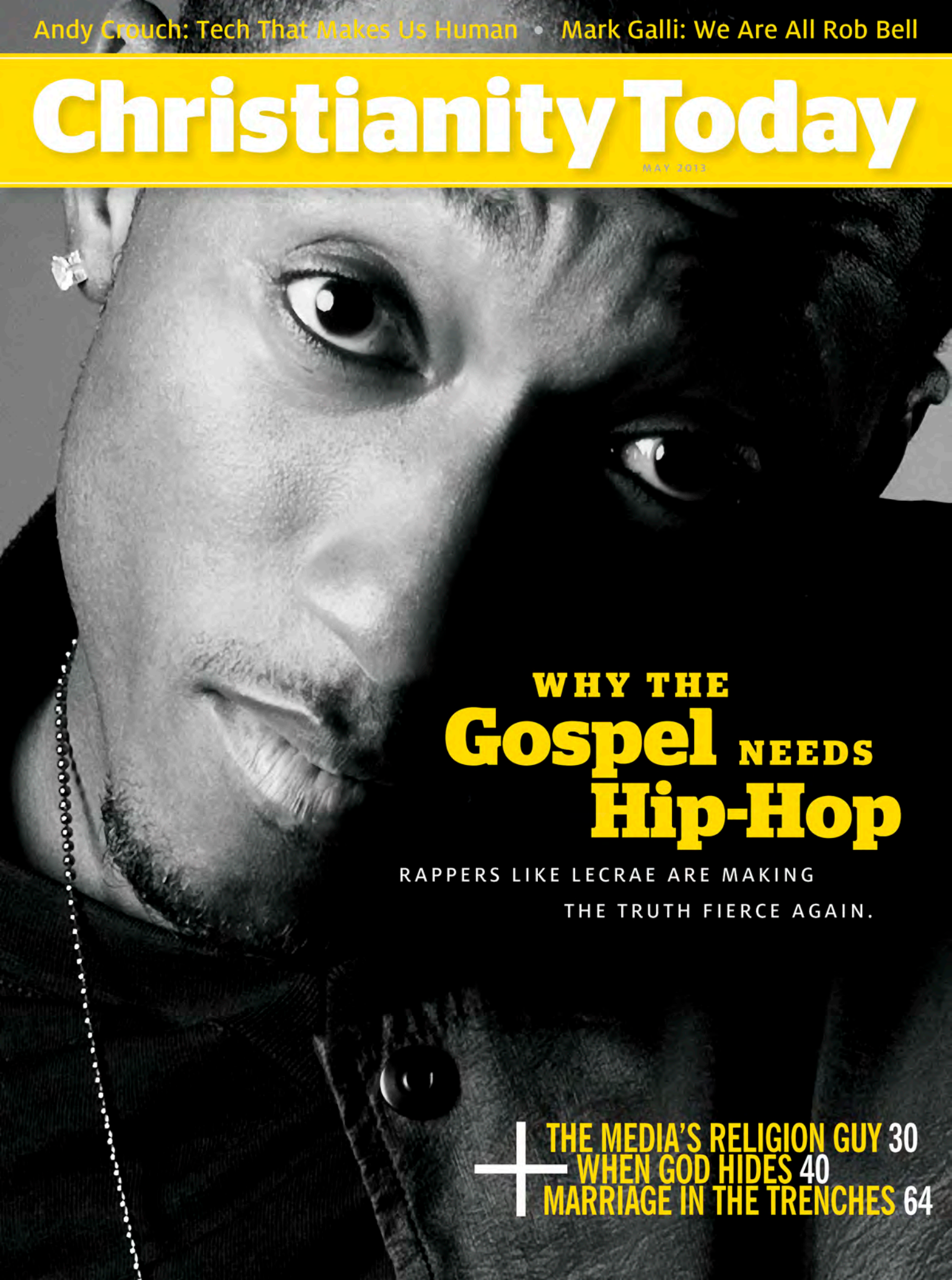


Andy Crouch: Tech That Makes Us Human • Mark Galli: We Are All Rob Bell

Christianity Today

MAY 2013



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+ THE MEDIA'S RELIGION GUY 30
WHEN GOD HIDES 40
MARRIAGE IN THE TRENCHES 64

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Executive Editor

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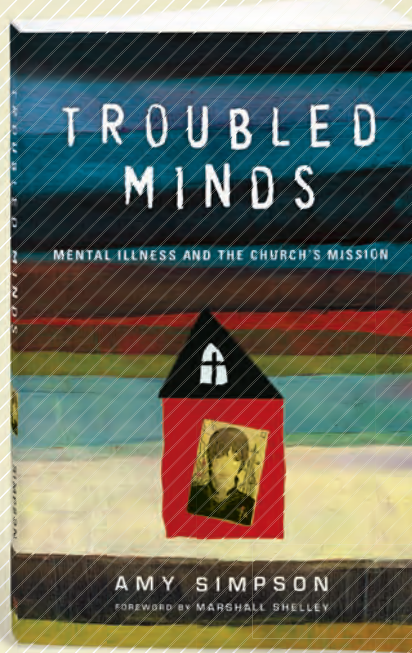
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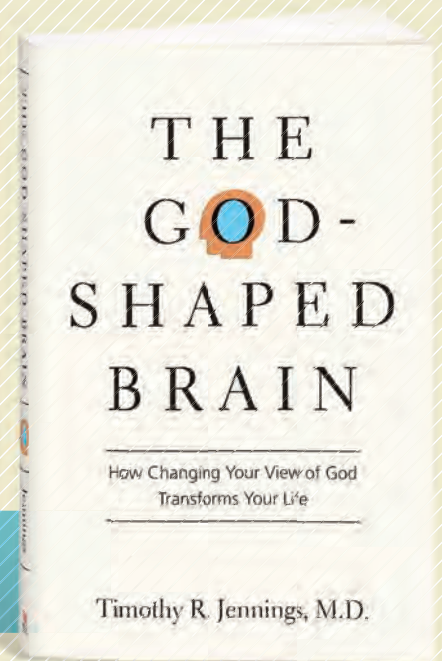
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Holy Hip-Hop Grows Up

But I'm still grateful for ccm's golden era.

