or carving *idols*, not things that are not idols ["Mail Bag," January-February '08, p. 25]. Otherwise, many of Israel's skilled craftspeople would have been [useless]. The Hebrew word *pecel*, translated "graven" in v. 4 and elsewhere (KJV), is defined in Strong's as "an idol:-carved (graven) image," and its Old Testament usage seems to be mostly in connection with idols. This also would have been how the Israelites in the wilderness would have understood it. Independently of v. 5, Israel would

have understood that the command could be broken simply by making what they (or others) considered to be an idol, but not by the carving of images not so regarded. For example, we could break the commandment by making a Buddha, even if we personally did not bow down to it, but would not break it by carving a decorative bird for our homes.

D. and A. K.
Adelaide, South Australia

Drawn to Leviticus

I enjoy the insightful and interesting articles. One of them actually got me to read Leviticus ("Tabernacle and Creation," by Jason Overman, April-May '07). I pray that God will continue to bless you guys with funding, knowledge, and ideas.

G. P.
Jamaica

A healthy step

Several times in past months I've read "My Protest" and "Conflict of Soul" [June '07, pp. 3, 31]. One valuable conclusion I realize from this experience is that it represents a very healthy step in the right direction along life's often painful journey. It was also cheering to read the many reader responses expressing appreciation and identifying with the problem of understanding the will or actions of our heavenly Father. Their letters [September '07 "Mail Bag"] are as one great voice crying out to better understand life.

I do miss my wife so terribly; we enjoyed Bible studies and discussions. When she passed away in December 2002, having become another falling under the vile hand of acute leukemia, this wonderful blessing of our study together was

blotted out of my life. All too often it is difficult or impossible to fully understand the events of life. You and Elder Rose addressed this so forcefully, and I'll continue to appreciate "My Protest" and "Conflict of Soul."

