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BA
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2014

What's Ahead:
Hope or Dread?



Inside

2014: Worship

ARTICLES



- 4 Photo Opportunities | Erik Dunn
- 6 Starting the Journey | Bob Fogarty
- 9 Keeping the Sabbath and Keeping Your Job | Dr. Daniel Botkin
- 12 When God Seems Silent | Loren Gjesdal
- 14 Humor in the Bible | Calvin Burrell
- 16 A Time to Laugh | BA Interview with Liz Curtis Higgs
- 19 Where's the Power? | Whaid Rose
- 22 Positive Godliness | Loren Stacy
- 24 Saved by Light | John Ferreria

DEPARTMENTS

- 3 First Word — Clear and Cloudy
- 8 Questions & Answers
- 20 My Journey — For This Child I Prayed
- 25 Mail Bag
- 30 International Congress — Asia and Pacific Rim
- 31 Last Word — The Worshipping Church

COG7 IN ACTION

- 27 NAWM, SWORD, and more

Scripture quotations

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Clear and Cloudy

Last year was a dark and stormy one, western Christians will say. It's a trend this millennium. We took a big blow on September 11, 2001, another with the great recession of 2008, and again in 2013 with more than its share of local and world problems. Governments have not produced on the high hopes and prosperity that people seek and that leaders promise. Conflicts, violence, and natural disasters seem more commonplace than ever.

I'm not here to disagree with any of the above but to tell another half of the story you won't hear in the news: *There's a lot more going on in the world, both bad and good, than most people know about.* It's not only true that "evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse" in the last days (2 Timothy 3:1, 13), it's also true that God is right now fulfilling His Word to bless all families of the earth through Christ and the gospel of His present and future kingdom (Genesis 12:3; Matthew 24:14).

Given these double-barreled truths, my 2014 forecast is for more of the same: clear and cloudy. Nobody knows for sure what's ahead on any given day, so let's expect the best, hope the best, trust the Best, do our best, and speak the best of others — even of people whom folks love to hate. And be ready for more storms.

To get you started, our first articles (pp. 4-7) will encourage you for the journey ahead, to let go of past negatives and let God develop your tomorrows. The Sabbath item (p. 9) reinforces a long conviction and counsels us well on our workplace attitudes. The pieces on pages 12 and 22 have "God" in their titles, "Loren" in their bylines, and encouragement in their genes.

Mid-magazine (pp. 14-18) features an interview on humor with speaker and writer Liz Curtis Higgs. Husbands and wives in childbearing years especially will enjoy "My Journey" (p. 20).

The next BA (March-April) is "Simply Jesus" — an astonishing way to encounter *truth* for an authentic *life*. When your copy comes around February 28, remember you heard it here first.

Last spring, my switch to the G.C. Missions ministry of CoG7 was announced here, and a search for a fresh editor began at Bible Advocate Press. As of December 2013, the search goes on. Join in our prayers, please, for an inspired "find" in 2014.

— Calvin Burrell





God has an album, too.
by Erik Dunn

All parents have a favorite picture of their children, a photo that captures an expression, a milestone, a memorable time. A favorite photo of my son Jordan was taken when he was just ten months old. We were in Guanajuato, Mexico, and I was fortunate enough to capture the moment he first walked. With hands raised high, he casually strolled down the slanted cobblestone street like a typical tourist on holiday. Just out of the camera view was his nervous mother, reluctantly granting me space to catch this perfect photo-op.

I don't have a verse to back this up, but I believe our heav-

enly Father has an album with our photos in it. And I'll bet one of His favorites of you is when you took your first steps of faith in Christ. Do you remember where you were in that picture? God does. Maybe you were at a revival service like I was when I surrendered my life to the Lord. Maybe you were at a youth camp or a small group study. Perhaps the only other person in your picture was a faithful friend who led you to Christ with her testimony.

How long ago was that picture taken? What new photo-ops have you given God to add to your spiritual album?

For the last sixteen years my photo albums, hard drives, and cell phones have been filled with milestone moments of all my sons. Perhaps you've never considered it, but shouldn't God

have just as many pictures marking spiritual milestones in your life? Depending on how long you've followed Christ, there should be hundreds of photos documenting your spiritual progress over the years. From the moment we first trusted the Lord to the later times of surrendering our thoughts, actions, convictions, relationships, possessions, and opportunities to Him (Luke 14:25-27), God continues to arrange opportunities for us to take our next steps. After all, isn't that why they call it the "Christian walk"?

What we don't realize is that our walk with God involves risks – something to give our Christian life adventure. Believers who admit their faith-walk is boring or predictable can usually trace their arrested spiritual development back to a season when

they hesitated to take new steps. From the apostle Peter we can learn much about how to step out in faith.

Watching Peter

For good or bad, Peter is often in front of Scripture's camera. We have snapshots of him hauling in the catch of his career on the Sea of Galilee. He's on hand up the Mount of Transfiguration. And he's at center stage taking his first steps of faith on the water during a storm at sea. Matthew's account of this story (14:22-33) highlights good reasons that Peter is found in more photo-ops than the other disciples.

When Peter saw a growth opportunity, he jumped on it. He didn't hesitate or procrastinate. He didn't stop to measure the ambient temperature or calculate the depth of the water. He didn't wait for consensus or make excuses. He heard the Master's voice and responded.

Peter understood that growth requires risk. He didn't allow his personal limitations or understandings to limit his opportunities. It's not hard to see why Peter experienced Christ in ways that others did not. Peter's life reveals that God has many life adventures scheduled that are designed to keep faith vibrant, growing, and fulfilling. In fact, every new photo opportunity in Christ is designed to be more exciting than the last.

Consider the account of Peter's experience with a vision he later conveys in Acts 11:1-10. Does anything in this story seem remotely familiar? Comparing Matthew 14 with Acts 11, notice the similarities in the stories.

Bigger challenges

Matthew 14 was just a small-scale dress rehearsal for an even greater experience for Peter in Acts 10 and 11. The similarities between the two events lead me to believe that the experiences we've had in Christ until now are just rehearsals for what God wants to do yet in our lives.

Look up right now, in fact, and see the photo-ops that God has arranged around you recently. Maybe He is calling you out of your dependence on a certain relationship and into a greater faith in Him. Perhaps He is inviting you beyond your current skill-sets into a ministry where His gifting will be the source of your success. Maybe He is calling you, as He did Peter, to a mission field or just across the street to share your testimony. Do you hear Him calling you out of old, predictable religion and into more personal adventures in Him?

Whether God is inviting you to give

Jordan's first day of high school. →

Chris Dunn's high school graduation. ↓



more, go more, love more, or be more, there are still some empty pages in your spiritual photo album that He is eager to fill. I don't know what these pictures might look like, but Peter's story says that all you need to experience God in new and amazing ways is courage to step out in the same faith you did the first and last times you experienced Him.

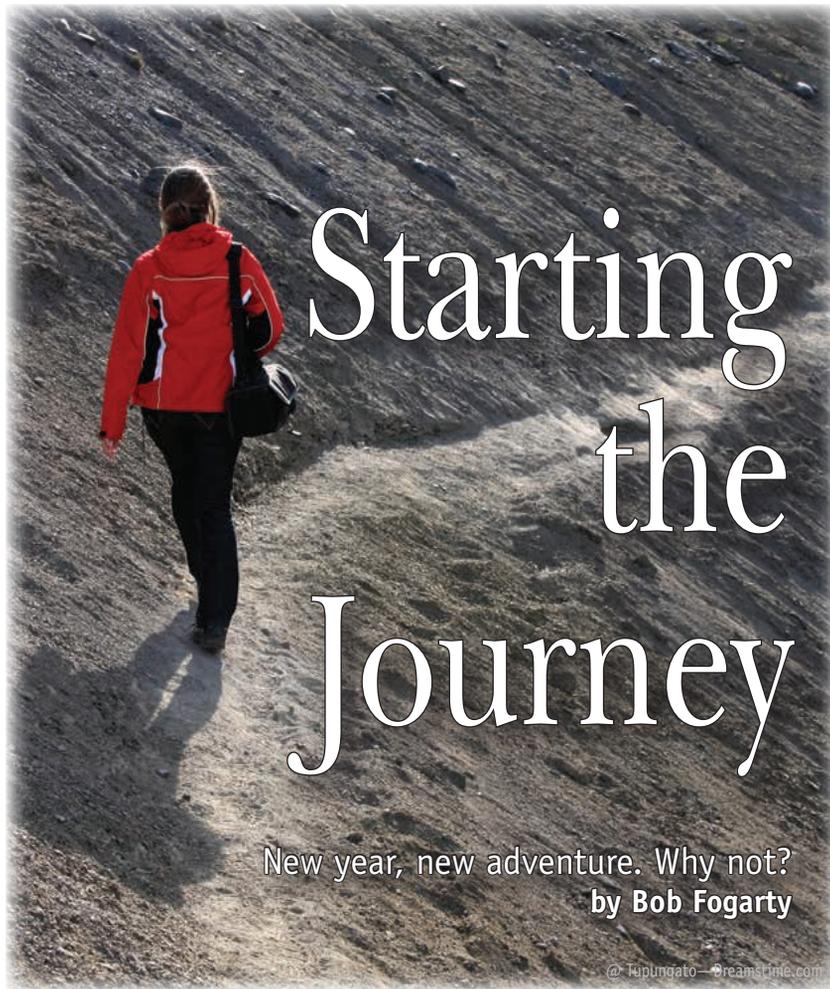
So what's holding you back? If the root of your hesitation is like mine, then your wavering is because what God asks from you today is a lot more challenging than what He required of you yesterday. If so, congratulations! You have discovered one of the major keys to spiritual growth. As in Peter's case, each new step of faith may often be more demanding, require greater risk, and have fewer supports than the previous step.