If you wanted to trace the roots of Christian hip-hop, I'd tell you all about dc Talk.

At age 13, following a Geoff Moore and the Distance concert, I stood up to commit myself to Jesus, despite the voice inside my head that said the boys in my youth group would think I was a dork for doing so. Riding home in the backseat that night, I felt "my heart strangely warmed," and I've been a Jesus freak ever since.

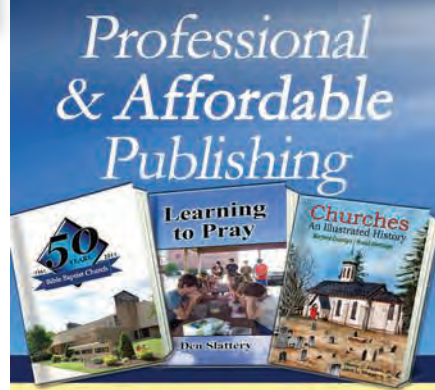
After that concert in 1996, I naturally wanted to listen to music about Jesus—and being a teenager in the mid-'90s, I had plenty to choose from. This was arguably the golden era of contemporary Christian music (CCM), when you could hear Jars of Clay's "Flood" and Sixpence None the Richer's "Kiss Me" on secular radio, and Tooth & Nail Records and bands like MxPx and Starflyer 59 made it possible to be both cool and Jesus-y.

dc Talk's *Jesus Freak* album had recently gone double platinum, debuting at 16 on the Billboard charts. Mixing rock, pop, and hip-hop, it was a derivative of Nirvana and A Tribe Called Quest, calling American Christians to stand up for truth when debates about prayer in public schools threatened to silence them. (Then again, we always had See You at the Pole.) I listened to the CD nonstop.

That dc Talk copied secular artists for evangelistic ends fit them neatly into the history of CCM, a subgenre born in the late-'60s that often takes the best of non-Christian music and baptizes it with biblical lyrics. But the Christian hip-hop scene has evolved. As this month's cover story suggests, a new crop of artists—including the one on our cover, Lecrae—is transcending CCM's copycat ways by mixing beats and rhymes that would hold up in any Kanye West comparison. And they're doing so, argues theologian Russell Moore, in ways that return hip-hop to its very roots and infuse the gospel with renewed edge. Call it "W.W.Jay-Z," which starts on page 22.

Back to dc Talk. In their early days—I mean *Nu Thang* early, 1990—they released a song called "I Luv Rap Music." A sampling: "Ya know, I asked Christ to come into my heart / And he gave me a brand new start / And on top of dat, he gave me my dreams / Doin' hip-hop music with a Christian theme." It goes without saying that "hip-hop music with a Christian theme" has grown up, thankfully. But I'd also challenge any reader to a word-by-word recount of all the verses in "Jesus Freak," which nearly 20 years ago helped more deeply plant this once-new Christian into the Word. Word.

Next issue: Economist Bruce Wydick examines why child sponsorship is so effective; Leslie Leyland Fields looks at the church-based fitness craze; and Steven R. Guthrie explains why our souls need more singing.



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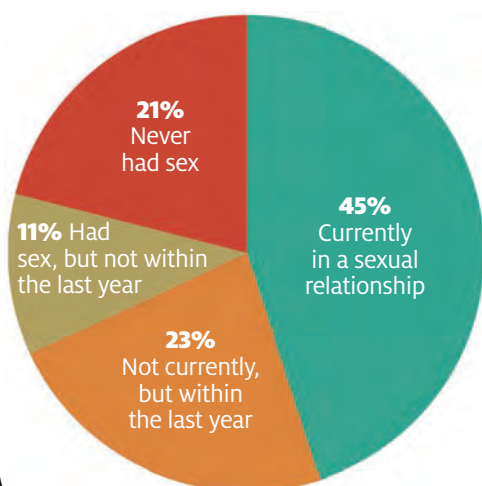
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REPORTING & DISPATCHES FROM THE CHURCH WORLDWIDE

Briefing

SPOTLIGHT: The Sex Lives of Unmarried Evangelicals

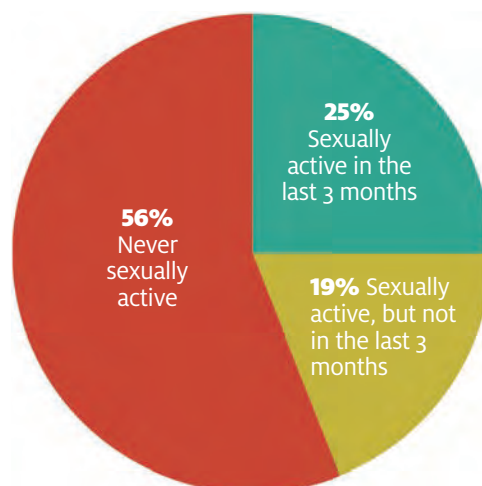
☞ It was the statistic shouted around the church: 80 percent of young unmarried evangelicals have had sex. “Christians are having premarital sex and abortions as much (or more) than non-Christians,” said *Relevant* (a magazine marketed to 20-something evangelicals). “Chastity is not the norm.” But a more recent survey said most unmarried evangelicals have never been sexually active. Who’s right?



National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy/Guttmacher Institute

Which do you believe?

Two different surveys, both working with the National Association of Evangelicals, asked unmarried evangelicals ages 18–29 about their sexual behavior. The results differed dramatically.



Grey Matter Research

Which is right?

Probably both, depending on how you define *evangelical*. The National Campaign survey asked if respondents considered themselves a “born-again Christian, evangelical, or fundamentalist”—31 percent of them said yes. The Grey Matter survey used a six-point test: its “evangelicals” were respondents who attend church at least monthly and hold traditionally evangelical beliefs on salvation, the Bible, evangelism, and active faith—which was only 10 percent of those ages 18–29. In other words: If you call yourself an evangelical but don’t go to church or hold evangelical beliefs, you’re also unlikely to stay chaste.