L. P.
Manassas, VA

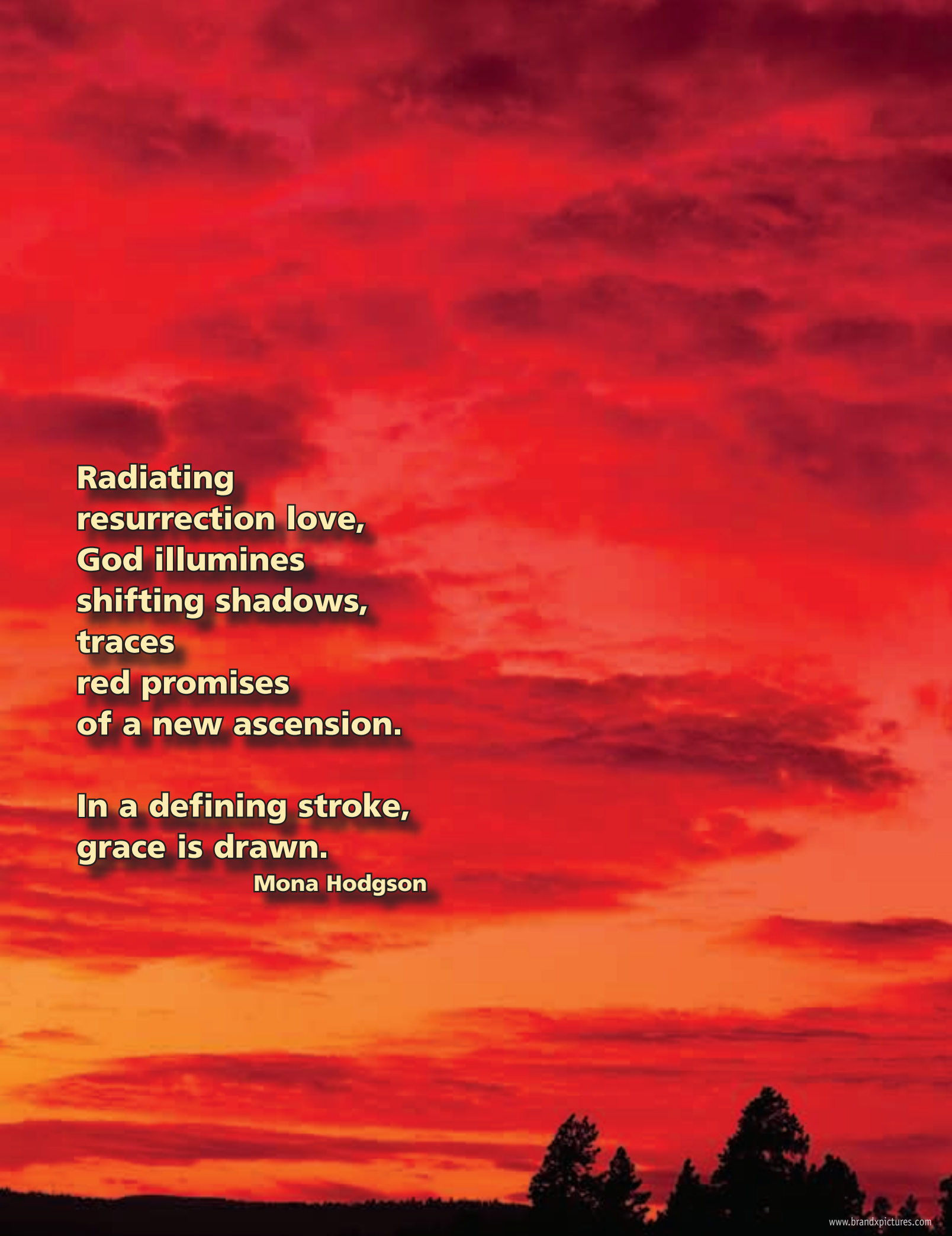
Back to the basics

[Jerry] Falwell is remembered as one who fought against the world's injustice and moral decay ["Lamp-lighters," December '07, p. 31]. On the surface, that seems like a worthy cause. But I find no basis in Scripture for those who try to fight God's war instead of adhering to the gospel message and the Great Commission. Everything Christians do should point to the kingdom of God as man's only hope. This is good news because "The world is passing away, and the lust of it" (1 John 2:17); no bandage will save it. We should indeed be light to this dark world, not by fighting to save it but by bringing hope to all nations.

The Falwells of this world try to legislate morality and make life better. They miss the grand picture of life everlasting in God's eternal kingdom. We hold moral values because they belong to God, and we love Him.

M. D.
Powell Butte, OR

Note from "Lamp-lighters" author Whaid Rose: I believe Christians should seek a balance between efforts to improve current culture and our work to take the gospel of a coming kingdom to all the world. The Bible encourages both endeavors.



**Radiating
resurrection love,
God illumines
shifting shadows,
traces
red promises
of a new ascension.**

**In a defining stroke,
grace is drawn.**

Mona Hodgson



General Conference
Church of God (Seventh Day)

GC Ministries

Did you know . . .

- that BA is 145 years old this year, five years younger than the Church that publishes it?
- that CoG7 has roots in the Protestant Reformation (early 1500's) and the Millerite Movement (1840's)?
- that the first congregations (1850's) were called Churches of Christ?
- that our CoG7 General Conference was formed in 1884 and incorporated in 1899?
- that the Church has experienced changes in theology over 150 years and continues with its "open creed"?

For a fresh, candid perspective, read "CoG7 Journey" on pp. 16-17 of this and previous issues.

National FYC

Kurt and Kristi Lang, Directors

April is emphasis month for the ministry that targets CoG7 youth ages 13 to 22. Here's a refresher on the ways we serve:

- We offer guided focus on spiritual growth through an annual theme. This year it's "The JOURNEY: What's Your Story?"
- We promote opportunities for local churches to develop youth ministry based on the purposes of the Church – **Gimme Five**
- We publish *Youth Reach* and e-mail *Youth Flash* newsletters
- We host MISSION POSSIBLE, a ministry-based camp, and promote other youth camps and retreats
- We develop leadership through our national youth officer team, the Hunger Lock-In, and Fall Challenge weekends

Five ways you can be a part of this ministry:

- Encourage your local youth group to join in our **Hunger Lock-In** foreign fundraiser. Our goal is to send \$4,500 for the growing CoG7 youth ministry in India.
- Participate in the G. C. Ministries offering in April. If your church doesn't, get it going!
- Sponsor a youth to MISSION POSSIBLE or to another camp
- Serve your church as youth sponsor or assist the current sponsors. Volunteer at a camp or retreat (see p. 23)
- Pray daily for our CoG7 youth!

There's so much going on in National FYC! For the bigger picture, check us out at <http://nfyc.cog7.org>.



Sabbath in Wilcox, AZ

West Coast District representative Gabriel Guzman (white shirt) and his wife from Phoenix recently visited the CoG7 group at 101 N. Bower Ave. in Wilcox.



