

A photograph of a man with glasses looking upwards, with a woman's face blurred in the foreground.

BA

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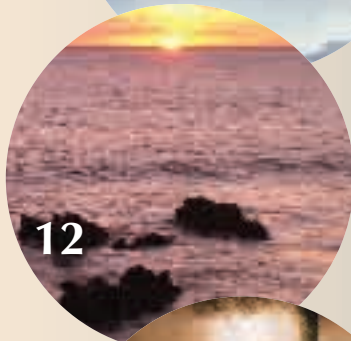
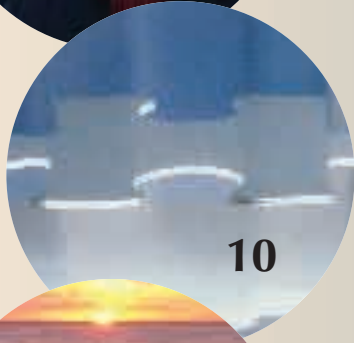
March 2009

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In the March issue of *Now What?*: dealing with heart defects in children (<http://nowwhat.cog7.org>)

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Smile at the Storm

The cold winds of secularism, skepticism, sin, and death blow strong in our day. This “perfect storm” tries to steer the ship of faith onto jagged, brutal rocks of agnosticism, even atheism. For many, trust in the God of the Bible is tested like never before.

A friend e-mailed me this concern: He had heard (on radio, no less) a report that another CoG7 minister and I no longer endorse the Bible truth about Christ, that we “think it’s all a lie.”

Let me explain why someone may have thought that. Two years ago, the premature death of a close friend and co-servant sent shock waves into my spiritual core and left hairline cracks at the surface. I reflected on my partial recovery in this space last March, well aware that many readers have been through much worse – and with less soul-trauma.

Though I admit to being a recovering addict to the unresolved whys and wherefores of God’s ways with man, still I assured my friend that I’ve resolved to remain a Jesus follower and die in this faith at the end. So help me, Lord.

Staying afloat in this storm means we need fresh, divine encounters that keep us both anchored and ruddered toward Kingdom Harbor. In a Rio Grande Valley Sabbath morning class on the tabernacle, I asked, “What is your Most Holy Place – that earthly location in which God came nearest or where you go to meet Him regularly?”

Several students mentioned the church; others, their pillow or a car, a hospital bed – even childbirth. More than one related stories of severe illness or testing.

One asked what my answer would be. For me, God whispers loudest in His Word; through His people – the love, acceptance, and forgiveness shown by fellow pilgrims; and in the outdoors, on any nature trail. Encountering heaven’s God often happens in very earthy ways.

In reading the Book, in our mutual fellowship, and in a dozen or hundred places each week, we sense anew that God is faithful even when we are less faith-full than we’d hoped (2 Timothy 2:13). Our hope is that items in this BA, like those on prayer (pp. 4-6, 8-9), will help keep you trusting the Christ who rules wind and wave.

Gales persist. Torrents rage. Collateral damage appears. A man goes overboard. The tempest may worsen before it’s finally spent. No fear: The grand old ship of faith goes on steadily. Our Anchor holds!

– Calvin Burrell



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Seeking a Mountain

Want to get alone with God?
It may be harder than you
think. by Jean James



Daily snacks of prayer weren't enough. This time I needed a seven-course meal – the kind of prayer feast Jesus partook of when He went out to a mountain and prayed all night (Luke 6:12). I pictured myself on a lonely hillside in the wee hours of the morning. If the very Son of God had felt the need for such isolation and effort, how could I do less?

Place and time

But where could I go to be alone with God?

There weren't any enticing mountain ranges within walking distance of my home. It would have to be a close-by place. I searched our house for a place to pray uninterrupted all night. That eliminated the bedrooms, kitchen, bathrooms, and living room, subject to invasion at any time. I could crawl into bed and pull the covers over my head to pray, but I'd tried that before and always fell promptly asleep. At length, I chose a small room at the far end of the house, a room we were eventually going to turn into an office.

The next important consideration was, When did night begin? Nine o'clock seemed a reasonable time to commence, but when nine rolled around, the house was still alive and my chosen room had no door. I decided to take a nap while I waited for everyone to go to bed. I woke up at six the next morning.

I decided to try again that evening. By ten o'clock, I crept into my new prayer room. It had an office chair that I rolled close to its lone window and made myself comfortable. I was gazing up at the mysterious night sky when

our cat crawled into my lap and demanded attention.

I dumped her unceremoniously to the floor and began to pray from my knees, but I'd hardly said, "Dear Lord" before she'd climbed up my back and perched on my shoulder. I gave her the room and slipped outside to our small front porch. The weather wasn't bad, and I began to feel close to God with that star-lit sky so near. Unfortunately I'd made too much noise closing the front door, and Rasputin, our overly friendly hound, dove toward me, determined to get the affection he craved.

'Auto' prayer

I promptly moved my prayer closet out to my car. Sitting in the front seat with the window rolled down, I gazed again at the sky and tried to meditate on God. When a lone mosquito buzzed around my ears, I tried to ignore it. When it was joined by a humming friend, I closed the window.

I began to feel alone with God and was about to render a quiet hymn when my son came out on the front porch with a cell phone and flashlight. When he turned the flashlight in my direction, I dove for cover like a criminal and peeked out to see if he'd seen me. He hadn't, and proceeded to make his call.

I struggled to think holy thoughts as I peeked out now and then to see if he was still there. At one o'clock he went inside to continue his phone call — from my original prayer room.

Eternal thoughts eluded me. I glanced back and forth from that lit-up window to my nearby sleeping hound. I noticed my dusty dashboard. My thoughts

wandered to topics like *I really need to give this car a thorough cleaning* and *Is he ever going to get off that phone?* It was ten minutes after two when he turned the light out.

Worship

Are You still there, Lord? He must be totally patient, because He was there, all right. But how was I to start? I'd had so many interruptions, my mind was dead. I began to recite the Lord's Prayer and tried to think about it, tried to mean what I said.

"Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name," I said reverently and rejoiced when I suddenly felt companionship with Him. I was on a visit to heaven and could almost catch a glimpse of the Tree of Life with the crystal stream running by. I began to talk with Him, to look into His face and rejoice over all He'd done for me: His salvation, His help every day, and His love. I was suddenly near to Him, and that was all that mattered.

Wants, worries, and woes

The distant sound of an ambulance landed me back on Earth and reminded me I had a list of needs — my wants, worries, and woes list. It had felt so grand to just enjoy God's company, I'd forgotten for a few minutes

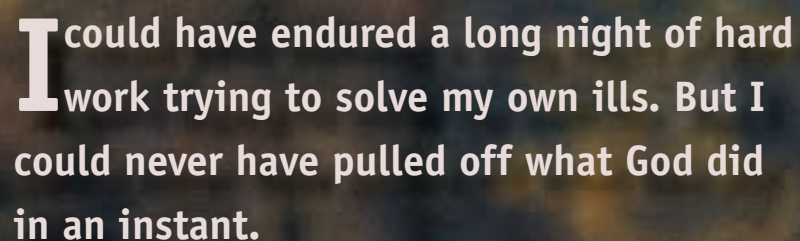
the troubles of this life, and that wasn't like me at all.

I had pages and pages of requests; I mentally reviewed them. When I looked again into His face, it seemed wise to start with requests that would make me appear slightly more righteous and not quite so greedy — the type I usually forget to list.

I bowed my head and prayed with more speed than fervor: "Please forgive all my failings, and help me be a better Christian, be more loving, more patient, more kind, more honest, and — more Christ-like." I managed to ask in one breath and devoutly hoped it wouldn't be too painful for me if He answered.

Self-satisfaction rolled over me, and I was ready to plunge into the real list. I started with those requests that weren't so pressing, the more generalized ones. I asked for success in everything, and I wanted money — there was never enough of it. And I wanted good health for myself and for everyone I loved, and maybe it would be nice if they had more money, too. And I wanted all of us to be kept safe from harm. I had enough troubles rioting through my life and didn't want any new ones.

With that thought, the dam burst and I became honest with God. I began to say what was really on my mind — the cata-



I could have endured a long night of hard work trying to solve my own ills. But I could never have pulled off what God did in an instant.

Why Pray When You Can Worry?



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Paul says, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6).

The first clause tells us to not be distracted by worry. Is there nothing for us to worry about? Nothing, says the Word — not even one thing. Here’s why: because all things are from God and under His control.

Ever notice that we thank God when things go right, but we do not want to “blame” anyone but Him when it goes wrong — in our estimation? Yet Job wondered why we can receive the good from Him and not the bad (2:10). Evidently God is responsible for *all* of it, and even Satan is a tool of His loving purposes (Romans 8:28). From this we see that nothing can happen that we need to worry over.

The corollary to this fact is that we ought to be thankful in everything, as the second clause of Philippians 4:6 says. The word *prayer* here suggests praise, and *supplication* means the expression of an urgent need. What we are to do, then, is 1) give thanks in all things (good or bad), knowing they come from a sovereign God, and 2) ask for fulfillment of needs, realizing that everything is from Him, through Him, and for Him (Romans 11:36). Prayer keeps us in touch with the reality that God does nothing but bless us — sometimes with good things and sometimes with not so good.

There we have the Christian solution to any situation that may seem worrisome: First give thanks, then make requests, and expect His peace to follow (Philippians 4:7).

This has worked for me, and I see the results in my prayer notebook. Each entry consists of the date entered and a brief description of the need. When an answer comes — yes or no — it is recorded in a third column, with the date. Looking back, I see dozens of yes answers, and there is most often a gap between the dates in column one and column three. For me, that means God answers prayer, but He does it when it suits His purposes. It’s all in His hands.

