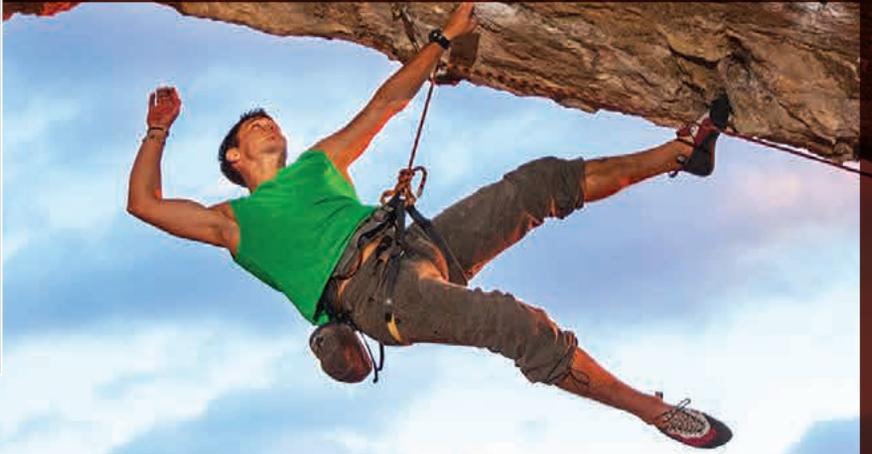


September - October 2015

BA
BIBLE ADVOCATE®



Radical
Commitment



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2015: Crossroads

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Baton Passed



General Conference convention in Milwaukee in July marked transition time for the Church of God (Seventh Day). One such change was Elder Calvin Burrell, now of Stayton, Oregon, passing the BA's lead baton to Pastor Jason Overman of Jasper, Arkansas. Recently, the two men dialogued about the magazine, its future, and the heart of the new man at the desk marked "Editor."

CB: Your journalism experience includes selling ads for the *Harrison (AR) Daily Times* before you became manager of that newspaper several years back. Talk about the decline of print media that's overturned many newspapers and magazines.

JO: The digital revolution has been a tremendous challenge for traditional media, but it has brought exciting opportunities too. Newspapers now see themselves as media companies that deliver content on two platforms: print and web. My former company, for instance, has a solid base of readers subscribing to the traditional print product. That's not going away. Many more readers access content on our website, Facebook, and Twitter. Audience preferences have changed, but the total audience is bigger than ever.

From a business vantage, the biggest challenge has not been keeping the audience but monetizing the new platform. That is slowly happening. The irony is that social media and the information age are cultivating a more uninformed and anti-social public than you might hope for. This should concern us all, even as we embrace the opportunity of reaching a greater audience than ever.

CB: Give us a glimpse of what you're thinking to help BA thrive in this culture with a decreasing percentage of hard-copy readers.

JO: Mark Twain once wrote that the rumors of his death were greatly exaggerated. The same is true of print publications. Many were convinced that TV would be the death of the movies. Now the movie industry is posting some of its biggest years, while there are more TV stations than ever. There is room for both.

In the print industry, local content is still in strong demand as many hunger for more substantive, authoritative content in niche areas of

continued on page 22

Necessary



Transgressions

Why the gospel will be spoken against in a world like ours. **by Jason Overman**

A shudder ran through the church the day the Supreme Court ruled in favor of same-sex marriage. Even for those of us who weren't surprised by the decision, it came with a sense of foreboding — as if we had reached an end. If there was any doubt before, we are now most certainly living in what many call post-Christian America, and that reality presents us with new and serious challenges.

How did we get here, and how should the church respond?

Individualism

It was a long time coming. Indeed, it goes back centuries to the very philosophical underpinning of liberal democracy: individual autonomy, individual choice, individual tolerance as the respective vision, value, and virtue that define the public order. Free of metaphysical constraint, this ideology reaches its logical conclusion in reasoning like that of a recent Supreme Court ruling on abortion:

... at the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.¹

Boundless self-definition is where individualism is taking us, both in culture and in courts. And the church, by definition,

has no standing on this playing field. As a traditional religious community, it, with God, is out of bounds in political discourse. As Protestant writer and teacher Peter J. Leithart rightly noted at *First Things*, in response to the same-sex ruling:

Orthodox Christianity has lost all cultural potency in the United States. No one defending traditional marriage before the court dared raise the fundamental question: Who creates marriage, God or the state? Theology has no public standing, no persuasive force in the culture at large.²

After decades of vast culture war defeats, we must concede that the church cannot, and should not, hope to triumph in the public arena when the deck is stacked. Playing by the rules of

this world is futile. The church, rather, must be *the church*, playing by its God-given rules — not for a civil religion but for the kingdom, even if that means transgressing culture’s one cardinal virtue: tolerance.

Tolerance

Tolerance now means more than just “accepting the existence of different views,” which we must support, but rather the “acceptance of different views” (emphasis mine).³ As D. A. Carson writes in his insightful book *The Intolerance of Tolerance*:

This shift . . . is subtle in form but massive in substance . . . we leap from permitting the articulation of beliefs and claims with which we do not agree to asserting that all beliefs and claims are equally valid.⁴

This has enormous consequences for intentional Christians called to exercise their faith publicly. If tolerance is this culture’s sole virtue, then intolerance is its sole vice. As Leslie Armour, professor emeritus of philosophy at the University of Ottawa, neatly puts it: “Our idea is that to be a virtuous citizen is to be one who tolerates everything except intolerance.”⁵

It is a small step from an accusation of intolerance, or bigotry, to indictments of discrimination and hate speech with all the legal, professional, and financial sanctions that could follow. We must not underestimate the profound pressure many Christians will feel to either fall silent or assimilate to dominant cultural norms. Many Christians, and Christian organizations, are already succumbing.

Setting priorities

As hostility mounts, our local churches must become communities of care and character — a counter culture — in order to recover biblical foundations for authentic Christian formation and courageous gospel proclamation, while understanding the genuine consequences that are likely to follow.

The church must get its priorities set. We seek not to guide a nation but to make disciples, as Jesus commanded us. It is His kingdom we seek, not the kingdoms of this world. Disciples are made, not by coercion but when the gospel creates opportunity for us to speak the truth in love.

When the gospel is proclaimed, it will often offend dominant cultural norms, since a faithful church will challenge idols like autonomous individualism, self-definition, and mandated tolerance of all choices as equally valid. We cannot help but offend many in our effort to convict a few.

Ironically, the controlling political ideology cannot help but be intolerant of a practiced faith like ours, because our life message — that *Jesus* is Lord, not the *individual* — transgresses the most basic tenet of political faith: the

requirement that we tolerate, accept, affirm, and even celebrate people’s fundamental right to define themselves, and reality, any way they please.

Rival kingdom

As legal pressure, cultural ridicule, and public ostracism intensify, be aware that this is not new. The pagan world into which Jesus was born, and to which Paul preached, was no more eager to submit its will to the gospel — and certainly no less reserved in its attacks — than our secular world is.

Of the New Testament writers, Luke may best capture this dynamic. His Gospel-history, Luke-Acts, reveals important theological bookends that bind his whole project and speak plainly to us now.

Acts concludes with the apostle Paul’s arrival in Rome and house arrest. The Jewish leaders in the imperial city meet with him, and while not familiar with Paul’s circumstances, they do admit to having heard about a new “sect” that is everywhere “spoken against” (28:22).

Now rewind to the beginning of Luke’s story. Jesus, an infant of only eight days, is brought to the temple to be circumcised when

We must not underestimate the profound pressure many Christians will feel to either fall silent or assimilate to dominant cultural norms.

righteous Simeon takes the Babe into his arms and prophesies, “Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against . . .” (2:34).

Spoken against! What a strange beginning and end to the story Luke tells. Why should the coming and preaching of Jesus Christ be “spoken against”? The gospel is “good news,” after all.

The answer is close at hand. The good news of Jesus Christ is inseparable from the message of the kingdom. Acts ends with Paul still teaching Jesus *and* the kingdom of God (28:31). Luke begins with Mary learning that her Son will reign and “of His kingdom there will be no end” (1:33).

A rival kingdom to the kingdoms of this world and the petty kingdoms of private making is here. . . . And they don’t like it. Rebellion against God’s rule has defined human existence. It continues.

The gospel declares that Jesus is Savior *and* Lord (Luke 2:11) and that we are slaves and sinners. It proclaims the kingdom of God and denies the dominion of self. It calls us to repent and submit. *He* defines, not *we*. So the good news is only “good” to those who see their condition as “bad.”

Risk and resolve

The world denies its darkness and opposes those who would expose its need. The word *sin* is no longer a category our culture tolerates. Naming us *sinners*, and certain acts *sinful*, will now carry certain risks that we are not accustomed to, but not unlike those that Jesus and Paul faced in the first century for the sake of the gospel.

Twenty centuries later, things are oddly similar. Except, perhaps, our own courage and resolve.

Too often Christians water down the gospel to accommodate the culture. We offer grace without discipleship, a Savior but not a Lord, Jesus less judgment. We make it pleasant, and relevant, to the world, but such a course misses the narrow road to God’s kingdom. We want to be liked. It is not easy to be spoken against in a world that makes its own rules and rules its own making.

Peter understood the pressure to conform. He denied his Lord when loving Him might mean dying with Him (Luke 22:57). But later, Peter would boldly teach, “Be saved from this perverse generation” (Acts 2:40), though that kind of public preaching would

land him in jail more than once.

