

January-February 2009

BA

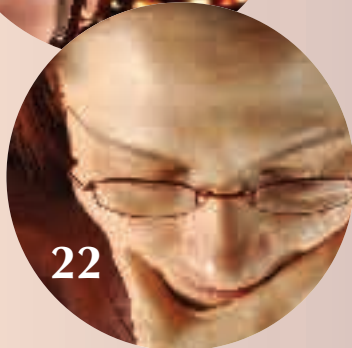
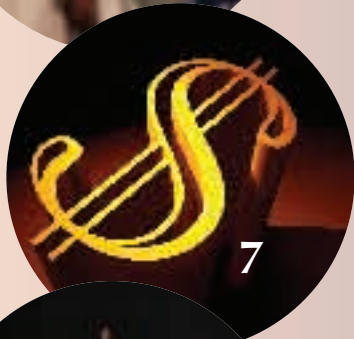
BIBLE ADVOCATE®

Teach Us Your Ways

Christians and culture (p. 4)

Wonder of the Word (p. 12)

♥ HeartSpeak (p. 15)



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

Coming in the March BA: suffering, prayer, forum on ecology

In the January and February issues of *Now What?*: dealing with chronic illness, post-partum depression (<http://nowwhat.cog7.org>)

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



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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:
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What's New? What's Not? What's Hot?

One way to explain the difference be-
 tween conservative and liberal is that
 the former want to “conserve” the way
 things are (or were), while the latter call for
 change and a new way.



Surprise: The Bible says that both ways –
 old and new – are right! On one hand, a prophet raises this conserva-
 tive cry: “Ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it;
 then you will find rest for your souls” (Jeremiah 6:16). On the other
 hand, Isaiah (43:19) and the psalmist (96:1) call for a new song and
 change, previewing the Lord’s words: “Behold, I make all things new”
 (Revelation 21:5).

So it is as the old year ends: The new is coming. For America, new
 means fresh faces in Washington D.C., changing directions for our
 country. Barack Obama ran on a dream and was elected on the liberal
 hope for change from the conservative past. His success or failure will
 be told only as the future unfolds.

With fervent prayers, we welcome the first man of African heritage
 to serve in the nation’s highest office. May heaven’s favor be upon him
 for whatever good and godly changes are proposed. Likewise, may
 whatever still remains of the old and good way be yet conserved, by
 God’s grace!

Your BA this year will try to strike the Bible’s balance (and that of
 our Lord; see Matthew 13:52) by offering things new and old. For an
 annual theme, we have adopted one chosen for the G. C. convention
 in Texas next July: “Fresh Encounter.”

Vanguards of the fresh and new sprinkle this issue, like the call to
 renew our devotion to Scripture (p. 12). Sample our “Faith-Plus Forum”
 (p. 7; it and “Readers Respond,” p. 6, are offered for consideration and
 may not always represent official Church views). Then try “Bible in the
 News” (p. 11) for a review of what’s hot in recently released Bibles.

And be sure not to miss *HeartSpeak* (pp. 15-18), which replaces
Youth Reach and is especially for the under twenty-five crowd. **Parents,
 pastors, and youth sponsors: Get this center spread to teens and
 other youth, please!** Remove it from the magazine, if need be, so they
 can get their hands around *HeartSpeak*. It’s new and it’s hot!

What’s not new in the ‘09 BA? Our commitment to serve readers
 with the Bible’s grace and truth, fully incarnate in Jesus Christ! May we
 hear from each of you at least once this year with an e-letter, question,
 reader response, or a prayer?

– Calvin Burrell



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The Church as

Changing society begins with changing Christians.

What is a culture? These days, it signifies society in general — the beliefs, values, and practices of a particular people at any time and in any place. The words *culture* and *cultivate* are related: Just as farmers cultivate crops in their fields, so *culture* suggests the growth of people in a realm that has the power to influence the character of those planted there.

This is why the word *culture* is tossed around so much these days. If people are the product of their culture, then we ought to be interested in what kind of culture we have. Many in the media and in the pulpit like to call the ongoing battle over the shape of American life the “culture wars.”

Another term that describes our situation even better is *multiculturalism*. American culture is not simple, uniform, or easily steered but is a vast and complicated organism composed of many cultures, each espousing diverse and competing values and practices.

The question we must ask, one of critical importance to our youth, is just what it means to be a Christian in a culture like ours. Once it was assumed that American culture was Christian by definition, that it was sufficient to represent and advance Judeo-Christian values through-

out society and cultivate a godly citizenry.

If these assumptions were ever really true, they are no longer. Christians are now realizing like never before that rather than being a friendly and trusted ally in our quest to cultivate virtuous citizens, this culture is, in unprecedented fashion, doing just the opposite.

As important as it is to ask how the church might influence a culture like ours, a more fundamental question must be asked first: Should not the church itself be a culture in its own right? If the church is to have a positive influence on a multicultural world, it will succeed only to the degree that it is already a culture capable of cultivating its own virtuous citizens. We cannot continue in the misguided notion that secular society will, or even should, be the primary agent in doing what the church itself is called to be and do in the world. If the church can shape the character and habits of Christians so they can resist the powerful, and often corrosive, pressures of American culture, then we will be in a position to genuinely influence the culture around us.

Diminished church

One big problem for many Christians today is that they

cannot fathom that the church might be a culture, much less a counterculture. Most Christians have been trained by the modern world to think of the church as a small compartment within the culture. They think culture is concerned with the real world, while religion is about saving souls and getting folks to heaven.

In this scenario, the church is mostly irrelevant to real-life issues like politics, education, medicine, the arts, economics, and entertainment; it is merely relegated to the “personal” and “private” opinion of the individual. The sad result of this modern philosophy is that the church is diminished from “being” to a “building.” It’s somewhere we go, rather than something we are.

When we read Scripture afresh, however, we begin to recover the idea of the church as a culture called out of worldly cultures in order to witness of God’s true culture. Abraham’s story, for instance, begins by being called out from his old life to become the father of the faithful. He is to be a blessing to the whole world, but he has to leave in order to bless. Abraham leaves — not alone but with his family (Genesis 12). Note that Abraham’s faith is personal, but it is more than personal. From this point on, biblical faith is always

Counterculture

by Jason Overman



born and sustained within community.

Later, Israel is called out, too. Exodus names the story of how Yahweh is the God of a people destined to be a holy nation. But if she is to follow God and become a “peculiar people,” a “kingdom of priests,” she cannot stay in Egypt (Exodus 12–19). In the wilderness, this newly redeemed Israel is now commanded. She learns that every aspect of her life is to be ordered by the will of God – not in private but as a publicly embodied way of living in the world.

Called-out community

Israel is not a new system of personal salvation but a new community whose very existence bears witness to the full scope of God’s salvation. Israel is not a religion; she is a nation. As she submits to God, she becomes a people capable of resisting the cultures of Egypt (her past) and of Canaan (her future) in order to be a culture herself (Leviticus 18).

The very language that describes Israel in the Old Testament is used to describe the church in the New. We too are a “holy nation,” a “peculiar people,” a “priestly kingdom” (Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9). Like Abraham and Israel, the church is called out of the world in order

to be a people competent to address it.

The word *church* originally referred to an assembly gathered to discuss the business of a city. In other words, *church* in its Greek context was not really a religious word but a political one. And *church* is not the only New Testament word used to convey the social dimensions of God’s people. We have forgotten how thoroughly political words like *kingdom* or *gospel* or even *worship* sounded in the ears of that first generation. These words have lost their social and public character over the ages and are now sadly domesticated.

Recovering the culture

As both witness and foretaste of God’s coming kingdom, the church is a cultural phenomenon, a social reality gathered and ordered around the lordship of the crucified and risen Christ. This cross-shaped community does not merely provide a new way of thinking or believing for persons, but is in fact a new way of being in the world.

Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount is a good place to start to recover the kind of culture God has in mind for His people. Here we find the politics of Jesus and the way of His kingdom (Matthew 5–7). To accurately live this mes-

sage, we must become what the apostle Paul called “transformed nonconformists” in the world in order to reach it (Romans 12:2).

The question “What does it mean to be a Christian in a culture like ours?” must begin with the admission that we are already citizens of another kingdom, a “city on a hill,” a culture intended to cultivate us into people able to resist, confront, and transform the culture around us. But what if this city has forgotten that it is one? What would it mean for us to rediscover, restore, and rebuild?

These are interesting questions. Can we let go of our personal interests long enough to submit and be accountable to God’s people? Can we let go of our private assumptions long enough to rethink what a public faith might look like? Can we come together and imagine what it would be like to be a “city on a hill,” a “holy nation,” a culture once more? **BA**

Jason Overman lives and ministers in Jasper AR, with his wife, Stephanie, and their two children, Tabitha and Isaac.



Readers Respond

In the October-November '08 BA (p. 7) we asked, "Is it true that the days of miracles have passed?"

Fewer miracles today do not indicate that God lacks power but that we lack faith (Mark 16:17, 18; John 14:12; Matt. 9:22, 29; 14:34-36; 17:20, 21; 21:21). In every case, unwavering faith is the key element, sometimes accompanied by prayer and fasting, as Jesus often did. The people's faith healed them. On the other hand, Jesus did not do many mighty works in His hometown because of their unbelief (Matt. 13:58). We do see miracles today, but a lack of faith by either the person praying or by the person prayed for often causes a lack of results. God won't do anything against His will, of course, so it could be that we sometimes pray outside His will.