What makes a difference:



YES

BIBLE READING? Evangelicals who infrequently read the Bible were 70 percent more likely to have been recently sexually active than frequent Bible readers.



YES

CHURCH ATTENDANCE? Evangelicals who attend church less than weekly were more than twice as likely to have been recently sexually active than weekly attenders.



NO

CONVERSION? Of the sexually active singles, 92 percent had sex after becoming “born again.” That’s largely because the average age when evangelicals under 40 became “born again” was 8.



1



2



5

GLEANINGS

Important developments in the church and the world.

1 Argentina's pastors love Pope Francis

ARGENTINA The first Roman Catholic pope from the Americas has won strong praise from evangelical leaders in Argentina—but it's not just hometown pride. Pope Francis's election "has been an answer to our prayers," said Norberto Saracco, coleader of Buenos Aires's council of pastors. He's impressed by former archbishop Jorge Mario Bergoglio's passion for prayer and church unity. International evangelist and Argentine native Luis Palau expects a papacy that will "make [Catholic-evangelical] relations easier and lessen tensions," given Francis's moral convictions and biblical faith.

Dakota after 6 weeks (in some cases). However, a federal judge overturned a similar Idaho law that banned abortions after 20 weeks. The laws attempt to end abortions at the point when fetuses reportedly begin to feel pain. The ruling prompted many experts to say fetal-pain laws, which now exist in nine states, could be the next abortion battle—one likely to reach the U.S. Supreme Court.

4 Do adoptive parents have to be married?

SCOTLAND An adoption agency "does not provide public benefit" if it requires prospective parents to be married. So said Scotland's charity regulator regarding a Catholic agency in Glasgow. It stripped St. Margaret's Children and Family Care Society of its charity status because the agency's policies amount to "unlawful discrimination" against unmarried and same-sex couples. This "outweighs the other positive effects of the charity's work," the government office said. St. Margaret's can comply with equality laws or appeal the decision.

2 Blasphemy charges alive and well

PAKISTAN Blasphemy remains a hot-button issue in Pakistan. A drunken quarrel between friends led to accusations of blasphemy, which in turn sparked the nation's largest religious riot in nearly four years. A mob burned down 150 homes in a Christian colony in Lahore. (A similar riot in Gojra burned nine Christians to death in 2009.) Meanwhile, dissident church members accused a Salvation Army pastor of blaspheming the Bible. Denomination officials said the charges were unfounded, but relocated the pastor and his family for their safety.

3 The next abortion battleground

In March, state lawmakers approved the tightest abortion restrictions in the United States. Arkansas banned abortions after 12 weeks of pregnancy, and North

5 Life after C. J. Mahaney

Sovereign Grace Ministries (SGM) founder C.J. Mahaney announced in March that he would step down as president of the beleaguered network of churches. The announcement came shortly after SGM asked a Maryland court to dismiss a lawsuit alleging its leaders covered up the sexual abuse of children. Critics were hoping Mahaney would acknowledge the accusations or apologize, but Mahaney just said he wanted to focus on pastoring a local church. He did not apply for SGM's new executive director position because his

"gifts and sense of call [were not] the best fit for certain aspects" of the role.

6 Family fraud at million-person church

SOUTH KOREA Prosecutors are investigating David Yonggi Cho, 77-year-old founder of the world's largest congregation, for an alleged "breach of trust" that may have cost Yoido Full Gospel Church more than US\$9 million. They are also investigating him on suspicion of tax evasion (he is said to owe US\$5.5 million in taxes). Korean news sources also say that his son Cho Hee-jun has been arrested for allegedly selling stock to the church at a rate almost four times higher than market value, costing the church US\$14.5 million in damages. David Cho first came under investigation in 2011, when church elders accused him of embezzling US\$20 million. The church suspended 28 elders as "retaliation for blowing the whistle," said Korean sources.

7 Church to former pastors: Sorry!

An Indiana church recently invited four former pastors to return so the congregation could repent of sins that drove the leaders away. Peter A. Joudry, current pastor of Madison Assembly of God, hosted a reconciliation weekend where he and his wife washed the feet of the former pastors, whose tenures spanned three decades. Although many of the church's 260 current members are not the same men and women who caused the pastors to leave "wounded and deeply distressed," Joudry had congregants apologize for "misdeeds and un-Christlike attitudes," including gossip and publicly maligning them.

8 Why are children of divorce less religious?

Adults whose parents divorced are more likely to disconnect from institutional

GO FIGURE Church Life

Differences between churchgoers in New England and the rest of the United States:

"I try to put God first in my life."

60%

New Englanders who agree.

77%

Overall Americans who agree.

"I have significant relationships at my church."

53%

New Englanders who agree strongly.

40%

Overall Americans who agree strongly.

LifeWay Research



6

religion—but perhaps not for the reasons sociologists thought. It's not because of the divorce as such. According to Baylor University researchers, previous studies downplayed factors like being separated from a parent or stigmatized by the church. These factors, they say, may better predict the religious behavior of children of divorce.

9 Canada court endorses 'telling the truth in love'

CANADA Evangelicals found reason to cheer the Supreme Court of Canada's unanimous ruling against a Christian who distributed antigay pamphlets. The court upheld Saskatchewan's ban on hate speech but struck down provisions banning publications that "ridicule, belittle, or otherwise affront dignity of persons." "Essentially the court affirmed the biblical principle of telling 'the truth in love,' while cautioning as to where the line is drawn that would result in telling the truth in a hateful fashion," said Don Hutchinson, vice president of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, which intervened in the case.

10 Trafficking takes a hit

INDIA International Justice Mission (IJM) recently won a landmark legal victory against sex trafficking in India. In a case IJM has pursued since 2009, a Kolkata court sentenced five men to 10 years in prison for human trafficking and rape. The ruling against Nakul Bera and others connected to his brothel is "the first time this particular court gave a conviction for both trafficking and rape in the same case," IJM noted.