In light of this perversity and hostility, we should carefully heed the generous words of Peter: “having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Peter 2:12).

We are for a world that opposes itself and so cannot help but oppose us when we address it as it is. But some will see, and glorify God, if we are not afraid to be “spoken against” by many more.

A faithful church will risk that. It will humbly transgress for the gospel’s sake, though it incurs the wrath of those that blindly assert, “Don’t judge; only tolerate.” A faithful church will be patient and gracious and real, but it dare not simply be *tolerant*, reduced to silent conformity, when the Lord calls it, *us*, to cry as He did, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” **BA**

1. *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, 505 U.S. 833, 8books51 (1992). Quoted by James Kalb, *The Tyranny of Liberalism*, 37.
2. First Things, www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2015/06/after-obergefell-a-first-things-symposium, accessed July 16, 2015.
3. *Encarta Dictionary*, quoted by D. A. Carson in *The Intolerance of Tolerance*, 3.
4. Carson, *The Intolerance of Tolerance*, 3-4.
5. Leslie Armour, quoted by D. A. Carson in *The Intolerance of Tolerance*, 12

The gospel proclaims the kingdom of God and denies the dominion of self. It calls us to repent and submit. *He* defines, not *we*.

Questions & Answers



I'm really worried that I may have committed the unforgivable sin. I was baptized in CoG7 but never felt different – like the Holy Spirit came to me. The minister, as I recall, never said He was baptizing me in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The more I try getting close to God, the further away I feel. I just keep running into doubts and more doubts. The harder I try to have faith, the more doubt creeps into my mind. How can I know whether or not I've done the unforgivable sin?

Let's review Jesus' words about unpardonable sin and allow them to have their impact on us. He says, "All sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter" (Mark 3:28; Matt. 12:31a).

Hear it again: "All sins . . . whatever blasphemies . . . will be forgiven"! Have you murdered? Stolen your neighbor's wife? If you've committed these sins or worse, Christ says you can be forgiven! He promised it: "All sins will be forgiven . . ."! Doubting this does not make it untrue. If Jesus said it, and if you have confessed your sins while believing in His name, it is true: You are forgiven in Him (Eph. 1:7)!

Then Jesus adds the words that have troubled many: "but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men" (Matt. 12:31b; Mark 3:29).

Those who closely study this issue often say that the unforgivable sin is limited to those who claimed the mighty works of Jesus were from Satan. If so, then unforgivable sins were only possible for those alive and present during Jesus' ministry.

Others have concluded that the only unforgivable sin is dying outside of Christ. Another way

of saying this is that if we die without confessing our sin to Him, only then are they unforgivable.

I encourage you to trust in the name of Jesus and confess your sins to Him. Doubt is not an unforgivable sin, so confess it to Jesus. Claim His blood to wash you clean from all sins, even those you don't think to mention; He promises to do just that. Your faith may seem small, but it doesn't take great faith to be forgiven. One man cried in desperation to Jesus, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:23, 24), and he got exactly what he asked for.

Your concern over this issue suggests that the Spirit is still striving with you (Gen. 6:3). As long as the Spirit draws us to Christ, there is great hope! Please read John 6:44 and John 6:37, in that order.

Perhaps Jesus warns against blaspheming the Spirit because the Spirit is the only God we know experientially. God the Father is in heaven. Jesus, God with us, was here for a time, then returned to His Father. But God the Holy Spirit is with us always. The Spirit is the presence of the Father and the Son. If we drive away the Spirit, we have quenched everything about God we can experience in this life.

I suggest that you discuss this issue with a pastor or a small group of believing friends. There is hope, so don't abandon yourself to doubt. Rather, doubt your doubts and believe your beliefs. God has not abandoned you. Christ's words on this topic can be harsh for those who willfully reject the Savior and embrace their sin. Based on what you wrote, I don't think that is you. Your struggle can end as you permit the Spirit to write God's words of grace and truth in Christ across your heart and mind.

— Elder Calvin Burrell

Avoiding Holy Huddles

How we live out the CoG7 vision of being distinct, but not exclusive. by Paul Pedersen

I was thrilled and nervous. At the Washington State Super Sabbath — the first for a long time — people from a variety of backgrounds and traditions (feast days, Pentecostal, etc.) attended, displaying the theme of unity. All of us together in fellowship — momentous!

As a youngster, I thought if anyone believed differently from what I'd been taught, they were sinning. In my naiveté, I believed we shouldn't associate with anyone who didn't believe exactly as we do.

Thanks to His longsuffering, God began to whittle away some of these prejudices. He used youth camps, where I encountered kids from churches and places I had never heard of, like the General Council and Turner Campmeeting. These kids became my friends and didn't seem much different from me.

I also made friends at school

with kids who came from non-Sabbath churches and shared much of my convictions about Christ and sin. I found freedom and joy in worshiping with others and enjoyed learning how other churches conducted their services.

As a graduate student, I gained greater perspective when I came across a concept called Church Growth Pathology.¹ I learned that dying churches have "diseases" that strangle the life out of them. One of them is called *koinonitus*, or the "holy huddle." In this disease, people become so comfortable with each other in the same congregation and their way of doing church that visitors don't feel at ease. When this happens, churches sever themselves from the rest of Christ's body and fail to make an impact on the world. What, then, do we do to avoid the holy huddle?

Get the right mindset

"In essentials, unity; in doubtful matters, liberty; in all things, charity."²

This popular saying grabs the idea that some things we cannot budge on, like salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8). But we can budge on our interpretation of symbols and parables in Scripture. For example, some people claim that mountains mean governments, beasts mean kingdoms, waters mean people, lamps mean the Word of God, and a day means a year. These kinds of things are best discussed with an open mind. Even if we do not agree about all things in Scripture, we can still display the love of Christ to each other (1 Corinthians 16:14).

Having the right mindset means that, even on more important items like the nature of God, we can be distinct but not exclusive. For example, our General Conference Statement of Faith says "God is revealed in Scripture as Father and Son" and that "The Spirit is God's presence and power. . . ."³ If someone believes that God is revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we can still love that person, worship with him, and minister with him. Or if a person believes that God is revealed as the Father, that Jesus is His Son, and that the Spirit is the presence of the Father, we can easily love, worship, and minister with that person as well.

Expand your vision

Gaining the right mindset toward others outside our group prepares us to reach even further beyond the holy huddle. Jesus

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When I was 26 years old, I heard God's call deep inside me to go and preach the gospel. The transforming power of Jesus Christ then led me to seek God more intimately.

Working as a nurse, I felt professional satisfaction at seeing people healed from sicknesses, often through prayer. But God spoke to my heart: "You are very happy in your profession seeing those physically sick people healed. But so many people outside the hospital are sick, and their sickness is *sin*. If nobody will share the way out with them, they will be lost."

Because Jesus is my Savior and Lord, I gave up my nursing career to serve full time in reaching the lost and reviving the church. I began sharing my testimony and preaching the gospel. As of today, many souls have been saved in various places, many churches planted, and many converts turned into disciple-makers. And we see the hand of God reviving the church.

This year our passion is to preach the gospel as a whole national church, as districts, as local groups, and as individuals. We are radically committed to our Lord and His great commission and passionate to work like the New Testament church!

Would you like to join us? If so, these biblical truths can guide you in reaching the lost more effectively.

Personal encounter

We cannot give something to others that we ourselves don't have. We cannot sell a product with conviction if we are not convinced about its value. Likewise, we cannot testify about

Here Am I; Send Me

"Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!"
(1 Corinthians 9:16b).
by Billy Abugan



@ Vyacheslav Leskovskiy—Dreamstime.com

Jesus with power if we have not encountered Him personally. The disciples, Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, and Apostle Paul all had personal encounters with Jesus (Matthew 28:9, 10; John 3:1-3; 4:7-26; Acts 9:3-6).

When we share the gospel, we are not giving people head knowledge. We are sharing the revelation of who Jesus is: the Christ and Son of the living God. We are telling what He has done for us at the cross and will do in our lives through the Spirit's power if we surrender the throne of our hearts to Him.

Prayer and fasting

Preaching the gospel is spiritual warfare. We are going into Enemy territory and must expect opposition. Therefore, prayer and fasting are critical for the battle. When His disciples failed to cast out a demon from an epileptic

boy, Jesus said, "This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting" (Matthew 17:21). In the same way, the spiritual forces of darkness must be bound and cast out from the lives of unbelievers (18:18; Mark 3:27). We cannot truly win the lost for Christ if we don't first deal with the spiritual strongholds in people and places. Sharing our doctrines cannot cast out the powers of darkness, but we can share the Church's teachings with people after they are converted.

When I began preaching the gospel where drug addiction and drug smuggling were rampant, the church started with three days of fasting-and-prayer warfare. On the first night, a drug pusher in that area and his wife surrendered to the Lord, and their daughter was healed the next day. Since then, he has been a missionary in our church. Glory to God!

Spirit filling

Paul writes, “Be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18) — a continuous filling. This involves daily surrender to the Lord and cleansing of our spiritual lives from any known and unknown sins. It involves daily devotion to God and walking in holiness of heart so that the fruits and gifts of the Spirit are manifested through us.

Being Spirit-filled means self-denial, self-discipline, and constant prayer — like Jesus, who rose early in the morning to commune with the Father (Mark 1:35). It means reading, memorizing, and meditating on God’s Word so we can confess it to others.