— *Michael Watters*
Bellaire, MI

While dispensational teaching that "the days of miracles have passed" quotes the Bible, it twists Scripture to fit a presupposed notion. For example, dispensationalists say 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 teaches that miracles and other spiritual gifts ceased after the Bible was canonized. They believe Scripture was the "perfect" thing predicted (v. 10). To believe this, however, one must say that verse 12b refers to the same, and therefore claim that we now know God as He knows us: through Scripture's arrival! But Paul speaks here of our future encounter with God (compare 1 John 3:2), not of Bible canonization.

Another text is Hebrews 2:3, 4, relating how the gospel first began to be communicated, but never implying a future change. Rather, the New Testament teaches that God's *initial* means of communicating the gospel would be the *enduring* method. Those who claim that this passage spells the end of miracles and spiritual gifts (v. 4) must also affirm that it spells the end of the Lord's offering of salvation and its confirmation within believers (v. 3).

Thus dispensationalist claims are not supported by these texts. Their answer to "Have the days of miracles passed?" is invalid. The scriptural reality is that God has always been, and continues to be, a God of miracles and that all gifts of the Spirit, including miracles, are necessary to the body of Christ today.

— *Israel Steinmetz*
Kansas City, MO

Miracles? If you want the spectacular stuff that most people think of with this word, you may not have long to wait. What Jesus calls false Christs and false prophets will dish them up with such magnitude and effect that, if possible, they would deceive even the elect (Matt. 24:24). How to tell God's true prophets from the false? Jesus said we know them by their fruits — by the way they live, the things they do and say — either in line with God's way or against it (7:15-20). False prophets are lying prophets.

Until Jesus' return, here is our chance to learn God's way. When the time of big miracles comes, we'll be able to know which are from God and which are not. Happy reading — in the pages of your Bible.

— *Ernie Klassek*
Perth, Western Australia

We are told [in the Bible] to pray. But why, if we expect no miracles? Many times I thank God for miracles He did for me when I knew it not. If I need a miracle, I sometimes pray, "Please help me." I'll keep on trying on my own, though. God has laws, both physical and spiritual.

— *Arlo Gieselman*
Blue Springs, MO

Editor's note: As evidence of his belief in miracles, this writer sent photocopies of a badly mangled 1950's automobile in which he fell asleep at the wheel — and survived the ensuing crash!

Welcome to the Faith-Plus Forum! Each issue this year, a few readers will address topics of current interest beyond the Bible's basics of faith, repentance, baptism, obedience, and so on (see Hebrews 6:1-3). Starting here with economics, we hope to cover ecology, ecumenism, attitudes toward homosexuals, politics, age of the earth, spirituality (healing, tongues-speaking), and other religions before 2009 is done. Our purpose is to help readers to think "Christianly" and respect biblical differences. Contact the editor for a full list of topics, due dates, and requirements.

Living by Faith

by Max Morrow
Owosso, Michigan

When Jesus sent out the twelve disciples and seventy more, He told them to take no money (Luke 9:3ff; 10:2ff.) They were to live by faith and depend on Him to provide. A later exchange between Jesus and the Twelve (22:35) gives cause to believe that it worked, for they lacked nothing.

From the days of the prophet Habakkuk, it has been God's best that "the just shall live by his faith" (2:4). The New Testament repeats it three times: Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; and Hebrews 10:38. However, in Luke 22:36, Jesus expressed a modified stance near the end of His earthly life: "But now, he who has a money bag, let him take it, and likewise a knapsack. . . ." The successful test run of taking no money had proved the Lord's faithfulness; now it was time

for the disciples to prove their faithfulness. They were to have money but still live by faith.

This is precisely where Christians are today. We have money but are to live by faith. Some even have great wealth but still are to live by faith. Paul urged Timothy to tell wealthy folks not to put confidence in "uncertain riches but in the living God" (1 Timothy 6:17).

Whether we have money or whether we don't, our trust is to be in the Lord! If our shaky economy totally collapses, God

is faithful (Philippians 4:19).

God enables us to acquire money so we can invest in His cause. In essence, this is what Jesus told the rich young ruler: "Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor . . ." (Luke 18:22). The wealth that had been entrusted to the man was not his to hoard but to give away.

Too much focus on the proverbial "nest egg" for emergencies or retirement undermines the exercise of faith in God to provide. Don't let it be so!

Faith-Plus Forum



on Finance

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Oil and Faith

by **Javier Ramírez**
Grand Prairie, Texas

In 2 Kings 4:1-7, a widow turns to Elisha for help because a creditor wants to take her sons as slaves in exchange for a debt her husband left. The prophet asks her, “What do you have in the house?” She responds that all she has is a jar of oil.

Elisha sends the widow to borrow jars from her neighbors. Back home with the door closed, she pours her own small supply of oil, filling all the jars until none remain empty.

The widow does not have much of the world’s wealth, but she has a lot of faith. Her story teaches us that when someone acts in faith, there will be more than enough.

In our difficult moments we should unite as a family. Enclosed in our homes, let us beg the Lord to send down His oil, His blessings. Closing the door implies privacy, a moment between God and us. But it also implies not allowing the good things to escape, not wasting anything. It is a time to make adjustments and not spend our resources wrongfully so that we can enjoy the blessings of God and family.

When the widow returns to tell Elisha everything that happened, he tells her to go and sell the oil to pay her creditors. The family can live off of what is left. Sometimes these economic situations rob us of peace, the privilege of worship, and even our faith. In this case, the widow resolves her family’s problem with the help of God, who responds to her faith.



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As we allow our faith to act, God can do big things in our lives. His Word says that without faith it is impossible to please God. Today God still wants to do miracles in our homes. He wants us to trust in Him and take our jars to Him because He wants to fill them. He wants to send down blessings where there is faith.

May our God bring peace and blessings to the homes of His people.

Economics and the Christian

by **Melvin Sweet**
Stanberry, Missouri

What is the Christian to make of the economic meltdown that occurred in the United States and world financial markets in the fall of 2008? What does God want from His people in difficult political and economic times?

Some reading this have suf-

fered loss of employment, reduction in work opportunities, or even had property foreclosed upon. What God asks of us in good times and bad is to trust Him and “lean not on your own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5). Tough times present us with ways to serve one another that we might never have had in good times. When people become desperate, they tend to become receptive to counsel. Or they might become angry and lash out at others who experience more prosperity.

Consider these Bible texts that should guide our actions and attitudes, whatever the circumstances:

I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content (Philippians 4:11).

Now godliness with contentment is great gain . . . And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content (1 Timothy 6:6, 8).

“I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5).

Free Enterprise

by Howard Mesick
Lewes, Delaware

Having prosperous grandparents and knowing that the free enterprise system provides the most wealth and freedom for an entire nation, I recall words attributed to Thomas Jefferson: “That government is best which governs least.” More and more I notice that wealth, uncontrolled by government, establishes for itself and its children a dynasty of privilege, power, and opportunity unavailable to working folk, especially to the poor.

I now realize that liberals often do take moral positions on the issues. Many of the have-nots see the immorality of the gulf between rich and poor. They see more government control as the only cure for the “free enterprise disease.” I think they see an illusion. More government control moves the greed and corruption of society into the halls of government.

Yes, the great gap between the haves and the have-nots is clearly immoral but is a necessary evil in this vale of tears and sin. In the millennium, I think (but am not entirely sure) we shall have free enterprise based upon cooperation rather than competition. What a wonderful difference!

The Right Perspective

by Giovanni Villagran
Passaic, New Jersey

Money can bless or it can curse. God wants all He gives us to be a blessing, but our perspective differs from His.

We think the money is ours. We work hard to get it and do whatever we want with it: spend, save, invest, give to others, and, if we’re good Christians, give ten percent to God.

God’s perspective is that everything belongs to God (Psalm

24:1). Is something *not* included in the word *everything*? Our house? Our car? Our family? Our selves? Our salary? It all belongs to Him, and we are His administrators over it.

How we administer our finances reveals our spiritual condition and affects our relationship with Jesus and others. Business deals that include exploitation, bribery, and uncontrolled or improper spending prove that our hearts do not please God. Our fidelity to the Lord is seen in our stewardship — how we earn and spend money.

If we get into too much debt, financial problems drag us down to frustration, and we become financial slaves — poor administrators. If you can’t sleep or think of much except your debts, if you wonder how many days until the next payday, this is what psychology calls “mental fixation.” In that situation, you can hardly dedicate anything to God or read His Word, praise Him, or pray. Even your family is affected. In fact, many divorces happen because of these problems. As the saying goes, “When poverty gets through the door, love goes out through the window.”

Can we love both God and money? Jesus says we can love just one (Matthew 6:21-24). Our Lord tells us here that money competes against God for our heart.

Lots of people believe that both poverty and prosperity depend upon relationship with God, but this is untrue. Beware of two myths:

1. Holiness happens only in poverty.
2. Wealth happens only in true faith.

In the Bible we can find holi-



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ness in wealth and in poverty. Neither of these flow automatically from faith, like a mathematical formula. It is not that simple. Let's beware of the prosperity gospel, a latecomer in the world of false doctrines.

We are living in tough times, with large-scale economic problems everywhere — a global psychosis. Christians should never forget that our Lord promises to hold us in His hand and take care of us no matter what.