So let’s pray regularly. Or maybe we’d rather just worry.

— Gordon Feil

strophic needs that had prompted this night of prayer. These were the kind of troubles all humans face at different times of their lives, the ones like “Please don’t let me lose everything” or “I’m in real trouble, Lord” or “Please don’t let them die” or “Won’t You cure the cancer . . . save the marriage . . . save his soul . . . find my child . . . find me a job,” and so on. It had taken me a while to get to my deepest problems, but now I was bowed as low as one can get in a compact car. And God was there. He’d waited patiently for me and stayed close to hear me out.

Alone time

What did I accomplish in one night? Everything! I could have spent a strenuous night worrying — or even weeping. I could have endured a long night of hard work trying to solve my own ills. But I could never have pulled off what God did in an instant.

First, He told me He could turn any situation around in a way I would never imagine possible (Jeremiah 32:27). And then He showed me. When I went out to meet the new day, everything was different; I was different! I couldn’t help being different after an entire night with *Him*.

Now I understood why Jesus often went aside to pray, to a mountain or garden or wilderness area, sometimes all night and sometimes a great while before day (Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12). He went there to speak with God face to face. **BA**



Jean James writes from Finger, TN.

Q Does Matthew 16:18 teach that Christ would build the church upon Peter, as a large segment of Christianity teaches?

A This verse records Jesus' words "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." The key word here is *rock*. What, or who, does Christ mean when He speaks that word?

The word in question is the Greek *petra*. It denotes a mass of rock, such as could be used for the sure foundation of a house (Luke 6:48) or out of which a tomb could be cut (Matt. 27:60). In other texts, *petra* refers to the Lord Jesus Christ, the spiritual rock of both testaments and the foundation on which the church is built (1 Cor. 10:4; Rom. 9:33).

Catholic Christians believe that the rock in Matthew 16:18 refers to Peter, the apostle who first served as church bishop in Rome and who became for them the first among all bishops of the universal church. This theory depends on the fact that the Greek form of Peter (*petros*) is closely related to the word *petra*.

The difference between *petra* and *petros* is in the magnitude and stability of the rock. The former signifies a large, building-sized rock, whereas the latter refers mostly to smaller pieces (stones and pebbles) of the main rock. Thus Jesus is the rock, and Peter is a stone.

If Jesus had intended to identify Peter as the stone upon which He would build His church, it seems He would have said, "You are *petros* [Peter], and upon this *petros* [upon you, Peter] I will build My church." Instead Jesus used a different word than *Peter* to describe the foundation of the church He would build. He used *petra* instead of *petros*.

The fact that Jesus used a different designation for the foundation than for the man strongly suggests that He did not regard the man to be the foundation.

It is true that Peter, as an apostle of Jesus Christ,

has a place of honor alongside the other apostles in the church's foundation, all of it anchored to the chief cornerstone, Christ (Eph. 2:20). It is even more true that Jesus himself is the only foundation that can ever be laid for His church (1 Cor. 3:11) and that all the rest of us, including Peter, are smaller stones and pebbles built upward upon the one Foundation. Peter himself knew and wrote this truth (1 Peter 2:4, 5ff).

— Elder Calvin Burrell

Q If God moved King David to number the people, why would He punish him later for doing it (2 Sam. 24; 1 Chron. 21)? How can these varying accounts be reconciled?

A No, God would not punish David for doing something He directly caused the king to do. The difficulty with these texts is that the first says the Lord moved David to number Israel, while the second says the Devil made him do it.

The solution to this may be found in the relationship between God and Satan. The Old Testament mostly assumes that God is in control of all things and that the Devil, or Satan, is merely God's instrument, used to bring temptations, execute various punishments, and carry out other actions. With this approach, Satan was the active agent of evil to David, and the king, not relying on God's grace, was defeated.

Harmony of these two texts is achieved if we affirm that the sovereign God permitted Satan to tempt David with the evil act of numbering Israel. This may not appear an obvious sin to modern readers, but David clearly realized his error (2 Sam. 24:10; 1 Chron. 21:8). The basic principle here is that God does no evil, nor does He force men to do evil (James 1:13).

— Elder Calvin Burrell



Lord, Teach Us to Pray

Helpful “how and why” from the Master Teacher himself. by Larry Marris

Do you ever wonder what it was like to hear Jesus pray? I’ve imagined what He whispered to the Father while He walked through the throngs of fallen, broken people and what He might have said in those more intimate times away from the crowds.

What were Jesus’ prayers like in His hectic moments? And when He was tempted — for certainly He was! — how did His prayers change? When He was sad, angry, or felt other deep emotions, how did He commune with God then?

I’m thankful the Bible contains a few recorded prayers of the Master, for they not only provide examples of what was in His heart but also prompt our

imagination the more. By them I’m better equipped to evaluate my potential for personal communion with the heavenly Father. I need that!

So did the disciples, evidently. After hearing Jesus pray “in a certain place,” one of them pled, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). I believe this request carried emphasis. No doubt he’d witnessed the power and passion of the Teacher’s prayers, and their results. Longing for similar prayer-fruits in his life, the disciple asked Jesus for instruction. And he mouthed the unspoken words in the other disciples’ hearts, as well as in ours: *Teach us to pray.*

Seizing a teachable moment, the Master presented His first

lesson now known as the Lord’s Prayer (vv. 2, 3). In this familiar passage of Scripture, Jesus shared six major purposes of praying as He did.

Communing with God

Our Father in heaven . . .

By addressing God as Father, Jesus stated the first purpose in prayer: to commune with God. Prayer is an intimate time between Abba Father and His children, and intimacy requires unity — one of the things Jesus prayed for before His crucifixion:

“that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us” (John 17:21).

The first words of the Lord’s instructive prayer — “Our Father” — suggests the unity for which He earnestly petitioned. With broken human relationships, we can hardly get past this phrase in loving God.

Honoring and praising God

Hallowed be Your name.

The second purpose in prayer is to honor and praise the Father. Though we enjoy intimacy with Him, He is more than a best friend; He is God Almighty, high and lofty.

We therefore must not treat God casually or with indifference. Our praise should be packed with awe, as the angels’ was before the throne: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!” (Isaiah 6:3b). Our praise should be unceasing — night and day — as the four creatures’ in the throne room of heaven: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” (Revelation 4:8c).

When we pray, let us remember how great our God is and give Him the praise and honor He deserves.

Finding God's agenda

Your kingdom come. Your will be done . . .

When we come to God in prayer, we must surrender our will to His — the third purpose of prayer. In His earthly ministry, Jesus never spoke His own words or fulfilled His own purposes. He made clear that He came to do the Father's will (John 5:30). Seeking God's will in His life wasn't a mechanical exercise when Jesus prayed. So determined was His desire to obey that Jesus sweat drops of blood as He prayed in Gethsemane and died on the cross (Luke 22:42; 23:44-46). None of us have been that intense (Hebrews 12:4).

Like Christ, we ought always to seek only the Father's mind and heart when we pray, to find and follow His agenda throughout each waking moment. As we do, we are promised His power to follow through (Philippians 2:13).

Seeking God's provision

Give us day by day our daily bread . . .

A fourth purpose of prayer is to place our daily needs before the loving Father above. Since our needs are never ending, this phrase has a pleasant way of assuring that our contact with heaven is also on a without-ceasing basis.

God enjoys communing with us over the things we need and care deeply about. The Psalms are full of such requests, like this one:

Let my prayer come before

You; Incline Your ear to my cry. I waited patiently for the LORD; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry (Psalm 40:1).

Jesus said that even imperfect earthly fathers know how to give good gifts to their children. How much the more, then, our Father in heaven who knows and understands our every need (Luke 11:13).

Confessing faults and forgiving others

Forgive us our sins . . .

God takes sin seriously — so seriously that Jesus included forgiveness as another purpose of prayer. Elsewhere He warned, "If you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:15). We must not hide our own sins nor hold others' wrongs against them. Our failure to release others keeps us in emotional bondage, hurting us more than it does them.

Jesus' instruction here, coupled with the previous phrase, suggests that a daily prayer of confession and forgiveness may not be too often. Sin separates us from our holy God. By asking His

forgiveness in prayer, we open the way for Jesus to set us free (Luke 4:18).

Seeking His protection

Deliver us from the evil one.

Jesus knew firsthand what it was like to confront Satan. He therefore made the sixth purpose of prayer a plea for God's protection from the evil one.

The evil one, our accuser and persecutor, strives to draw us away from the blessings of being children of the Most High. Satan's purpose is to distract us from the rights of our inheritance and then kill, steal, and destroy us through his deception, trickery, and false enticements (John 8:44; 10:10a). It is not our own clever defense but the very power and protection of God that prevents this from happening.

In harmony with this prayer for deliverance, Jesus, our Good Shepherd, stands guard over us and keeps us in all His truth (8:32).

Reaping the benefits

Want to know how to pray? Learn the six purposes/strategies in the Lord's Prayer and be filled with His presence, praise, purpose, power, provision, and protection. Then watch for the fruit to appear. **BA**

**God enjoys
commun-
ing
with us over the
things we need
and care deeply
about.**

Larry Marrs directs LITES Ministries in Stanberry, MO, and serves on the General Conference board.



Solving the Puzzle

Jesus' death and resurrection allow us to do "greater works than these."

by David Kidd

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"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father" (John 14:12).

Of all our Lord's recorded statements, this must be one of the most exciting – and puzzling. How can believers do works greater than Christ's? The words are hard to read literally and understand, but not impossible. Let's take a closer look.

Problems with the promise

One obvious reason we may be slow to embrace Jesus' promise is that it feels too prideful on our part. Considering

that the servant cannot be greater than his Lord, our works cannot exceed Christ's. Whatever the servant does is by the Lord's presence and power within. We're not doing the works; He is.