So why take that next step? Because each new step of faith yields greater reward. With the same assurance that prompted my son to negotiate the walkways of downtown Guanajuato and the confidence with which Peter stepped out upon the water, you should take your next step, believing that God has His camera ready!

BA

A member of the General Conference board, **Erik Dunn** attends and serves with his family in the New Life congregation in Houston, TX.





Starting the Journey

New year, new adventure. Why not?
by Bob Fogarty

My dad is here, visiting a couple of weeks from Michigan. We've spent much time the last several days reminiscing and sharing stories of life together. Someone once told me, "Never forget your past: God uses it to mold and shape us into who we are today." It is who we are today that matters most.

The spiritual journey, for many of us, is like being lost without a compass: We find out by default that the ways of God are *not* the ways of man. What used to give us clear meaning and direction suddenly applies no longer. This puts us at a scary disadvantage when trying to find our way. The Bible points us back to Abraham, the "father of faith," to help us

find clearer revelation of how God works and what He's up to in our lives.

Just as your personal story begins before it begins, so Abraham's story starts before Abraham's story starts. Watch how this works and compare his path to yours.

Background

Abraham's father was named Terah, who raised his family in a place called Ur (Genesis 11:26-28). Ur was a city in Chaldea, part of the region called Babel a chapter earlier. The city of Babel was the beginning of the kingdom of a man named Nimrod, described as a "mighty hunter before the LORD" (10:9).

Commentaries agree: Nimrod was Satan's tool in his day, a sadistic dictator and ruthless killer who violently opposed God — so much so that his kingdom, Babylon, became the biblical synonym for darkness and confusion. History reveals that Babylon, including the Chaldeans, was the seat of early Satanism, magic, witchcraft, and sorcery. Ur in southern Babylon, where Abraham lived for a hundred years, was known as the City of Tombs and was consecrated for the worship of Sin, the name of the local moon-god. The Babylonians literally worshipped sin!

This is important because where and how we grew up forms much of who we are as adults. The first step in understanding where God is leading us *to* rests in first looking back to see where He has led us *from*. Abraham was familiar with the dark ways of his world. He had to choose between leaving them or following God. He couldn't have it both ways.

Dissatisfaction

The second step in deciphering what God is doing in our lives is to recognize *who* and *how* God calls. When Abraham first heard from God in Genesis 12:1, all evidence says that he was a pagan shepherd disenchanted with what his world offered. He was neither a spiritual superstar nor a brilliant theologian. Hebrews 11:10 gives insight as to why God approached Abraham by disclosing that, at the core of his being, Abraham was a man looking for a city, a kingdom, whose builder and maker wasn't any man but God. Such divine discontent, when we

are dissatisfied with what this life and the world around us offers, is how true faith can begin with us also.

When we realize that the life around us isn't the answer, then God begins to make sense for us. God calls spiritual sojourners, His voice often disguised as our own dissatisfaction with the way things are.

Obedience

Another trait in Abraham draws our attention. As he discerned the will of God, he obeyed the will of God. Many Bible translations begin God's call to Abraham in verse 1 with "Now" (Genesis 12:1f). Elsewhere it is written, "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts . . ." (Hebrews 3:15).

Notice God told Abraham three things He wanted him to do. First leave "your country" (Genesis 12:1). What God said to Abraham He says to all spiritual sojourners: "I don't want you on your own turf. I want you to *choose* to leave it *for Me*. I want you to leave your friends, your 'haunts,' the place where *you* are most popular, and go to a new place, a new soil, a new area."

Then God cut a little deeper: "I want you to leave your *relatives*." The call of God involves leaving not only familiar places but also familiar people: "I want you to leave the soil you are familiar with. Those who are closest to you, your cousins, aunts, uncles — tell them 'goodbye.'"

Then came the fatal blow: "I want you to leave your father's house." Literally, "I want you to leave behind your father, your mother, your brothers and sis-

ters." Sound familiar? Jesus says the equivalent to His followers in Matthew 10:37: "If anyone loves _____ [fill in the blank] more than Me, they are not worthy of Me."

What is God up to? Destroying homes and families? No, God wants to take us *from* the place where either our past or our selves control the present. Jesus wants to be the hero of situations, successes, and problems. This is the greatest sacrifice of all.

We like it when we are in charge, when we know (think) we are safe. But Jesus wants us to be one hundred percent reliant on Him. We are told to seek *first* the kingdom of God, but we often seek *first* the path of least resistance and seek *last* the kingdom. When no options remain, we grudgingly turn to God.

God says He will provide our needs, but we think Visa is the answer. God says He will take care of us, but it's easier to depend on ourselves or others. God wants to teach us, but we're so stuck in the ways and traditions of the past, He cannot.

Depending on God

God had a work for Abraham to do, so He moved him. Why? If Abraham's influence remained unchanged, he would not hear

God clearly enough to do His will.

God wants the same relationship with you and me and will go to any lengths to get us there. His desire is that we be not self-dependent, family-dependent, work-dependent, church-dependent, nor government-dependent — only God-dependent!

As with Abraham, God says to us, "Start your journey with Me." We may protest, "But I've been a Christian for years!" to which God replies, "Begin *again* with Me." There comes a time when we need to shift from being little children to becoming the men and women God needs us to be. We must leave our baby Christian life to move on and grow up. Abraham was seventy-five years old before he began to truly grow up. How long will we wait?

There is always the fear factor: Where will God lead? We won't know. Like Abraham, we are called to walk forward in faith to the land and place that He *will* (future tense) show us. Step by step, little by little, and day by day. **BA**

Bob Fogarty resides in and writes from Lee's Summit, MO.



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Q&A Questions & Answers

I read of the final judgment in Matthew 25:31-46. Are there other previous judgments, or is that it?

The Bible contains several scenes that approximate a last great judgment day. Some of these are in the Hebrew prophets, like Isaiah 65-66, Ezekiel 38-39, Joel 3, and Zechariah 14. It is no simple task, and not fully necessary, to fit all of these into a single-event scenario.

The New Testament teachings of final judgment are less complex but still not fully clear. These include Jesus' judgment parable in Matthew 25:31-46 (to which you refer) and His "judgment" sayings in John's Gospel and Revelation, along with other scattered texts.

John 5:22-30 is a key passage here. In it Christ foretells a future hour (time) in which all the dead will be raised to judgment. This trial's outcome hinges on whether those being judged did good or evil (v. 29) and on their response to Jesus' words and their faith in God who sent the Christ (v. 24).

Is this John 5 text the same judgment scene Christ described in His familiar sheep and goats parable in Matthew 25? Probably so, although the stated basis for separation of the sheep from the goats (how they treated the least of Jesus' brethren) is not there linked with faith in Christ or His words as it is in John 5.

Further statements of our Lord in the fourth Gospel assign the judgment He performs a more generic sense. For example, see John 9:39, where it refers to the judicial dimming or brightening that Christ assigns based on one's daily choices in the light of Christ and His words. Some choose well and some do not. All are judged accordingly.

Other judgment texts (John 5:22, 27; Acts

10:42, 17:31; 2 Cor. 5:10; and 2 Tim. 4:1) underscore that Christ is judge, that all people will someday give an account before Him. These texts must be balanced with the Savior's words that while those who trust and obey Him may be judged in some sense, they can never fall into final condemnation and destruction (John 5:24; Rom. 8:1).

No survey of Bible teachings on final judgment is complete until it wrestles with the awesome Great White Throne judgment of Revelation 20:11-15. It's the Bible's grandest ultimate judgment scene, and it raises the most questions. Please turn to this text and read it now.

Revelation 20:11-15 places the final judgment more than a thousand years after the first resurrection when the righteous dead rise to immortal life at Christ's return to live and reign with Him on the earth (vv. 1-10; see also 1 Cor. 15:23 and 1 Thess. 4:16).

Revelation 20:5 implies, but does not explicitly mention or describe, a "second resurrection" when all the dead not raised in the first will come forth from their graves to stand before God at the great white throne (vv. 11-15). This could include not only the unrighteous dead of all ages but also those who lived and died during the millennium without the obedience of faith. By this understanding, "all who are in the graves" will not come up in one literal hour (as suggested by John 5:28, 29 and Matt. 25:31ff) but separated by a time of one thousand-plus years.

The eternal life-and-death issue at the Great White Throne is settled by who's written in the Book of Life and by what's written in the other books of judgment (see Dan. 7:10). Though much about this judgment remains unclear, it does appear as the "final" one in Scripture.

— Elder Calvin Burrell

“I’d like to keep the Sabbath, but I can’t. I have to work on Saturdays.”

Wrong. No one who believes in keeping the Sabbath has to work on Saturdays, at least not in America. Americans who work on the Sabbath do so by their own choice, not because they have to.

Sabbathkeeping Christians in Communist Russia were ordered by their oppressive government to work on Saturdays. Many of them chose to obey God rather than man, and they lost a lot more than some crummy job. They suffered imprisonment, exile, and torture for refusing to break God’s holy Sabbath. When we stand with these faithful saints before the Lord on Judgment Day, will any of us have the gall to say, “Well, Lord, I wanted to keep the Sabbath, but I couldn’t. I had to work”?

Informing your employer

How does a disciple of the Messiah go about getting every Sabbath off from his job?

First, you do not go in and ask your employer if you can have Saturdays off. You are not there to make a request; you are there to inform. You inform your employer (politely and respectfully, of course) that you will not be available to work from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset. Your employer may respond in a number of ways:

“I’ll see what we can do, but for now you’ll have to keep working Saturdays.”