Weathering the Storm

by Israel Steinmetz
Kansas City, Missouri

America is facing its largest financial crisis since the Great Depression. Anxiety, poverty, unemployment, and financial woes dominate the headlines. In Scripture, God gives us wisdom and direction that will allow us

to weather any financial storm regardless of the economic situation around us. Consider these principles:

First, we must place our **trust** in God. It's not easy to get to the place where our confidence is not in ourselves, our government, our job, our economy, or any other earthly thing but rather in the Lord alone. Jesus promises that if we seek God's kingdom and righteousness first, He will provide our every need (Matthew 6:25-34). What a promise! If we commit ourselves wholly to God, He will become for us what He became for Abraham: Yahweh Yireh, the Lord who Provides (Genesis 22:14). This is the foundation to everything else Scripture teaches about finances.

Next we must learn to practice **generosity**. The world system of materialism and selfishness is flipped on its head in Jesus' declaration that "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Christians are called to live simply so we can share from our abundance with others. It is

in giving that we find true wealth and abundance that is spiritual and eternal, not earthly and temporal. Give to those who are in need, give to the work of the gospel, give freely, for freely you have received! This is at the heart of God's economic plan.

Third, we must commit ourselves to **integrity** in a world marked by cheating and lying. All through Scripture we are called to live as people who are trustworthy, above reproach, and faithful. Our world believes in cheating the system, looking for loopholes, and finding creative ways to be dishonest. We are called to search out ways to be righteous in how we deal with finances. Christians are called to live by hard work and wise spending, a high calling in a world where a piece of plastic can get you anything you desire. It is unethical to live off other people's money or off money that doesn't exist! The unchecked spending on everything from clothing to furniture to pets and pedicures has swallowed up countless Christians in a deceptive web of debt.

Finally, we must be faithful to **God-given responsibilities and priorities**. This means overcoming the typical worldly compulsions in order to live as those who honor God first, provide for their families next, and then search for opportunities to bless others. Being faithful to these priorities means learning the difference between needs, wants, luxuries, and waste. It is unrighteous to fall short on paying for necessities because we've spent money on things we want. God calls us to faithfulness in our finances. **BA**

by Sherri Langton

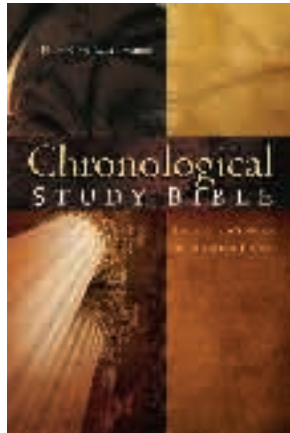
This year, the BA hopes to publish brief news items as they become available — about the Bible, its distribution, and its role in modern society. In this issue, we report on two recently released Bibles. This is not an endorsement of all one may read in these niche publications but simply an attempt to make Bible lovers aware of what's available. Future issues will feature other ways the Bible makes today's news.

Chronological Study Bible (Thomas Nelson)

Released in November 2008, the *Chronological Study Bible* presents the text of the New King James Version in chronological order. It is the only Bible on the market to offer such an approach.

This could be a nice diversion for Bible lovers who find themselves in a reading rut. First and 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles, for example, are interspersed with psalms that David wrote during his conflicts with Saul and his reign as king of Israel. The excerpts I read deepened my understanding of what happened in Old Testament times and when it happened. I like a Bible that not only communicates God's truth but also enhances my knowledge with notes, articles, and graphics.

I also found the reading plan for the *Chronological Study Bible* a big plus, available at www.chronological-studybible.com. The site offers promotional and order information as well.



The Voice New Testament (Thomas Nelson)

If you think a Bible in chronological order is different, wait till you see what Thomas Nelson has done with the New Testament. *The Voice*, also released in November 2008, is the first completely new Bible translation arranged in screenplay format. In

other words, there are no conventional dialogue tags, like "Jesus answered" or "Peter replied." Instead, dialogue is introduced by the speaker's name and any "stage direction," as in John 7:3: "Brothers of Jesus (to Jesus): 'Let's get out of here and go south to Judea. . .'"

This New Testament also features more modern expressions of biblical terms. John the Baptist is called John the Immerser. Instead of "In the beginning was the Word" in John 1:1, we read "Before time itself was measured, the Voice was speaking." In the sample I have, the apostle John introduces his Gospel with background information about himself and his writing. It does provide a more immediate, "you are there" feel.

The Voice is not the work of Bible scholars but a collaboration of historians, poets, storytellers, and songwriters that remains true to the original Greek and Hebrew manuscripts. Its fresh approach may put off traditional Bible readers. Still, in publishing *The Voice*, Thomas Nelson desires to offer an alternative New Testament to millions of Americans who are seeking alternatives to traditional church. I applaud that motive.

Your Bible study group or church drama team may enjoy the project's screenplay format. Learn more about *The Voice* at www.hearthevoice.com and download the Gospel of John free.



Best of the Good Book

Been neglecting this Bestseller? Why not take the plunge today? by Gordon Feil

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Never has there been such a book. The best of men could not have written it, and the worst of men would not have written it.

We should seek the Bible and take it seriously. Truth is, many of us neglect a daily reading of it. With a review of its extraordinary content, we can better appreciate the Bible's uniqueness and regard it as our primer for life.

Consider . . .

What book has the *ideals* of the Bible? Those ideals change lives, a fact documented in uncounted testimonies of conversions and deliverance from

sinful habits. Those who've experienced its transforming power freely accept the Bible as God's Word — even its difficult parts.

Consider the Bible's *integrity*. A passage like Luke 3:1, 2, with all its detail about the characters and setting of Jesus' birth, could be at risk of error. But it passes the truth test.

Think of the Bible's *composition*. About forty people from seven countries wrote it across sixteen hundred years, yet it is internally consistent and presents a unified theme.

Marvel at the Bible's *indestructibility*. How many times have governments tried to put an end

to what they thought were only ancient fables?

Reflect on the Bible's *foreknowledge*. Where else can you find writing by an Author who inhabits eternity and thus knows what will happen beforehand?

Consider the Bible's reliability. The strongest reason to receive the whole Bible as God's truth is that God, in the form of Christ, says it is. If the Scriptures of His day were good enough for Jesus, they are good enough for us too. He overcame His adversary by quoting and applying the written Word (Matthew 4:1-11).

The psalmist focuses on the crucial role of God's Word:

How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word . . . Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You (Psalm 119:9, 11).

We *cannot* live right without resorting to God's Word!

Divine revelation

The Bible offers many marvels, the greatest being its revelation of God and Christ. Though we learn something about God from creation (Romans 1:20), it doesn't provide all we need to know about Him. Only the Word assures us of God's love, gentleness, omniscience, justice, and mercy.

We learn the most about God through His Son, Jesus:

In many separate revelations [each of which set forth a portion of the Truth] and in different ways God spoke of old to [our] forefathers in and by the prophets, [But] **in the last of these days** He has spoken to us in [the person of a] Son . . . (Hebrews 1:1, 2,

Amplified; author's emphasis).

This text, especially the emphasized words, implies the finality of God's revelation. The days of God speaking Scripture through humans ended with Jesus Christ and the apostles. Anyone claiming to be God's prophet now (in the sense of adding to His revelation in Christ) must expect to be punctuated with a big question mark.

Jude also teaches that "the faith . . . was once for all delivered to the saints" (v. 3). This suggests that there's no more God-breathed information coming. The book of Revelation takes us right out to eternity and ends by saying that no man can add anything more.

The Bible tells much about Jesus the Messiah; He in turn reveals God. Jesus was God incarnate (John 1:1). Anyone who saw Him had seen God (14:9). What we need to know about God can be seen in Him (Colossians 2:9, 10). No one on earth today has ever seen Christ; we know Him only by the Bible's portrait of Him, confirmed by the Spirit's witness.

Taking in the light

When Paul says in Philippians 2:15 that we are lights to the world, he uses a word for the reflected light of the moon, not a light that is its own source. How do we get that light? Through God's Word. "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105).

How can you take in the light of the Scriptures?

- Read the Word of God daily. Start with key books like Genesis, Deuteronomy, Psalms, Isaiah, the Gospels, Acts, Romans, Ephe-

sians, Philippians, and James — in any order. Or just start at the Bible's beginning and work through the whole Book.

- As you read, notice things that may not agree with what you thought, and those that do. And particularly notice the correction, the encouragement, the promises, and the descriptions of what God is like.

- Meditate over the Scriptures, and memorize key texts. Use them in conversation with God and His people. Consider your ways in light of what you've

read. Commit an occasional day to fasting, deeper studying, praying, and meditating on how to better serve God and Jesus Christ.

Rise to this challenge in 2009 and make the Bible a habit. We become as we do, and God promises His blessings upon us *if* we do. **BA**

Gordon Feil and his wife, Linza, are Church members residing in Victoria, British Columbia.

Worth of the Word

The Word of God is infallible, holy, perfect, true, and many other good things. In it we have all we need for faith and practice.

I have not always believed this. I once embraced New Age teachings that discounted the Bible and its truth. Back then I thought a Christian could be too "religious."

I now realize that the Word of God is priceless. I have come to believe that one can never be too intimate with the Lord through His Word. Some call that religion, but I don't.

Online with MySpace.com, I've encountered Christians, agnostics, atheists, Hindus, Muslims, witches, wizards, and others who believe all kinds of things. I have been cussed out, mocked, ridiculed, but also accepted and embraced by some.