MTS Summer Session

When: June 2-12

Where: Denver, Colorado

Who: Ministerial students, lay pastors, and others serious about vocational service

What's taught: CoG7 Doctrines, History, Polity; Pastoral Ministry; Bible Interpretation; and Preaching — all required for the lay pastor certificate; Intro to Theology, New Testament, Christian Calling, Christian Walk, Intro to Logic, and Church Finance — all for the 42-credit diploma

Who's teaching: Alex Ciurana, Robert Coulter, Jeff Endecott, Harv Fischer, Bill Hicks, Larry Marrs, Whaid Rose, and Calvin Burrell — in English; Julio Martinez, Jose Luis Ramirez, Noe Reyes, Ramon Ruiz, and Raul Lopez — in Spanish

(Final curriculum and instructor list depends on demand as determined by pre-enrollment.)

Cost: \$250 - \$300 tuition, plus room and board; assistance available for qualified students

Pre-registration: Return your application form or request one from MTS: 713-828-9969 (Spanish); 303-452-7973 (English); training@cog7.org

Why: The Lord is calling, the Church has need, and Summer Session moves students quickly along the path. If you're hearing from God about this, let us hear from you!

— Calvin Burrell, Director
Ministries Training System

Ministers to be Ordained

In its February meeting, the License and Credentials Committee approved the following men for ministerial license:

Samuel Holland - Hamilton, Ontario

Rex Miller - Shelbyville, Michigan

Santos Merino - Conroe, Texas

Raul Romo - The Colony, Texas



'09 Convention

President Whaid Rose has announced the next General Conference convention for July 6-11, 2009, on the waterfront in Corpus Christi, Texas.



Double sadness: Death recently struck the Church in India — not once but twice. Shown here with her husband, Jacob S. Rao (Church general secretary) is Mrs. Rani Rao, who died suddenly on Sabbath, February 9, while the Rao family was in mourning for Pastor V. J. Prabhakar Rao (brother of Jacob), who passed away just five days earlier. On behalf of brethren around the world, the BA extends sympathies to Elder Rao and his family.

Spring Vale Academy Seniors

Celebrating 60 years of service, Spring Vale Academy will graduate these seniors from its Owosso, MI, campus in May 24-25 exercises.

Back row (L to R):

Rigo Salgado - Holland, MI

Zach Ciavarella - Mitchell, SD

Ben Brann - Huntsville, TX

Jessica Miller - Shelbyville, MI (4 yr.)

Abby Chesney - Harrisburg, PA

Front row (L to R):

Karri Bland - Claremore, OK (4 yr.)

Amos Ballesteros - Crystal City, TX

Cameron Crayton - Uniondale, NY

(student body president)

Katelynn Paul - Citrus Heights, CA

Ariel Beattie - Edgewood, WA

Rebecca Hanna - Owosso, MI



Death Notice

Minister Cesareo Meza, pastor in Inglewood, California, passed away on February 13 at age 76. A long-time minister in Mexico before moving to California, he is survived by his wife and five children.



Pastors Jacob S. Rao and P. Kennedy (at left), officers of the Associated Churches of God (Seventh Day) in India, are shown in January with members in Mandalay, Myanmar, where they assisted with purchase of property for a permanent Church office. The historic visit was the first since the late pastors V. J. Joseph and V. J. Utham Rao planted the Church in Burma (or Myanmar) more than fifty years ago. Pastors Kennedy and Rao were met and hosted in the country by Pastor and Mrs. Daved Ye Gyan and Pastor J. Samson Laban. While in Myanmar, the elders planned for strengthening the churches and forming a national conference.

Coming Up . . .

- National Youth Week & Hunger Lock-In: April 18-20 (or before June 30); nfyc@cog7.org, <http://nfyc.cog7.org>
- Bloomsday Youth/SWORD Weekend: May 2-4 in Spokane, WA; kurtstranberg@comcast.net; sign up for 7-mile run/walk/wheelchair event at www.bloomsdayrun.org
- Dakota Youth Retreat (ages 13-21): May 22-25; Lakewood Park Bible Camp, Devil's Lake, ND; \$50 fee or \$60 after April 22; contact: 701-252-1677 or toHiswork1@msn.com; www.churchof-godalfred.com
- National SWORD Retreat: May 23-26, Jasper, AR; speakers, leaders: Larry Marrs, Bertha Upchurch, Steve/Annette Cortez; <http://sword.cog7.org/sw/>
- Dover Camp: June 8-14, near Kingfisher, OK; contact 918-695-6036, clarence@bestqualityroofing.com
- SWORD Climb of Mt. Adams (ages 18-35): June 28-29, near Yakima, WA; contact: Dave Palmer (palmerda@wildblue.net, 509-465-9074) or Rachel Stirn (swordnw@ptera.net, 509-434-8985)
- SWORD Camp at Sis-Q Meadows, OR: July 16-20; \$120; contact: Kim Duncan, 541-923-0487, k_jduncan4@hotmail.com

Let God use YOU in . . .