“We can give you Saturdays off, but you’ll have to work on Friday nights.”

“We’ll try, but you may have to occasionally come in on a

Keeping the Sabbath and Keeping Your Job

Sound advice for a puzzling situation.

by Dr. Daniel Botkin

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Saturday if we're short of help."

None of these responses is acceptable. Pharaoh tried three times to persuade Moses and Aaron to compromise the Lord's demands (Exodus 8:25-29; 10:8-11). Moses and Aaron steadfastly refused to accept Pharaoh's solution, and we must likewise refuse to accept an employer's offer to compromise.

If your employer refuses to accommodate you, one solution is to look for a different job. However, that may not be necessary. If this particular job is important to you, you may want to inform your employer of his legal obligation toward employees' religious practices. This should be done politely and respectfully, not in an obnoxious or threatening way.

What the law says

Many people do not realize that federal law requires employers to accommodate employees who need time off for religious reasons, unless the employer demonstrates that accommodation would result in undue hardship on the conduct of its business. You, the employee, do

not have to prove the validity of your case. It is the employer who must prove that letting you keep Sabbath would cause undue hardship to his business. The burden of proof is on the employer, not on the employee.

Federal law considers the following solutions to be "reasonable accommodation" that would not cause undue hardship to an employer's business:

- Securing a substitute worker (even if the employer has to secure the substitute).
- Flexible scheduling (flexible arrival and departure times, floating or optional holidays, flexible work-breaks, use of lunch time in exchange for early departure, staggered work hours, permitting an employee to make up time lost due to the observance of religious practices).
- Lateral transfer and change of job assignment.

The employer must offer the alternative that least disadvantages the individual (i.e., the employee) with respect to his or her employment opportunities. The employer can also be required to bear the extra costs of accommo-

dating the employee, unless the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission determines that it is "more than a de minimis cost."

Sometimes an employer is afraid to give an employee every Saturday off for fear that other employees will see this and likewise demand every Saturday (or Sunday) off for religious reasons. However, according to federal law, this is not proof of undue hardship: "A mere assumption that many more people, with the same religious practices as the person being accommodated, may also need accommodation is not evidence of undue hardship." The above legal information can be found in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended (sections 701[j], 703, and 717, eoc.gov) and in Part XII Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Guidelines on Discrimination Because of Religion.

These laws apply to labor organizations as well as to employers. The laws pertain not only to scheduling (though this is the most frequent accommodation needed) but also to other religious practices, such as a man's right to wear a beard because of his religious convictions. The employer's legal obligation to accommodate "pertains to prospective employees as well as current employees."

Sabbathkeepers need to know that employees have legal rights to reasonable accommodations and that some employees take their employers to court to enforce these rights. Sometimes the employer wins the case, when it truly would cause undue hardship for the employer to accommodate the employee.

When undue hardship is not



Many employers will respect you for taking a firm but polite stand for what you believe.

an issue, though, the law is on our side. Most employers are reasonable people and intelligent enough to know that it would be wiser for them to accommodate your need than it would be to refuse. Many employers will respect you for taking a firm but polite stand for what you believe. If they are smart, they will know that a person with strong convictions is likely to be a reliable, honest worker with integrity and will find a way to accommodate you.

Other options

Some employers are not so kind and understanding and will simply say, "No, you have to work on Saturdays." In that case, you must pray and ask the Lord to show you what He would have you to do.

Would the Lord have you take your employer to court, or would He have you look for a different job? (You don't need to pray about whether or not the Lord would have you keep working on the Sabbath. He's already told you in the Ten Commandments not to do that!) Fighting for your legal rights in court is one issue, but there is also the issue of maintaining a good testimony as the Messiah's disciple. Some questions to consider:

- Do I really want to work for an employer who lets me have the Sabbath off only because he was forced by the court to do so?
- Will going to court result in resentment or jealousy in my workplace, and do I want to work in such an atmosphere?
- Is this job really worth fighting for?
- Is it possible that letting me



Keeping your job should be your third priority. Keeping the Sabbath and your testimony are top priorities.

have every Sabbath off really would cause undue hardship for my employer's business?

- Even if the court rules in my favor, would there still be some hardship, and would it be right to let my employer bear this inconvenience?

Keeping your job should be your third priority here. Keeping the Sabbath *and* your testimony are top priorities. If you can do this and keep your job, great. Personally, I would not feel comfortable forcing my employer to pay extra costs in order to accommodate me, even though the law can require the employer to bear these minimal costs. For the sake of my testimony as the Lord's disciple, I would prefer to not exercise this legal right and pay the extra costs myself, unless my employer cheerfully insisted on bearing the cost.

If my employer is willing to bear some minor inconvenience in order to accommodate me, then I should be willing to bear some minor inconvenience to keep the Sabbath. Every situation is unique and has many factors to consider. If you do lose your

job for the sake of obeying the Lord, the Lord will honor your sacrifice. He may not provide another job immediately, but He has promised to meet your physical needs if you seek His kingdom first (Matthew 6:33).

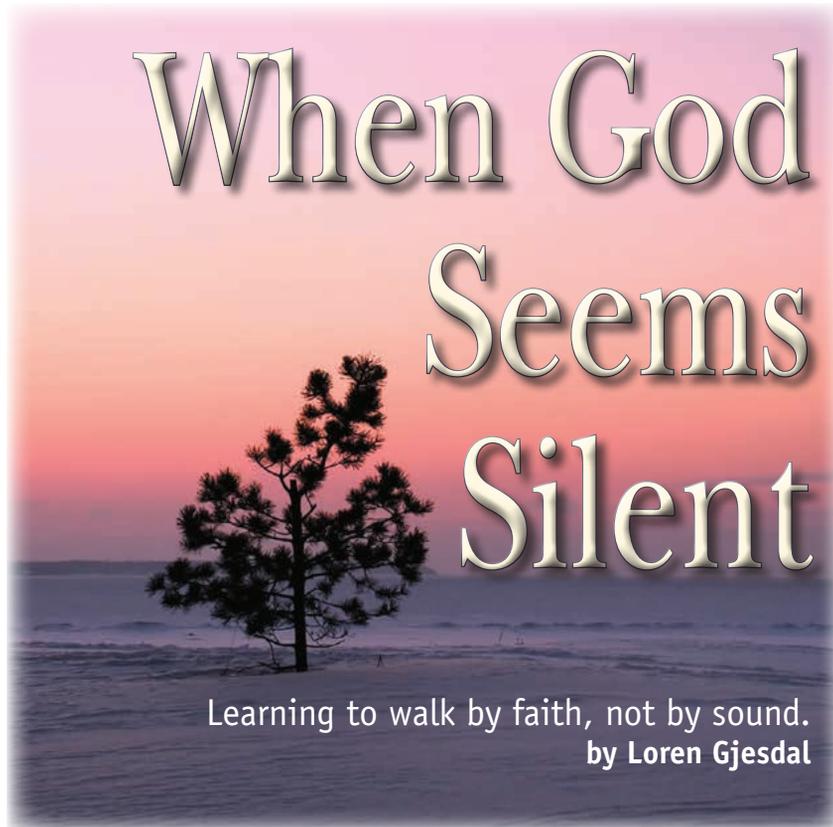
True identity

So don't let your employer or anyone else tell you that you have to work on the Sabbath. You are not called to be a slave to your job. You are to treat your employer with honor and respect, but he is not your Owner and Master.

If you are a disciple of the Son of God, then He is your real Owner and Master. You are called to be a servant in His kingdom, not a slave to the world system. **BA**

Dr. Daniel Botkin has a bimonthly publication, *Gates of Eden*. For a sample issue, write to P.O. Box 2257, East Peoria, IL 61611-0257.





For a year and a half I have earnestly asked for God's guidance in daily prayer, wrestling with career choices, family decisions, and issues of the Church. Often over these months I have felt that God's answer was silence.

Someone told me recently that the teacher is always quiet during the test. Does that mean we are on our own when God doesn't speak? What am I, what are we, to do when God is silent?

Abandoned Savior

The Bible says that indeed we are not alone when we suffer. We do not go through a test that our Savior hasn't already passed: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet

was without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

One test Jesus endured was the Father's silence. As He hung on the cross suffering the rejection of His countrymen and of His disciples, His agony was increased by the Father's apparent absence:

At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" — which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:33, 34).

Angels had ministered to Christ when He was tempted in the desert and again in the Garden of Gethsemane. At His crucifixion, however, the physical world mirrored the spiritual reality that, while Jesus bore the sins of the world, the Father turned away and that, for the first time,

a separation existed between Father and Son.

Jesus endured Satan's last temptations — to prove His identity to taunting Pharisees, to take revenge on cruel Romans, to escape physical pain and suffering — alone.

In Jesus' cry from the cross, we hear the agony of loneliness we so often feel. We also hear His commitment to carry out the Father's express will. Jesus was actually quoting the first verse of Psalm 22 where, along with Isaiah 53 and elsewhere, God clearly foretold that the Christ must suffer and be crucified. Jesus told His disciples the same thing (Matthew 20:18, 19). It was His surrender to this plan of the Father that He expressed with the words "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). And it was a cry of triumphal completion when Jesus at last said with a loud voice, "It is finished" (John 19:30).

Faith walk

Between the prayer of surrender in the garden and the triumph of the cross, however, we easily forget that Jesus had to walk by faith in the absence of God's constant affirmation. Jesus knew the plan and will of God and had committed to carrying it out. He knew the importance of its completion and the promised reward that awaited. Jesus had all the revelation of God's will that was necessary for the moment, and He had the faith to surrender to death by crucifixion, even during God's silence. He walked in obedience by faith, just as we are called to do when God is silent to us.