Training

Sharing the gospel requires not only trusting the Holy Spirit to work through us but also gaining knowledge and training in the skills. Many soul-winning guides are available that make points like God’s original plan for man, the problem, the solution, and the response or commitment.

Using these tools effectively takes practice, until expressing our faith becomes a way of life. “Be ready in season and out of season” (2 Timothy 4:2).

Position

We are no longer just Christians; we are soldiers for Christ (2 Timothy 2:3, 4). Equipped with spiritual armor and ready for spiritual battle, we pose a threat to the Enemy when we spread the gospel.

But we’re more than soldiers; we’re also God’s ambassadors. We have all the authority and support of the heavenly forces

as we tell others of His glorious grace (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Satisfaction

I’ve come a long way since my days of nursing and treating people’s physical ills. I find much more satisfaction now in treating the spiritual health of people. May Paul’s desire to preach the gospel be ours in fulfilling the Great Commission. **BA**

Pastor Donald Billy Abugan (45), grandson of Philippines pioneer Elder H. C. Rosell, serves as president of the Philippines Conference, and lives in Poblacion, Tubod, Lanao del Norte.



Avoiding Holy Huddles

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Christ challenges us to be His witnesses “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Note the progression. Witness begins at home as we serve our communities and share Christ there. It extends to the district surrounding and then goes national and international.

When you break out of your holy huddle, you find a new range of people to worship and minister with. They are from other churches within your denomination, from independent churches of God, and in other denominations. I challenge you to expand your vision.

Get out of the box

With an expanded vision for God’s kingdom, we can think of new and unique ways to spread the good news — another way of breaking free of the holy huddle.

Start with a goal. Are you trying to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ? Are you nurturing spiritual growth in all believers? Perhaps your church wants to get others involved in evangelism and include other churches in leadership training. Perhaps you enjoy a forum exchange with other Christians about biblical topics or can conduct a gracious public debate about the Sabbath. The point is, you are thinking of ways to get out of your box, and Christians are engaging the whole body of Christ for the sake of the gospel.

Work in progress

I’ve come a long way since those early days of thinking myself better than other Christians just because of what I believed. I thank God for His grace and mercy that broadened my vision and enlarged my heart — for His sake and the kingdom’s. **BA**

Paul and Rebekah Pedersen and family have recently moved from Washington to Texas, where he serves as pastor of the Conroe congregation.



1. “Church Growth Pathology,” <http://home.snu.edu/~hculbert/diseases.pdf>, accessed July 1, 2015.
2. “A common quotation from ‘Augustine’?,” <http://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/augustine/quote.html>, accessed July 1, 2015.
3. “What We Believe,” cog7.org/about-us/what-we-believe/, accessed July 1, 2015.

As used here, *radical* is the opposite of *nominal*, *so-called*, *in name only*, *lukewarm*, and *ordinary*. Each of these short pieces illustrates the complete commitment to which our radically committed Lord has called us.



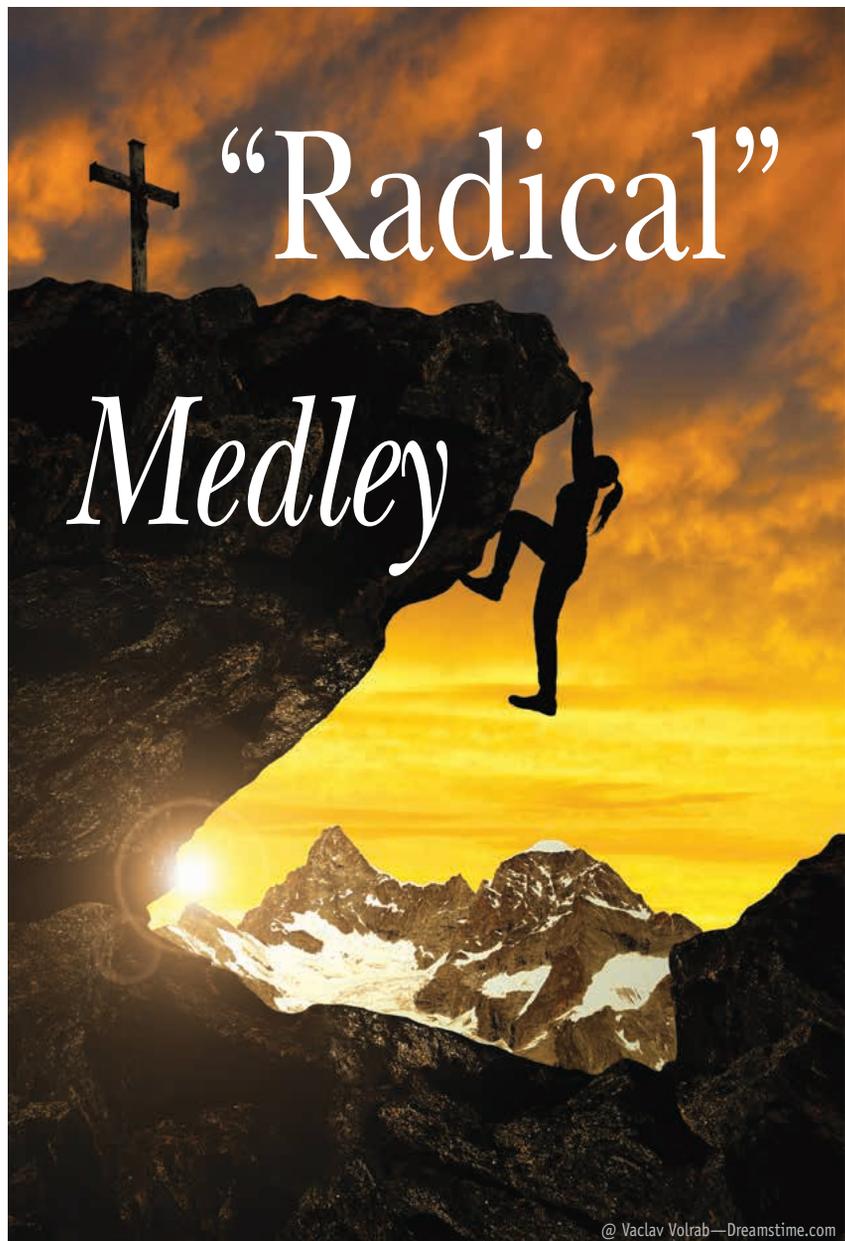
Trust Test

Will God really provide our needs if we seek His kingdom first and fully?

George (not his real name) was seventeen years old when he was dismissed from his dream job. His employer demanded that he work Friday nights, but George wasn't willing to compromise Sabbath rest. Though devastated at the time, this young man could not have known that embracing such a decision would in time help set him on a path that would lead closer to Christ and deeper into His will. It was a defining moment.

Years later, when George experienced a distinct call to discipleship, a skeptical friend in the Christian community quizzed him about Matthew 6:33. To George, this verse seemed to say that believers are to seek God's kingdom and righteousness first, and God will provide for their physical needs.

"Get a job that pays well," chided his friend, quoting the national minimum wage. What he was really saying was that you



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can't rely on a literal understanding of Jesus' words that God will provide all our needs.

George saw it differently: That's what Jesus had said. Surely He meant it, especially in the light of His pre-incarnate words: "Put me to the test, and see if I will not bless you" (Malachi 3:10, author's paraphrase).

Some two years after his employer dismissed him, George was walking near a busy highway when a car suddenly pulled over.

It was his former employer.

"George," his old boss asked, "what are you doing these days? Will you come back and work for me? Everyone we employed since I let you go has let us down. I remember how diligent you were; you're a good bloke. I should have never let you go!"

As we look back on those events decades later, George's experience illustrates that the light of Christ always shines brighter than our immediate cir-

cumstances, no matter how dire they may seem at the time. If we trust in Jesus, for both the short and long terms, our commitment to Him works for the ultimate good.

Not only was George's employer finally blessed, but so was George with encouragement, empowerment, and ongoing commitment in Christ.

— John Klassesk
Northam, Western Australia

I'm Spartacus!

Millions over the centuries have followed Jesus by taking up their own cross — to death.

The 1960 movie *Spartacus* was a story about a Thracian slave who became a Roman gladiator and rebelled against Rome. He wanted freedom for himself and for all slaves. He dispatched cohorts and even legions back to Rome in disgrace.

Spartacus wanted to fight his way to the south of Italy, where he and other slaves would board Salesian trade ships to freedom. His plan was thwarted when Rome threw a few legions at him. Though defeated in battle, their spirit and desire for freedom remained strong — a brotherhood of slaves who would not kill each other.

After the Romans defeated them, the survivors were told, "Slaves you were and slaves you remain." They would be spared

death by crucifixion *if* they would find and turn over the slave called Spartacus, dead or alive. The Romans did not know what Spartacus looked like.

A hush fell over the survivors. Just as Spartacus was about to rise and identify himself, Antoninus shouted, "I'm Spartacus!" Then another and another. Soon about three or four hundred slaves were shouting, "I'm Spartacus!" They would not give the Romans the satisfaction of this final insult. Rather than escaping crucifixion, they would all be crucified.

To me, this movie makes a compelling parallel between Jesus Christ and Spartacus. Jesus gave His life for the world. Spartacus gave his life trying to set millions of slaves free. Jesus died on the cross to make all who will, free. Jesus loves us and proved it by what He did for all.