Another reason we struggle with John 14:12 is that we do not often see its promise fulfilled in our lives or in the lives of others. For example, missionaries leave their homes and preach to people more hungry, more willing to believe. But they may never see the results of those spiritual investments in their lifetime. Still, the deeper our trust and the more we step out on faith and share the gospel, the more Jesus Christ will do through us. His promise in John 14:12 was conditioned on belief, and much unbelief lingers in the world and in believers' lives.

The unbelief of others can actually limit the work Christ does through us. Even Jesus had this problem: He could not do many mighty works in His own town because people didn't believe in Him. This suggests that Christians may be more fruitful away from their home areas and other zones of comfortable unbelief.

The third reason we wrestle with John 14:12 is that we tend to put some well-known miracles of Jesus (healings, calming the sea) above His other works that probably should be considered "mightier." Think for a moment. Which is greater: miraculous healings or acts of love? Who was the greater disciple: the one who did most miracles or the one who was servant of all? What was greater: the feeding

of five thousand or the spiritual conversion of three thousand at Pentecost? Was it a greater work for Jesus to still the winds and calm the sea or to transform the heart of a tormented man?

Maybe our difficulty with John 14:12 is that we aspire to the outward miracles of Christ, when the spiritual works He did (and we can do through Him) were actually greater. This is not to say that we should expect no miracles; let them be according to our faith. But recalling even a few of the countless lives of service, courage, and love that have followed in Jesus' wake allows us to make good sense of Jesus' promise, without weakening it in any way.

Personal help

"Most assuredly" at the beginning of John 14:12 signifies that Jesus' words must not be watered down, and "because I go to the Father" at the end provides not only a key to understanding but also the greatest reason the verse should be read literally. What Jesus intended by the promise is explained in the following verses:

"I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever — the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you" (vv. 16-18).

"Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart,

I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (16:7, 8).

Here Jesus promises that after His death and resurrection, the Father and the Son will dwell with people in a more personal and powerful way: through the Holy Spirit. This personal presence of God within and among people makes a great difference!

We might have expected that during His earthly ministry, Jesus would have produced many more followers than the hundred and twenty in Jerusalem and the five hundred in Galilee. However, the full power of the gospel had not yet been generated, because the message of its earthly events — Jesus' death and resurrection — had not been completed. Before those events, no one could testify that the Son of God had died for sins and become the first to rise from the dead. After those events, Jesus' power — and ours, through Him — to affect lives was increased greatly.

Further, before He died and rose again, the omnipresence of the Holy Spirit to convince men and women of their sins was

not fully recognized. This came shortly after and still remains.

Beyond unbelief

F. B. Meyer wrote that the results we see all around can't compare to the potential we have in Christ; they suggest the limiting effect of our unbelief instead. Meyer urged Jesus' followers to lift their heads and hearts on high, permitting the King of glory to enter in and serve through their lives, doing greater works than ever He accomplished on Earth. According to our faith, it will be unto us.

Thus the risen, glorified Savior does greater works than the persecuted Jesus of Nazareth. He does them as His Spirit works in untold thousands like you and me who obey Him by serving others in love. **BA**

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



Maybe our difficulty with John 14:12 is that we aspire to the outward miracles of Christ, when the spiritual works He did (and we can do through Him) were actually greater.



Faith-Plus Forum

on Ecology

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Must Christians Go Green?

by Israel Steinmetz
Kansas City, Missouri

I saw an ad for *The Green Bible*: More than a thousand verses about the earth are lettered in green. It may come as a shock that the Bible mentions Earth care, since some Christians seem content to abandon our planet to ruin or think that only “environmental nut jobs” are concerned with going green. But God’s Word does offer insight into how we should treat what He created.

Most important is the simple fact that it was *God who cre-*

ated (Genesis 1:1). Like you and me, the earth is part of what He made and considered “very good” (1:31). He entrusted His handiwork to humanity, telling Adam and Eve to “fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over [it]” and placing them in the garden to “tend and keep it” (1:28; 2:15; Psalm 115:16).

In this light, the pressing questions are “How can we be good stewards of the earth? How can we treat God’s creation with respect, a creation that groans with us in eager expectation of redemption (Romans 8:19-22)?” Should God-loving, Bible-believing Christians “go green”?

The answer is both yes and no. Some items labeled as the “green agenda” are simply

incompatible with a biblical worldview. For instance, the notion that humans are essentially parasites on this planet cannot be supported from Scripture. Nor can the idea that our primary role is to serve the needs of the earth, rather than the other way around. Neither of these reflects Bible truth about the created order.

At the same time, much of green thinking *does* represent God’s desire for creation. For instance, the concept that we should *use*, not *abuse*, the earth is certainly a biblical ideal that ought to influence our thoughts on pollution and waste production/disposal. The notion that we are responsible for using the earth to leave abundant natural resources for the next generation is supported by God’s Word and should guide our choices about farming, industry, and other areas. The call to simplicity, contentment, and gratitude for limited possessions is biblical and ought to play a large part in determining what we value, what we obtain, and how we dispose of it when we’re done.

These broad strokes require specific application in many complex areas of everyday life: the way we shop, eat, work, dispose of packaging, vote, and so forth. May God give us the wisdom to know how to apply scriptural principles and be faithful to His commission from the Garden of Eden. And may our descendants find cause to be thankful for the proactive work of today’s Christians who decided to care for the planet in a way that honored God and future generations — even if it earned us the label of “going green.”

Global Warming?

by Allan Burlison
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Can faith and ecology coexist? Is the global warming phenomenon fact or fiction?

Simply and honestly put, the answer to the first question is yes, faith and ecology can, and do, coexist. God created the natural world (ecology), and I believe it (faith). And global warming is fact, not fiction. If it were not fact, we would all be kin to the indigenous people of Alaska.

Without a doubt, our northern and southern hemispheres were once covered with large ice caps. These resulted from a sudden tilting of the earth on its polar axis — the effect of water pooling like a huge raindrop on one side of the earth as it rotated during the great flood of Noah's time. This 23.5-degree tilt is just the right angle to give us four seasons and the climate differential from equator to polar cap. One degree of change in this deflection either way would cause the earth to freeze or burn. What a great God we serve!

These ice caps formed glaciers that gouged great holes in our planet. The Great Lakes were formed in this way and filled by the melting ice. Yes, the earth has warmed following the shock of this tilting.

This conclusion, reached by a number of scientists, makes the Ice Age post-diluvial — third millennium B.C. This places it within the "young earth" conception of time and maintains the integrity of the Bible's version of creation.

God's truth prevails.

Global temperature is not man-made; its changes result from the natural effects of oceanic upheavals as waters circulate. This causes cycles of global warming and cooling, approximately forty years in length. Other explanations (cows belching, fossil fuels, Freon gases, etc.) are often politically motivated and have little, if any, effect on the greater environment.

Man was given dominion over the earth and a responsibility to care for it until Christ returns. This gives man and the church a role of stewardship — faith and ecology, not doom and despair for political gain.

Work of Grace

by Worrel Largie
Orlando, Florida

The Father's intent and instruction to man at the start was that we rule over all God made:

Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl

of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas (Psalm 8:6-8, KJV).

We see the concept of "rule" in Adam's relationship with Eden's animals. It emphasizes care and nurturing (Genesis 2:15, 19), as when a man "rules" his house well. Such gentleness and tender-loving care would mark Adam as a good steward in God's garden.

Everything on earth — each plant, blade of grass, piece of fruit, fish in the stream, crayfish, lobster, whale, nightingale, cockatiel, and dove — is His, for the Lord God made it all (Psalm 24:1). We have not created one iota of the creatures around us over which we rule.

How humbled we should be as we reflect on this, and how honored! We are masters of what we have not created nor earned. It is by God's grace that we were assigned the care of creation.

Being stewards doesn't mean we are free to exploit the earth for selfish gain. In the name of economic progress, bowing before the gods of materialism, societies run roughshod over nature. God left everything to us in good shape, but we have subsequently made a mess of things.



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E-Care: Our Responsibility?

by Troy Gedack

Colorado Springs, Colorado

Over the past century, much of the world has enjoyed unprecedented improvements in human health and life expectancy, political and economic liberties, and scientific advances. Has this progress been more threat to the natural environment than blessing to humanity?

Biblical guidelines can help us clear the muddled waters of ecology. Sound environmental stewardship begins with key concepts from God's Word:

- Our Creator God rules over all (Psalm 103:19-22).
- The earth and all creation reveal the Creator's wisdom and are sustained by Him (Psalm 19:1-6; Hebrews 1:3, 10-12).
- Created in God's image, humans have the privilege and duty to exercise responsible stewardship and caring dominion over the earth and all other creatures (Genesis 1:26-28; Psalm 8:5).
- Disobeying God, humans brought corruption upon themselves and the earth, defiling what was created good (Genesis 2:17; 3:22-24; Romans 5:12-14).

• God has not abandoned sinful humanity but restores people to fellowship with Himself and enhance the earth through stewardship (Romans 5:10, 11, 15-21; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21).

• Human beings are called to fruitfulness, to bring forth good from the earth. This does not contradict our call to be stewards of creation, but complements it (Romans 8:19-23).

Some environmentalists insist on "biological egalitarianism," giving equal value and rights to all life forms. This unwisely negates the unique role and responsibility granted to people as stewards of God's creation. Lowering them to the level of animals leads to bestial treatment of humans and removes them from the equation of creation care.