Jesus' example helps me. Too often I find myself wrestling with questions of career, family, or ministry. In my uncertainty I am tempted to stop until I get answers from a silent God. In reality, I know His will: to walk in faith as Jesus did, filling my place in the body of Christ, using my gifts to equip fellow believers for works of service, and doing those good works myself (Ephesians 4:10, 11; 1 Corinthians 12; James 2:14-16).

I am called to represent the saving love and sacrifice of Jesus to those I encounter every day where I live and work by the way I live and work (Matthew 5:13-16; 2 Corinthians 5:20). I am called to lay my life down for my wife and my family, that they may see clearly in me the way and will of God (Ephesians 5:25; 6:4).

In short, I have more than enough ministry to occupy each day, moment by moment, even in times of God's apparent silence. I long for a neon sign that says, "Pick Option A." I want the yellow brick road that leads step by step to God's kingdom. But what I have is the challenge to walk by faith, continuing in the instructions already given in God's Word.

God's sovereignty and promises

As I struggle to do the right thing in the absence of neon signs, I can take comfort in God's sovereignty. My Father in heaven is big and wise enough to ensure I end up right where He wants me and when — probably once I've grown enough in faith and obedience to be prepared for a new task.

The familiar proverb counsels us, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding" and promises that if we submit our will, "He will make your paths straight" (Proverbs 3:5, 6). I wrestle with exactly how not to lean on my own understanding, and I come back to wanting that neon sign to point the way. When the sign isn't there and God still seems silent, I find I must prayerfully make the best decision I can while specifically and sincerely yielding those decisions to His will.

The best advice I've received in seeking God's will for difficult life choices is this simple insight: "It is easier to turn a car when it's moving than when it's standing still." This wisdom is echoed in Proverbs 19:21: "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails." God is big enough to bring me where He wants me to be, despite myself, if I am sincerely yielded and earnestly moving ahead in what He has already made clear.

Along with the comfort of knowing God is sovereign, I find the promises of God reassuring. We, unlike Jesus, will never truly be alone. Because Jesus tore down the wall of separation created by sin once and for all, we have these promises: "Never will

I leave you; never will I forsake you"; "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Hebrews 13:5; Matthew 28:20).

Reality

Sometimes we don't get the clear guidance we long for. Sometimes we don't get the comforting affirmation that we are on the right track. Sometimes, it seems, God is silent while we are tested with difficult choices. These are our perceptions.

The reality is that when our spirit is yielded in faith, God works in us and through us to accomplish His will — whether we perceive it or not. We have enough clear instruction to keep us fruitful in kingdom ministry every day of our lives, with or without the clarity of a specific ministry calling.

The question is, have we surrendered to all that we know of God's will for today? God is never completely silent, and He never leaves us to work alone. **BA**

Loren and Nickki Gjesdal and their three children attend church in Marion, OR. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



My Father in heaven is big and wise enough to ensure I end up right where He wants me and when.



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Funny the meanings we find in Scripture.
by Calvin Burrell

For many, the Bible is a sobering book — no laughing matter. Not often do people think of *humor* in the same sentence with *Scripture*. Generally, God’s people know that the grace and truth of our Lord is to be taken seriously.

Laughter

In some ways, God’s Word doesn’t recommend laughter very highly. Though there is a time to weep and a time to laugh (Ecclesiastes 3:4), the former receives higher praise from Bible writers than the latter (7:3). This may be because tears speak the language of sorrow and repen-

tance that God requires and are more therapeutic to the proud heart than many hee-haws (2 Corinthians 7:10; James 4:9, 10).

Laughter can be the language of fools: sardonic, cynical, and mocking (Ecclesiastes 7:6). More than ten times the King James Bible reports those who “laugh others to scorn.” Abraham and Sarah laughed when the Lord announced they would bear a son in their old age — a response that Sarah denied and for which she was gently rebuked.

In a few places, laughter becomes a testimony against those who ridicule and scorn God’s goodness now, for He will someday “laugh” at their destruc-

tion (Proverbs 1:24-27; Psalm 2:4; 37:13; 59:8). In Luke's list of Beatitudes (6:21b, 25b) Jesus assures those who endure godly sorrow today that they'll end up laughing, and today's laughers that they shall someday weep. A Hebrew version of this reversal is seen in Psalm 126:5, 6.

Laughs are not all bad, however — not at all! Endorsements for merriment are found in Proverbs 15:13, 15 and the familiar words of 17:22: "A merry heart does good, like medicine. . . ." Though there is a time to laugh, Proverbs 14:13 reminds us that even a laugh can be a cover-up. Thus is the mixed witness of Scripture to the laughter we love but too easily misuse.

Deeper level

The rest of the story is that the Bible commends humor at a deeper level than mere laughter. The blessings of joy and merry-making may be found in many texts. See, for example, Isaiah 61:1-3's prophecy of the Messiah, abbreviated here:

"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to . . ."

- heal the brokenhearted (v. 1);
- comfort all who mourn (v. 2);
- console those who mourn in Zion, to give them . . . the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified (v. 3).

Here, sorrow is seen negatively, and its cure is recommended highly. This passage conveys the truth that sorrow in our wounded world is too often the mourning of heavy spirits and broken

hearts, traceable to human sin. It is the common lot of all of us at sometime in our lives. And this is the affliction that Jesus came to cure (Luke 4:17-19).

The good news is that, through Christ, our saddest burdens may be exchanged for better things: comfort, oil of joy, and a garment of praise. Rewritten in new covenant terms, the passage speaks about heaven's love, acceptance, and forgiveness here. Each phrase of the quote from Isaiah suggests that laughter will be a fitting, holy response to the promised work of the Lord's Spirit in the gospel.

Elsewhere the same prophet lauds the day of the Lord Jesus in poetic language: Hills and mountains sing; trees of the field clap their hands (Isaiah 55:12).

"The ransomed of the LORD shall

return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (35:10).

Celebrate!

Go ahead, all who are in Christ by faith: Celebrate and rejoice! For the Word and work of the Lord are to heal our hearts and wipe tears from our eyes. No more death, sorrow, or crying shall be, for the former things have passed away.

Final fulfillment of this is still future, for sure, but the promise is realized by faith today as we trust and obey the Lord. So laugh, you children of God, laugh long and loud! The enemy of our souls is defeated in Jesus. **BA**

Ten Humorous Texts

Genesis 31:30: Laban (apparently sincerely) asks, "Why did you steal *my* gods?" (NIV).

Numbers 22:28: The prophet wouldn't speak God's words, so God uses a donkey.

Judges 16:10: Delilah says, "You have made a fool of me" (NIV). Read: The pot calling the kettle black.

1 Samuel 3:1-9: God plays hide and seek with Samuel.

1 Kings 18:27: Elijah mocks the prophets of Baal.

Proverbs 11:22; 27:15: Two of several proverbs with a glint of humor.

Jonah 1:3: Running from an all-seeing God is no smart strategy.

Matthew 23:24: Jesus speaks of straining at gnats and swallowing camels.

Mark 3:17: Jesus refers, tongue-in-cheek, to James and John as "sons of thunder," or "sons of trouble."

John 21:7: Peter is so excited, he puts on his coat to go swimming.

— Bob Hostetler



A Time to Laugh

BA Interview with Liz Curtis Higgs

Everyone loves a laugh — even more than medicine. And smiles are superb: They increase our face value.

Nobody knows this more than Liz Curtis Higgs. A speaker with Women of Faith, she spreads joy and laughter to audiences nationally and internationally. In this BA interview, we'll learn more about humor from this woman who generates it with excellence and experience.

BA: Humor comes naturally to you, despite your troubled past. Do you see humor as God's gift?

LCH: Yes, I do believe humor is one of God's kindest gifts. Non-offensive, uplifting humor is a natural and healthy way of coping with stress, defusing tension, and helping people relax. When we can stand back from a difficult situation and see the humor in it, we are on our way to finding a solution.

Any physician, therapist, or minister will tell you that when patients or parishioners can muster a smile, it's a good indicator of healing. They are coming around — physically, emotionally, and spiritually on the mend.

When Sarah finally gives birth to a son at age ninety, she says, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me" (Genesis 21:6). This is a bit of wordplay around Isaac's name. *Yitschaq* means "he laughs." But Sarah's statement also lets us see that she has regained her sense of humor. Sarah is laughing again, and it's contagious.

I fully believe God intends for us to be a laughing people. Never in a crude or derogatory way at the expense of others, and certainly not laughing nonstop, but simply seeing the humor and irony in everyday life and allowing that amusement to restore our sense of balance.

BA: Speak to believers who feel humor and Christianity don't mix: "After all, wasn't Jesus a man of sorrows?"

LCH: Jesus also had a wonderful sense of humor, or children would not have been so drawn to Him. All parents, even serious ones, are pleased when an infant begins to respond to them by smiling. As they grow, children laugh naturally and unashamedly. Only when adults wag their fingers and say, "Straighten up!" or "That's *not* funny!" do children cover their mouths when they laugh or stop laughing altogether.

Believers who don't embrace much humor likely grew up in an environment where it was discour-

aged, not affirmed. My heart aches for them. They truly miss one of God's wonderful gifts: the ability to laugh at ourselves and at life, to put problems in perspective, to see that God is in charge and we are not.

Those of us who love to laugh and help others laugh learned long ago that you can't *make* anyone laugh. You can only offer them an open door.