Are we willing to prove our love for Him? Someday soon it may not be popular to be a Christian. If you find yourself in a room with people of mixed religious and political beliefs, do you have the courage to stand up and say, "I'm a Christian! I'm

a follower of Jesus Christ! I stand opposed to that"?

In the movie, the time came for slaves to stand up and declare, "I'm Spartacus!" to support him. Will you declare with me, "I'm a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of lords" whatever the cost?

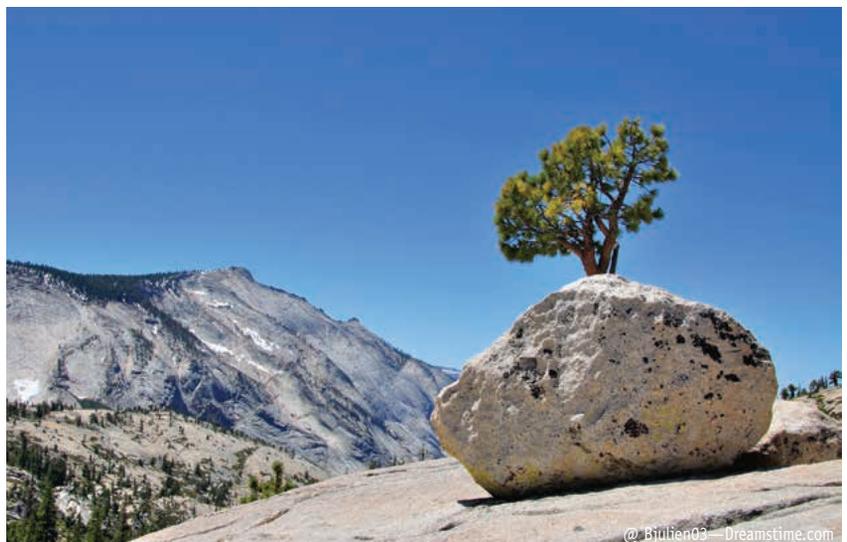
— Frank J. Camero
San Antonio TX

Heavy Boulder

The call of obedience can seem drastic, and then we recall what's already done.

God's law has two sides. One defines *righteousness* and the other defines *love*. Viewing law as the only means to righteousness is like trying to push a huge boulder up a hill to please God.

To help us see that the boulder is too much, He makes it heavier and the hill higher to take away all our hope of ever making it to the top. Why would God do



such a thing? The Devil tells us it's because He is mean and angry and wants us to fail. In reality, the heavy boulder and the high hill are demonstrations of God's wisdom and love.

God wants to show us our hopeless natural state — our inability to live as we ought so that we can give up and die. We must die to our efforts to be righteous before God apart from Christ, so that we can be reborn to abundant life in Him. When we remove the side of God's law that demands perfect righteousness from us to please Him — the side that breeds guilt and condemnation — the only side left is love.

We should stop trying to push the big boulder uphill to please God. The more effort we put into it, the heavier God makes the boulder and the higher He makes the hill. We should let that big rock roll us over and kill us instead. Now dead to sin and trusting in Christ, we are loved, accepted, and righteous in Him.

What does this plan of God mean for us? It means we can stop drawing self worth by how well we keep the commandments. Getting our value that way breeds pride and a critical, judgmental spirit toward others. It's a breeding ground for failure, shame, and self-condemnation.

Viewing God's law as the law of love means we obey from a different motive. We allow others to grow and experience God's love — a love that changes lives. God conforms us to the image of His Son through love working from the inside out. He writes His law of loving God and loving others in our hearts and minds. We become His people and He our God, not because we got the boulder up the hill but because

we now know that the boulder is already at the top — in Christ.

— John Ferreira
Portsmouth, RI

Happiness and Forgiveness

What can be more radical than to love everybody and forgive them for everything?

Is anything more central to the blessedness of God than His willingness to forgive?

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities . . . (Psalm 103:2, 3a).

Likewise, nothing is more important to our happy relations with others than the willingness to forgive. Enjoy these happiness words every day: *I'm wrong. I'm sorry. Forgive me. Please. Thank you. You're welcome. You're right.*

We can be the happiest word. We are brothers and sisters in God's family. God is our Father, and Jesus is God's only begotten Son — our elder Brother. God is love. Jesus is mercy. The Holy Spirit is forgiveness.

Say these words each day — and do them. You will be doing God's will. When we know what Jesus does and then do what He says, we will be His friends and will enter the kingdom that's in heaven, on earth, at hand, and within us.

God gave us permission to choose. We are called to be independent in making decisions,

interdependent in relationships, and dependent upon God. We promise to love, to care, to listen, to encourage, and to forgive. This is the free promise of compassion.

When we forgive, we set ourselves free to be the best we can be today, tomorrow, and forever. Say and do the "Forgiveness Prayer" every day: "Please forgive them, for they know not what they do. Please help me forgive them. Please forgive me for what I knowingly or unknowingly did to cause the problem. Please help me forgive myself. Please take away any anger, bitterness, hurt, and any other negative emotions. Please restore my soul and my joy."

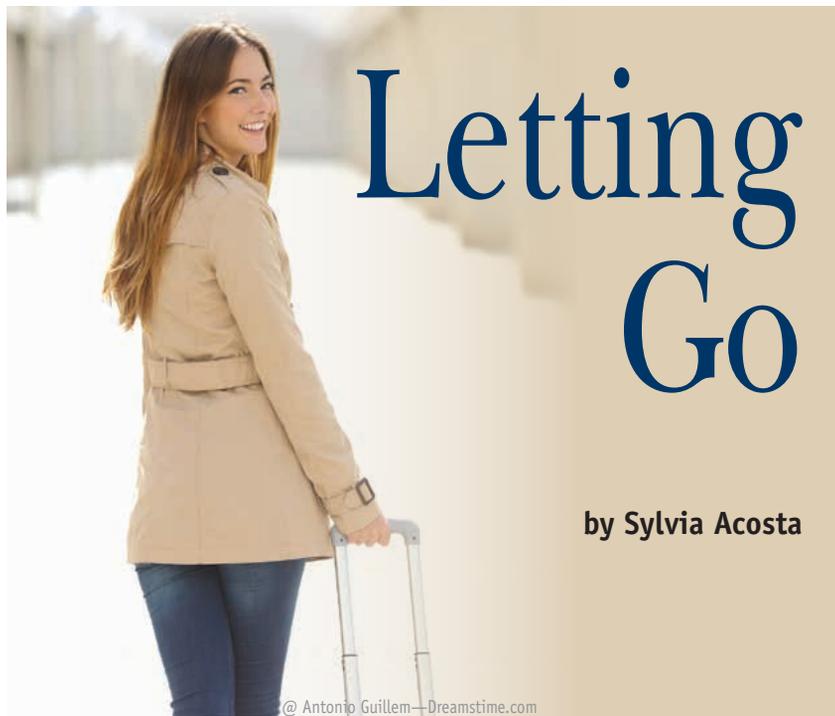
We have the power to love, care, listen, encourage, and forgive. We have the power to be honest, happy, healthy, and humble and to give and forgive. We have the power to tell the truth, ask good questions, give good answers, and pray. We have the power to control our words, admit our shortcomings, trust God, forgive others, and be like Jesus each day — all because we have been forgiven first.

"Pay it forward" by sending this message of love and friendship to others in God's family.

If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared (130:3, 4).

— Bob Moyers
Liberty Center, OH

Bob, a.k.a. "Mr. Happy," wrote this in anticipation of the twentieth anniversary of National Forgiveness Day, the last Saturday of October. — Editor. **BA**



Letting Go

by Sylvia Acosta

As young parents, we dedicated our children to the Lord, not knowing where life would take us and how we'd have to let them go.

One of our two daughters marched to a different beat from the start. Whatever phase she was in, she was passionate to know all about it. In high school she became fascinated with ancient Egypt and Queen Nefertiti. After graduating from Spring Vale Academy and attending one year of college, she informed us she was planning to teach math in Egypt as a student missionary.

Thinking of our girl in the Middle East struck fear in our hearts, especially after 9/11. The months before she left were some of the scariest for me as her mother. Her travels would be beyond my control, her problems beyond my rescue. And I didn't even know how we'd communicate.

My husband and I took our daughter to the airport. They let us go through security and sit

with her a couple hours before she left — a young girl heading out into the wide, unknown world alone, not knowing anyone on the other end. We prayed much for her and her safety, to let her go and not be afraid.

But I could not find peace. Watching her plane rise and disappear into the sky, I told the Lord, "She's in Your hands. There's nothing I can do to protect her now." Finally, a peace came from God. This was what He wanted all along: for me to just give her to Him.

Since then, she and her sister have traveled the world as students and missionaries abroad, conference attendees, or archaeologists in Jordan and Turkey. There have been a few frightening times when they couldn't contact us to let us know they were OK. But it's clear to me now that they have been so blessed by expanding their worldview past American borders. Their doors are open in

all directions for whatever God allows into their lives.

Despite my fears, I worked up courage to travel to the Middle East last year with my daughter and son-in-law. Our trip to Jordan was indescribable. I finally understood why our daughter was so much at home there.