In His instructions to Adam and Eve, God elevated humans above all non-humans with the responsibility of environmental stewardship (Genesis 1:26-28). While attempting to mitigate competing demands, human needs trump non-human needs when the two are in conflict. People alone have been created with rationality and moral capacity to exercise stewardship, to accept accountability for their choices, and to take responsibility for other creatures. Rejecting


human stewardship is to embrace no stewardship at all.

The ideal vision of environmental stewardship consists of God and His perfect law at the core and humans acting as accountable stewards. Since the Fall, creation has been subject to the curse of futility and corruption (Genesis 3:17-19; Romans 8:20, 21). Through Christ's death, a process of restoration and reconciliation has begun (Romans 5:10, 11, 15-21), including the broader work of delivering all creation from its bondage (8:19-23).

Meanwhile, freedom and responsibility must coexist within a legal framework that holds people accountable for harm they may cause to others or to the environment (13:1-7). The most effective stewardship is through rigorous commitment at the local level with virtuous human behavior in the workplace and in the government. There can be a positive correlation between economic growth and environmental quality.

As we await the fullness of God's kingdom, we continue to combat evil in ourselves and in our world. And we seek better ways to love God by honoring Christ and keeping His commandments. Greater concern and better means for dealing with environmental issues usually correlate with greater prosperity. Finding ways for nature and humanity to coexist requires ingenuity, economic freedom, human effort, and ultimately complete deliverance through God's redemptive plan for all creation. **BA**



To read Pastor Wayne Hrenyk's view on the treatment of animals, go to www.cog7.org/BA. 

♥ heartspeak



Every morning when you wake up, the sun rises in the east, and every evening it sets in the west. It's been this way for thousands of years. Everything around you — life, warmth, and the seasons — proves the sun's presence. Your senses tell you, and your faith, that the sun exists.

But imagine this. One night a man tells you something he's really convinced of: In the morning the sun will not be there because it has ceased to exist.

You argue with him and try to show him all the ways that the natural world proves the sun exists, but he doesn't give up.

Though you know you're right, you still ask yourself these simple questions: *Why did he say this? Does he know something I don't? Why is he convinced that the sun is no more?*

In our culture, many people believe that the God of the Jews and of the Bible no longer exists. They feel that human beings are way above God, that God couldn't be involved with them. But if you don't recognize God through faith, you can't believe the physical evidence that proves He exists.

Why are people so sure that God is dead, especially if I'm a witness of His love and power and salvation through His Son? If I have done the job that Jesus asked me to do, then why are they so convinced God isn't alive?

Wait . . . have I done my job? Have others seen the true love of God through me, or have I been hiding it within the church walls?

Guys, if you believe that the Bible is God's divinely inspired Word, that the sacrifice of His Son is the

only way to salvation, and that God has given everyone an opportunity to know Him personally, then there is nothing that anyone, anywhere can believe that will stand mightier than that. Period (2 Peter 1:21; John 16:13).

How can we do our part to stop people from believing that God is dead? By proving through our actions and words God's beautiful, powerful, awe-inspiring love. I know that God isn't dead because I feel Him inside me even now. I must share this with the world (2 Corinthians 4:3-6).

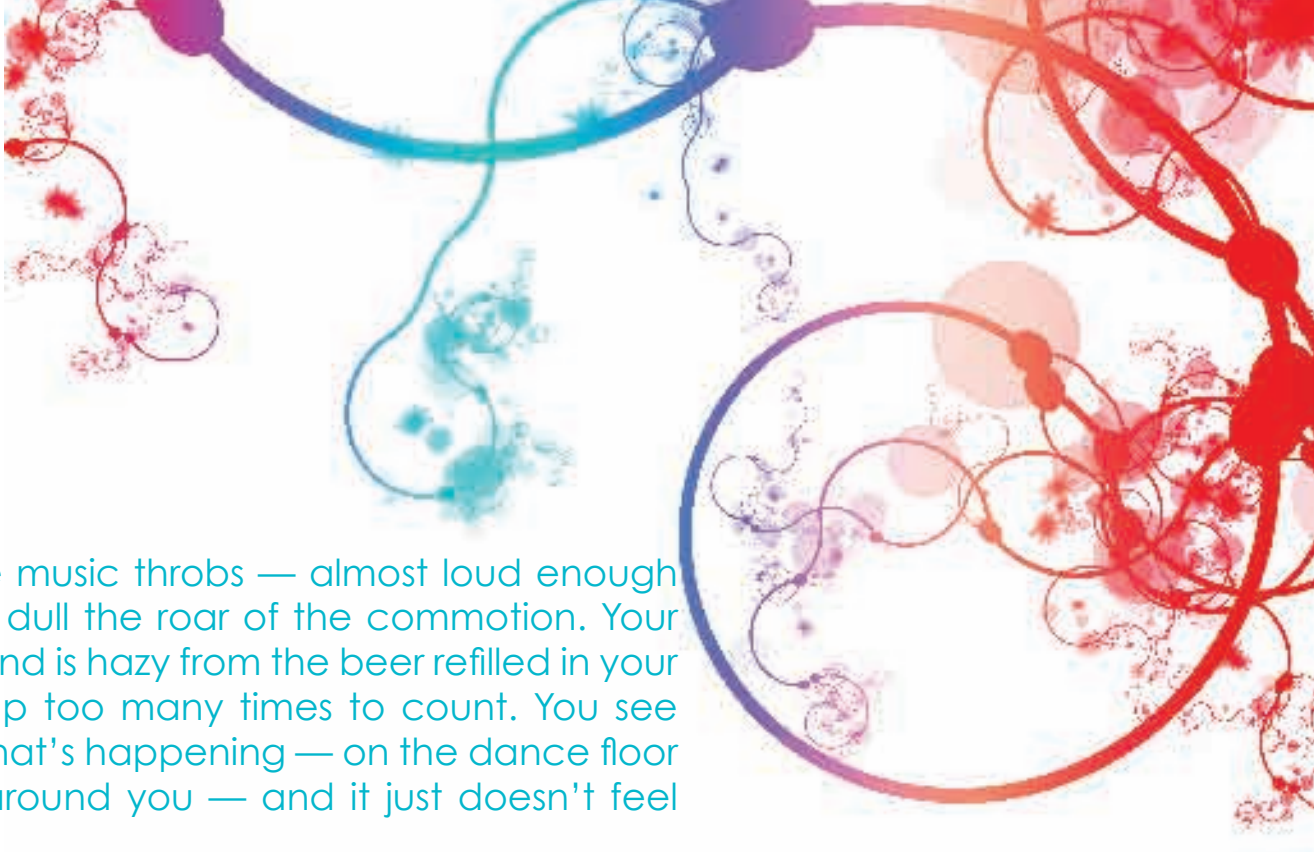
"Why blame the dark for being dark? It is far more helpful to ask why the light isn't as bright as it could be" (Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith*, p. 75).

BY MICHAEL MANCHA
PHOTOS BY PAUL RUIZ



life of the party

BY AMOS BALLESTEROS



The music throbs — almost loud enough to dull the roar of the commotion. Your mind is hazy from the beer refilled in your cup too many times to count. You see what's happening — on the dance floor and all around you — and it just doesn't feel right.

Like it goes against everything you believe. Deep down your conscience tugs: *This isn't where you're supposed to be. Why are you doing this?*

These thoughts might make you pause nervously, but you quickly wash them away with another drink. Then another thought comes to you, and it sounds like what everyone else is thinking: *This is fun.*

Can you relate to this scene? You can especially if you attend college. When I think of college, three things always come to mind: learning, freedom, and partying. More and more, partying heads the list because it's seeping out of the campus scene into all ages and settings of youth.

What's wrong with partying anyway? Nothing, according to many youths. They see parties as a way to meet people and find new friends. The truth is that while everyone is dancing and drinking, doorways to drugs, sex, and other harmful things open up that can ruin your life.

When you hold an alcoholic drink at a party, what are the odds that it will be the only one? The very fact that you're holding it makes a bold statement that you're willing to fit in with the crowd. And if you do what you know you shouldn't do, that may be a sign that your will is the weakest one in the room.

When you refuse to avoid temptation like this, then leave the title "Christian" in the pew; it doesn't fit. And you're in real danger of missing out on eternity in the kingdom (Galatians 5:21). The same goes for people who lead others into that kind of wild life (Habakkuk 2:15, 16). They will end up with the same shame they've poured on another.

To some people, drugs are neither black nor white but somewhere between — a shade of gray. Morality gets twisted. God doesn't decide what's right and wrong; they do. You've heard the statements: "If it doesn't hurt anyone, then it's fine." "So long as I don't bother others, what's the problem?" "I'm old enough to decide what's best for me." God disagrees.

At a party, people can't see beyond what's happening now. Their judgment becomes fuzzy. Things like premarital sex or driving when drunk happen more. The minute you lose the ability to make a reasonable de-

cision, you double the chances of destroying your life or that of someone else. Then, the long-term effects that you failed to see come crashing down.

That's when you see what sin really is: selfish satisfaction. You plunge from a high to an inconceivable low. There is no constant high to sin; it's just an ever-deepening rut of lows. In the end, there is no upside to sin; it always ends in regret.

When you oppose the will of God, you find yourself battling against the nature of God in you. You're hoping that when the dark road stops, there might be a worthwhile ending, but there is only one end to this constant feeling of being unfulfilled that you try desperately to fill with meaningless things — and that is God.

If you find yourself in this situation and the alcohol no longer drowns out your conscience, ask God to speak to you. And be ready to do what He says.

Amos Ballesteros is a 19-year-old writer from Crystal City, TX.

NEWS FROM THE FUTURE

Conroe, Texas Youth Conference

April 11-12

Contact: Jason and Rose
Rodriguez; jandrrodriguez@att.net
or 832-797-9916

The "Spring Thing" Rally

April 17-19

Nampa, Idaho CoG7
Contact: Laura Perez; lperez40@
hotmail.com or 208-468-8970

National Youth Week/ Hunger Lock-in

April 17-19

For a full list of events, go to
<http://nfyf.cog7.org>.