The unbeliever's view of God's Word doesn't bother me; he is blinded. What bothers me are Christians who discount God's Word as though it's full of errors and no longer relevant. In his *Time* magazine article, David Van Biema quoted a 2007 statistic from Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life: ". . . 57% of Evangelical Christians were willing to accept that theirs might not be the only path to salvation . . ." (June 23, 2008).

One professing Christian wrote me about scriptures I posted on MySpace. He referred to them (John 3:16; Romans 13; Psalm 139) as "blather" and said people like me give Christianity a bad rap. He referred to the abominations of Deuteronomy 18:9-14 as "harmless hobbies." I can understand when a non-believer calls God's Word "babble" — but a believer?

If God hadn't drawn me to Himself and shown me the importance of His Word, I'd be an unbeliever, too. Thank God He loves everyone and that His love, mercy, and grace are great toward us through the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

— Steven Zuraff



by Israel Steinmetz

In the debate over America's heritage, many vocal Christians claim that America was founded on principles of Scripture that allowed her to evolve from a group of struggling colonies into a world superpower.

To be sure, many of our nation's founders possessed a genuine belief in God and sought to live according to Bible principles. Their ideals and actions were shaped in a large part by godly principles that became part of the bedrock for this fledgling nation and accounted for much of its success.

At the same time, some components of our country's foundation can hardly be construed as Christian — a reality that should moderate our rhetoric about the "Christian" origin of the U.S.

Freedom, honor, and human

rights are among the ideals that express the lofty worldview of our founders. The tragic reality, however, is that those men chose *not* to extend these noble benefits to everyone in the country. While they *preached* liberty and justice for all, they *practiced* slavery and injustice for countless thousands.

The sad reality is that despite the rhetoric about freedom, justice, and equality, masses from Africa and the Caribbean were subjected to cruel slavery and abuse while this continent's native inhabitants were exploited and often killed under the guise of Providence and Manifest Destiny. The displacement of Native Americans and the institution of slavery were significant building blocks in our country's heritage and must factor into any honest discussion of its foundations.

Had our founders not stolen from, pillaged, deceived, and

destroyed native peoples of this continent, our nation never would have acquired the land we now enjoy. Had our forefathers not enslaved the peoples of Africa and the Caribbean, our nation would likely have never established herself as an economic force in the world. This economic strength led to military, industrial, and political power as well. So it is that two of America's significant founding policies were not truly Christian, despite efforts by many to justify them from the Bible.

* * * *

Let us take care that patriotic and nationalistic concerns do not blind us to the reality that America was built in part upon the degradation and enslavement of others. This should give us pause when we begin to speak indiscriminately of our founding fathers as men of highest charac-

Continued on page 19

Heartspeak



BY MICHAEL MANCHA

You've seen them before, haven't you? The t-shirts with the Coca-Cola logo that says "Jesus Christ" instead. Or the ones that have the MySpace logo that read "HisFace." This new one I saw had a little Jesus avatar — you know, the kind you create on the Nintendo Wii — and it said "Hii Saved Me."

And it doesn't end with t-shirts. There is a "Christianized" version of everything you can think of. They even have a version of the popular Bratz dolls called God's Girlz. My personal favorite is one I saw recently. It was a bright green shirt with a spot-on match of the Mountain Dew slogan "Do the Dew," but instead it read "Do the Jew." Did they really say that?

I've heard so many different names for this stuff: Witness Wear, Good News Clothing, Christian Swag. My generation has a term for it: Jesus Junk.

Sometimes I wonder what the point of all this is. Does it amp up the message of the gospel? Is it truly effective? Or does it just simply cut us off from the rest of the world and cheapen Jesus' whole purpose?

Just before He ascends to heaven, Jesus says this (Mark's Gospel): "Go now into all the world. Take everything the current culture has to offer and tweak it a bit so it's less secular and more godly. Use these things to blend with the culture — only subtle differences. Sooner or later someone will notice."

Oh, wait. What Jesus actually said was this: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (16:15, NIV). Did you catch that? He said, "Go into all the world."



shine a light



© Vincentlow - Dreamstime.com

Imagine our culture as a raging river. It moves fast, it's always changing, and it's rough. Anyone can call themselves Christians when they are out of the cultural water walking safely along the shore.

They're dry, they can breathe, and mostly they're safe. But fact is that the gospel is not safe. It's dangerous work. Jesus didn't come here to play it safe. He came to go where people were, to pour out His heart and love them beyond measure. And that changed the world forever.

The ideal of American youth is to be in the mix of popular culture. But the truth is you are popular culture. You are right in the heart of it, and Jesus wants us not to stand to one side and hope someone will come along, but to stand in the middle and shine a light. Cause we are in Him and He in us and we must be that light.

This magazine has one purpose: you. It stands to motivate, inform, provoke thought, and raise questions. Its goal is to encourage you to be who you are in Christ, to embrace your goals, your ideas, and your voice.

HeartSpeak is about communication among hearts – God's, yours, ours, and others'. We are all different, but HeartSpeak can help bring us together, united in our love for God, for His people, and for the world He so loved. As we open our hearts to the heart of God, we will find a way to make His voice heard in the world, revealing His HeartSpeak.

Michael Mancha is the designer-coordinator of HeartSpeak. He and his wife, Batina, are the music directors for the Living Rock CoG7 in San Antonio, TX.

Just in case you're wondering...

The average person will spend two weeks over his lifetime waiting for the traffic light to change.

No word in the English language rhymes with month, orange, silver and purple.

The Bible, the world's best-selling book, is also the world's most shoplifted book.

Coca-Cola translated to Chinese means, "To make mouth happy".

Apples, not caffeine, are more efficient at waking you up in the morning.

Mosquito repellents don't repel. They hide you. The spray blocks mosquitoes' sensors so they don't know you're there.

www.randomfunfacts.com

NFYC Registration for 2009 is here!

All local youth groups are encouraged to register with the NFYC at the beginning of each year.

Benefits include youth camp discounts, SVA discounts, weekly youth e-devotions, and more! Youth workers can register your group by going to <http://nfyc.cog7.org/register> and completing the simple process for each of their students.

Register today!

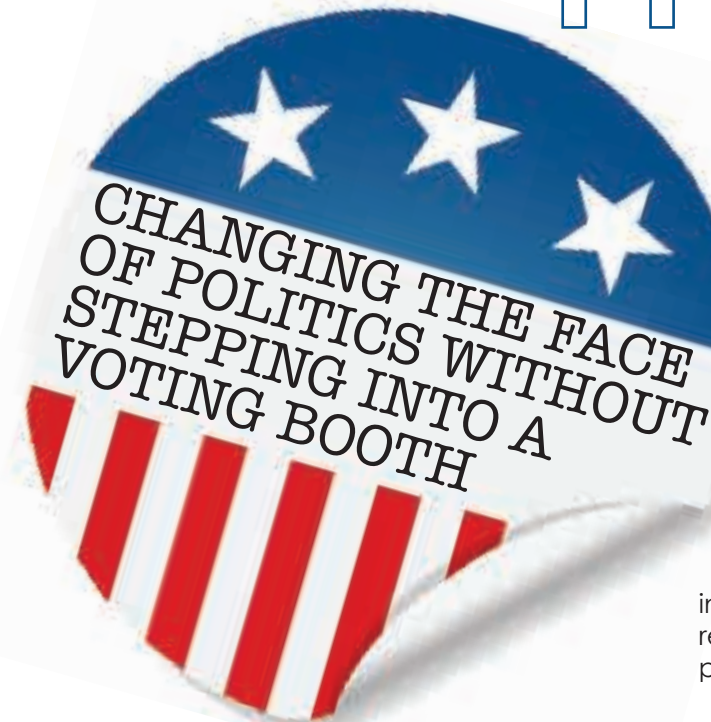


National Youth Week/ Hunger Lock-In April 17-19, 2009

Get your local church involved! Information packets are available. Contact Kurt Lang, NFYC director, at nfyc@cog7.org for more information.

MORE THAN A VOTE

BY MICHAEL FLORES



I recently asked my sixteen-year-old brother if he cared about the presidential election. He enthusiastically answered, "Yeah!"

Surprised, I asked why. "I don't know," he said "I mean the next president is going to be important for the nation."

Hearing him try to communicate his thoughts, I remembered this about youth: Despite what popular culture wants us to believe, they *do* care about others. Put teenagers in a situation where they can help someone, and they probably will.

This month our new president, Barack Obama, will be sworn into office. This is a sensitive nerve in our culture, especially for some in Christian culture, but we can learn valuable lessons here.

The recent campaign felt as though it was all about one person, one party, trying to gain power, and about lines being drawn that made one side all right and the other all wrong. So many of the political ads we saw in 2008, and even the statements we heard, revealed this one-sided, greedy approach to power-hungry politics.

On the surface, at least, the past election seemed to fall short of showing much genuine care for our neighbors, at least those who disagreed with us. As Christians, we are called to surrender power. The American model of government is one of service, and that model is something Christians should identify with above any political or individual interests. American government is "of the people, by the people, for the people." If government is about the people, then getting involved and developing your views should be for *all* the people, right?

My awareness about politics should be centered not only on how politics affects me but also on how it affects my neighbor. My vote, or any political involvement, is not just an expression of my voice but also a reflection of how I love my neighbor.