Our younger daughter began her masters degree in Global Health last fall. She already had a great job but wanted to serve the Lord by helping people. She is now in the Philippines and will live in sub-Saharan Africa part of 2015-16. *Here we go again, Lord. Africa sounds so scary. Do You really want her there?*

My heart faltered at the thought of war, malaria, and Ebola, and every part of me wanted to say, "No!" Then we heard more from her about what she's learned, watched videos from global health conferences, and began to understand her desire. Did I learn anything the first time around? I did. *She's Yours, Lord, in Your control. There's nothing I can do to protect her now.*

The peace of God keeps filling me as we pray daily, asking the Lord to cover our children with His protecting hand. Today's communication tools keep us in touch even when they are far away. While I'd still love to have my children in the same country with us, I know Who's in control. My God never slumbers or sleeps. **BA**

Sylvia Acosta worked at Spring Vale Academy for five years. She and her husband, Jose, live in College Place, WA, and are active in the Walla Walla CoG7.



by Tluang Kung

What in the world is the church for, or the church in the world for?

Is it mostly for gathering every Sabbath day? If so, Christianity is no different from other religions that also gather on their sacred days. Is the church chiefly for helping the poor? If so, it will be a social club for good deeds.

The church's primary purpose is to obey Christ's commission: Go and make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:46-49; John 20:21; Acts 1:8). These last earthly words of Jesus are the church's first priority. The word go makes clear that this is not our choice but His command, whether or not we feel good about it or we're financially empowered to do it. Unless the church commits itself to make disciples, it is not a church at all.

Our success in this mission depends on how much we commit to a good cause. Commitment includes love, labor, time, energy, courage, and willingness to learn, no matter the cost. Just as love for Christ motivates commitment for Him, so people's love for the church will impact their commitment to its top job. Without commitment, nothing is achieved.

Coming to Christian faith, one must not aim for what the world sees as success. We are working in our Father's vineyard, and everything is ours through Christ. Our reward is well reserved in Him. This will encourage us when it seems that we have failed in the task. The world takes Jesus to be unsuccessful too, because He died before His work (the church) was full grown. But God takes Jesus to be successful



because He finished the mission He came for — not to build a big church but to die for the world. Likewise, how the world evaluates our ministry is not too important.

After committing to follow and obey Christ, we must guard against the tendency to turn back. Jesus warns us, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). This tendency may come from disappointment, criticism, feeling unsuccessful, hardship, money problems, etc. It might be better not to commit to follow Christ at all than to turn back before the mission is finished (14:27-30).

How did Jesus reply to a scribe who wanted to follow Him? Not with "Oh, what a decision! I appreciate it! You are welcome!" Instead, Jesus told him the price of following Him, without rejecting the scribe's desire (Matthew 8:19, 20).

Taking up one's cross (Luke 9:23; Matthew 10:38) requires not only daily self-denial but also

physical "death" for the sake of Christ as the ultimate price to pay. No man carrying his cross returns alive.

It remains for all committed disciples to be "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). There is no "exit" in commitment to Christ but renewal of commitment to what God asks of us. Be assured that something will discourage you; disappointment is so human. But we cannot allow these to stop us. We can trust Jesus' words for whatever cost may be required: He overcame the world, and He will be with us unto its end (John 16:33; Matthew 28:20b). **BA**

Tluang Kung, 31, serves as general secretary of the Myanmar Conference of CoG7 from his home in Yangon. He and his wife, Ro Din Pui, have two young children.



Radical: Grounded in the amazing assurances of our great God
we are fully committed to an uncommonly extraordinary life

Fruits

- of Holy Spirit
- of righteousness
- of radical obedience to Christ
- of loving service to God and man
- of gospel witness to the world

Jesus

John 15
Roman 3—5

Isaiah 37:31 And the remnant who have escaped of the house of Judah shall be as a tree with roots and without leaves, which shall be cut off, and shall be as a tree without roots, which shall be cut off.

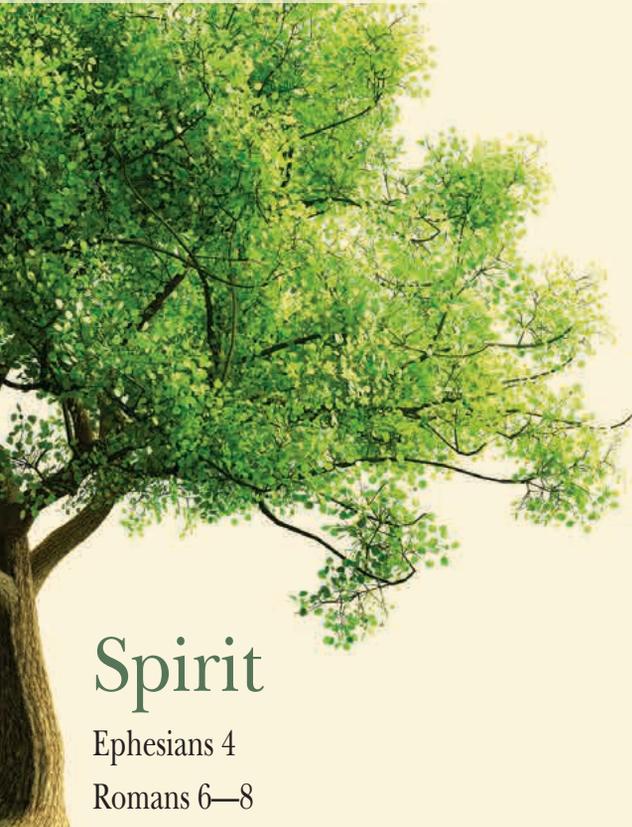
Jesus of Nazareth

- the preexistent Word
- His incarnation
- His life
- His death
- His resurrection
- His return



Hebrew Law, Writings, Prophets → Four Gospels →

God and Savior through the Word and Spirit (Roots, below),
every life of faith that works through love (Fruits, above).



Spirit

Ephesians 4
Romans 6—8

Good Harvest

- Obedience
- Right walking with God
- We ought (imperative)
- Presenting ourselves a living sacrifice
- Sins overcome
- Sanctification

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of Judah Shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward.

Roots

God's Grace in Christ

- Trust
- Right standing with God
- We are (declarative)
- By the mercies of God
- Sins forgiven
- Justification

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Acts —————> New Testament Epistles —————> Revelation

We Walk the Line

What does country music legend Johnny Cash teach us about being a Christian disciple? by Calvin Burrell

@ Lane Erickson—Dreamstime.com

Not to be cute or trendy, this question is posed to help us better grasp the privileges and responsibilities of knowing and following the world's one true Lord and Savior. The answer to the question will come shortly.

Because Jesus is a wonderful Savior, we enjoy the very best blessings and promises by trusting Him. These blessings and

promises represent God's grace — His unearned favor realized in some measure now and reserved without measure for us in heavenly glory to be revealed in due time, all at Christ's expense.

Because Jesus is a mighty Lord, we are called to the highest standards of faith, love, and life — obeying and following Him in sacrificial service to God and

others. These standards represent God's truth in Christ. His Word and Spirit empower us to become what we would never be without Him.

God's Word made flesh was full of these two marvelous attributes, according to John 1:14: God's grace and God's truth. So that we don't miss this thought, verse 17 repeats it: "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."

Jesus' grace and truth aren't confined to John's Gospel, however. Great words of gospel grace appear in red letters in all four Gospels, and red-letter words of timeless truth accompany them there, as the chart on the next page confirms.

Wonderful and difficult

All four Gospels mix wonderful words of *who Christ's disciples are by grace* with difficult words of *what Christ's disciples do in truth*, like this:

- In Matthew, *we are the poor in spirit who receive the kingdom. We do the will of our Father in feeding, clothing, visiting, and taking the gospel to the least of these.*
- In Mark, *we are the many for whom Jesus gave His life as a ransom for sin. We do deny ourselves, take up our cross, and give up our own life to follow Christ.*
- In Luke, *we are those who express saving faith through humble confession of sin. We do give up all we have so that we might follow Jesus.*
- In John, *we are those who truly believe and find life in Him. We do continue in His Word and keep His commandments.*

Christ and Cash

So, what does Johnny Cash have to do with being a disciple of Jesus Christ?

Johnny's life was a mess — until someone made the difference for him. Johnny's someone first loved him, accepted him, forgave him, motivated and inspired him so fully that his life was raised to a whole new level of dignity and respect for God, for others, and even for himself. Everything about Johnny changed when he met her.

It was then that Johnny could write and sing about June Carter Cash: I'll be true. I won't turn to

the right or to the left. I'm going straight on with you and you alone, as long as we both live. "Because you're mine, I walk the line."

This, I think, is a fair comparison to being one of Christ's disciples. Because of Jesus' love for us, we are learning to love Him with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength — and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

Because He promises us the kingdom, we will do what the Father says in His Word and gives us to do through His Spirit. Our light will shine before men as we feed, clothe, care, give, and go — to the least of Jesus' brethren.

Because Christ gave His life as a ransom, we will deny ourselves, take up our cross, and gladly lose our lives to follow Him and lift Him up — around the corner and around the world.

Because Christ has forgiven us and declared us as righteous as if we'd never sinned, we will surrender all to follow Him.

Because Christ has given us life abundant and eternal, we will continue in His Word. Because He loves us and we love Him, we will keep His commandments.

Jesus, because we are Yours and You are ours, we walk the line of grace and truth. **BA**

According to . . .

Matthew

Jesus' grace: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (5:3). Christ promises God's kingdom to those who confess their sins and their need of a Savior, and who repent: That's grace!

Jesus' truth: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (7:21). Those who feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and imprisoned, and show mercy to the lowest will inherit the kingdom (25:34-40).