11 The Bible for unbelievers

About 4 in 10 Americans watched at least one episode of the History Channel's miniseries *The Bible*, and 7 in



11

10 said they learned something new. The Barna Research survey, on behalf of the American Bible Society, also found that more than a quarter of the show's viewers—more than 13 million total viewers for the premiere and more than 10 million in subsequent weeks—said they were not Christians. "Our greatest hope is that this series will affect a new generation of viewers and draw them back to the Bible," said Mark Burnett, who created and produced the series with his wife, Roma Downey.

12 It's a free market for casket sales

In March, the Fifth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that Louisiana monks at St. Joseph Abbey may sell handmade caskets from their monastery. They had been opposed by Louisiana's funeral home directors, who claimed a sole right to sell caskets in the state. The court decided that the existing ban had "no rational basis." The Benedictine monastery has struggled for years for the right to sell simple, wooden (and inexpensive) caskets to fund their medical and education work.

13 A strange way to fight same-sex marriage

RUSSIA The response of some Christians to same-sex marriage apparently knows no bounds. A small group of Christians in Russia has demanded that the United States relinquish control of Alaska. The Moscow lawsuit alleged that President Barack Obama's support for gay marriage will infringe upon the religious freedom of Alaska's 50,000 Russian Orthodox Christians. It also cited "technical violations" in the 1867 treaty between the two nations that legalized the sale of Alaska. However, the lawsuit was tossed out due to the group's failure to submit all of the required paperwork.

QUOTATION MARKS

"You [don't] get to vote on what God actually believes."

Atheist **Penn Jillette**, challenging CNN anchor Piers Morgan on disagreement by many Catholics with the pope's stance against contraceptives to prevent disease in Africa.

CNN

"We exhale, perhaps, but do not rejoice."

Columnist **Jonathan Merritt**, critiquing Christians who publicly celebrated the March death of Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez.

Religion News Service

"I've kind of separated myself from the culture of Christianity."

Mumford and Sons frontman **Marcus Mumford**, saying he favors "Jesus" over organized religion.

Rolling Stone

"Without this plan, I would not have known God. . . . I have no regrets."

High-profile Hong Kong fortune teller **Tony Chan**, on converting to Christianity as he faced trial for attempting to defraud the estate of one of the world's richest women.

South China Morning Post

"We're trying to create tens of thousands of Kirk Camerons and put them out there."

Liberty University chancellor **Jerry Falwell Jr.**, announcing a film partnership between the *Left Behind* actor-turned-director and the school.

Trinity Broadcasting Network

GO FIGURE Marriage

64%

Americans who believe legalization of same-sex marriage is inevitable.

50%

Born-again, evangelical, or fundamentalist Christians who believe this.

63%

Americans who support pastors' right to refuse to officiate same-sex weddings.

LifeWay Research



MISSIONS

Rx Renaissance: Medical missions conferences are enjoying record attendance, while Southern Baptists report an all-time high of 300 doctors at mission hospitals, such as this one in Ghana.

Missionaries Changing Medicine

Why we'll see more impressive discoveries in the field. By Ken Walker

Mississippi pediatrician Hannah Gay has done something never accomplished before: She has apparently cured a baby born with the AIDS virus. The final verdict is still out, but the child has been off antiretroviral drugs for two and a half years, with only traces of HIV remaining.

Gay is not just a pediatrician, but also a former Southern Baptist missionary to Ethiopia. As such, she has made just one of many significant discoveries by current and former medical missionaries worldwide.

Such contributions are not new. In the 1950s and '60s, Irish doctor Dennis Burkitt identified a new type of cancer that came to be called "Burkitt's lymphoma" while investigating jaw tumors in Ugandan children. Jack Hough, who played a key role in the founding of global Christian health organization MAP International, was a pioneer in microscopic ear surgery. Surgeon Paul

Brand earned acclaim for his innovative treatment of leprosy patients in India.

Russ White's research on esophageal cancer at Tenwyck Hospital in Bomet, Kenya, is a current example. By placing a stent inside tumors, he has successfully treated the region's most common malignancy.

"Christian-inspired missionaries and nationals [have] made a huge contribution to global health," said Ray Martin, director of Christian Connections for International Health. He expects more progress.

Research faces less red tape in the mission field, says David Stevens, CEO of the Christian Medical and Dental Associations and a former missionary to Kenya. And an "enormous renaissance" in doctors doing medical missions has increased the opportunity for research.

When Stevens went to Kenya in 1980, he was one of only 3 doctors at his hospital; today there are 17. "[This] gives you . . . more time to

deal with issues and try innovative solutions."

Attendance at the Global Missions Health Conference in Louisville, Kentucky, has ballooned more than tenfold over the past 16 years. Meanwhile, attendance at the Christian Community Health Fellowship conference has quadrupled over the past four years. And the Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission Board reports an all-time high of 300 medical missionaries on the field.

"God is calling some of the best and brightest healthcare personnel to some of these difficult-to-reach areas," said Stevens. "So it's not surprising that they're coming up with some of these innovations." 

EDUCATION

Who Volunteers the Most?

Graduates of Protestant high schools, apparently. By Melissa Steffan

Religious Americans participate in charitable or volunteer organizations twice as much as do secular Americans. So says existing research. But a new study suggests that it's not people's religion that prompts them to become model volunteers, but which high school they attended.

According to Calvin College researchers Jonathan Hill and Kevin den Dulk, the type of high school people attend influences them more than any other factor—including religion, socioeconomic status, or family type. What type makes the most difference? Their study, published this March in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, shows that graduates of Protestant high schools out-volunteer peers from Catholic, secular, public, and home schools—all by significant margins.

The "counterintuitive" findings (researchers expected homeschoolers to be on top) stayed consistent

GO FIGURE Worship

60,000
The low-end estimate of the number of American churches singing Chris Tomlin's worship songs on any given Sunday in 2012.

128
Songs written (or cowritten) by Tomlin that churches used in 2012.

3.12 million
Estimated times Tomlin's songs were played in churches in 2012.

Christian Copyright Licensing International

throughout all tests, den Dulk says.

“Educational setting,” he said, has a value “beyond religious identity.”

The problem is no one knows exactly why Protestant schooling predicts the likelihood of volunteering.