I know what you're thinking. "Why should I care about politics? I can't even vote!" Well, consider this. Would you help someone if you could? Anyone: a friend, a stranger, a parent, or a grand-

“You can try to understand why other people think differently.”

parent? What would you do if a friend came to you asking for advice on having an abortion? Or if you knew your grandparents couldn't afford the medicines they needed? Or if you knew that most of your friends couldn't pay for college because of education prices? Or if your parents couldn't afford healthcare because of rising living costs? If you wouldn't ignore these people, then maybe you're the kind of person who does care about politics.

Politics is about the girl in your high school who is pregnant and thinking about her options. Politics is about the grandparents who are struggling to pay for prescription drugs. It's about ways for everyone to pay for college or healthcare. Politics affects not just you but everyone. Valuing human life is not just babies but also the poverty stricken, abused, neglected, and addicted. Economic recovery is not just for those who have lost their homes but also for those who never had one. The war is not just on the streets of Iraq but also on the streets of LA, Houston, and every town in America.

So maybe it will be four years before you can vote for president. It doesn't mean you can't be socially conscious. You can know what it means to be Republican or Democrat, or what it means to support one issue while denying another. You can try to understand why other people think differently and engage those who do vote in political discussions. You can volunteer with organizations that are helpful to your community. Your age doesn't deter you from loving someone, so it shouldn't be a reason to be socially and politically uninformed.

As we begin this four-year journey with President Obama, remember to pray for our leaders, to petition God for wisdom for them and for ourselves. He also calls us to love our brother and sister. He calls us to put those who are last, first. And He calls us to do justly and to love mercy.

Michael Flores is a former youth leader living in San Antonio, TX, with his wife, Victoria, and their daughter, Kennedy.

GO DEEPER

Maybe you're not 18 yet. Maybe you just missed your chance to vote, or maybe you did vote for the first time. Wherever you fall in that mix, it's important to know that anyone can make a difference. Here are some ways you can bring about a change.

- **Pay attention in government class.** Having a well-rounded understanding of how the government process works is your first step.
- **Write to your state legislators.** There are no restrictions as to who can petition local and state leaders. Letter writing campaigns often work!
- **Write letters to the editor of your local paper.** It's your first amendment right!
- **Find an area of service that is not funded by the government and volunteer.** There are countless numbers of non-profit organizations that seek volunteers. Research them and find one that you can be passionate about.
- **Get the church involved in funding local organizations that need assistance.** Local non-profits will appreciate any help they can get. Petition your church board and pastor about organizing a project.

Continued from page 14

ter, godly virtue, and biblical ideals. It should spare us from the foolish notion that America was a nation whose birth and early growth are indisputable evidence of God's approval upon our attitudes and actions. It should remind us to look on our heritage with a deep sense of repentance toward God and compassion toward those we afflicted, rather than with an ignorant pride and patriotism that would selectively remember only those foundations we find honorable.

True enough, many of those who founded the United States were God-fearing, honorable people who sought to follow biblical principles in their lives and government. True enough, these principles have aided America in becoming a nation that affords freedom, justice, and liberty to a greater number of people than many other nations in the world. However, let us remember that America is still a man-made geopolitical entity with the faults and failures that are to be expected from a nation built, not by God but by men marred with the effects of sin. Let us have the honesty and conviction to praise America for its strengths without being blind to its weaknesses. Scripture, not nationalism, is the lens through which we must evaluate our nation's righteousness, both in its founding and in its present state. **BA**

Israel Steinmetz serves as pastor in Kansas City, MO.



Fresh Courage



Library of Congress

by **Joe Corrales**

Civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King had tremendous courage. He endured criticism, beating, imprisonment, fire-bombings, death threats, and eventual assassination in the cause of justice for American blacks.

In spite of all the negatives, Dr. King kept going. He would not give in no matter how difficult life became. The key to this determination? He was doing the will of God, and he knew it.

At the age of twenty-six, Dr. King became leader of integration efforts in Montgomery, Alabama. He was threatened by the Ku Klux Klan and harassed by police. Once King was arrested for driving just over the speed limit. Released the following day, he received a phone call threatening to kill him and destroy his house.

King took the threat seriously. He later told how unnerved and afraid he was — for himself, his wife, his children — as he drank coffee at his kitchen table after that call. He thought of the danger his family was in, and he could no longer take it.

At that point, King realized that religion had to become real to him and that he had to know God for himself. At that table, he bowed his head, telling God about the justness of his cause and the weakness he felt in carrying it out. An inner voice urged him to stand up for justice and truth. The words of Jesus assured him, "Lo, I will be with you, even until the end of the world."

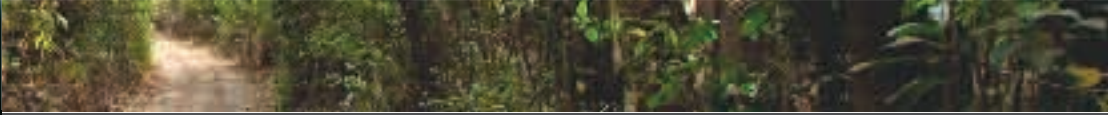
Three nights later, a bomb exploded on the front verandah of the King home. Thankfully no one was hurt. King got through it because of the new strength he'd gained from that religious experience just a few nights before.

This took place not long before his greatest victory in the long civil rights campaign. Time and again throughout his ministry, Martin Luther King returned to that experience to strengthen himself as he faced terrible difficulties. Knowing he was fulfilling the will of God made it possible for him to face all the opposition and endure in the fight.

King learned that God never gives us more than we can handle and stands by us when we commit to His will. **BA**

Joe Corrales serves as pastor of the Heart of Worship church in San Antonio, TX.





Secret Sin

by Darla Mills

I grew up in a Christian home with loving, gracious parents. My dad was a pastor, so I was automatically stamped with high expectations: the pressure to be a “good girl” and not to make many mistakes other kids made.

I went away to Spring Vale Academy for most of my high school years. By this time, my dad wasn’t only a pastor but also the president of the General Conference. I felt that this pushed the expectations of me up a notch.

After I graduated high school, the man who would become my husband came into my world. I desperately longed for new excitement and was ready to dive into the life that looked so inviting. Sean did not come from a church background and was in a tough, wandering period of life. We dated, drank, and made lots of poor choices. The following summer I found myself pregnant with his baby. *What now?*

When I first realized I was pregnant, I had many mixed emotions. *How can I possibly tell my parents? What will Sean say?* Since he wasn’t a real committed boyfriend, I eagerly thought

that this pregnancy would finally make him stick with me.

I called Sean right away. His response was that we couldn’t have this baby; the time wasn’t right. We were so young and both in college. For him, abortion was the only “answer” to our “problem.”

Although surprised by this, I didn’t resist long. I felt that I wasn’t strong enough to have this baby alone, and I sure didn’t want to lose Sean. So I soon turned off any feelings I might have had for the baby and took responsibility for a bad choice. I scheduled the abortion.

When Sean and I walked into the clinic we both felt “ice.” There was nothing warm or pretty about the place; everything was white and hard. The staff did an ultrasound to see how far along I was but didn’t show me the screen. (This is part of their plan so the mothers don’t see that their “blob of tissue” is a real baby.) They put seaweed in my cervix to make it dilate and sent me home to return the next day for the procedure.

That night I didn’t let myself feel or think about anything going on. When we went back the

next day, the ice feeling in the clinic was the same. I lay on the cold table, focusing on the posters affixed to the ceiling and the sound of the machine running.

I wanted the procedure to be done so I could get out of there. After it was over, the doctor simply said, “You’re not pregnant anymore.” No feeling.

That made me angry! I asked the staff to bring Sean to me, and I cried — more for myself and what I had experienced. I didn’t let my mind think about the baby, however. I had turned off all feelings when Sean and I made this decision. I couldn’t feel any pain or regret for the loss of that life. The following day, I went home, and we both went on with our lives.

A couple of years later, Sean and I married. Changes came slowly, and struggles came and went. We talked about the abortion, always saying that it would be our secret forever. It was too fresh to ever think of telling anyone.

About ten years after our abortion, God started opening our hearts to His calling. The pain of the choice we made so many years before was growing



Sean and Darla Mills, surrounded by their four children (clockwise, from left): Jace, Faith, Jadon, and Paige

heavier and more real. What I thought was going to be our secret forever became something totally different. I still fought with the thought of telling my family. I just couldn't bear the fact that I took a life so thoughtlessly.

A couple of years later in January, Sanctity of Life Month, I sat in the church pew, holding our fourth child, Paige. But I could hardly remain there comfortably. I struggled to hold in all the tears and emotion that I had stuffed for twelve years.

At that moment, I knew the abortion would no longer be Sean's and my secret. Though I'd made one very bad mistake, I couldn't make another by keeping silent. I had to help save other babies and other parents from going through the agony I was experiencing.

But how could I possibly tell? What would people think?

Sean and I finally decided to tell our parents. The hardest thing I've ever done was to sit in our living room and tell my parents that I killed their grandbaby. I bawled and couldn't look them in the eyes.

When I finally glanced up at them, I saw the most amazing thing. Both my parents were crying and rushed right to us for hugs. They couldn't believe that I had gone through that ordeal without their knowing and when I lived under their roof.

Telling our secret turned out to be a healing experience for me. Despite the devastating news, all my parents could do was think about us and what we had gone through. They showed us the grace of Christ. I knew that God forgave me because He's God, but my parents are human. How was it possible that they could show such grace un-

der these circumstances?