Mark

Jesus' grace: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (10:45). Christ's mission on earth had the primary purpose of serving, giving, and paying a sin price we could never pay.

Jesus' truth: Following Him can cost us everything. "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it" (8:34, 35).

Luke

Jesus' grace: One man in church lifted himself to look down on others, while the second confessed his sin humbly — and went home justified rather than the other. "For . . . he who humbles himself shall be exalted" (18:9-14).

Jesus' truth: "Whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple" (14:33). This give-it-all-you-got principle is not just for a few elite disciples but for all (see also Matthew 13:44-46; Luke 18:22).

John

Jesus' grace: "He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment . . ." (5:24).

Jesus' truth: "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. . . . If you love Me, keep My commandments" (8:31; 14:15).



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Our God is always giving us good things. Will we use them?

by Thomas E. Engel

In college, my first year English professor, Mrs. Wagner, began each class period with an inspiring saying on the board. One of these I often recall: “Each day create a new you again, again, and again.”

The repetition of the word *again* made me do some thinking back then and quite a bit now. One new me a day seems enough, and it would seem to take a lot of work to keep creating a new person throughout a whole day. I am not sure what

I wrote back then. In college, I thought I had it all together, so probably nothing too deep. But since then, life has dealt some hard challenges, and through the years, I have felt pretty worn. That word *again* keeps coming back to me.

Tough teachers

The freezer breaks down, and all the meat has gone bad; a copier jams just when there is a deadline to meet; news from the doctor about a lump that needs to be treated immediately: Such things can happen in a short time and be overwhelming.

But in these times, we can learn something about ourselves — something I didn’t get when I was young but am getting more now: Life’s best lessons come

from failure. I did not like to fail when I was young. Things going wrong messed with my ego, but now I am learning that during difficult times, we can search for what is really in us.

God gives opportunities every day for me to make me what I want me to be. To be sure, we are not in control of the situations that come our way. When driving down the road, I can’t do anything about getting a flat tire, but I can choose the way I react when I hear the thuds of a tire going flat.

This is a moment when I can create a new me. I can react with impatience and anxiousness that will cause just more stress and possibly more problems because I am out of a good mindset. Or I can accept the situation for what

it is, change the flat tire, and thank God that I am safe and back on the road.

The only way to learn about patience is to be in an anxious time. We learn about courage by experiencing fear. When we are weak and can't go on, we can find strength and perseverance. In times of discouragement, we can see that there is hope.

The important word here is *can*. God makes available to us all we need, so in every situation we can have things like patience, courage, strength, perseverance, and hope. God is good and is always giving us good things.

Teaching the kingdom

Jesus is the ultimate Teacher. He is the best authority on the kingdom of God because He is the kingdom of God. He knows where people are and meets them in their situations. It is not that heaven is so hard to understand but that we tend to be stubborn and don't let the simple truths of God's love and will into our minds and hearts.

Jesus wanted people to know about God's kingdom, and He knew that the only way to get through to them was to show them the kingdom. That is why Jesus went to the blind, deaf, lame, and sick and performed miracles — even raised the dead. He taught people in parables and shared simple stories that met people where they were.

Jesus was trying to get people to understand that the kingdom of God was about new life in Him. In Christ we have always been able to come to God with our problems and the burden of the guilt and shame of sin, and find strength and forgiveness.

By the grace of God, there is never a "bad" day. Yet I want to be careful not to minimize our problems. Bad things do happen. Peter tried to walk on water with Jesus but lacked faith and began to sink. He had boldly said he would die with Jesus, then later denied his Friend and Lord. That was truly a bad day for him as he wept. Not getting it right was a pattern with Peter at first. He had a lot to learn and had to start over.

Remaking a day

I think Mrs. Wagner was trying to get over-inflated college students open to new ideas. God is asking, "What are you making for this day?" While things may happen that try to discourage me, it does not mean that this day has to be bad. I can say when anything happens that life is good today.

When I go to visit my great niece, I like to buy her a little gift, like new crayons or a book. The

last time I visited, I bought her Play-Doh. I had forgotten how much fun it is to mold something with your hands.

With her imagination and little fingers, she made a dog. "Look, Uncle Tom," she said. "My new little puppy." I said, "Yes, I can see it," though I really just saw a ball of Play-Doh with some thumb impressions in it. The great thing about Play-Doh is that it can be made into something new — like each day.

"You can have it if you want," she said. The puppy is on my desk with a little note: "Life is good today." **BA**

Thomas E. Engel
writes from Gurnee,
IL.



While things may
happen that try to
discourage me, it
does not mean that
this day has to be
bad.

Baton Passed

continued from page 3

interest. The key is to know your topic and your audience and to deliver consistent quality. The BA is well positioned not just to maintain circulation but also to grow it, which I hope to help facilitate. I also want to look closely at the digital side of our publications; we may be missing opportunity there. Print and digital formats are mutually supportive when done right. A subscription-free publication, BA has an added benefit of being well supported within the Church. After 24 years on the revenue-generating side of the industry, I consider it a pleasure to come to a print publication that isn't chasing the bottom line as a main priority and that puts content — kingdom content — first!

CB: Your BA work won't be much about copyediting — that's Sherri Langton's domain — but more about being a chief visionary, planner, writer-wordsmith, and spokesperson for the magazine and, in print, for the Church.

JO: I know the tremendous asset we have in Sherri, and it's a credit to your years at the helm that I don't feel the need to reinvent the wheel as the new editor. I've been likening the editorial transition to jumping on a moving train; the track is stretched out before us.

The prophet Amos foresaw a time when there would be a famine for hearing the Word of God. I think we live in such a time. Sadly, this hunger reaches even into our churches. Our secular society is starving us from true, embodied transcendence that



the Word, rightly divided, feeds us. I have a deep burden for the church, increasingly illiterate in Scripture's story, and the intentional, lifelong discipleship that follows from a commitment to that story. My vision for the BA is that through it I might address Christian mediocrity and our surrender to secularity, just as David addressed Goliath with one smooth stone.

CB: Can you give us insight into your biggest apprehension, your best encouragement, and your highest hopes in this new assignment?

JO: There is always self-doubt, worrying you might not be enough for the task; I have my share of that. I also have an honest fear of being dragged into the politics (and nastiness) of power that has too often undermined the strength of churches. I want the BA to be a vehicle of unity rather than division, service rather than debate, even as I recognize that I'll very likely be seen as the new face, or target, of those who see a theological threat here or there. There are huge, real enemies facing the Church of God

in our times. We need to come together in hopeful humility, but I fear that the petty and personal might distract us from the profound, to our own undoing.

We Christians have been given the greatest story ever told. Telling it rightly and well is the calling of Christ on our lives. The Bible is full of faithful men and women who lived this story imperfectly, and yet successfully, in every imaginable circumstance. Together, with that cloud of witnesses, equipped with the Word and the Spirit, we will tell and live this story before our generation. We have the advantage of knowing the end of the story. That should give us confidence: If God is for us, who can be against us?

CB: In every denomination, we've seen recent loss of interest in Bible study as part of weekly worship. As you begin writing Sabbath school curriculum for CoG7 adults, any ideas on how to reverse that trend?

JO: This loss surely contributes to the growing gap between the biblical worldview and the practice of the average Christian in

the Western world. The statistics are frightening. The self-sufficiency of modern society hurts us here. As the “measure of all things,” we humans struggle to submit to studying the Word and will of God when we would rather talk about our own feelings and ideas — more often formed by culture than by Christ.

On the other hand, this loss may simply reflect that we are bored with Sabbath school as we’ve known it. In either case, a first start is a reaffirmation of intentional discipleship. There is no discipleship, or Christianity itself, outside the authority of the Word. So the study of Scripture in the community called “church” is not optional, but a priority, for faithful living among those who recognize that we are in the crosshairs between Christ and culture.

Our quarterlies should provide structure but not too much of it. Timely topics and texts, questions that invite genuine interaction within a diverse group of believers, and the mutual commitment to both speak and listen to the text and each other, are important ingredients in recovering an exciting and transforma-

tive Sabbath study.

CB: As your friend and colleague, Jason, let me give you a heads-up on the more challenging parts of your BA job:

- Choices about controversial content: If your material is afflicted by sameness, lameness, and tameness, people don’t read or they read half asleep. You’ll need to win their full attention without losing your job!

- Recognition that you will never hear from some people until they are unhappy or disagree with what you publish.

- Necessity of publishing material of marginal quality because excellent stuff is rare.

- Numbers - readers and dollars: Our subscriber list has held steady for years, and our financial base is stable for those. More readers can and should be had, if the financial base expands to support them. Your vision can help pull it off.

JO: I think we Overmans are by nature a bit more *controversial* than you Burrells. And our own doctrinal statement has plenty to keep the conversation lively. But I’ll try to keep myself in check and strive to be as diplomatic as you are. I appreciate

the real need to find a proper balance between Jesus Christ as Lord of all — the same yesterday, today, and forever — and always overturning the tables of our preconceived ideas and pride. The gospel is both “same” and yet “untamed.” We need a bunch of both.

One thing I bring with me from the newspaper is the recognition that complaints outpace compliments 10 to 1. But even complaints show that people are reading and that they care. They are an opportunity to improve ourselves or to understand each other better, at least.

I appreciate the *necessity* of discovering, and cultivating, writers of excellence. I am already practicing my “Calvin speak” as I visit with potential writing candidates on their topics of interest: “Can you give me five hundred words on that?” I ask enthusiastically. We have a lot of untapped ability in the Church and a solid group of writers who can continue to improve.