BA: Comedians Mark Lowry and Tim Hawkins elicit varying responses from believers. Is there a temptation to push the envelope of Christian decorum to get laughs?

LCH: Humor is always risky. Always. The key is to wave at the envelope but resist the urge to push it. We have to know the audience's boundaries and try not to cross them. When we do (audiences will let you know), we need to step back immediately, offer a lighthearted but sincere apology, and move on.

Some jokes and stories that were acceptable fifty years ago are *not* funny now because they are sexist, racist, ageist, insensitive, politically incorrect — you get the idea. Comedians need to be extra careful not to step on anyone's toes now, and that's a good thing. For me, I just step on my own toes, give the audience permission to laugh with me, and perhaps see themselves in the funny situations I'm describing.

Here's the truth: There will *always* be people who don't enjoy humor. Pray for them. No, I'm not kidding. Humor is one of the safest, cheapest, most satisfying coping mechanisms when hardship crosses our path. Naturally we pray first for the Lord's direction and strength, and we turn to

our family of faith for help. But a little laughter along the way can help lighten our burdens considerably.

BA: A *Christianity Today* article says that some Christian thinkers have developed "an aversion for speakers-writers who use emotion [humor] to elicit temporary responses that bypass our mental maps and leave us in worse shape than when they started." Your thoughts?

LCH: Those are actually John Ortberg's words, conveying Dallas Willard's opinion, but still no doubt accurate. Ortberg also wrote that Willard once said, "Speakers should never tell stories." So it wasn't just *humor* that didn't sit well with him. It was storytelling, period, and the human emotions that stories often produce: laughter, tears, sympathy, compassion, and so on.

Willard was a brilliant man and more than entitled to his opinion. Still, God designed us to be intellectual *and* emotional. Whenever one aspect of our human nature is enhanced and the other diminished, we aren't functioning to our fullest capacity. The best stories — and the best humor — should make us *feel* and think. The intellect is not left behind when emotions come into play. If anything, the mind is engaged to a higher degree.

My brother David, a retired college instructor, is brilliant — I mean over-the-moon smart, huge IQ, all that. He also has the best sense of humor of anyone I know. Clearly his brain *and* funny bone are both in good working order.

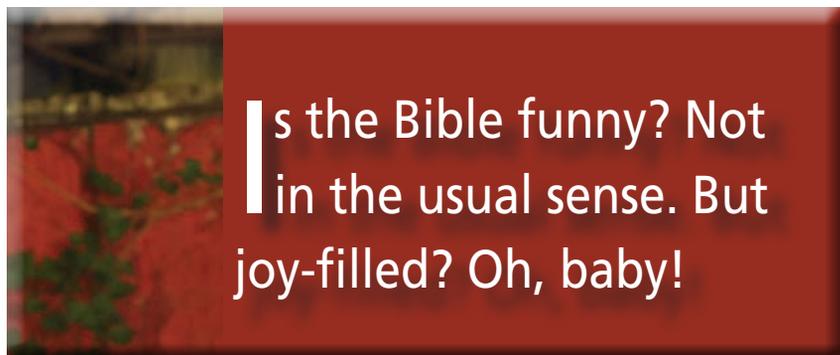
BA: Why do you think God gave us a book that typically provokes sober reflection and rarely offers what readers would describe as "funny"?

LCH: Ah, but what the Bible does offer us, over and over again, is *joy*. No, joy is not the same as humor; it's not even the same as happiness. Joy goes far deeper than either. Still, when I am joyful, there's a good chance I might smile. Might even chuckle. Could end up laughing. When the Holy Spirit fills us to the brim, joy often spills out.

The Bible covers the full gamut of human emotions and experiences. In a single psalm David can move from gnashing of teeth to an outburst of praise. Psalm 5 begins with a "cry for help" and ends with the hope that "those who love your name may rejoice in you."

Is the Bible funny? Not in the usual sense. But joy-filled? Oh, baby!

BA: Most passages cited as samples of Bible humor would



likely be seen by many modern humorists as contrived attempts to find humor where it isn't.

Comments?

LCH: Well, I *am* a modern humorist, so I'll tell you what I see. When I read the Bible, I laugh a *lot*, either because a biblical character is behaving true to human nature (that is to say, foolishly) or because the Lord is revealing the truth of His sovereignty in yet another breathtakingly creative way. The Bible is anything but dull or sober. It is the living Word of God. It breathes, it moves, it touches our emotions, our intellect, and every other aspect of who we are. God changes us at the cellular level, and He uses His Word, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to do that.

And yes, sometimes God uses humor. When Moses comes down from Mount Sinai and asks his brother, Aaron, what has happened that the people are worshiping a false idol, Aaron explains, "They gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!" (Exodus 32:24).

Seriously? I always crack up when I read that passage. True, Moses was not the least bit amused. But Aaron's exaggeration *is* laughable. When we see how foolish our actions must look to God, that's the first step

toward contrition, confession, repentance, forgiveness, and a fresh start.

BA: Jesus wept (John 11:35), but we never read that He smiled or laughed. What's the best example of our Lord's humor, for you?

LCH: I've always longed for a simple, two-word verse: "Jesus laughed." Not in Scripture. But even His weeping indicates that He experienced the fullness of human emotions.

To be sure, humor in the Bible is more subtle and often dependent on a deep knowledge of the idioms and customs of a given time and place to really get the joke. Clever wordplays, of which there are many in Scripture, escape those of us who don't know ancient Hebrew or Greek.

But there are definitely scenes that contain splashes of humor, like this one in Acts 20. Preaching his last sermon before he leaves town, Paul "kept on talking until midnight" (v. 7). Any humorist knows this is a perfect set-up for what happens next.

"Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on" (v. 9). This is visual humor at its best. We see Eutychus fighting the pull of sleep. First his head

droops, then he snaps it back up with a little snort. We're smiling at this point, because we've all nodded off during a sermon. We get it.

Oh, but look. This young man is seated *in a window*. You don't suppose. . . . No, he couldn't. . . .

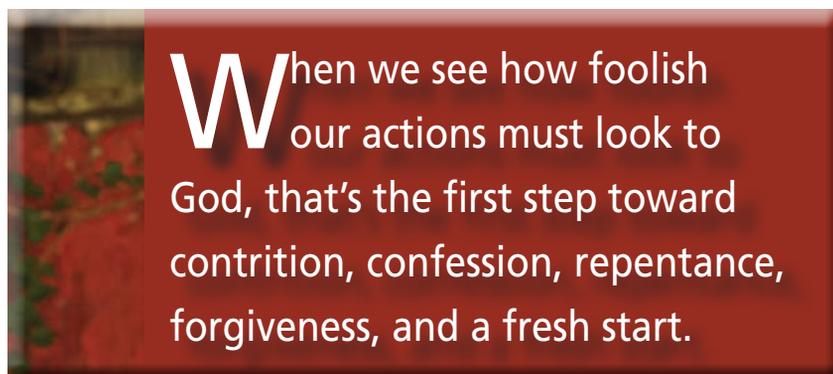
"When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground . . ." (v. 9). Yup, right out the window. And from the *third story*, too. This is pure slapstick. There he goes, arms flailing, sandals flying.

Except things get very serious indeed when he hits the ground. Our inclination to laugh stops the instant he's "picked up dead" (v. 9), as we're transported from the height (literally) of humor to the depth of sorrow.

But not for long. Paul threw his arms around Eutychus, then told everyone, "Don't be alarmed. . . . He's alive!" (v. 10). Moments later they're back upstairs, breaking bread, and Paul goes on talking until daylight.

A glorious story, perfectly told to engage all our emotions — including our sense of humor — and ending on the happiest note possible.

Many verses I love, but this one is a special favorite: "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11, ESV). **BA**



baonline.org Be sure to read Liz's books, among them *Bad Girls of the Bible: And What We Can Learn from Them* and *The Girl's Still Got It: Take a Walk with Ruth and the God Who Rocked Her World*. See more on Liz at baonline.org. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, except where noted.

Consider the enormous challenge of early believers coming down from the upper room after Christ's return to heaven. Their task was to persuade skeptical men and women that the young Rabbi who had been condemned and publicly crucified weeks earlier was now risen from the dead and is the Savior and Lord of humanity. Imagine trying to sell *that* line to skeptics in a Roman world. That might have been an effort in futility — except for what the early believers had going for them.

Their advantage is easily observed on the pages of Acts. A miraculous element that couldn't be ignored or explained away accompanied their ministry: "And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women" (5:12a, 14).

Unmistakably, this was no mere human organization or movement. This was God at work in people's lives. The early church began with power and remained an unstoppable force as long as it operated there.

But centuries removed from what we read in Acts, this power can seem relegated to believers in far-off places, spoken of in wishful tones by those convinced there's more to the Christian experience than they usually see or experience. To borrow an analogy from A. W. Tozer, "They love the altar and delight in the sacrifice but are unable to reconcile themselves to the continued absence of fire."

So believers ask, "Where's the power? Where's the wonder? What about the supernatural,



the miracles that accompanied the early church? What about us?" That's the essence of a recent letter to my inbox whose author wonders if the absence of miraculous power is proof of our unfaithfulness, our failure to worship God in Spirit and truth.

Power principles

Such questions can be balanced with these: Is the sensational power that accompanied Christ and His first apostles intended to be the pattern for the church in every age? Didn't this supernatural element serve mostly to confirm the apostles' teachings and establish the church? Can reliance on the miraculous lead us to the temptation to "fake it" and make us susceptible to the ebb and flow of our emotion, relying more on subjective experience than on objective faith?