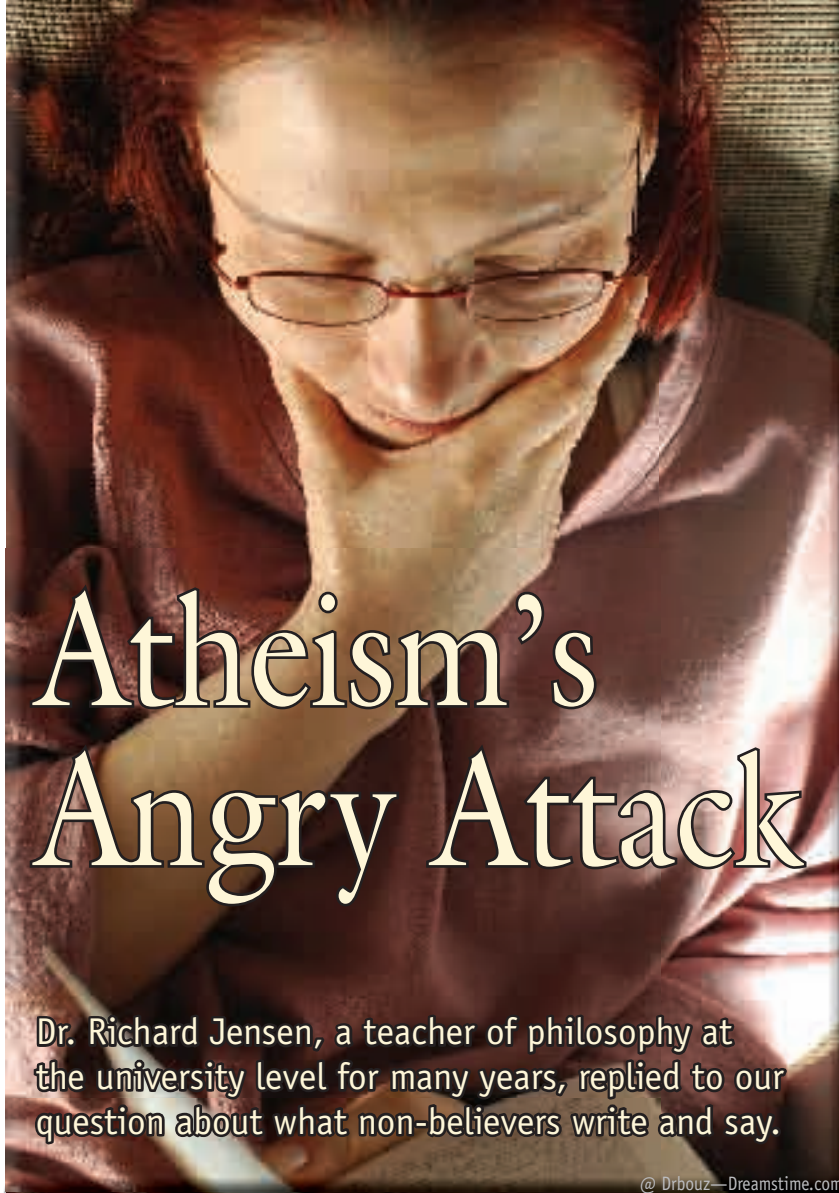
After that night, new confidence filled me. If my God and my parents could love and forgive me, why should I worry? With newfound courage, I was empowered to go and share my story.

I don't know exactly where God is leading me through this, but I do know that I have to use my story to help others. There are so many out there who need just one person to stand up and share. It empowers others to stop living in isolation and reach out for help. Many crisis pregnancy centers are in every state and offer healing studies for post-abortive women. I found so much healing through this study.

God has proven His love and forgiveness repeatedly. His hand was on me even when I walked away from Him and lived my life outside His will. I learned that He loves us no matter our failures. Even abortion can't separate us from the love He has for us.

Someday I will meet my child. I can't wait for that day! Through the sacrifice Jesus gave on the cross, He has healed my heart and taken my shame. He holds my child safe in His arms. Thank You, Jesus!

Darla and Sean Mills are the parents of four living children, with another expected in June. The family resides and attends church in Thornton, CO, where she also serves with Life Choices, a crisis pregnancy center.



Atheism's Angry Attack

Dr. Richard Jensen, a teacher of philosophy at the university level for many years, replied to our question about what non-believers write and say.

@ Drbouz—Dreamstime.com

We're hearing about a resurgence of militant atheism in recent years — books that attempt to demolish the Bible, the church, etc. What's new about this? Should Christians read something by an atheist writer to prepare for this battle?

You are certainly correct to talk in terms of both resurgence and militancy! Not long ago, I visited the philosophy section of a Barnes and Noble and found literally dozens of books on atheism and against Christianity. I bought five and looked at more than a dozen others. Checking the dates of

publication revealed that most of them were published within the last five years. We're now seeing a lot more "popular" works in favor of atheism than ever before. These books are marketed to the masses, and many spend weeks on the New York Times bestseller list. Millions of people are reading them, most who are not professional philosophers or scientists. So there is definitely a "new wave" of atheistic literature for popular consumption that is in fact being consumed.

The literature has indeed gotten more militant as well. Even the earlier classics, like Bertrand Russell's *Why I Am Not a Christian*, said some positive things

about Christian moral virtues. But the latest crop of atheistic books is not merely dismissive of theism in general and Christianity in particular. Instead the authors argue that theism is an actual plague on the intellectual and social landscape that should be systematically and mercilessly eradicated.

I'm not sure that anything is qualitatively new about the surge. The "culture war" between atheism and theism/Christianity has been going strong in the United States for many decades, with increasing intensity. We're seeing a greater quantity of atheistic material, but atheists/scientists are making substantially the same arguments against theism/Christianity that they have always made. The best of this argumentation is fairly philosophically sophisticated, which makes it difficult for the average person to understand and evaluate it.

But two things do seem new to me. First, atheists are getting a lot savvier in presenting their case. No longer are the arguments dry, esoteric, and inaccessible. The recent material has some very sophisticated argumentation that has been developed and packaged for the layperson. The subtlest nuances of atheism/scientism have been recast in popular prose, containing many interesting and compelling examples coupled with recent scientific research that seems to prove the points. Atheists are making the same old case, but they are targeting it much more effectively at the average person, using better examples. And, unlike in decades past, the average person is reading the new atheism.

Second, the new atheism is

being marketed almost as “self-help,” with practical application. “Believers” who have been living a form of godliness but lacking the power thereof have largely experienced failure and guilt. The new atheism explains the failure and alleviates the guilt. The “ethic” that it offers accords with (fallen) human nature, and so atheism “fits” our everyday experience. The arguments are not merely sophisticated and well presented; they are viscerally appealing. Thus unbelievers are intellectually confirmed in their unbelief, and former believers are literally convinced that their believing was a huge (and personally damaging) mistake. They feel that atheism sets them free!

In the face of what I’ve just said, I’m hesitant to actually recommend an atheistic book. Perhaps this will seem like a punt, or perhaps people will think that I’m afraid of modern atheism. Neither is the case, but the situation today is complicated.

Here’s the problem. On the one hand, I might recommend a book that doesn’t do a good job for atheism, and there are some like that. On the other hand, I might recommend a book that does a great job. In the first case, I’m not comfortable to recommend a book that I know can only be used as a straw man against atheism, since I know that the case for atheism is much stronger than that book makes out. In the second case, I’m not comfortable to recommend a book that I know can have an extremely damaging effect on faith, when I know that most Christians reading it will not have the necessary background to effectively respond.

This is a major issue to me.

Most Christians today are pretty ignorant about the best atheistic/scientific arguments. Among the many demands upon them, they simply don’t have the time to get up to speed on a body of literature like this. So if they read a badly argued book, they think, *Yeah, ridiculous! OK, I’m right to be a Christian.* I think that approach is intellectually dishonest. But if they read one of the better attacks on Christianity, they will likely think, *Wow! I didn’t realize that my faith was so ill founded.* And then they lack the tools and background to even sort through the issues, much less effectively respond. So the question is, “How can Christians be both intellectually honest and really informed about modern atheism?” Unfortunately, at present it is very difficult.

There needs to be more and better books responding to the atheists. In that section of Barnes and Noble I mentioned, there was one book offering a theistic response: *The Devil’s Delusion* (a response to Dawkins’ book, *The God Delusion*). I’ve read it, and it’s OK. But it’s not great, and it doesn’t address many of the more pressing atheistic arguments. Lee Strobel’s well-known books (such as *The Case for Christ*) are popular with many Christians but are not adequate in the face of a “both barrels”

blast of the best atheistic literature, in my opinion. So I’m really hesitant to recommend that Christians jump into the abyss of atheistic literature when I know that they are not going to find comparably well-crafted theistic responses.

I hate to sound dire, but I think that fundamentalist Christianity is facing difficult times, and we had better learn to deal with the new barrage from atheism/scientism. We need to be sure that our own faith is well founded, and we need to be able to respond to the most pressing questions we will be asked from increasingly atheistic/scientific unbelievers. Somehow we have to find the time and devote to the study. Yet another pass through the Bible or yet another rehash of a Sabbath school lesson will not prepare us to respond to the issues that are increasingly before us. We need much better education on this topic than we have had, and in my opinion, education should be the Church’s top priority. **BA**

Dr. Richard Jensen and his wife, Dana, attend church in Walla Walla, WA.