David Sikkink, an associate professor of sociology at the University of Notre Dame whose research has found similar results, believes that somehow teachers implant a sense of civic duty in students’ minds.

Protestant schools tend to be strong communities where students get a sense of “collective identity,” he said, “and they get practice committing to the common good of the institutions.”

One possible explanation is the type of “opportunity structure” for community service that exists for graduates. Hill and den Dulk speculate that Protestant schools may provide better access to parachurch groups like Youth for Christ or InterVarsity, which are present in both high schools and colleges.

Another explanation could be the way Protestant teachers motivate students. Bill Cochran, director of school ministry for the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, says most of its teachers encourage students to love their neighbors not because it’s a civic duty, but because it’s a biblical one.

Robert Wuthnow, professor of sociology at Princeton and author of *Learning to Care*, says it may not matter where a student volunteers. His research indicates that the willingness to volunteer comes from both the quality of the service and debriefing sessions that follow.

“The key factor was coming to think of oneself as a caring person,” Wuthnow said. “That meant not just being good-hearted, but knowing that one had some skills that would carry forward.”

But the Calvin study suggests that Wuthnow may not be right, according to Hill.

“It’s more likely they just get in the habit of doing it and automatically

volunteer when there are opportunities,” he said. “Schools somehow affect people’s habits below the surface.”

LIFE ETHICS

Murky Plan B

The morning-after pill may not cause abortions.

By Ruth Moon

Conservative Christian companies and colleges naturally object to paying for drugs they believe essentially abort babies. So they’ve sued the government for insisting that they subsidize, through insurance programs, emergency contraceptives for employees.

But have they gotten it wrong? Do drugs such as Plan B really cause fertilized eggs not to implant?

Teva Pharmaceuticals, the creators of Plan B (the “morning-after pill”), has repeatedly asked the Food and Drug Administration to remove its warning label that the drug “may inhibit implantation by altering the endometrium [the inside lining of the uterus].” It increasingly is finding support within the medical research community.

The International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics, citing new research, declared last March that Plan B does not inhibit implantation but instead blocks fertilization. This February, Germany’s Catholic bishops also cited the research when they dropped their opposition to using morning-after pills in Catholic hospitals for victims of rape.

Evangelical bioethicists interviewed by CT remained critical of Plan B, but for various reasons.

Dennis Sullivan, director of Cedarville University’s Center for Bioethics, reviewed emergency contraceptive research for a peer-reviewed article in *Ethics & Medicine* last fall. He found a “lack of any substantial evidence” that Plan B causes abortions.

“Our claims of conscience should be based on scientific fact,” he said, “and we should be willing to

change our claims if facts change.”

Nonetheless, Sullivan has other problems with the drug, given that recent studies found it might only prevent about half of possible pregnancies. He fears many buy it without realizing how ineffective it is, and says the pharmaceutical industry is unethical to promote it.

“I hate Plan B, but we ought to hate it for the right reasons,” he said. “[It] has many ethical issues associated with it, but it’s not the monster that it’s portrayed to be.”

Not everyone agrees with the new research, however. The exact mechanism by which Plan B prevents pregnancies is not likely to be cleared up soon, says Donna Harrison, executive director of the American Association of Pro-Life Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

“How you ask the question determines what kind of answer you get,” she said. “What you don’t have is a lot of funding for research that asks, ‘Does this drug affect the embryo?’”

Less research has been done on ella (the “week-after pill”), about which there is more controversy because of its chemical similarity to RU-486—the drug used for early-pregnancy abortions.

More sexually active women than ever use such drugs, growing from 4 to 11 percent of such women over the past decade. Gene Rudd, senior vice president of the Christian Medical and Dental Associations and a practicing OB-GYN, said new research provides more evidence that Plan B may not affect fertilized eggs. However, he still does not recommend it because of its ineffectiveness and remaining questions of how it works.

In the meantime, Harrison says, doctors are responsible to warn patients.

“As a point of informed consent, it’s only honest to say it’s possible that this may have postfertilization effects,” she said. “If that matters to you, this is not the contraceptive of choice.”

PASSAGES



Selected

Mark Labberton

As president of Fuller Theological Seminary. The director of Fuller’s Institute of Preaching will replace longtime president Richard Mouw in June.



Named

Jim Mellado

As president of Compassion International. The Willow Creek Association president will succeed Wess Stafford in September.



Appointed

Melissa Rogers

As director of the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships. Rogers, a Baptist church-state expert, previously chaired its first advisory council.

[continued on 16]

EDUCATION

A New Creation Story

Why do more homeschoolers want evolution in their textbooks? By Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra

Christian homeschool science textbooks have long taught young earth creationism (YEC) almost exclusively. But observers say a growing number of parents want texts that also teach evolution.

“Homeschooling has broadened so much, and now includes many Christian groups who have never adopted [YEC],” said homeschool pioneer Susan Wise Bauer, a history professor at Virginia’s College of William and Mary. “Also, there are a lot of younger evangelicals who have come to a different way of understanding Genesis, while still holding [on to their] evangelical roots.”

Numbers on the trend are hard to pin down. Still, BioLogos president Deborah Haarsma says that it’s “fairly common” for homeschooling

families to request materials from her organization, which promotes theistic evolution. Some of these parents still believe in a young earth, says program director Kathryn Applegate, but they want their children exposed to different perspectives.

Doug Hayworth, coordinator of homeschool science resources for the American Scientific Affiliation, agrees. Inquiries to his Christian association reveal not a wave of old-earth converts, but instead frustrated young-earth believers who believe that “the standard [YEC] curricula . . . are very strident,” said Hayworth, who homeschools. “They’re looking for some advice.”

Curricula for such families have been hard to find, said Wise Bauer. “I am consistently frustrated when evaluating resources. There really isn’t much.”

Sonlight Curriculum is an exception. It offers a diversity of homeschool curricula that allow parents to teach various theories of origins.