Not everything in Scripture, particularly in the transition period of Acts, is prescriptive

for the church of our day. Jesus used strong language to describe those who follow after signs: "an evil and adulterous generation" (Matthew 12:39). Conforming us to Christ's image, not supplying miracles, is God's grand purpose for our lives. At times this involves dealing with unanswered prayer, letting the sick go unhealed while pain and death take their natural course.

On the other hand, Jesus instructed His disciples not to leave Jerusalem until they were endowed with supernatural power (Acts 1:4). This power equips us for world evangelization (v. 8), is the dynamic for Christian living (Galatians 5:25), and is available to believers in every age — as many as the Lord will call (Acts 2:39). The same power that raised Jesus from the dead and indwelt early Christians in Acts also indwells us. What a beautiful reality!

What will this power do in and

continued on page 24



My Journey

For This Child I Prayed

by Jennifer Stucker

When my husband and I married, talking about having children brought happy thoughts. But I never knew childbearing would be so painful and difficult. After three years together, I endured two pregnancy losses six months apart. What an emotional roller coaster! One minute I was celebrating, planning to share the good news. The next moment I was experiencing overwhelming sadness as my body tried to heal.

At times in my grief, I doubted I could ever have children. I tried reaching out to a few people, but they didn't know how to respond in the way I needed. Others who knew my situation sometimes said the wrong things. Or not knowing how to respond, they said nothing.

Grief and praise

During our second miscarriage, I was home alone while my husband worked away. Hurting deeply, I stayed in bed crying for two days. Then I managed to move to our living room, where I started talking to God, telling Him I wanted to give up.

God quickly changed my heart, helping me feel His

comfort. In response, I praised Him with songs, lifting my hands in the air. I told God that if He wanted me to reach out to other women who've experienced the loss of a child, I would. He reminded me of 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, that we can use the comfort He gives us in our trials to comfort others.

Masking pain

My trials with conception were not over. At a relative's house, one couple announced that they were expecting a child.

With the emotional and physical pain still fresh, I broke down and cried openly. Though happy for them, I despaired for myself.

As time went on, trying to be strong in front of others, I masked my pain and denied myself permission to fully grieve. I gave time and energy to ministry and career, but that didn't fill the emptiness or lessen the pain.

Victory and losses

More than two years after our second miscarriage, my husband and I again discussed children. I fought an inner battle: *What if I lose another child? I'm afraid to try again.* In God's good plan, I became pregnant and carried our baby full term. We named

our precious firstborn daughter Nicole, meaning "people of victory." God had allowed us victory through our trials.

Now we hoped for more children. But on Nicole's first birthday, our third pregnancy loss began. Sharing the same due date as my sister-in-law's made this miscarriage especially difficult. Feelings from the past swept over me, and fear re-rooted in my mind: *I want more children, but how much more can I take emotionally and physically?*

After a year, my husband and I found strength to try again. But something went wrong, and another child was lost. At this point I went through exams, genetic tests, and blood work. All results came back normal, with no medical reason for the losses.

Bible stories

During this time my husband and I diligently sought the Lord's will regarding the size of our family and the method He might use to grow it. We began reading the Bible together.

Sarah, Rachel, Leah, Manoah's wife, Hannah, Mary, and Elizabeth — all experienced miraculous conception and joyful birth. Scripture came alive to me in these real-life stories. I wrestled

with God, as did Jacob, on getting His blessing. I felt Rachel's pain when she said, "Give me children or I'll die." I understood the bleeding woman's desperation as she walked into the crowd toward Jesus, thinking, *If I only touch His cloak, I will be healed.* I cried with Hannah in supplication for a child, and I sang a praise song with Mary. Reading their stories, I knew that God was fully capable of performing another miracle through us.

Adoption option

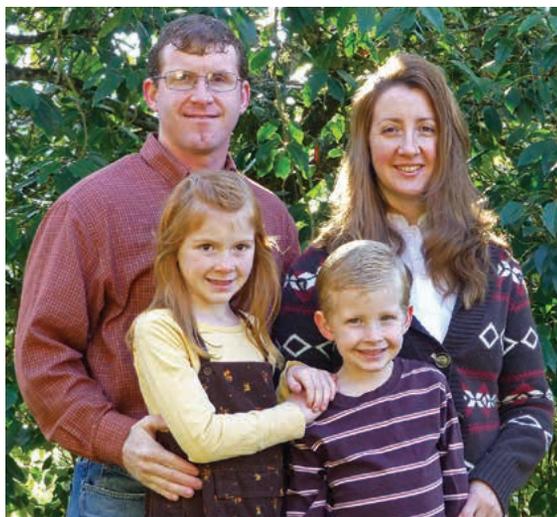
While never giving up on natural conception, we researched adoption agencies and soon selected one. I was excited, but my husband wasn't ready to proceed just yet. Adoption couldn't be God's will until my husband was ready, so I accepted his decision as if God himself were speaking.

This too was a painful time. Grieving again, I put away the adoption information, respecting my husband and finding closure until he was ready.

Support and perspective

Few people understood my journey. Thankfully, some empathized with my pain and expressed it through a caring glance, a hug, or a listening ear. When others said they were praying for us, it spoke volumes about their love and support!

Through this difficult time, the Lord stirred my heart to be



more grateful for my husband and daughter. I began to appreciate Nicole all the more, thanking God for His good gift to us.

Strength and hope

The Lord also reminded me of His presence. My refrigerator magnets spell out "Miracles do happen. Believe in God." During sad moments those words penetrated my heart. And the words "Believe in miracles" on the front page of an adoption agency's newsletter strengthened my faith.

I found resources on handling my grief, including a GriefShare class at a church. After seeing an article about patience, those four words "Wait on the Lord" jumped out at me whenever I read my Bible: "I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry" (Psalm 40:1); "Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. . . . Blessed are all who wait for him!" (Isaiah 30:18).

Reading these verses, I gained

a renewed sense of hope that the Lord would bless us with another child – some way.

Prayer and persistence

My husband and I experienced a total of eight pregnancy losses over four-and-a-half years. Through faith and belief that God is able to meet all needs, I willingly subjected myself to the possibility of more pain, not knowing if each pregnancy would lead to a live birth.

After years of suffering silently, my husband and I shared our struggle with our church family – publicly. Small groups in the church began praying, and I was anointed by the elders. Four months later, I became pregnant again. This time God would answer our prayer by giving us a son, Jeremiah.

That name is significant to us. It means "The Lord exalts." Jeremiah reminds us daily of the Lord's power, of His goodness to our family, and of the lessons we learned through these trials. I pray that God will use my painful journey to mature me and equip me to minister to others with greater compassion than ever before.

Jennifer Stucker is the West Coast District Women's Ministries representative. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.

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POSITIVE GODLINESS

The right strategy will help you defeat the Devil.
by Loren Stacy

In the game of American football, there is a defensive strategy known as the prevent defense. In theory, if you are the team in the lead near the end of the game, all you have to do is hold onto the lead until the game is over. Prevent defense says, “Just give up the short gains, prevent any long gains that may lead to points, and run out the clock.”

That’s prevent defense in theory, but it’s a theory that seldom works. Something horrible happens when a team’s mindset changes from “We’re here to

win!” to “Let’s try not to lose.” Most football coaches, players, and fans have come to the conclusion that all the prevent defense really prevents is a win for the team that adopts it.

This football strategy came to mind as I was thinking about the chapter “Emancipated? Then Live Like It!” in Charles Swindoll’s book *The Grace Awakening*. Swindoll expresses his concern that many Christians seem to have forgotten who they are and what resources they have in Christ. They seem to have decided, “Godliness is impossible. Let’s just try to sin as little as possible.”

Do you see why football’s prevent defense came to mind?

In the same way that there is a huge difference between a focus on winning and a focus on not losing, there is a huge difference between the negative thought “All Christians sin sometimes” and the positive thought “In Christ, I have the power to choose godliness.”

Personally, I’d rather play offense than defense. I’d rather think positive than negative. Even when Satan is on the offense, instead of thinking *I know I’m going to sin. I’m sure glad Jesus will forgive me*, I would much rather think, *Satan doesn’t own me; Jesus does! I can do all things through Christ, who gives me strength*. That kind of positive godliness is possible for each one of us who has given himself or herself to Jesus.

In the interest of a more positive godliness, let me recommend a four-step plan to defeat temptation suggested by Rick Warren in his book *The Purpose Driven Life*.

Defeating temptation

1. Refocus your attention on something else.¹

It seems strange, but if you want to overcome a sin, the most effective thing you may be able to do is to stop thinking about it. Warren writes, “Every time you try to block a thought out of your mind, you drive it deeper into your memory. By resisting it, you actually reinforce it. . . . You strengthen it every time you think it.”²

Warren is correct. Just take a moment or two right now to not think about elephants. Put elephants completely out of your mind! African elephants with their really big ears and Asian

elephants with their smaller ears. . . . Huge old elephants and cute baby elephants. Don't think about them! Just don't think about elephants at all.

So how did you do? If you read the preceding paragraph, I'm guessing you thought about elephants. It's the same with various temptations to sin. If you keep thinking about them — if they're your focus — it's likely that sooner or later you'll give in and sin. Focusing on the thing we're trying to avoid doesn't work.

What does work? Focusing on a positive alternative! Warren writes, "Since temptation always begins with a thought, the quickest way to neutralize its allure is to turn your attention to something else. Don't fight the thought, just change the channel of your mind and get interested in another idea."³

It's an interesting thought, isn't it? Maybe the apostle Paul knew what he was talking about when he wrote in Philippians 4:8, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things."