Missions Ministries

William C. Hicks
Director

Reflecting on God's goodness today, we consider your wise investment in the Great Commission. Through His children, our heavenly Father reaches worldwide to share the good news of humanity's only sure hope, Jesus Christ. Take this moment to read the opportunities and decide how you can partner with us to go into all the world. First, pray for us and the missions work. Then send your offerings to make it happen.

Church Planting seeks to establish new churches in the U.S. and Canada through our Missionaries to America initiative. Residents of the U.S. and Canada: Is God calling **you** to be a missionary at home?

Home Missions encourages growth in local churches through evangelism and training. Are **you** learning to share your faith and grow your church?

Missions Abroad supports missions on every inhabited continent by uniting congregations to bless those who need the gospel. Missions Abroad donations are used outside the U.S. and Canada. To see current needs, visit www.cog7missions.org.

Managed Project Funds

Disaster Relief responds to natural or man-made calamity when, not if, it strikes. Help us meet current needs in Kenya and Mexico and prepare for tomorrow's disaster as well.

Christ is Coming! provides salary or subsidy to evangelists in some 15 countries. With 450+ associates donating \$20 per month, we seek 4,500 more donors to assist 500 workers in many



more countries. Do **you** believe Christ is coming? Then help us send missionaries around the world to let people know!

Change for Your World helps the International Ministerial Congress change the world with pocket change. Response is growing. We hope many more of you will place your daily change in a jug, box, or drawer and send it each summer to support our growing church in other countries through IMC. Support is needed for regional meetings with CoG7 leadership around the world before the next congress, scheduled to take place in England in 2012.

Widows and Orphans Fund brings together all our efforts with orphans and widows (Kenya, Nicaragua, Zambia, and other countries) into one ministry, starting this year, as the Lord provides through your contributions.

Medical-Dental Missions Fund relieves the suffering of many in the third world. With your financial support, our health care professionals can accomplish the next medical mission in 2009. Please earmark your offering "Medical Missions."

*G. C. Missions Ministries . . .
working for you around the corner and around
the world, sharing the good news
of Jesus Christ.*



International Tour

South America

Peru

Ramon Ruiz, International Ministerial Congress president, and Bill Hicks, Missions Ministries director, set out February 17 on a four-nation tour of Latin America. Arriving in Lima, Peru, they found that their trip would not go as planned. Elder Ruiz was informed that a recent change in Peruvian law regarding his Mexican passport meant that he would have to depart immediately. He was sent to Colombia to acquire a special visa that would allow him to enter Ecuador.

Meanwhile, Elder Hicks visited members' homes in Lima and presented Ruben Cruz with a missionary certificate from Missions Abroad to lead the first CoG7 mission in Peru.

Ecuador

From Peru, Elder Hicks traveled to Ecuador on February 19, where he met with the congregation in South Quito before preaching at the Quito Central church that evening. The next day he met with the Pugili church, recognizing the leadership sessions offered there by Pastor Leonardo Pastuna. Edgar Correa and Edgar Pastuna were recognized for efforts in support of Cristo Viene.

Elder Ruiz rejoined his missions partner later on the twentieth. Together they completed a leadership orientation with the Ecuadorian brethren and visited the Latcumba and La Libertad congregations (on the slopes of the Cotopaxi volcano) before departing for Bogota on the twenty-second.

Colombia

Elders Ruiz and Hicks met with the executive board of the Colombian church for talks on Friday. On Sabbath the twenty-third they enjoyed the dedication of a new Bogotá North church facility. Elder Hicks presented his Power Point of IMC churches, emphasizing Cristo Viene. The Church in Colombia is the first outside North America to establish a complete Cristo Viene ministry in unison with the U.S./Canadian Conference. Through their own national conference, donors there will help provide salaries and subsidy for missionaries and evangelists around the world.

Pastor Hugo Santana was named national coordinator for Cristo Viene in Colombia and Sandra Rodriguez, national representative. Elder Ruiz challenged the Church to be the Spirit-filled people God calls us to be in our community.

Elders Ruiz and Hicks met with the El Lucero congregation on February 24 and then departed for meetings in Panama. They express their sincere thanks for the Father's blessings and for your faithful support of missions in Zone 3 (South America) and of our other efforts around the world.