“The YEC position is strong and ingrained in the homeschool movement,” said Sonlight president Sarita Holzmman, who homeschools her children and believes in a young earth. “That might be to our detriment.” She says students need to be

DISCUSSION STARTER Giving

A recent study found that churches where pastors know how much is donated and by whom were more likely to be doing well financially. However, only half of the 3,000 responding congregations (and only 39 percent of evangelical ones) told the Lake Institute on Faith and Giving that their pastors knew this information.

able to evaluate different positions.

Two professors at Bryan College, a CCCU school where 27 percent of incoming students are home-schooled, agree.

“Many homeschool parents contact me or show up at my office and quietly say, ‘Is there anything besides [YEC]?’” said Kenneth Turner, a theology professor at the traditionally YEC college who homeschools.

With a recent grant from BioLogos, Turner and colleague Brian Eisenback, a biology professor, are writing a textbook that discusses the history of the science of origins, as well as different positions scientists have taken on Genesis and origins. They will include material on YEC, evolutionary creationism, intelligent design, and atheistic evolution.

A similar BioLogos project is underway at Wheaton College, where five professors are working on a textbook covering the current scientific consensus on origins.

Sonlight cofounder John Holzmman believes the books will find a market of homeschooling parents who perhaps aren’t shifting views so much as becoming more polarized and public with their previously hidden positions. “At this point there is more ‘coming out,’ if you will.”

UNDER DISCUSSION Topics in the current debate.

compiled by Ruth Moon

Should pastors know how much church members give?

YES

“This notion of pastors not knowing how much people give is a recent development, born out of a materialistic, individualistic society. As a pastor, you’re the doctor of the congregation. You’ve got to be looking at diagnostic information, and there’s none better than financial giving.”

JIM SHEPPARD
CEO, Generis

“A pastor doing ministry should have access to financial data and use it in ways that are prescriptive, descriptive, and diagnostic. They’re entrusted with other personal challenges: birth and death and the life experience in between. Money shouldn’t be any different.”

AIMÉE LARAMORE
associate director, Lake Institute

“Our research found 83 percent of pastors think most church members don’t want them to know how much individuals give, while 78 percent think the information can help assess a member’s spiritual health. The metaethical question: Give to do what?”

JOHN AND SYLVIA RONSVALLE
empty tomb inc.

“Not necessarily, but there are things pastors should know. The pastor could be notified when someone starts giving, stops giving, or gives a large gift for a special purpose. When deciding on future leaders, it is also helpful to know if those being considered are faithful givers.”

BRIAN KLUTH
founder, stateoftheplate.info

“Biblical principles support faithful giving in secret. Moses commanded a flat tax where all supported the temple equally; Jesus said to practice charity in secret. The real stewardship question is whether we want to simply raise funds or biblically create disciples.”

GARY MOORE
founder, the Financial Seminary

“No. The temptation to play favorites, to cater to the biggest givers’ wishes, and to ignore the less-than-faithful givers is great. Not knowing what people actually give avoids these temptations. Other church leaders should be responsible for biblically encouraging more sacrificial giving.”

MICHAEL EMERSON
sociologist, Rice University

NO



Life at the Margins: Outside of Sarajevo, Bosnian Roma gather to celebrate Djurdjevdan (St. George's Day). Some 80,000 Bosnian Roma remain in exile 18 years after the regional Balkans conflict ended in 1995.

MISSIONS

God Among the Roma

Dreams, visions, and healings spur new disciples among the 10–12 million Roma in Europe. By Melody Wachsmuth in Croatia

A

shivering 15-year-old, Biljana Nikolić, stood shielding her one-month-old on a street corner in Serbia as a fierce thunderstorm whipped through town.

Biljana leaned against a house to steady herself against the wind. She was fleeing her abusive second husband—less than a year after running away from her first husband, a man her mother forced her to marry. She watched her baby struggle to breathe, and remembered a song her aunt taught her when she was 9: *I have a phone that goes up into the sky, when I have problems I can call Jesus.*

“God, I know you are here and that you gave me this child,” she muttered, “but I

don’t know what to do with him. If you want, take him.”

Just then, a Serbian woman opened the door of the house Biljana was leaning against. She urged Biljana to come inside. It was the first of a long string of answers to prayer that would change her life.

Eventually, her first husband, Đeno, asked her to return to Croatia for the sake of their son. Yet the couple struggled for years. Grinding poverty compelled Biljana to beg on the streets, and forced Đeno to sift through trash for scrap metal to sell for cash. They had no legal documents and no civil rights in Croatia. Mutual growing bitterness resulted in violent arguments.

There seemed to be no end to their suffering—until 2004. While Biljana was begging

on the streets, a local Christian woman befriended her—an encounter that eventually led Biljana to give her life to Christ.

The change in Biljana’s life moved Đeno. “I would wake up in the night and see she was in tears praying for me,” he says. “I thought that she had surely cracked, but my conscience began to bother me for everything I did to her.” Slowly, his love for Biljana grew as he learned about the love of God, and he finally accepted Christ in 2007. They started maturing together in faith, albeit slowly. One thing that wasn’t slow, though, was their passion to serve their people—the Roma.

“Almost every time Biljana and I prayed, we prayed that somehow we could go and serve our people,” Đeno says, “but



Word and Worship: At the Gypsy Smith School (above), students use ethnic Roma music before class. At right, graduates gather at the Providence Baptist Church in Bucharest, Romania.

we didn't know how to start." Local Croatian Pentecostal pastors encouraged them to begin by fasting and praying for the Roma village of Darda.

AGENTS OF CHANGE

The Nikolićs represent a fresh wave of transformed Roma who are reaching out to their own despite enormous social and economic challenges.

Media reports of Christianity's rapid growth among Europe's 10 to 12 million Roma—stigmatized for generations as “Gypsies”—stand in contrast with the staggering prejudice they face. During the Holocaust, 200,000 to 500,000 died in Nazi death camps. Today they are the world's largest people group without their own nation state. There are 70 subgroups of Roma, mostly tracing their origins to northern India. A 2012 World Bank and European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights survey found their situation in Europe grim. Only 15 percent finish upper-secondary general or vocational education, fewer than 30 percent are employed, and about 45 percent live in households lacking an indoor kitchen, a toilet, a shower or bath, or electricity.