I feel strongly that it is one thing to have something worthy to say — and we need to think carefully about what is truly worthy to publish in the BA. And yet it’s another thing to communicate that truth worthily. Being able to do both, like choosing a piece of classical piano music and performing it well before the world, is a matter of practice, practice, and more practice. We must value the craft. Reading great writing; knowing the topic well; researching, reflecting, responding; and then writing and rewriting — and after that, rewriting some more. It’s not just a gift. The gift is having the determination to master the unruly world of words.



The tyranny of *numbers*! We can't escape them, can we? But we can surrender them to the lordship of Christ. I trust that He who multiplied five loaves and two fish can multiply our gifts as He wills. The BA work certainly needs the prayers and financial support of those who value Bible-based Christian content. I hope to lead by example in sharing the gifts God has given me, to the best of my ability, and letting God bless the increase.

CB: When I think of Overmans, I think of your parents, of niche music well composed and well performed by your family, and of free-style Bible study.

JO: Some of my earliest memories are of Dad writing music at the kitchen table and poring over his Bible late at night. Music and Bible study/discussion have always been at the heart of our family life. Add shared meals twice a week, and you've got the three *m*'s of the Jasper congregation: music, midrash, and meals. That's us!

CB: There's a link between your musical heritage and your lyrical writing style, wouldn't you say?

JO: I'm sure my love for words generally, and for the Word in particular, was inherited. My mom is an English literature teacher who adores reading, and my dad is a preacher with the heart of an artist. I grew up with Tolkien in one hand and the Bible in the other. My parents encouraged in me the idea that words are important and that a thing worth saying is worth saying *well*.

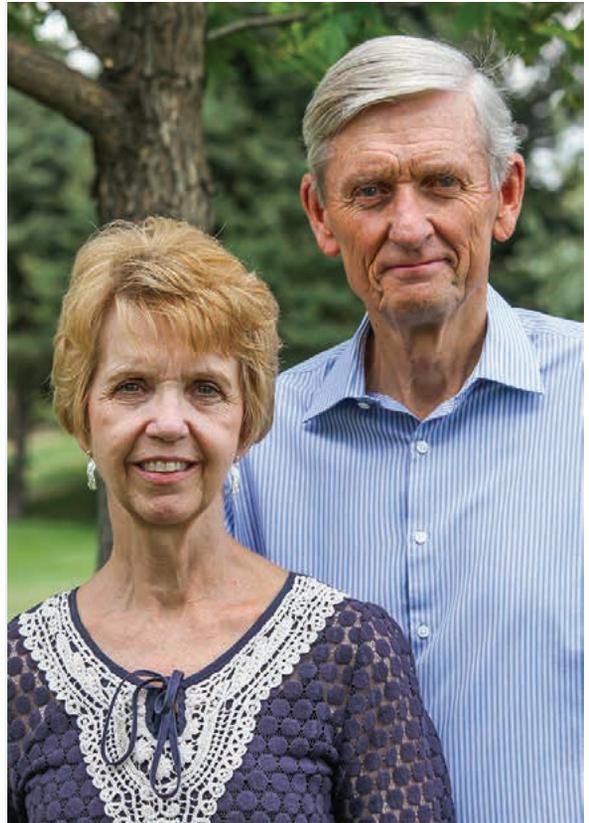
CB: Jason, writing and editing

for BA has given me a satisfying avenue to complete fifty-one years of vocational service (teacher, pastor, administrator) with CoG7. There is no success without a successor, so I gladly yield the BA editor's desk to you now, confident that the years ahead will take the magazine and the Church further into trajectories of fruitful service for Christ and His kingdom.

My deep, personal gratitude to you and Stephanie (your wife), to Tabitha and Isaac (your twelve-year-olds), and to the Jasper church (your congregation) for cooperation in this seamless BA transition. I pray a million blessings from Jesus' expansive grace and truth to our loyal BA readers, and trust that more than half of those will come through your tenure as editor.

JO: Calvin, your years of service to our church — and more personally, your unceasing encouragement, confidence, and example — are a special treasure. To see farther, reach higher, we all stand on shoulders. I am proud to stand on yours, not to mention that of the family and congregation that have formed me, and the thirty-one editors of the *Bible Advocate* who came before you.

As I reflect on the addition of my name to that list, I am humbled by this legacy and my



responsibility to it. All of us share a passion for God's Word and its ability to transform lives. We all tirelessly *advocate* that all Scripture is breathed by God and is profitable for instruction in righteousness, that His Word will not return to Him empty-handed but will accomplish what He pleases and prosper in the thing to which it was sent. Let that fruitfulness be true not only of God's Word but also of us, in whom the Word of God has been engrafted and embodied and shared for His kingdom's sake.

I am honored to pick up your mantle as the editor of the *Bible Advocate*, and I pray that those million blessings you have sent our way rebound and redouble upon you and yours for your work of faith and labor of love on our behalf.



Harvest

Old failures
haunt my memory,
mock and taunt me,
molest my peace of mind.
The stench of them
chokes and suffocates my spirit.
The pain of them
paralyzes me with despair,
renders me hopeless
until I remember
that the heart, like the grape,
tends to yield its harvest of sweetness
in the moment of crushing.

Sandra H. Bounds



General Conference Convention

- Hilton Inn and Wisconsin Center in Milwaukee
- June 29 – July 4, 2015
- Program Theme: “Worship His Majesty”
- Convention Planning Committee: Ken and Mary Jean Knoll, Sam and Maria Holland, Harold and Vona Ogren, Brad Ciavarella, Gordon Kuryluk, Dawn Wayman
- Registration, ushering, counting coordinators: Jody McCoy, David Babbitt, Rex Miller

Worship and the spoken word: large group sessions twice daily, focusing on the prophecies, birth, life, death, resurrection, and return of Jesus Christ the Lord

- Sabbath attendance: 1,100+, mostly from Canada and the United States, with guests from Mexico, Jamaica, St. Martin, England, Nigeria, and Pakistan

Conference business: Fifteen hours in session, focus-

ing on proposed bylaw revisions called for by the 2013 conference-in-session (report below)

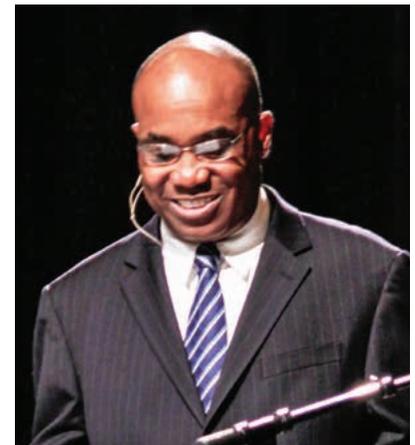
- registered for business: 687
- “State of the Church” address by Whaid Rose (read it in *baonline.org*)
- Board of Directors (2015-17): Mark Caswell, Brad Ciavarella, Sam Holland (chairman), Dennis O’Banion (vice-chairman), Joshua Gutierrez, Jose Hernandez (secretary), Wayne Hrenyk, Greg Lincoln (treasurer), Rubeen Marquez Sr., Raul Romo, Manuel Salazar, Larry Zaragoza
- Nominating Committee (2015-17): Bryan Cleeton, Brian Larson, Abel Salazar, Bruce Noble (chairman)
- Amendments Committee (2015-17): Chip Hinds, Israel Steinmetz, Raul Romo (chairman)

Convention activity: programs for children, youth, young adults, women; seminars on Christian education, church

finance, and aspects of worship; LifeSpring School of Ministry’s graduation event, featuring 25 of 39 graduates (2013-2015), including seven women, first-time graduates from four new LifeSpring programs, and the first bachelor of arts in Christian Ministry graduate (Ismael Martinez); focus meals and booth space for LifeSpring, Spring Vale, Bible Advocate Press, and G. C. Missions.

Highlight: Sabbath evening service in which outgoing General Conference President Whaid Rose passed the CoG7 leadership torch to the new president, Pastor Loren Stacy of Lodi, California. This was followed by a convention choir and brass presentation, directed by Dr. Ross Jutsum: “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” “God of Our Fathers,” and “Hallelujah Chorus”!

Bylaws business: An old chorus says that there is peace wherever the Spirit of the Lord is. Those words were



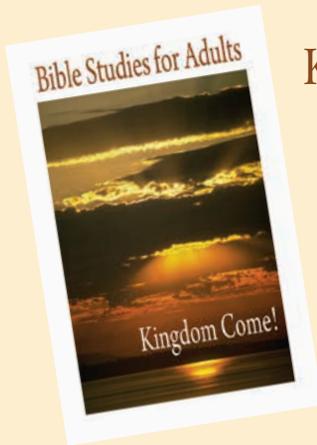
proven true during the Milwaukee convention's business. These sessions could easily have become hurtful and divisive because of members' passions about a proposed revision of our bylaws, but they did not. As many members devoted themselves to prayer that the business would be conducted in a way that honored God, so it was.

Discussion of and amendments to the proposed bylaw revisions proceeded in an orderly, sometimes tense, sometimes humorous fashion, keeping chairman and members alike on their parliamentary toes. In the end, time expired before the process could be completed. The revision was referred to the Bylaws Revision Committee, with instructions to report again during our 2017 convention and to preserve the work done during the 2015 convention.