Inside the NFYC



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NATIONAL YOUTH WEEK/HUNGER LOCK-IN

April 17-19 are our suggested dates. If this weekend doesn't work for your church, pick any weekend up until June 30.

This is a great way to get involved in foreign missions — without the travel! Fifty percent of the money raised goes to support one of our sister conferences abroad. Packets have been sent to all local youth workers and are available online at <http://nfyf.cog7.org>. For more information, contact Kurt Lang, NFYC director, at nfyf@cog7.org.

WHAT'S IN YOUR INBOX?

If it's like mine, it gets full of junk e-mail from who-knows-where. How about putting some good stuff in there, like Youth Flash, our weekly e-newsletter. Great devotion ideas, new Web sites, jokes, cool quotes, and more. Sign up at <http://cog7.org/mailman/list-info/youth>.

While you're at it, sign up on our cell phone texting list, and we'll text you a daily verse, joke, thoughts to ponder — a little something each day to remind you how good God is! E-mail your number to nfyf@cog7.org.

FRESH ENCOUNTER

Are you meeting Jesus daily? Or have your encounters been few and far between? At the Conference Convention youth program in Corpus Christi, Texas, July 6-11, you'll encounter great speakers, an awesome worship team, and fine friends to help you celebrate or renew your connection with Christ. Look for more details at <http://nfyf.cog7.org>, and DON'T MISS THIS!

GIMME FIVE!

Up high? Down low? Right in your local church you'll find this show!

Sponsored by the National FYC, Gimme Five encourages youth groups to develop a well-balanced program based on the five purposes of the Church: worship, evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, and service. Materials include a program packet, poster, and a journal booklet to record your activities throughout the year and so people twenty years from now can see how cute you were as a teenager! This is a great resource for any church, no matter the size of your group. For a copy of the '09 materials, e-mail Kurt Lang at nfyf@cog7.org.

If your group hasn't sent a copy of your '08 journal for the Gimme Five awards, contact us today on how you can participate. We want to honor your accomplishments!

Angles on Angels

Question-and-answer study on a set of Bible characters that create curiosity. by Calvin Burrell

Who celebrated the creation of Genesis 1 but were not involved in its labor?

Angels (Job 38:4, 7).

Who, or what, are angels?

Angels are created spirit beings that play roles from heaven to Earth. They are God's creatures (Psalm 148:2, 5), far below His status but a little higher than ours (8:4, 5). They are part of the spirit world, like God, and part of the created order, like us. At home around heaven's throne, angels may also appear as humans on earth, though we are often unaware (Hebrews 13:2). The Greek word *angellos* simply means "messenger" — one who serves the heirs of God's salvation in Christ (1:14).

Do we worship angels?

No. Since they are not deity (i.e., God), angels must not be worshiped (Colossians 2:18; Revelation 22:8, 9). We may not exalt them as we do the Father and Son (Revelation 5:11-14).



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Are angels only men and women then?

Angels are not humans. Humans were made a little lower than angels (Psalm 8:4, 5). Angels do not reproduce nor will they die, except for those who followed Lucifer out of heaven and are reserved in chains of darkness for final judgment (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6; Revelation 12:9; Matthew 25:41; 1 Corinthians 6:3).

Do good people become angels when they die?

Little or no Bible evidence supports the idea that angels are disembodied spirits of godly men and women, nor that their number is increased when someone dies. Their number may well be fixed, exceeding twelve legion and one hundred million — even innumerable (Matthew 26:53; Revelation 5:11; Hebrews 12:22).

continued on page 21

Who, Me? An Addict?



by Robert Sumner

No way! At least that's what I told my wife, family, bosses, church family, pastors, and even myself. I said it so long that I ended up floating down the "river of denial" until I crashed on the rocks. Those rocks came in the form of a major car accident — another DUI. It sank my boat, and I hit bottom.

I had already been near bottom many times because of my addiction to alcohol. It wreaked havoc on my body, triggering cancer and other health issues. Now the accident brought on heart failure, high blood pressure, fibromyalgia, mild COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease), sleep apnea, and diverticulitis, among other things.

Added to these was nerve damage in my right foot and hand.

My body wasn't the only thing that suffered from alcohol addiction. So did my job performance and relationships. Over the years I lost two jobs, went through divorce, and landed in prison four times due to alcohol-related crimes. I felt like both Jonah, who ran from God's calling on his life, and the prodigal son, who, when he finally came to his senses, got sick and tired of living in pig slop and returned to his father in repentance and humility. In the twelve-step programs we call this "being sick and tired of being sick and tired."

No wonder I felt this way. I had been addicted to alcohol for nearly forty years. I started drinking at age two, so you could say I'd lived with this addiction my whole life. I started drinking heavily, however, when I was thirteen or fourteen years old. In time, alcohol triggered addictions to gambling, work, and pornography. I lost tens of thousands of dollars — even money I stole or embezzled from others.

This behavior was far from my decent upbringing. I accepted the Lord at age twelve and attended church. I even went to seminary after I graduated high school. Obviously I was a nominal Christian — one in name only.

There was no passion, no desire to let Christ be Lord of my life. My human nature set itself totally against God and His character of holiness and love (Romans 8; Psalm 103). The disgust and shame over my hypocrisy is partly what drove me further into alcoholism and other addictions. I thought I was too far gone for even God's help. As long as I pretended to be religious but ran away from the Lord's control of my life, I was an addict of some type.

But that last DUI was my wake-up call. I lost everything, including my family and money. I realized I could have killed many people, including my children and even me. I finally got the "spiritual awakening" the twelve-step program talks about. I knew I was lost, lonely, and sick. I could not help myself; I needed God, professionals, doctors, and others to help me.

I attended hundreds of Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, and other twelve-step programs. I attended mental health hospital outpatient treatment and rehab, plus anything else my probation officer required.

Like Job, I had to spiritually repent in "sackcloth and ashes." When I did, I found the road back a hard one to go down.

Angles on Angels

continued from page 19

Although forgiven, I still had all the legal, health, relationship, alcoholism, and gambling issues to deal with. But I faced them with the Lord's strength and guidance. No instant healings of body, mind, and emotions; it took over three years before I went on disability and found somewhere to live and work. I started rebuilding my life not only physically, but more important, spiritually. I realized I couldn't just accept the Lord Jesus' sacrifice for my sin. I also had to allow Him to be Lord of my life, taking up my cross and following Him daily.

The Lord has taught me many lessons of faith, repentance, reconciliation, and restitution. Now I'm in communication with God through prayer throughout the day. I acknowledge Him in every step I take, in every breath I breathe, and thank Him for everything He's done. I'm learning to practice love the Matthew 25, Isaiah 58, and James 1:27-2:24 ways, through providing encouragement, food, or financial help.

Today I'm a new creation in Christ and am finally at peace with the Lord in my journey. I try to live the "worthy walk," seeking His strength because I cannot do it myself. He has called me to a personal ministry, and I can truly say that my new "addiction" of serving God and others is the right one.

Robert Sumner, a member of CoG7 in Harrisburg, PA, lives and works in Richmond, VA, where he worships with a house-church of devout Christians.

What do angels do?

Their general duties include

- standing in God's presence to worship (Hebrews 1:6; Revelation 5:11)
- assisting, protecting, delivering, and watching over God's people on Earth (1 Corinthians 4:9)
- rejoicing when sinners repent (Luke 15:7, 10)

More specifically, angels . . .

- came to Abraham and Sarah in the tent and to Lot in Sodom (Genesis 18, 19)
- kept Abraham's hand from killing his son, Isaac (Genesis 22)
- wrestled with Jacob at night (Genesis 32)
- guided Israel through the wilderness; expelled the Canaanites (Exodus 13; Joshua 3:10)
- helped give the law at Mount Sinai (Acts 7:53; Galatians 3:19)
- destroyed the people in a plague (2 Samuel 24:16)
- smote Sennacherib's army (2 Chronicles 32:21)
- delivered Shadrach, Meschach, Abednego, and Daniel (Daniel 3:25; 6:22)
- visited Peter in prison (Acts 12, 27)