“There is urgency to this matter,” says Anne-Marie Kool, until recently a professor



of missiology at the Karoli Gaspar Reformed University in Budapest.

Factors leading to this state of affairs are complex, but basic social discrimination—found even in some churches—is a fact of daily life for Roma. Still, many Roma leaders believe the church holds the key to transformation for their people. “The only institution that can help the ‘Roma community’ on a global level is the church,” says local leader and seminarian Miodrag-Miša Bakić. “The people have lost hope in all of the political-social leaders and in every institution except the church.”

Bakić's family was converted after his brother was miraculously healed of throat cancer, and he is now preparing for ministry in the pastoral footsteps of his father. Roma leaders are walking alongside their people on the path from conversion to

transformation.

For example, in the 1970s, ethnic Serbian pastor Mio Stanković and his wife, Else, opened the doors of his small evangelical church of about 30 to the 8,000 to 10,000 Roma living in villages around Leskovac, Serbia. After 10 years, Roma trickled in when word spread of miraculous healings. Within 20 years, the congregation exploded in growth, and in 2004, the church of 1,000 decided to divide itself into two worshipping communities.

These churches, in turn, have become a base for missions, planting other Roma congregations in Serbia and reaching out to Roma communities in Croatia. Different languages, dialects, cultural groupings, and host countries make each Roma village unique. What unites them are miracles, dreams, and visions that lead to

conversion. “Our Gypsy people really want to see something—to feel the presence of God,” says Selim Olivić, one of the pastors in Leskovac.

Change is neither immediate nor easy, leaders told CT. “Roma people come easily to Jesus, to pray the Sinner's Prayer—and then they stop,” says Alexandar Subotin, founder and pastor of three churches and two

mission stations in northwest Serbia.

“At the moment they hear the gospel, they are usually without hope. They accept and have a fire in their heart, but they don't know how to put wood on the fire.”

Subotin was converted as a teenager and served in a local Serbian Pentecostal church until he began a Roma church in his village. He biked to other villages, as far as 35 miles away, in order to lead home groups and evangelize. Fifty Roma now attend his largest church, though he recognizes that many come just for humanitarian aid. Still, he aims to treat equally everyone who attends.

ACROSS-THE-BOARD OUTREACH

Systemic poverty, a survivalist mentality, low education levels, cultural isolation and persistent prejudice have conspired

to keep Roma at the bottom of European society.

But effective discipleship has a proven track record of transforming individuals and renewing Roma culture. That is the conclusion of scholar Miroslav Atanasov, who's completed groundbreaking research on Pentecostal Gypsies in Bulgaria. A key factor is grassroots Roma pastors having a comprehensive vision for ministry.

In 2008, Subotin placed new emphasis on the command from Christ to care for "the least" (Matt. 25:35–40)—no matter what it takes. His work requires him, depending on the need, to be a pastor, lawyer, advocate, nurse, and counselor. "He gave me these people, and I must serve them, work with them, encourage them," Subotin says, "not only to preach the gospel but to encourage them to work and have normal lives."

Subotin says instances of violence and witchcraft have decreased, and school attendance and legal marriages have increased. More Roma now have personal documents that give them legal status in society, and there is an increasing desire to find work and keep gardens and houses clean.

Subotin says, "I always tell them, 'We will be very proud of our nationality if we have a Roma doctor or lawyer.' They don't have this vision. Some go to high school, but when they hit puberty, hormones start to work and they want to be married."

Discouragement is constant, as is divine encouragement. At one point, pastor Olivici felt overwhelmed. At a prayer meeting, he sensed God asking him to get down on the floor. "I had a picture of Jesus coming down and taking my hand and saying, 'Get up. Lead my people, lead my people.' I really felt God wanted this from me."

The changes are evident even to local authorities, who now call Roma church representatives if there is an altercation between Serbs and Roma in Leskovac. Some Roma leaders now believe that God will use them to reach the majority culture: mostly Orthodox or Roman Catholics. "Serbians see hope in Roma people, in God," says Šerif Bakić, another pastor in Leskovac. "We wait for God to open the door to do big evangelizing so that everyone can see."

Influence is spreading regionally. Romania's population is declining, but independent Roma churches are growing 2 percent annually, even though their pastors do not have the same access to high-quality training as do pastors from established Christian groups.

A pastor and teacher, Marius Constantin, ministers in Romania and wants to see theological training improve among the Roma. Speaking about one problem of independent congregations, Constantin says, "A man with a lot of power, if he repents, can open a church and everyone has to listen to him. He doesn't know how to read and write, but he wants to be the boss."

'We wait for God to open the door to do big evangelizing so that everyone can see.'

~ Šerif Bakić, a Roma pastor

The Gypsy Smith School in Bucharest, Romania's largest city, is one of the few places in the country specifically designed to prepare Roma for ministry. It opened its doors in 1999; many of its 50 graduates are now serving as pastors, elders, deacons, youth and music ministers, church planters, and missionaries.

In 1999, three years after Florian Tanasie became a Christian, he felt a strong desire to translate the Bible into Romani. Even while working as a brick-maker, he started privately translating the Psalms. When he heard about the Gypsy Smith School, he telephoned and asked if he could study there. After graduating in 2000, he went for further study and then returned to brick-making.

"I was working with bricks every day, but constantly on my knees asking God to let me translate the Bible," Tanasie says. Finally, in 2006, he received an unexpected call from an old professor, which led to becoming a mother-tongue translator working with Wycliffe Bible Translators. So far he has helped to translate six books of the Bible into the Usari Romani dialect.

Pastor Adrian Petrovici claims that mentorship is also an effective way to train

Roma. "The biggest impact I see is after I finish a sermon. I sit with the people, I touch them, and I talk with them and eat with them."

JESUS IN DARDA

The fasting and praying by Biljana and Đeno began a two-year process of reaching out to the village of Darda.

Their ministry began to take definite shape in 2010, when pastor Šerif traveled the 265 miles from Leskovac to hold an evangelistic concert in Darda. Biljana and Đeno were surprised when Šerif insisted on visiting Roma homes afterwards, but they learned a lot about ministry in the process, even though they were reluctant at first.