Christianity is facing difficult times,
and we had better learn to deal with
the new barrage from atheism/scientism.

AN EVANGELICAL MANIFESTO

Editor's note: For a fuller grasp of what the term evangelical means today, we offer this excerpt from "An Evangelical Manifesto." Reader comments will be considered for the "Mailbag" page.

Evangelical: What is it?

To be Evangelical, and to define our faith and our lives by the Good News of Jesus as taught in Scripture, is to submit our lives entirely to the lordship of Jesus and to the truths and the way of life that he requires of his followers, in order that they might become like him, live the way he taught, and believe as he believed. As Evangelicals have pursued this vision over the centuries, they have prized above all certain beliefs that we consider to be at the heart of the message of Jesus and therefore foundational for us – the following seven above all:

First, we believe that Jesus Christ is fully God become fully human, the unique, sure, and sufficient revelation of the very being, character, and purposes of God, beside whom there is no other god, and beside whom there is no other name by which we must be saved.

Second, we believe that the only ground for our acceptance by God is what Jesus Christ did on the cross and what he

is now doing through his risen life, whereby he exposed and reversed the course of human sin and violence, bore the penalty for our sins, credited us with his righteousness, redeemed us from the power of evil, reconciled us to God, and empowers us with his life "from above." We therefore bring nothing to our salvation. Credited with the righteousness of Christ, we receive his redemption solely by grace through faith.

Third, we believe that new life, given supernaturally through spiritual regeneration, is a necessity as well as a gift; and that the lifelong conversion that results is the only pathway to a radically changed character and way of life. Thus for us, the only sufficient power for a life of Christian faithfulness and moral integrity in this world is that of Christ's resurrection and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Fourth, we believe that Jesus' own teaching and his attitude toward the total truthfulness and supreme authority of the Bible, God's inspired Word, make the Scriptures our final rule for faith and practice.


Fifth, we believe that being disciples of Jesus means serving him as Lord in every sphere of our lives, secular as well as spiritual, public as well as private, in deeds as well as words, and in

every moment of our days on earth, always reaching out as he did to those who are lost as well as to the poor, the sick, the hungry, the oppressed, the socially despised, and being faithful stewards of creation and our fellow-creatures.

Sixth, we believe that the blessed hope of the personal return of Jesus provides both strength and substance to what we are doing, just as what we are doing becomes a sign of the hope of where we are going; both together leading to a consummation of history and the fulfillment of an undying kingdom that comes only by the power of God.

Seventh, we believe all followers of Christ are called to know and love Christ through worship, love Christ's family through fellowship, grow like Christ through discipleship, serve Christ by ministering to the needs of others in his name, and share Christ with those who do not yet know him, inviting people to the ends of the earth and to the end of time to join us as his disciples and followers of his way. **BA**

An Evangelical Manifesto
A Declaration of Evangelical
Identity and Public Commitment
May 7, 2008, Washington, D.C.
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Manifesto Steering Committee



Looking over the past,
I realize I've dwelt
on the pain,
not on the hand
that led me through it,
not the wisdom I have gained.

Looking over the past
as a chain of trails,
I reminisce in vain.
I've partaken
in Christ's sufferings.
As I journeyed, I was trained.

Janice M. Jones



North American Women's Ministries

Mary Ling, Director

Did you know . . .

- that the General Conference of our church in North America (Canada, United States) is 125 years old this year?
- that the Church in North America is designated Zone 1 of seven International Ministerial Congress zones and has less than 5 percent of CoG7 world membership?
- that the G. C. Ministries represent the cooperative services of all 200+ affiliated congregations?
- that the General Conference of our church is not "them" but "us"?



Shown here at Lake Louise, Alberta, are NAWM leaders Mary Ling of Ohio, Sylvia Corral of California, Clea Endecott of Iowa, Marjorie McLaughlin of Ontario, and Sandra Shapitka of Alberta. They met for planning last fall, sandwiched between a Sabbath in Parkland church and an extra day in the Canadian Rockies.

Awareness check: Do you know what's going on with your Conference-wide women's ministry?

Women's Day services are scheduled in many congregations for a Sabbath in March. The ladies will plan the service around the theme "What's Your Footprint Showing?" In other words, what are you leaving behind, and where are you heading?

An International Women's Convention is planned by our British sisters in Manchester, England, May 23-26, with the theme "Elect Lady." Now is the time to book airfares for this trip. For more information or a registration form, contact Mary Ling (maryling@oh.rr.com).

We're planning our women's luncheon for General Conference convention in Texas, July 6-11. A bazaar table there is our most public way of raising NAWM funds. Others are offerings from individuals, local women's groups, districts, etc. Without funding, we could not support Seekers, *Afterglow*, Medical-Dental Missions, and other benevolent projects as we do. We'll use a silent auction and give daily prizes for the first woman at the bazaar table each day at convention (your donated items are needed). This will be an excellent time of fellowship and getting to know other churchwomen.

NAWM is going hi-tech with an online survey to learn what Church women expect from Women's Ministries and to plan accordingly. Look for this survey soon on www.cog7.org, under the Ministries section. Results will be shared at the summer convention.

In 2008, the Faithful Servant Memorial Fund awarded scholarships to six young men – from California, Florida, Michigan, and Oklahoma – studying for ministry. Contributions to this fund, administered by NAWM, are made in honor of a deceased loved one or dedicated minister in the Church.

West Coast Church Alive!

The Harrisburg, Oregon, church participates in several civic activities around their small town and in nearby Junction City. Projects include Habitat for Humanity, a Boy Scout troop, a food bank, volunteer fire fighters, and more. These members were honored at the '08 Chamber of Commerce banquet: Jeff Curran (Outstanding Citizen of Junction City), Donald Sherman (Senior Citizen Lifetime Achievement Award), Don Bowers and Ellis Dodd (volunteer work for Harrisburg Area



Harrisburg family (L to R): Marie and Bruce Dailey, Esther Sheffield (Bruce's mother), and the Dailey daughters — Karen Curran, Kelly Otto, and Lori Nienhuis (now from North Dakota).

Elder Hubert Weekes, born on the Island of Trinidad, West Indies, died on November 28 at age 86 in Inola, Oklahoma. He is survived by his wife of 39 years, Phyllis, and seven children (one son and six daughters). During the first half of his life, Elder Weekes served the Church in his native Trinidad. Then, he migrated to the United States, where he served the gospel cause in Missouri, New York City, and Oklahoma.



Museum), and Danielle Curran (Outstanding Youth Services).

These Harrisburg members recently joined the ranks of CoG7 golden couples: Numan and Pinky Haffner (married 50 years on July 14, 2007); Bruce and Marie Dailey (December 22, 2007); Ellis and Jo Dodd (May 9, 2008); Jerry and Janet Sheffield (October 4, 2008); Don and Lorena Bowers (December 28, 2008). Also, Esther Sheffield of the Harrisburg church will reach her one-hundredth birthday on March 13, 2009.

G. C. Convention '09

A waterfront hotel in Corpus Christi, Texas, will serve as the site of the next biennial General Conference meeting for business and fellowship, set for July 6-11. Speakers have been selected to accent a "Fresh Encounter" theme:

Tuesday: "Encounter Jesus: Reborn!" – Pastor Heber Vega

Wednesday: "Encounter the Spirit: For the First Time" – Pastor Israel Steinmetz

Thursday: "Encounter Growth: Spiritual Disciplines" – Pastor Ken Knoll

Friday: "Encounter the Commission: Sharing Jesus" – Pastor Larry Zaragoza

Sabbath morning: "Encounter Grace: Free at Last" – Elder Calvin Burrell

Sabbath evening: "Encounter the Father: Life-Changer" – Elder Whaid Rose

See the back cover of this issue for more information.

SWORD

Last November, some SWORD district representatives and I met near Dallas, Texas, for a LeadNow conference and to discuss SWORD events, both past and future.

The three-day LeadNow conference served to equip and inspire over 1,000 ministry leaders to reach this generation of young adults. (If you'd like to attend this conference in '09, visit www.rightnow.org or contact me at sword@cog7.org) We were reminded to be sure our own walk with God remains vibrant while we serve others.

We are excited about the SWORD program planned for the Conference convention in Texas this July. We'll have workshops (on relationships); worship; socializing; service; and giveaways of CDs, iTunes gift cards, iPod Nanos, and more prizes. Young adults must be present to win. Look for our SWORD table at convention after you register in Corpus Christi.

Check out <http://sword.cog7.org> or the calendar in the BA and *Pulse* for upcoming events.

— Christy Lang
SWORD National Director



SWORD personnel (L to R): Christy Lang of Cedar Rapids, IA; Dan and Jacqueline Melgoza (with son, Garrett) of San Antonio, TX; Ruth Martinez of Irvine, CA; and Rachel Stirn of Deer Park, WA.

Your Will or the State's?

Do you have a Last Will and Testament? It is easy to put off preparing this document, but remember: A will is your last opportunity to express personal desires.

Even when little property may be distributed, your will is the legal avenue by which other issues should be addressed: naming an executor, avoiding bond expense, naming a legal guardian for minors, making gifts or transfers, reducing tax liability.

A frequently used method to support gospel work is the charitable bequest. It may take on several forms: a dollar amount, a percentage of the estate's residual value, a specific asset.