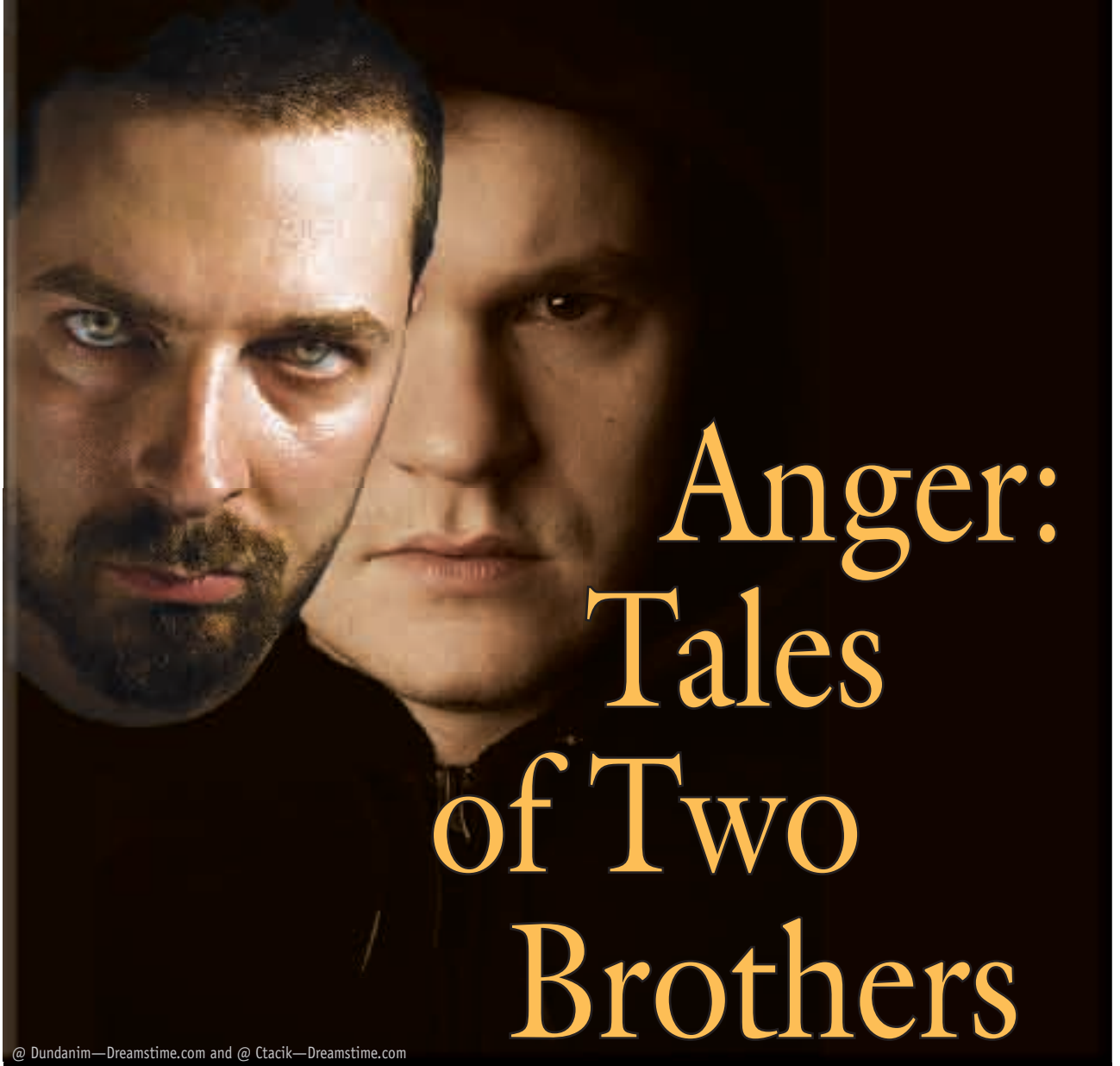
Is that all?

The greatest angelic acts relate to the life and ministry of our Lord. Gabriel announced His conception in the virgin's womb, and a multitude of the heavenly host announced His birth in Bethlehem. Angels served Jesus after His forty-day fast in the desert, and angels strengthened Him as He prayed in Gethsemane. An angel rolled the stone away at His resurrection. Angels stood by as He was taken into heaven, and they'll be with Him when He returns in glory. **BA**

Angels and the Christ (Hebrews 1)

- Angels are created beings; Jesus is the begotten Son (vv. 4, 5, 7).
- Angels are worshippers; Jesus is who they worship (v. 6).
- Angels are messengers around God's throne; Jesus is God on the throne (vv. 8, 9).
- Angels are creatures; Jesus is the eternal Creator (vv. 10-12).
- Angels serve salvation's heirs; Jesus is the heir of all things (vv. 13, 14).

— CAB



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One killed; the other forgave and loved. Which are you? **by Abiel Martinez**

The story on the news amazed me. In line to pay for her groceries, a woman stabbed and cut the person in front of her. The reason: The customer ahead had more than ten items in a lane marked for ten or less.

We live in a convulsive society. With people running here and there, it is easy to make someone angry. Something as simple as beeping the horn at a light or even a misunderstood expression can trigger a personal explosion in seconds.

Unhappily, this phenomenon happens also in the community of believers. Discontented brothers take offense over something that doesn't go their way — the choice of worship songs, the color of carpeting,

being replaced in a role they've claimed for years — and vent their anger to reclaim their rights.

All of us have gotten angry over something, sometime; that's human nature. What matters is how we deal with intense emotion when it flares. To help us, Genesis presents the stories of two pairs of brothers, different in their personalities and different in their handling of anger.

Bitter brother

The first story involves Adam and Eve's sons, Cain and Abel. When each brother brought his sacrifice, God was pleased with Abel's offering but not with Cain's (Genesis 4:3, 4).

And what was Cain's reaction to God's rejection? Verse 5 says, "Cain was very angry" — super angry, in other words — "and his countenance fell." Anger is not an emotion we easily hide; it's usually reflected on our faces.

Cain's reaction didn't sit well with God. He addressed Cain about it:

"Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it" (vv. 6, 7).

This is a critical point. God warned Cain to be careful because his anger could lead him to commit sin. Sadly, he didn't listen to God. When both brothers were in the field, Cain murdered Abel (v. 8).

Beloved brother

The Bible's first book also tells of a similar conflict between brothers, but with a different

ending. Because Esau was the firstborn, the blessing of his father belonged to him. But Jacob his brother deceived him. Helped by his mother, Jacob made Father Isaac believe that he was blessing Esau, when in reality he was blessing Jacob (27:1-29).

What was Esau's reaction to the stolen blessing? "Esau hated Jacob . . . and Esau said in his heart, 'The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then I will kill my brother Jacob'" (v. 41).

Isn't this the same hatred Cain felt for Abel? Esau was so blinded by anger and resentment that he wanted to end his brother's life.

Turning off anger

But he didn't. Though Cain and Esau experienced similar anger, Esau chose not to feed it. He allowed time to slow his emotions and turn off his resentment.

It didn't look that way to Jacob at first, however. When the brothers met years later, Esau brought four hundred men willing to do what their master ordered (33:1). Jacob arrived with his flock, his wives, and his children. Knowing the threats of his brother, Jacob feared for his family's safety and prepared to die with them.

But that's not the reception he got. "Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept" (v. 4).

What made the difference? Esau did not store his anger over those intervening years. He preferred instead to love.

Face of God

Which brother do we identify with? When someone makes us angry and we nurture the hurt instead of releasing it, God warns us as He did Cain, "Sin lies at the door." Unconfessed anger can lead to something far worse.

Instead, let's forgive as Esau did. Genesis doesn't provide the details of the process he followed during the years Jacob was away, but the mercy he showed to his deceptive brother indicates that Esau used that time to release resentment. That made room for love in his heart, a love that even changed his countenance. Once the brothers met, embraced, and wept, Jacob told Esau, "I have seen your face as though I had seen the face of God" (v. 10).

That's the kind of forgiveness to imitate — a change on the inside that shows on the outside, that transforms both church and society by the power of God. **BA**

Abiel Martinez

and his wife, Lizy, live in San Antonio, TX, and pastor the Potters House CoG7.



When someone makes us angry and we nurture the hurt instead of releasing it, God warns us as He did Cain, "Sin lies at the door."

Great disappointment

You do not speak kindly of your fellow Christians in the Seventh-day Adventist Church ["CoG7 Journey," Jan.-Feb. '08, p. 16]. You make fun of us as deluded because of the Great Disappointment of 1843. Jesus said for you to love us. Time will tell whether prophecies of the Sanctuary are correct. . . . There is one faith, one Shepherd, one fold.

C. F.
Woodhull, IL

Editor's reply: I reread that item and noted no unkind words. Both our churches grew from William Miller's error. We want to love our SDA brethren more, and we ask forgiveness for any disrespect over the years.

Obedying God

Editor's note: This reply came to our question "Apart from considerations of heaven and hell, is a Christian life still the best choice?" (Sept. '08, p. 7).

Following manufacturer's instructions, we get best use of any item. God made us, and His Ten Commandments in the Owner's Manual will result in freedom and peace. Examples: People who rest from the labor of the workweek are healthier. Faithful, monogamous marriages experience greater sexual satisfaction and true fulfillment. Generous and cheerful giving brings blessings.

Those who live godly have the promise of God's teaching (Psalm 119:99), His guidance (v. 105), His presence (16:11), His care (103:1-4), His protection (Proverbs 21:31), and His provision (Malachi 3:10). Yes, countless benefits and blessings come now to those who follow God. "Happy are the people whose God is the LORD!" (Psalm 144:15).

L. L.
Vancouver, WA



Sinning against God

Do Muslim, Hindu, and Oriental people sin against Jehovah, a God they do not recognize [Oct.-Nov. '08]? It is impossible to worship or sin against a God who does not exist. Sin in other religions is not possible.

Jehovah is the only God to positively identify Himself as the creator and redeemer of mankind. He says repeatedly that He is the only God. Others are the product of man's imagination.

Ministers need to ask other religions for their gods' credentials and insist on something more than faith traditions. Faith must be based on reality; it can't change something false into something real. Christians need to look more at historical science than ancient literature and be more assertive in promoting Jehovah as the one and only true God.

C. G.
Columbus, NE

True miracle

I believe Christians [think] that we know what's best in every situation [Oct.-Nov. '08, pp. 7, 10]. Having had obsessive-compulsive disorders myself, I no longer consider this a "disorder" but rather a gift that taught me. Many parents today

have children with "special needs" as we see it, but what if God sees the parents as the ones with special needs? What if He is teaching us to focus on what's most important: love, relationship, and family? That would be a miracle for today.

S. J. (death row inmate)
Florence, AZ

Praise for December

I was so glad to see more articles on prophecy in December '08 BA. I hope to see more in future issues.

W. L.
Meridian, ID

The picture postcard essay about God's country [p. 3] was joy from the heart. The "Q & A" about the four word meanings and their connections to "hell" was on target. "The Journey Continues" (p. 16) was worth repeating. As mentioned there, CoG7 has lost its way somewhat regarding end-time prophecy. The prophetic articles in this issue speak to that point.