The members also adopted a resolution instructing the 2017 Convention Planning Committee to schedule business meetings morning and afternoon Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday and Thursday morning. This was done to ensure that a decision regarding the proposed bylaws revision will be achieved during the 2017 convention. (Alternative seminars and sessions will be prepared in case business is completed early.)

Two additional resolutions were adopted. The first called for the formation of a committee to provide a plan (and any needed bylaw amendments) that would enable Conference members to electronically vote from their





Kingdom Come!

The thirteen-lesson Sabbath school quarterly for October-December 2015 focuses on the blessed hope of God's coming kingdom. Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come" and instructed us to "Seek . . . first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:10, 33, KJV).

What is this kingdom? Where will it be, and what will it be like? How is the kingdom present now, and how does our anticipation of its full arrival impact our lives today? These questions and more are tackled in this important study, suitable for home or church.

Order from Bible Advocate Press, P.O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233; e-mail bap.orders@cog7.org; or call 303-452-7973.

homes during the election of board of directors members. The second called for the formation of another committee to draft a bylaws amendment that would allow members at the convention, but serving elsewhere during the business meetings (children's program, teen program, etc.), to vote for members of the board of directors and Nominating Committee.

Chairman Loren Stacy is grateful for the services of Allan Burlison, parliamentarian, and for the respectful behavior of all members. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there truly is peace.



Publications

Through print and the Internet,
we are sharing the message of
Christ with the world.

September is Publications Emphasis Month

Pastoral Appreciation

These men received pins from CoG7 in mid-2015, recognizing their years of service in ordained ministry:

70+ years: Jesse Rodgers, Rudy, AR

60+ years: Robert Coulter, Thornton, CO; Paul Heavilin, Muskegon, MI; Roy Marrs, Lodi, CA; Max Morrow, Owosso, MI; Antonio Vega, Lanham, MD.

50+ years: Calvin Burrell, Stayton, OR; Hugh Buttrick, Albuquerque, NM; Richard Cress, Muldrow, OK; Aaron Fauth, Wapato, WA; Roy Keim, Dodge, TX; Stanford Lewis, Brooklyn, NY; Carl Palmer, Spokane, WA; Glen Palmer, Denver, CO; Wesley Walker, Ft. Smith, AR.



Daniel Camero



Ben Coulson



Larry Childers

40+ years: Daniel Camero, Von Ormy, TX; Jerome Camero, Sacramento, CA; Larry Childers, Nampa, ID; Ben Coulson, Pochontas, AR; Vernon Dickinson, McCloud, OK; Kenneth Durham, Seattle, WA; Kenneth Knoll, Eugene, OR; Kenneth Lawson, Cottage Grove, MN; Nathan Lawson, Conroe, TX; Nick Nimchuk, Medicine Hat, ALB; Gerald Ped-

ersen, Tigard, OR; Samuel Sanchez, Sacramento, CA; George Tolbert, Thornton, CO.

25+ years: David Gartner, Joplin, MO; John Howell, Tacoma, WA; Steve Kyner, Jamestown, ND; Earl Lewis, Neck City, MO; Melvin Reuscher, Lodi, CA; Don Rodgers, Rudy, AR; Whaid Rose, Denver, CO; Loren Stacy, Lodi, CA.

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International Congress

Asia and the Islands

Pakistan. In the city of Faisalabad, CoG7 has constructed and opened a Bible seminary. Classes began August 10, with more than 70 ministry students expected. Vocational and technical training (sewing, etc.) are planned. A SHINE mobile medical clinic is anticipated, as well as agriculture projects to sustain the church's ministry. Shamas Pervaiz leads the church here with Cristo Viene support from G. C. Missions.

India. More than 75 CoG7 pastors and evangelists receive support through Cristo Viene. Orphans and Widows ministry is also active here. Pastor Jacob Rao, who serves as general secretary of India's 250 CoG7 congregations, recently met with 40 Punjab pastors to present the Church's distinct teachings. The Indian Church's influence also extends into Bangladesh.

Myanmar. Asian Christian Theological Seminary is in its second year, with eleven students

under the tutelage of Tluang Kung (M.Th.). Trained leaders will increase CoG7's ability to reach this Buddhist nation with the good news. Land and building expansion is anticipated, as well as agriculture projects to sustain its growth and assist orphans and widows.

Malaysia and Thailand. In these Muslim and Buddhist countries, respectively, CoG7 is beginning work among refugees from Pakistan and Myanmar. In Bangkok alone, there are 5,000 Pakistani Christian refugees. Through Cristo Viene, pastors can be supported to plant the Church in these countries.



Indonesia. Indonesian Pastor Alfred Ander, his wife, and family sing for a group near the city of Manado.

Philippines. Under Pastor Billy Abugan's leadership, the Church reports 79 churches in this mostly Catholic nation. Bible Training Institute equips pastors and leaders here, and translation of *This We Believe* is underway.

Outreach opportunities also exist in Nepal, Bhutan, U.A.E., Qatar, Oman, and Saudi Arabia. Pray for more workers!

IMC Sabbath. Join CoG7 congregations in 50-plus countries as they celebrate God's work through International Ministerial Congress. Details will be sent through national leaders, or request them from gcmisions@cog7.org or hebervega@gmail.com.

— Bryan Cleeton





Looking Back, Looking Forward

Leadership expert John Maxwell posits five levels of leadership. The first is Position. The second is Permission. As of July 5, I have been loaned the position of General Conference president. But in order to reach Maxwell's third level of leadership, Production, I need Permission to lead from those I serve. I hope to begin earning trust through this self-introduction. I want you to know that I am devoted to Jesus Christ and to the Church of God (Seventh Day).

I was born to Carl and Alvina Stacy in 1952. My father pastored the Los Angeles CoG7, a position he held until his death at the hands of a drunk driver in 1954. In 1958, Mom married Roy Marrs, a widower with a daughter and three sons and himself a CoG7 minister. Our blended family settled in Southern California, where our parents taught school and my new dad volunteered as pastor of the LA congregation.

As a young man, I earned degrees (bachelors in English/music, masters in education) and a teaching credential from the University of Southern California. I began a teaching career, enjoyed sailing and flying, and in 1978 married my wife, Karen, with whom I enjoy three married children, their spouses, and (so far) two grandchildren.

Dad and Mom regularly took us to Saturday night Youth for Christ rallies. At one of those rallies in June 1960, I watched a film in which Billy Graham issued an invitation, and I gave my life to Jesus Christ. Soon thereafter, I was baptized by Elder E. A. Straub in a pay-by-the-fish trout pond near our Bloomington, California church. My relationship with Christ and our church was cemented in the following years as my parents enabled me to attend youth camps and Church conferences.

My call to pastoral ministry came in 1979 while Karen and I were members of the Har-

risburg, Oregon church, enjoying the spiritual leadership of Pastor Ken Knoll and his wife, Mary Jean. We moved to Denver, Colorado, where I earned a Master of Divinity degree from Summit School of Theology and worked as editor of *The Harvest Field Messenger* September 1979 – March 1981. I then was sent to Lodi, California, to intern under Pastor Mike Vlad and West Coast District Overseer Ken Lawson. When Pastor Vlad resigned as pastor in November 1981, I was ordained and made pastor of Lodi CoG7.

One of the many blessings the Lodi church afforded me in thirty-three years was the opportunity to also serve our church in other roles. While pastoring, I served the General Conference as Youth Agency director, West Coast District overseer, board of directors member and chairman, Ministerial Council secretary and president, Ministerial Training System regent, LifeSpring School of Ministry instructor, and member of too many committees to remember. What a pleasure it has been to serve, learn, and grow! Thanks, Lodi!

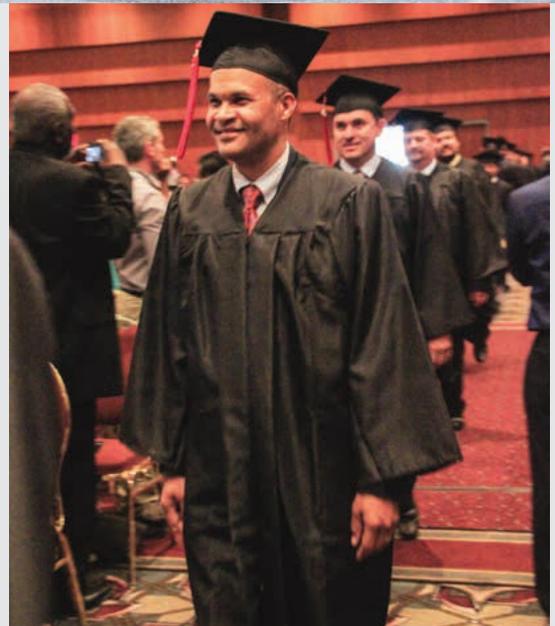
General Conference President Whaid Rose worked with such ease and grace, he made it appear easy. I know it is not. As Executive Director Jody McCoy and I grasp the baton President Rose passes to us in full stride, we ask God's help, and yours. My deepest desire is that we all may preserve "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" that is ours in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 4:3). By God's grace, we will! Our vision of a vibrant 21st century church is still before us. By God's grace, we will attain it!

— Loren Stacy





LifeSpring School of Ministry
graduating classes (2013-15) received
diplomas in Milwaukee, a reminder to
pray for laborers.



CoG7 members debated and
amended much of the proposed
bylaws revision and ended
the week in peace, a cause for
praise! For complete convention
coverage, see pp. 26-28.