The Office of Planned Giving of the Church of God (Seventh Day) can assist you: P. O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233; plannedgiving@cog7.org.

Calendar

Church Events

- January 11-13 - G. C. Ministries directors and district superintendents meet in Denver
- February 13-18 - MTS regents (13-15) and G. C. board of directors (15-18) meet in Denver
- February 22-23 - License and Credentials Committee meets in Denver

Northwest Super Sabbath

March 14 is the date of the twenty-first annual Pacific Northwest Super Sabbath in Jefferson, Oregon's, First Baptist Church again this year. Dr. Ross Jutsum of State of the Heart Ministries will lead music for the day and provide a gospel concert that evening. Dee Duke, author and pastor of the host church, is among the speakers. For more information, call 541-995-8003 or 503-769-6636.

Lord's Supper Service

The annual observance of the Lord's Supper in every congregation is scheduled for Tuesday evening, April 7, after sunset.

Medical-Dental Mission

Again this year, a team of CoG7 medical and dental personnel will provide *pro bono* services to people in need. The nation of Honduras is the recipient area, and April 9-20 are the dates. For more information, call 916-833-8997 or 916-921-2075; or e-mail ernestofrausto@att.net or carlylehix@aol.com.

Living with AIDS

by Rose Orinda, Kenya

I am one of the AIDS widows in Africa. I lost my husband and three children to this plague. My suffering and tribulation are almost as old as I am, but I thank God who forgave my husband and me, saved my life, and brought me to His church at my hour of greatest need. I also have AIDS, but that is the least of my worries. This body can't last forever.

I am a witness of God's true love. Instead of turning my trials into blame, our brethren showed grace and encouraged me to live well and so help those caught in shame. I thank God for Pastor John Njogu's fatherly love and concern, for Brian Baker's tireless work to help our orphaned children, for Pastor Robert Crawford's support for my family, and for Pastor Abrahams Odongo and other godly men's teaching. I purposed in my heart to serve God, who enabled me to recover taking antiretroviral medication.

My role as program coordinator is to visit orphans with their new families and report to the ministry board and to my sisters in the widows and orphans ministry. One case involved Maurine Otieno, who was ill and needed immediate attention after sexual abuse from a neighbor man. We took her to the hospital for counseling and testing. Though not an orphan, she was accepted into the orphan's project due to her HIV-positive status.

When I last visited Maurine, she was collecting firewood near her home, stronger and happier than before. She is back in school, and her teachers say she will do even better now.

Maurine and her parents attend church every Sabbath. She loves the Lord and speaks of her determination to serve Him. She was afraid to die but now believes that God has given her another chance to live.

Many people can be thanked, but mainly we want to continue "touching lives for the glory of God." Please keep us in your prayers as we minister where God has placed us.

As of October 2008, 215 children, many of whom have lost parents to AIDS, were being sponsored in accountability with your G. C. Missions Ministries. Sponsorship of a single child is \$26 a month. Contact Widows and Orphans Fund, 970-663-9106 or brianatbakersacres@juno.com.

Editor's Circle

A Gift to You . . .

If the *Bible Advocate* has blessed you and if you could give \$60 or more per year (\$5 per month) so the BA can bless others, then we invite you to join Editor's Circle for 2009. Your support will help us reach new BA readers with the grace and truth of Christ.

All donors who request it will receive Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi's latest book ***Popular Beliefs: Are They Biblical?*** – with chapters on soul immortality, eternal torment, Sunday sacredness, Mariology, tongues-speaking, eternal security, and infant baptism.

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International Tour

Canada and the United States

Often called the New World, this land was inhabited by Native Americans before it was acquired, settled, cultivated, and developed by mostly European immigrants — and African slaves — in the last five hundred years.

With respect to faith, the Church of God (Seventh Day) in North America is older than its sister conferences or churches on other continents. That's why the IMC lists us as Zone 1. Born in Michigan, Iowa, and Missouri one hundred fifty years ago, CoG7 spread to Canada and Mexico, then to many other lands. These may now be called the "new worlds" of our church.

Our church history is longer, but our church growth has been slower than in other countries. Slow growth, it seems, describes the church in most places that, like the U.S. and Canada, are economically advanced and affluent. We are part of the post-Christian society, where the faith of our fathers is under "soft" attack — by philosophies and new gods like materialism, not by guns and swords — and is losing popular support. One result of this is that we now receive more missionaries (from places like Lat-

in America, sub-Saharan Africa, India, and Korea) than we send.

Despite slow growth here, the Lord still allows us to serve in His gospel harvest. Our economic resources, for example, have grown faster than our membership, so we can assist missions work in more fruitful fields beyond. Disaster Relief Funds for hurting brethren around the world have also come generously from the U.S. and Canada.

The joy of serving together in this global work extends beyond our financial efforts. God has used North Americans to serve our global mission in far-flung regions. The progress of Missions Abroad and the International Ministerial Congress owes much to the vision and skill of men like Elders Charles Adams, Roy Marrs, Robert Coulter, and William Hicks over the years. We thank God for them!

Further, Zone 1 serves as a communications hub for the Church around the world. This relates to the popularity of the English language in many places where CoG7 exists. It also relates to the fact that the Bible Advocate Press produces its literature and magazines in both Spanish and English and circulates these mostly free of charge (ministers abroad, please contact us for information). This page in the BA serves to keep our international membership informed and connected.

Education is another area in which the North American church leads and serves around the globe. With strong help from Mexico, the United States attempts to supply this need through literature and by missions personnel who train pastors and teach in many places.

In recent years, many nations have seen new economic growth — until the recent market collapse that started in New York City. As we struggle to recover lost momentum, let us consider how the burden of carrying the gospel falls not just on a few, but on all our shoulders (2 Corinthians 8:10-15).

We are one world, one church, one people of God. The duties and privileges of this union can be shared by all the nations where the Church exists. Some excel in serving through one gift, and some in another. So let us grow onward, each national church doing its part to advance the one true Cause.

We here in Zone 1 thank God for every brother and sister in faith, around the corner and around the world! Please pray that we may resist the trends of secularism and materialism threatening God's church here and that we may overcome by the grace and truth of Christ and the power of His Spirit.

— Calvin Burrell, Vice President
International Ministerial Congress



Nine Marks for '09

“Healthy things grow.” This simple axiom on how life works is getting more of our attention these days as growth enthusiasts face the reality of what doesn’t work in church.

Like Dr. Spock who taught a generation of parents to be “child-sensitive” lest they warp a child’s fragile emotions, the church growth movement taught a whole generation about “seeker-sensitive” in order to make the gospel more attractive and palatable for the unchurched. Just as Spock would later confess, “We’ve raised a generation of brats,” so the church growth experts now admit that the seeker-sensitive model may produce a crowd but often fails to make mature, devoted followers of Christ.

Let’s stay balanced here. Jesus welcomed seekers (sinners), ate with them, couched the gospel in language they understood, and reminded His pious followers how much lost people matter to God. Thus, there *is* a place for seeker sensitivity; some churches need it more than others!

But the church can learn more than this from Jesus’ approach. He was sensitive to the seeker, but not driven or controlled by that. The glory of God and the cultivation of devoted disciples were Jesus’ greatest passions. To attract a crowd was not His goal. From a church growth perspective, one does not score points by driving crowds away – something Jesus often did through His uncompromising approach to truth and discipleship.

Mark Dever, pastor of a D.C.-area church that is growing in impact while breaking all the standard rules of church growth, has caught this principle. Though he is passionate about evangelism and outreach, Dever’s ministry does not emphasize church growth, but rather church health. His book *9 Marks of a Healthy Church* (Crossway Books) has my attention.

In it, Dever lists the biblical standards used to measure the health of a church. Many such lists are out there, and I doubt that any one fits all. But few make the case for church health as strongly as Dever. Here, in a nutshell, are his nine marks:

1. Expository preaching - a consistent diet of verse-by-verse teaching from Scripture
2. Biblical theology - a clear understanding of who God is and the relationship He wants with us
3. Gospel truth - a firm grasp on what is *not* the gospel (“God is love, we’re OK, and Jesus wants to be our friend”) and what *is* (sins forgiven and new life begun via a personal relationship with God)
4. Conversion - helping people realize why a change of heart and life is necessary, and how it happens
5. Evangelism - obedience to the Great Commission, with a clear understanding of what evangelism *is* and *is not*
6. Church membership – teaching the nature of the church; the importance of joining; privileges and responsibilities of membership, including regular attendance, generous giving, and spiritual accountability
7. Church discipline - daring to discipline and doing so in a biblical way that glorifies God and enhances the health and witness of the body
8. Discipleship and growth – understanding the Scripture’s command for the church: the spiritual formation of believers through the hard work of discipleship (Matthew 28:19, 20)
9. Church leadership – a commitment to the requisites of spiritual leaders and cultivating them

This new year is a good time to check the health of your church against these nine marks. Since the body is only as healthy as its individual cells, do your church a favor and become a healthy cell this year.

– *Whaid Guscott Rose*
General Conference President



FRESH: *of recent vintage; not faded, spoiled, or stale; sparkling*
ENCOUNTER: *firsthand experience*

That's the motif for the

**General Conference Convention
Omni Hotel Bayfront
Corpus Christi, Texas
July 6-11, 2009**

**To register for convention online,
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Or call 303-452-7973 for a
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information on page 27.**



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