R. M.
Liberty Center, OH

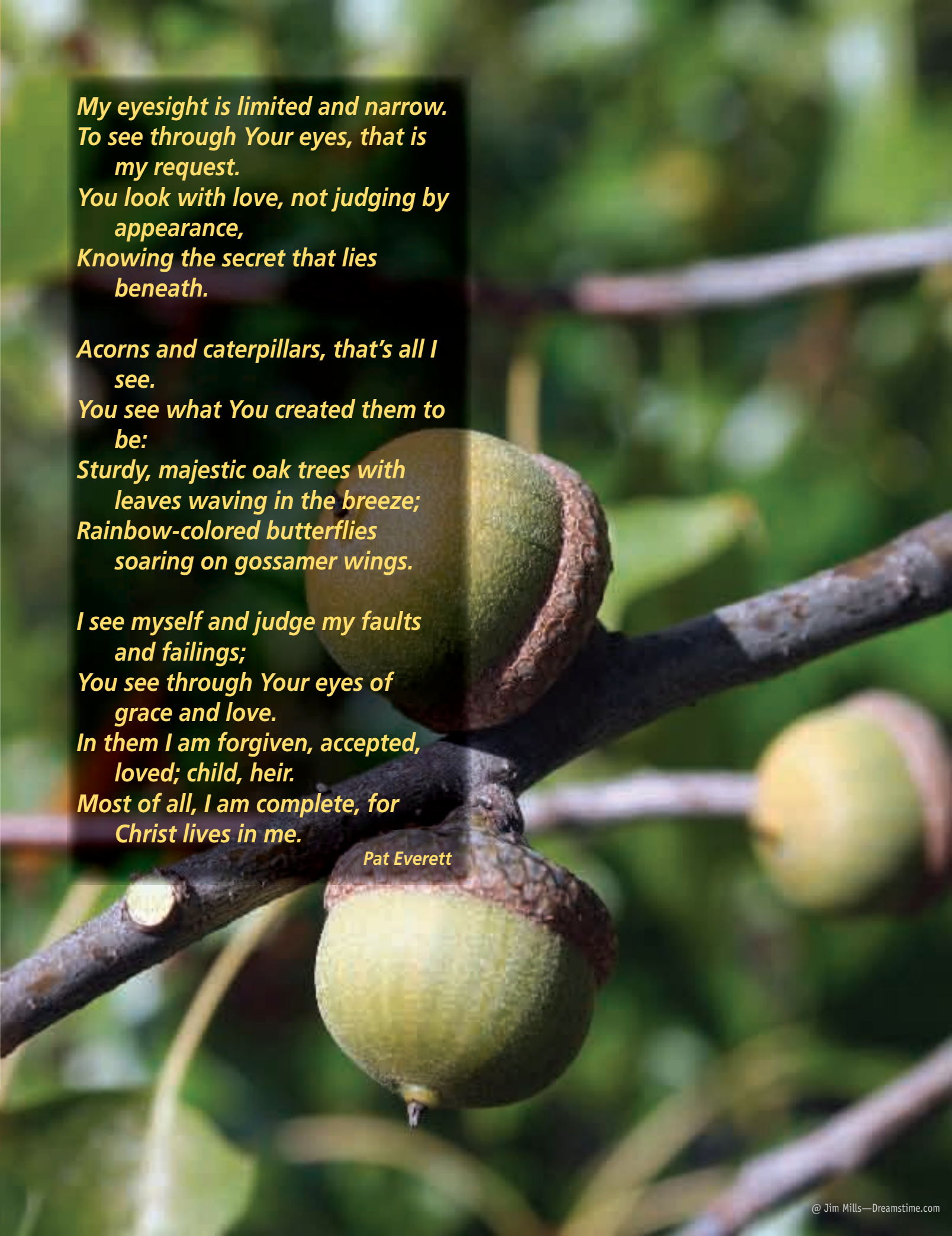
I just received my December issue. Please believe me: BA will be the first magazine I read. Thank you for including me on your mailing list.

D. S.
Tipton, OK

Powerful honesty

I am both dumbfounded and pleased at the powerful honesty of those submitting to your "My Journey" column. I think that is so important for the readers to know that we are all real, imperfect, bought, and believing Christians!

R. F.
Kansas City, MO



*My eyesight is limited and narrow.
To see through Your eyes, that is
my request.*

*You look with love, not judging by
appearance,
Knowing the secret that lies
beneath.*

*Acorns and caterpillars, that's all I
see.*

*You see what You created them to
be:*

*Sturdy, majestic oak trees with
leaves waving in the breeze;
Rainbow-colored butterflies
soaring on gossamer wings.*

*I see myself and judge my faults
and failings;*

*You see through Your eyes of
grace and love.*

*In them I am forgiven, accepted,
loved; child, heir.*

*Most of all, I am complete, for
Christ lives in me.*

Pat Everett



GC Ministries



Did you know . . .

- that the Church of God (Seventh Day) affirms the spiritual nature of God's true church; all who belong to Christ by faith are included?
- that our most significant assembly is not the Sabbath but the Lord's Supper (communion) service, commemorating the death of the Savior of humanity?
- that our annual observance of this sacred supper in 2009 is after sunset on Tuesday, April 7, in every congregation?
- that any baptized follower of Jesus Christ is welcome to attend and participate?

Publications

Keith Michalak, Director

This ministry publishes literature and distributes it around the world. Accomplishing this has been a challenge recently. Paper prices rose 10-15 percent last year; printing supplies (inks, chemicals) and postage costs also increased. Still, Publications maintained its budget and weathered the economic slowdown.

The *Bible Advocate* is printed and mailed to 13,000 readers per issue, in both English and Spanish, and charges no subscription cost for the service. We mail over 10,000 copies of Bible Studies for Adults each quarter, also in both languages.

We printed and distributed around 160,000 tracts in 2008. This is down somewhat from the previous year, due to higher postage to foreign countries. Despite this, we plan to expand our outreach this year and are exploring the possibility of producing tracts in French.

For two years we have printed *Youth Reach* in the *Bible Advocate*. Feeling youth need a new voice, Michael Mancha (San Antonio, Texas) volunteered to redesign that section and solicit material for it. The product of his work, *HeartSpeak*, premiered in the January-February '09 BA. Our goal remains to increase youth interaction with the magazine and with the Church, realizing they may more readily respond to the electronic media of this generation.

Youth Reach isn't the only thing that has changed. The *BA Online*

(<http://cog7.org/BA/>) and *Now What?* (our e-zine aimed at the unchurched, <http://cog7.org/BA/NowWhat/index.html>) have undergone a facelift as well. Check them out!

Through the *Bible Advocate*, Internet, quarterlies, tracts, *Forum*, *Churchright* (formerly *Pulse*), agency and promotional materials, Publications aims to meet the printing needs of the Church and its members. Lord willing, and until Jesus comes, we will continue working for the love of Christ and His kingdom. Thanks to those who contribute their words and prayers to our ministry.

Samuele Bacchiocchi Dies

Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi, prominent Seventh-day Adventist scholar and writer from Berrien Springs, Michigan, passed away on Saturday night, December 20. Best known for an energetic defense of the weekly Sabbath through his books *From Sabbath to Sunday* and *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness*, Dr. Bacchiocchi warmly befriended CoG7 and others of similar persuasion.

'09 Golden Couples

Jerry and Gwen (McMickin) Franks of Colorado Springs, Colorado, will celebrate 50 years of marriage on March 1. (Please contact the editor with news of other CoG7 golden anniversaries this year.)

European Expansion?

Recent reports from workers in England and Portugal offer good reasons to hope and pray for a growing church on "the continent." Robert Crawford of England recently visited a group of believers in the Netherlands who are seeking affiliation, and Paulo Coelho is working with a brother in France to translate CoG7 literature into French – a first-time effort in that country. Your support for Missions Abroad and the International Ministerial Congress will aid such efforts.

'Rubble to Revival'

The 2009 Annual Prayer Initiative, "Rubble to Revival (Praying the Book of Nehemiah)," is scheduled for March 21 - April 4. To reduce production costs, a Prayer Guide will not be distributed but will be available on the G. C. Web site (www.cog7.org). Churchwide participation in this spiritual exercise is encouraged and appreciated.

A Servant Rests

Pastor Melvin D. Sweet, 74, died in his Stanberry, Missouri, home December 27 after a restful Sabbath there. One of five children born to Texas CoG7 pioneers Elder and Mrs. B. G.



Sweet, Melvin faithfully served the Lord through the Church for over 50 years.

After his training at Stanberry's Midwest Bible College, Melvin entered pastoral ministry in San Antonio, Texas, and later pastored in Alfred, North Dakota; Hammondville, Alabama; Detroit, Michigan; Hickory, North Carolina; Grand Prairie, Texas; and back in Stanberry, Missouri. He also served in teaching and administrative capacities with Spring Vale Academy, LITES Ministries, the Northeastern District (as superintendent), Ministerial Council (as president), and several others. Few served with more joy than he.

On behalf of the entire Church, the BA expresses loving sympathy to Marybell, Melvin's wife of 53 years; to his daughters (Tami and Karen), their families, and his "adopted" son Bryan Kaeseman; to his surviving brothers (Murray, Belton, and Wesley) and their families; and to all who mourn his loss.

Medical-Dental Missions

The Medical-Dental Missions project is grateful for the outpouring of support from those who recognize the value of service to the needy in third world countries.