Embrace the Cross

Invented by barbarians in search of the cruelest form of execution, crucifixion was adopted by the Romans, though they regarded it with horror. Except in extreme cases of treason, their own citizens were exempt from it. The Jews despised the cross for a different reason: They made no distinction between a tree and a cross, and none between hanging and crucifixion. Therefore they automatically applied to crucified criminals the law's statement that "anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse" (Deuteronomy 21:23, NIV).

Early Christians avoided images of crucifixion at first, not only for its association with Christ (making them targets for persecution) but also for its shameful association with executions of common criminals. In the second century, Christians preferred to paint biblical themes such as Noah's ark, Daniel in the lions' den, baptism, and a shepherd carrying a lamb to depict Christ's ministry of deliverance.

But every religion and ideology has its own symbol. Buddhism has the lotus flower, representing the emergence of beauty and harmony out of the muddy waters of chaos. Though Judaism avoided visual symbols for fear of violating the second commandment ("make no graven images"), it eventually adopted the Star of David, a reminder of God's promise that the Davidic throne would be established forever. Islam, currently at the center of world attention, is symbolized by the crescent, originally depicting sovereign rule.

What, then, should be the universal symbol for Christianity as it grew and gained influence? A crib or manger, underscoring Incarnation? A carpenter's bench, dignifying manual labor? The boat from which Jesus taught crowds in Galilee? A towel, sign of humble service? The stone rolled away to proclaim Jesus' resurrection? A throne, symbol of divine rule? A dove, representing the Holy Spirit? Perhaps the bread and chalice?

My admiration for this topic has been enhanced by John R. Stott's classic work The Cross of Christ.

Each of these points to some aspect of Christ's life and ministry. But with the possible exception of the bread and chalice, none adequately communicates Christ's central mission: redemption. So not surprisingly, Christians chose the cross. It gained prominence during Constantine's era and has been the near-universal symbol of Christian faith ever since.

But not all Christians are equally enamored with the cross. Some find its message of suffering and death repulsive. Others declare the cross to be of pagan origin and seek to separate what happened there from the instrument of death itself.

Faith needs ritual, a regular practice of worship and celebration. That's the reason God gave Israel the weekly Sabbath and annual festivals and why baptism and the Lord's Supper were given to the New Testament church. Faith also needs a symbol — that which, due to association, suggests something of great value and excites response to what it represents. Aversion to the symbol dilutes one's fascination with what it symbolizes.

The cross is central to our redemption and the only way home for a culture that's lost its way. Haunted by memories of the Holocaust, 9/11, nuclear arsenals, and new threats that assault us daily, the world desperately needs the cross. Christians need it, too, not only because of what it did *for* us but also because of what it keeps doing *in* us.

God delights in redeeming things once thought pagan. The apostle Paul gloried in the cross above all (Galatians 6:14). Greater admiration for a replica of the Ten Commandments than for the cross, and more concern about paganism than about devotion to Jesus who died there, put the old rugged cross "on a hill too far away."

— Whaid Guscott Rose
General Conference President





Denver, Colorado: These General Conference officers, board members, superintendents, and ministry directors held annual Church of God (Seventh Day) leadership meetings in early February 2008. Together they say, "Thanks" and look to you for continued support of the Church's mission. (For a summary of the meeting, go to www.cog7.org/BA.)

Front row (L to R): Whaid Rose, Denver, CO; Chip Hinds, Wister, OK; Larry Marrs, Stanberry, MO; Orville Rose, Calgary, Alberta; Raul Lopez, Houston, TX; Mark Caswell, Owosso, MI; Dennis O'Banion, Conroe, TX; Ken and Mary Jean Knoll, Eugene, OR

Middle row: Sylvia Corral, Riverbank, CA; Max Morrow, Owosso, MI; Larry Zaragoza, Visalia, CA; Mike Vlad, Denver, CO; Harvey Fischer, Sacramento, CA; Jose Hernandez, Las Vegas, NV; Christy Lang, Cedar Rapids, IA; Julio Martinez, Montreal, Quebec; Alex Ciurana, Humble, TX; Robert Coulter, Denver, CO; Hope Dais, Denver, CO; Jeff Endecott, Farmville, NC

Back row: Eddie Villalba, Denver, CO; Charles Carr, Conroe, TX; Loren Stacy, Lodi, CA; Tim Endecott, Wellman, IA; Joe Corrales, San Antonio, TX; Kurt Lang, Harrisburg, OR; Bruce Chesney, Harrisburg, OR; Samuel Holland, Hamilton, Ontario; Brian Larson, Spokane, WA; LeRoy Dais, Denver, CO; Carl Palmer, Spokane, WA; Bill Hicks, Kingsport, TN; Calvin Burrell, Denver, CO