2. Reveal your struggle to a godly friend.⁴

Don't hide the fact that you're being tempted. Get it out in the open and ask for help. Make yourself accountable to someone. It's amazing how much self-control you suddenly acquire when you know that someone is going to check up on you!

3. Resist the Devil.⁵
Resisting the temp-

tation may be self-defeating because doing so causes us to focus on the very thing we're trying not to think about. But James 4:7 does command, "Resist the devil." And then it promises that if you do, "he will flee from you."

Satan has been defeated, but he's still dangerous. Warren writes, "Don't ever try to argue with the Devil. He's better at arguing than you are, having had thousands of years to practice."⁶

When temptations come, don't think so much about the temptation itself. Rather, quickly remember that it's the Evil One who is behind that temptation, and turn your mind to something positive. When Jesus was tempted, He focused on God's Word.

4. Realize your vulnerability.⁷
Warren says that being overconfident and cocky is a "recipe for disaster." We're not above falling. First Corinthians 10:12 instructs, "If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" Our ability to resist and overcome the Devil is not in ourselves; it is only in Christ.

Eating the elephant

For a period of time when I was in elementary school, "elephant jokes" became popular. One of those was actually insightful: "How do you eat an

elephant? One bite at a time."

Sometimes Christians look at God's call to holy living as being such a huge and impossible task that they just give up and quit trying. God might as well be asking them to eat an elephant.

But an "elephant" can be eaten — one bite at a time. We can make righteousness and obedience to God our regular pattern of living by, as many have suggested, just doing "the next right thing." Then the next. And then the next. We can play spiritual offense by committing ourselves to godliness — positive godliness. **BA**

Loren Stacy, with his wife Karen, serves in Church administration and pastoral ministry from their home in Lodi,



CA. They have three children, one grandchild, and another on the way. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.

Notes

1. Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, 210.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., 212.
5. Ibid., 214.
6. Ibid., 215.
7. Ibid.

Our ability to resist and overcome the Devil is not in ourselves; it is only in Christ.

Saved by Light

by John Ferreira

www.comstock.com

We are all saved as we respond to light. Light comes to the world from God in small amounts until the time when fuller light can be handled. Abraham believed and was faithful to the light he received. He didn't have all the light we have in Christ, but he was faithful to what he had.

Today we have much light, which is truth revealed. Faithfulness to it makes us holy. The Ten Commandments on stone were more light, but incomplete. Why is this?

Because God is light and love. The commandments teach us righteousness — one side of God. And they point us to love, God's other side. In Christ we see both sides of God. Jesus is the perfect light that has come into the world. He reveals both the righteousness of God seen in His law and the spirit or purpose of law, seen in God's love.

We need to walk in the light Jesus gave. Abraham didn't have this much light, but we do. The indwelling Spirit will blend together within us both the righ-

teousness of God and His love.

Jesus is the end of the law as a means to attain right standing with God, but He is not the end of the law as a means to express godly love. Love has to be 100 percent free to express itself, or it's not true love. Our light today must be received by faith and obeyed through love, just like Abraham's.

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love" (Galatians 5:6).

Faith working through love is defined by God's law.

"Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters" (1 Corinthians 7:19). **BA**

John Ferreira lives in Rhode Island, fellowships with Bethel CoG7 in Dorchester, MA, and leads a faith-based ministry for at-risk youth: www.crosswalkri.com.



Where's the Power?

continued from page 19

through us? Whatever will bring God the most glory. God will not waste His miracles in satisfying our whims or for us to wear as a spiritual badge. Could this be the reason Jesus didn't do miracles in certain places?

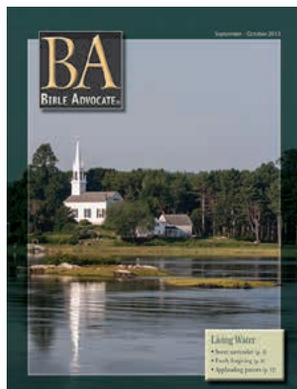
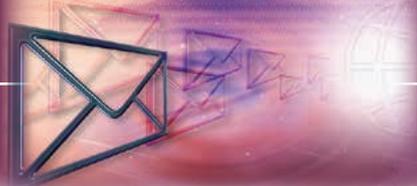
God's glory

While writing this, I had the privilege of visiting with a leader of Christians in a far-off place who testified of the miracles wrought daily among his people. He explained that they have no recourse — no hospital, no doctor, no medicine — so therefore rely totally on God for supplying their needs.

Could this be partly why the epicenter of the gospel has shifted from more prosperous nations to the less prosperous? Mark's testimony applies here: "So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs" (Mark 16:19, 20).

This will be neither the norm nor the exception. It will be to the glory of God, according to His will, and in His time.

Where's the power? It's inside us. When tapped, it makes all the difference. The presence of the Lord will be manifested in ways that cannot be ignored or explained away. We'll be a formidable force, a living embodiment of spiritual energy, turning our world upside down. **BA**



Depression, etc.

I didn't care for the "Green" article [September-October '13, p. 22] or the one on forgiveness [p. 11]. It sounded like a psychiatrist, and sure enough it was. People don't realize how entrenched in this world system we all are.

The article on depression, though true, seemed shallow. Clinical psychology is not the answer. Satan is the cause, and Jesus is the cure. The more I come out of the world and draw near to God, the better off I am. Yet I still get depressed — it's not a sin. It's hard to obey God, yet it's the only way to live.

J. C.
Dillon, MT

Your article about depression is so damaging to our Father's truth about human psychology that it actually promotes the very things the Bible condemns. It feeds the outrageous mentality that depression is not our fault and [that] only prescription drugs can help. People always look for a way to blame others or turn problems into a medical condition. Manic depression is relabeled bipolar disorder, drunkenness is relabeled alcoholism, and a lack of self-discipline is relabeled attention deficit disorder.

In reality, depression is simply an addiction to self-pity that destroys people because Satan has convinced them it's beyond their control. God did not tolerate Elijah's self-pity. He basically told His prophet to get over himself and keep doing his job. In every similar case in the Bible, God leaves no room for self-pity.

The Lord was and is loving, supportive, and understanding in countless cases of legitimate sadness and despair, but this is totally different from prolonged self-pity. More and more Christians are on anti-depressants because of articles like this that deceive and misguide. No one has the courage to stand boldly against the degradation of the church for fear of being socially analyzed and labeled self-righteous and judgmental.

O. M.
Willis, TX

Editor's reply: Our author urged gentle care, compassion, and encouragement toward persons anywhere in the wide spectrum of mental-emotional distress, especially toward the severe and prolonged cases known as "clinical depression." Where does the Bible condemn such care?

Your letter distinguishes between the many cases of "legitimate sadness and despair" and those of "prolonged self-pity" that you regard as less worthy of God's care and support. But no clear boundary exists in Scripture between lesser and greater cases of emotional distress. We are all subject to such attacks, to some degree. We should all do what we can in harmony with God's Word to escape depression at any level, but we should not demean the faith of those who, due to a chemical imbalance, find relief from the clutches of

despair in medicine also. No biblical conflict exists between helping others in emotional pain and expecting them to help themselves.

Spirit in man

"That spirit, probably entering with our first breath, enlivens body and soul" ["Alive in the Spirit," p. 22, November-December '13]. I find this statement alarming! This is the reasoning abortionists use to kill babies in all nine months of pregnancy. Jeremiah was set apart in the womb. John the Baptist leapt in the womb at Mary's greeting. Neither had breathed yet. It's time for a pro-life article.

K. F.
Avoca, MI

Author James McBride's reply: Whatever we may think about the "spirit in man," it must not detract from the awfulness of abortion. Life is precious right from conception and essential to God's purpose. The uniting of human ovum and sperm results in nothing but a human being. This miracle depicts the awesome wonders of our Creator (Psalm 139:13-16), who may set individuals apart for His purpose before their birth (Jeremiah 1:5; Galatians 1:15). Sadly, respect for human life in all its stages is rare today.

As to when the "spirit in man" combines with the body, the relevant texts are Genesis 2:7; Job 32:8; 33:4; Ecclesiastes 3:21. Since it's cited along with breath, I tentatively conclude that the human spirit enters with the first breath. However, individuals can be filled with the Holy Spirit prior to birth, as John's leap in Elizabeth's womb suggests (Luke 1:41).



My Knees

I go to my knees
For there's no other help,
No answers to be had in this world.
I need a miracle, hope, sanity, and wisdom
Only heaven can give.

I tell Him my woes, each of them.
I pour out my fears, each one.
I ponder the worst,
Yet pray for the best.

I rise from my knees.
Questions remain,
Yet wobbly faith has taken root.
Help, wholeness, miracles?
The outcome is now in capable hands.

Jewell Johnson



100 x \$100 Campaign

Spring Vale invites all alumni and friends to participate in a campaign to help fund a Senior Scholarship initiative for second semester. This will provide opportunity for one senior boy and one senior girl to attend SVA, fully funded.

If 100 alumni or friends donate \$100, the \$10,000 raised would more than cover the \$9,300 it costs for both scholarship recipients to attend Spring Vale the second semester starting January 14, 2014. If you prefer, you may spread your donations out over the next five months by sending \$20 per month.

Write "Senior Scholarship" on the memo line of your check and mail it to Spring Vale Academy, 4150 S. M-52, Owosso, MI 48867. Or you may donate with a credit card through the PayPal link on Spring Vale's website (springvale.us). Thanks for your participation in this life-changing campaign!



North American Women's Ministries

Grace L. Sanchez, Director

Last summer was a warm blur for me. With my husband's illness (heart attack in Omaha), so much was at stake. Yet in the epicenter of my personal storm, I was aware of God's immeasurable goodness. A trial followed by a blessing: trial and blessing, trial and blessing. Today I say, to God be the glory!