The Medical-Dental Missions committee consists of ten members, two from each of five local churches in and around Sacramento, California. The committee's major goal is to raise funds for medicines and other missions costs and to plan for other needs in preparation for the next trip. All issues

**General Conference
Convention
July 6-11 2009**



Catch a memory at the Corpus Christi Hooks baseball game on Monday, July 6, at Whataburger Field. Our own Arvella Rose will sing the national anthem!

This ballpark is on the site of a former cotton mill. Its historical equipment and buildings are available for viewing while in the field. A picturesque covered picnic area just inside the right field gate will be reserved for CoG7 and is perfect for eating and socializing while watching the game. Gates open at 5:30, with dinner at 6:00 and game at 7:05.

Whataburger Field has designated July 6 as Faith Night and plans a Christian concert before the game. If 250 tickets are sold, someone from our church will throw out the first pitch! Place your vote for who you would like to see throw it.

Christian concert, dinner, ballgame, kids playground, and historical exhibits all for only \$28 (adults), \$23 - children (4-12); under 4 - free. Add a Kid-Zone ticket (climbing rock, trampoline bungee jumping, and blow-ups) for only \$8.

Other area attractions include the *USS Lexington* with its IMAX theater, restaurant, and flight simulator. And the Texas State Aquarium – Come.Sea.Discover! – is nestled right on the beach. To learn more, visit www.ussexington.com and www.TexasStateAquarium.org.



Medical Missions team leader Ernesto Fraustro, with two workers at home: Terry Adame and Gloria Marquez

related to healthcare are subject to the approval of Dr. Eduardo Bermudez, the team's medical director.

To raise funds, gala dinners are held monthly, one at each of the five churches. Sisters prepare the food at their own expense, and the meal is served on a donation basis. Members from all the churches donate items for raffles, making all events profitable. Monthly breakfasts from October through March bring many together for great fellowship, and more dollars come in. Sisters Terry Adame and Gloria Marquez manage the scheduling, organizing, and assisting churches with these fundraisers.

The Medical-Dental Missions project not only meets physical needs but also addresses the spiritual aspect, for a healthy body, mind, and soul. The next missions trip is planned for April 9-20 in Honduras. To learn more, visit the mission Web site (www.cog7sac.org) and click on "Ministries."



On January 3, Pastor Eddie Villalba of the Aurora, CO, church baptized five new members. Left to right: Brian Alvarado, Raúl Andujo, Margarita Valenzuela, María González, Amanda Alvarado, and Pastor Villalba.



Pioneer Missionary Training '08

What a terrific trip we had for Pioneer Missionary Training – PMT, as we affectionately call it!

Most of our 14-member team arrived in Monterrey, Nuevo León, México on Sunday, December 21. All but one were at the Oberista church in downtown Monterrey by 9:30 a.m. Monday for a first session. Each day found us arriving there around the same time for devotions.

Our training began with a three-to-four-hour session by ministers or deacons who imparted their skill and knowledge to enhance our work. These men included Neftali Ventura, Ramón Ruiz, Juan Vázquez, Teóduo Hernández, and John Kennedy, an earlier PMT member. Classes covered topics like teamwork (with a great activity of building small souvenir houses), evangelism, sanctification, and being Spirit-filled.

Our team was under the constant, superb direction of Daniel Flores and the translation services of Abner Flores and Melanie López. Yair Moreno also blessed us by his friendship and experience.

Afternoons found us putting our classroom training to work. We served rest home residents by cleaning their facilities and ministering with skits and songs. We attended a funeral and ministered to the mourners. We shared the gospel in the streets, in the main city park, and in door-to-door witnessing. Some team members received the humbling experience of leading people to the Lord.

We visited a local hospital to provide food for patients and visitors, pass out Bible tracts, and

invite people to CoG7 congregations. This was on the worst weather day of our trip, with drizzle and temperatures near freezing. Those we served were grateful for the warm food and hot coffee.

Unanimously, our favorite activity was visiting an orphanage. It was tough leaving those children after such a fun time.

In addition to classes and fieldwork, we enjoyed outings at a museum, parks, restaurants, boat rides, a late-night coffeehouse, and local CoG7 congregations. The PMT team provided music and preaching at times and was treated to delicious meals in return.

On Wednesday, December 31, most team members made their way back to the states by plane or bus. Seven of us traveled together as far as San Antonio, where we welcomed the new year at the home of Elder Dan and Joyce Camero.

All in all, we had a wonderful time and grew very close to others through this experience — friendships that will last a lifetime and beyond.

— *Pastor Monico G. Muffley*
PMT 2008 Team Leader

Members of the '08 PMT team were Kaylee Larson and Kurt Stranberg (Washington); Monico, Karina Muffley and Katie King (Idaho); Joanna Noble (Michigan); Terri Parry and Rhonda Endecott (Iowa); Vanessa Gonzalez (California); Daniel Motta (Illinois); Tracey Chalus, Dan Bellows, and Mary Dell Wallace (Oregon); and Leah Wallace (with LITES in Stanberry, Missouri).

For another perspective of daily team activities, visit Bible Advocate Online (www.cog7.org/BA).



International Tour

El Salvador

God's blessings were seen on the many brethren gathered October 26 - November 2, 2008, in this beautiful Central American country. The meetings brought together leaders and workers of the Church in Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama, representing more than 1,200 congregations. The brethren from El Salvador hosted us in their capital city, San Salvador.

Sessions with Salvadorian pastors and workers were conducted by their conference president, Alfredo Castellon. Other sessions for this first leadership meeting of the International Ministerial Congress in Zone 2 were conducted by IMC officers Ramon Ruiz, Jacobo Gonzalez, Carlos Ceron, and Bill Hicks. (Representatives for the Caribbean, also in Zone 2, were not present. Our goal is to meet with Zone 2 English-speaking leadership in 2009, and hold a combined Zone 2 meeting before the 2012 congress in the U.K.)

Many of the seminars and presentations at this event were broadcast live on the Salvadorian church's growing radio network in San Salvador (1260 AM) and San Miguel (880 AM). These stations cover most of El Salvador and extend into Guatemala and Honduras.



A 5,000-person capacity auditorium, scheduled for completion in May, will serve the Church of God (Seventh Day) in El Salvador.

Another highlight was the ordination of our second Panamanian pastor, Giovanni Guerra, and the agreement of the zone delegations to aid in the development of the Church in Panama. This includes a commitment by the Mexican church to provide a full tuition and housing scholarship for the new pastor to attend the Mexican seminary in Cuernavaca.

The international delegates visited the location of the third radio station under construction in Santa Ana, as well as a new national church auditorium being built to seat 5,000, slated for completion in May. Also present was Ernesto Frausto, the U.S.-based coordinator for Medical and Dental Mission scheduled for Honduras in April.

The Zone 2 meetings were held in the Church's central offices and conference facility in San Salvador, where the foreign

delegates were also housed and treated to their meals for this week-long event. On Sabbath all the delegates were dispersed throughout El Salvador to worship with brethren and assist with services.

On November 2, seminars for El Salvadoran Conference staff were held by visiting IMC personnel, and a private tour of the National Palace was arranged.

El Salvador literally means "The Savior," and we all saw the hand of our Savior Jesus Christ throughout the week. On behalf of the IMC, we wish to extend our thanks for God's provision and graciousness expressed through our hosting brethren in El Salvador. And we request prayer for God's continued blessings upon the entire Church in Zone 2.

*— William C. Hicks
IMC Executive Director*



Praying for Obama

The inauguration of Barak Obama as the forty-fourth president of the United States was a historic moment. Watching the event reminded me of a great American, Abraham Lincoln, who signed the Emancipation

Proclamation and in whose symbolic shadow this sea of humanity gathered to watch the first African American take the presidential oath.

It was also from this hallowed spot that another great American, Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke to the conscience of our nation regarding justice, liberty, and equality: "I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal.' . . . I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

Observing the peaceful transfer of power from one administration to the next reminded me of the remarks of the late New York Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan: "Ashamed of America's less than perfect democracy? Show me a better one."

These thoughts are tempered by the realization that many Americans take little or no delight in Obama's rise to the presidency. One would hope that all who love justice and care for the oppressed might find some measure of joy in what this means for African Americans. Nevertheless, misguided notions about race and misgivings about Obama's political ideology and secret agenda, which only history will prove or disprove, dissipate that enthusiasm.

Legitimate concerns about this president's views on important moral issues like abortion and the definition of marriage are often heard. I share these concerns, which are a matter of conscience for Bible-believing Christians.

The question is, what should be the attitude of Christians toward political leaders with whom we disagree? Terms such as "Obamanation," e-mails inviting people to "join the resistance" and expressing desires for this man's failure, are unbecoming of God's people. Our attitude should not be guided by cultural or social norms, but rather by a biblical worldview.

Scripture commands us to pray for our leaders and for "all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life . . ." (1 Timothy 2:1). I am praying for the protection of our new president. I am praying for his success, for if he fails, so will our nation. And I am praying that he'll be surrounded by people whose godly influence will lift his moral views.

Further, we are admonished to "be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God" (Romans 13:1). We are to not only pray but also believe that our sovereign God controls the affairs of this nation and of the world. When the results of an election do not match our prayers, we must believe that God has answered according to His will. "Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him" (Psalm 115:3, NIV). Resisting God's sovereignty is not just unwise; it is sinful.

Let us remember that a perfect society is beyond reach, until Christ returns. Because of sin, all of us, including all politicians, are flawed. Therefore it is a mistake for Christians to trust any politician completely or embrace any political platform uncritically. As citizens of two worlds, we participate in the process with the full understanding that our ultimate hope is in Christ, not in politics.

So living in balance, let us neither be naively utopian nor hopelessly pessimistic about government. Let us obey the injunction to pray for our leaders, whether or not we voted for them. Let the church be the church!

— Whaid Guscott Rose
General Conference President

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