Meeting time for the NAWM board brought more trials, but we also counted our blessings from the convention. God's goodness had been experienced in the best-ever bazaar receipts and a convention workshop over the top with enthusiasm!

Our beloved *Afterglow* has a new bimonthly schedule in an expanded format. Thanks to the faithful partners in Conroe who keep this little paper coming to your mailbox.

Our efforts to roll out new Seekers program materials will soon be posted on the CoG7 website. Look for updates on availability.

A 75th anniversary event will honor the sisters who met on a hot day in late August 1939 to give birth to a new women's ministry in the Church of God (Seventh Day). Our celebration of remembrance will take place at the National Women's Retreat in Denver, Colorado, April 4-6. I encourage you all to join us there. Information and registration materials are on the Church website (cog7.org).

We covet your prayers and support for this ministry, delivered with a woman's heart and voice. "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine . . . to him be glory . . ." (Ephesians 3:20, 21, NIV).



Michigan Men's Retreat (October 2013) brought 63 manly men from seven states together near Lawton. We played football, basketball, paintball, soccer, and guitars; took a polar bear plunge and climbed high ropes; sang, heard the Word, and felt the Holy Spirit's intense presence and conviction for action. — Steve Rodriguez

Disaster Relief

Thanks to the generosity of CoG7 members and friends who give to the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF), our General Conference has contributed hundreds of thousands of dollars to those in disasters of many kinds, in many nations:

- hurricanes/typhoons/floods in Mexico, Honduras, India, Jamaica, the Philippines, Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan, and the US;
- church-bombing in Pakistan, rebel violence in the Philippines;
- famines in Kenya, Tanzania;
- tragic auto accident in Nigeria;

- tornadoes in the US;
- earthquake in Haiti.

Often our disaster relief is distributed through CoG7 personnel, using Galatians 6:10 as a guide. In some cases, relief funds are distributed through a public agency like the Red Cross. In all cases, 100 percent of Disaster Relief funds flow through your General Conference treasury, unreduced by overhead expense.

Over \$5,000 was sent for those who lost so much in the recent Philippines' super-typhoon. More will likely follow. As new disasters occur around the world, DRF keeps flowing from your General Conference treasury to hurting peoples — in the name of Jesus and with little fanfare.

Please help replenish DRF so that we can be ready to help when, not if, the next disaster strikes. You may contribute online at cog7.org or in your local offering plate, with an offering labeled "Disaster Relief."



SHINE, Jesus, SHINE: These medical, dental, and spiritual missionaries from the US and Mexico served more than 1,600 persons in the city of Cuauhtemoc, Chihuahua State, Mexico (November 27-29, 2013). No one was charged for these services or for medications used. Unused medications and reading glasses were sent to people affected by recent storms in Guerrero State, Mexico. The next SHINE mission is scheduled for June 15-23, 2014, in the Central American nation of Belize.



Ashley Moni is supported by IMC and G.C. Missions to establish CoG7 in the island nation of Sri Lanka, just south of India. Its 20 million residents are 70 percent Buddhist and one percent Protestant Christian. A native Sri Lankan, Pastor Moni led many rural congregations before coming to CoG7 teachings not long ago. He also has administrative, teaching, and writing experience. Welcome, Ashley, and those working with him in Sri Lanka. Pray for them.

Zone 3 Report

Two hundred and twenty youth came to camp in Crespo, Entre Rios, Argentina (October 2013), and 37 made a decision for Christ. It was a soul-stirring time of joy as we witnessed the Christian family still growing.

— Pastor Jorge Gillig
IMC Representative



Young Adult Ministries (SWORD)

Christy Lang, Director

Each year, retreats, rallies, and other occasions geared for young adults take place in CoG7. SWORD events in 2013 were held in California, Oregon, Washington, Iowa, Nebraska, Texas, Pennsylvania, and Toronto, Canada. How many did you attend? Why not plan now to take in a young adult experience in 2014, such as the National SWORD Retreat in Hawkins, Texas, May 23-26.

To spread the word, events are posted at <http://sword.cog7.org> and on [facebook.com/CoG7YoungAdults](https://www.facebook.com/CoG7YoungAdults). If you know of an upcoming young adult activity, please send the information to sword@cog7.org.



National SWORD Retreat

“yMinistry 2014”

Brookhaven Retreat • Hawkins, Texas

Memorial Day Weekend, May 23-26, 2014

Register by March 1 for discount: \$140 adult / \$45 child (4-6 years). First registrants, first available for cabins, lodge, and motel rooms.

Ideal for families! Childcare available.

Contact: Dan and Jacqui Melgoza (210-900-9889; sword-southwest@cog7.org)



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International Congress

Asia and Pacific Rim

Calvin Burrell and Bryan Cleeton visited five countries on behalf of G.C. Missions September 25 – October 21, 2013.

- In the Philippines Pastor Mike Dizon of Manila joined us in Cagayan de Oro City, Mindanao, where we enjoyed a Super Sabbath with Bayabas church, held a Sunday leaders' conference on Monday, and met with the national board and Pastor John Villarante (its 38-year-old president). CoG7 in the Philippines is 75 years old and represents more than 75 churches, mostly in the southern islands.

- In India we were hosted by Elders Jacob Rao (and his wife Deena), T. V. Rao, and P. Kennedy. In six days, we visited churches in the Khammam, West Godavari and Hyderabad regions of Andhra Pradesh state, dedicated a new church building, blessed the start of Asia Bible Training Center, and held two pastors' conferences. India reports about 10,000 members, mostly in five states. Elder Rao, the general secretary, works to plant CoG7 in several more.

- In Sri Lanka our two days were used in getting acquainted with Ashley Moni, 48, and his work. Pastor Moni, whom we first met in the US ('09), studied into harmonious views and hopes to influence others for Christ and the Church.

- In Western Australia we stayed three days with Christian film producer John Klassek, his family, and their house-church in Perth. John's interview with Calvin and Bryan may be seen at *MessageWeek.com*.

- In Myanmar (Burma) IMC Zone 4 Representatives Jacob and Deena Rao rejoined us for a week in this Buddhist nation. We held a leader's conference in Kalaymeo and dedicated a new church/school facility (built with G.C. Missions' assistance) in the city of Yangon (Rangoon). General secretary of the Church (ten congregations) in Myanmar is Tluang Kung, 30. Pray for faithful brethren there

who live and serve under economic and religious hardships.

Over half the world's people live in Asia, Oceania, and the Pacific Rim. The Philippines and South Korea have large Christian churches, but fewer than 5 percent of Asia's total population follows Jesus. We help share the gospel there so this region's Buddhist-Hindu-Muslim majority can be blest as God promised all nations through Christ (Genesis 12:3; Galatians 3:8-14).





The Worshipping Church

In the preface of *The Pursuit of God*, A. W. Tozer reflects on what he calls “the only real harbinger of revival” detectable anywhere on the religious horizon, that there are increasing numbers of Christians whose religious lives are marked by a growing hunger after God himself. Desperate for spiritual realities, they refuse to be put off with words or be content with “correct interpretations of truth.” They’re thirsty for God and will not be satisfied until they’ve drunk deep at the fountain of living water.

Nowhere is this more clearly manifested than in the area of worship. According to Worship Institute’s LaMar Boschman, “Meaningful and empowered worship is the cry of Christians in every denomination. Worshipers want to connect with God in a . . . sincere way. Consequently, Christian worship is experiencing a significant metamorphosis that challenges our traditions and touches us afresh” (*Ministry Advantage*, Vol. 7, No. 1).

Thankfully, many in CoG7 are marked by such growing hunger. Our vision of a Vibrant Twenty-first Century Church includes worship, and it’s being given high priority in many congregations.

Worship is a beautiful thing, but worshippers, though redeemed, aren’t perfect. Our worship can therefore be the basis of renewal, and it can be the source of conflict. Worship must be guided and nurtured, its biblical meaning taught, and the desire to become true worshippers encouraged.

I’m pleased to announce that the theme of CoG7’s 2013-2015 biennium is *worship*. Through various initiatives, published materials and resources, and hosting the Worship Conference (similar to the recent Conference Tour), the goal is to explore the biblical meaning of wor-

ship and teach its priority and significance in our relationship with God and the life of the Church.

We were created for worship, for God’s pleasure (Revelation 4:11). Sadly, that purpose was thwarted by sin (Romans 1:25), which is why the grand object of our redemption is worship – that we would unceasingly “proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness” (1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 5:8-14).

Meanwhile, the Christian life is rehearsal for the worship of eternity. Evangelism is getting people signed up for the choir! This perspective changes the way we understand worship. It’s not about culture, personality, or technique. It’s more than a Sabbath activity; it’s a lifestyle: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship” (Romans 12:1, NIV). Worship is first and foremost about God – for His glory, not our personal preference.

So please join me on this exciting two-year journey back to the heart of worship, defined by Archbishop Temple in this way: “Worship is the submission of our nature to God . . . the quickening of conscience by His holiness, nourishment of the mind by His truth, purifying of imagination by His beauty, opening of the heart to His love, and submission by the will to His purpose. And all this gathered up in adoration is the greatest of human expressions of which we are capable.”

May we do accordingly and truly become a *worshipping church*.

– Whaid Guscott Rose





Couples alive: Passaic, New Jersey church hosted this marriage retreat near Sparrow Bush, New York (fall 2013), with Alvaro and Jocheved Gonzalez (left, from Mexico City) as the presenting pair. May all our homes and families find more grace to live and love in 2014!