While visiting one home, Šerif asked Đeno to pray for the host.

Đeno pleaded, "No, please, brother, I am not ready."

Darda villagers began to pay attention to Christian outreach when one woman, who had been bedridden

for four years, was miraculously restored to full health. This woman and her family immediately became Christians, and she and her husband were the first from the village to be baptized.

But after two years of discipling people, Đeno and Biljana became discouraged. Not much seemed to be happening. Then, in the fall of 2012, Đeno was in the garden studying his Bible when he felt God reaffirm his call to Darda. "This woke up some kind of joy in me to finally begin the church," he says.

Now that the church in Darda is up and running, Biljana and Đeno already see potential "coworkers" in it, and they are amazed at the new believers who are visiting families on their own.

But the couple realizes many challenges lie ahead. "God used everything we went through in this life," says Biljana. "Now I can understand my people and what they are going through. I can comfort abused women, girls who feel rejected and unaccepted, and orphans. If [this] was God's will—for the glory of his name, I am grateful."

Melody Wachsmuth, based in Croatia, blogs at balkanvoices.wordpress.com.

It was a Saturday morning and
my husband had gone out to ride
his bike. Then the phone rang . . .

I heard the words
“*life-flighted*” and
“*trauma center*”.

I’ve never felt so helpless!

Jim’s conditon was critical.
Subdural this, broken that . . .
Embolisms, induced coma . . .

The medical bills were staggering. Medi-Share was my rock. Members everywhere
were praying. And God gave us a miracle! It’s been a year. Jim’s back on his bike.
And all our expenses have been shared. Praise God for Medi-Share! —Nancy



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W.W. Jay-Z

HOW CHRISTIAN HIP-HOP
COULD CALL THE AMERICAN CHURCH
BACK TO THE GOSPEL—
AND HIP-HOP BACK TO ITS ROOTS.

Reaching the Masses:
When Lecrae's album
Gravity released last year,
it hit #3 on the Billboard
200 and #1 (and #2!) on the
iTunes hip-hop/rap chart.

A

HIGH SCHOOL in Beaver, Pennsylvania, recently went into security lockdown over a rap lyric. Actually, *rap* here is a stretch. It was the theme song of a 20-year-old sitcom starring Will Smith.

A school official called a student's voicemail and heard the *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* song on the student's phone. She mistook "shooting some b-ball outside of the school" as "shooting some people outside of the school," and dialed 9-1-1.

In light of shootings linked to popular media, from *The Matrix* to *The Dark Knight Rises*, her fear is understandable. But there's a parable here too. Even in its most commercialized, bubblegum form, hip-hop scares middle-class America. The thumping rhythm and defiant lyrics can conjure up pictures of gang violence, even in songs solely about basketball or love or heartbreak. Smith was right: Parents just don't understand.

The violent edge of rap—"it's just so angry"—is most often what I hear behind American Christians'

By Russell D. Moore

If country and gospel music are in the company of psalms of lament, hip-hop is in the territory of psalms of imprecation.

ambivalence about the new wave of Christian hip-hop. But not all of this ambivalence is reactionary, revealing white-bread taste. It's a real question: Can one authentically rap the Sermon on the Mount, with its Beatitudes, warnings against anger, and meekness? No doubt one can set Matthew 5–7 to rhyme and meter, but would it still be hip-hop? If not, does that rule hip-hop out as legitimate Christian art?

That was the question Ken Myers posed as we talked recently about Christian hip-hop artists Lecrae, Shai Linne, Trip Lee, and others (especially popular among the “young, restless, Reformed” wing of the church). Myers, host of *Mars Hill Audio* and one of the most respected Christian thinkers on pop culture, has long warned about the church's tendency to separate the message from the medium. He sees this as an almost gnostic attempt to disembodied everything but truth propositions from art.

Music sounds “like feelings feel,” said Myers. That's why no one could credibly suggest that Beethoven's “Ode to Joy” conjures “feelings of melancholy, humility, tentativeness, or ennui.” And no one could claim that Gregorian chants are “brimful of arrogance, assertiveness, anger, or brashness.”

By contrast, Myers said, “Hip-hop is quite successful in [expressing] raw energy barely contained; it is a form that dares its hearers to contradict its address with a threat of escalation or retaliation.” In other words, rap is anything but about “reticence, patience, self-giving, or submissiveness.”

“Hip-hop with a bowed head (or a bowed heart) is hard to imagine; it would be unfaithful to the spirit of hip-hop, and to the spirit of reverence,” Myers said as we continued talking over e-mail. One cannot, he said, rap the Sermon on the Mount without altering the fundamental meaning of either the text or the form, any more than one could easily perform

“Girlfriend in a Coma” set to Fleet Foxes' “White Winter Hymnal.” To use “pious and humble” hip-hop lyrics would be to ignore or denigrate “the musical vocabulary of hip-hop,” since it is a style “more at home with a confident swagger than with receptive poverty of spirit.”

Myers' critique of Christian hip-hop wasn't a fundamentalist scold, wary of the Devil's music. Instead, he was concerned for the integrity of hip-hop as an art form—as well as for the integrity of the Bible and

the Christian tradition. For him, Christian hip-hop seems to be the latest incarnation in the evangelical project to “engage culture” by separating form from message, and to bridge the divide between pop culture and the old, old story.

And he's right. So often our attempts to be relevant are just ham-handed attempts to market the gospel with popular cultural tropes. And no one can seriously argue that musical forms don't change “the message.” Moreover, I agree with Myers that hip-hop generally taps into a certain set of human emotions and situations, and not others.

But that's where our agreement ends. I think Christian hip-hop is more than just the latest attempt to slap a Jesus fish on the bumper of a pop-culture fad. Hip-hop is reminding the church about the reality of sin and grace—and returning the hip-hop community to its prophetic roots.

HOW DOCTRINE SOUNDS

Listen to the new Christian hip-hop once, and you'll note just how theological it is. The first time I heard a song by artist Flame was also the first time I heard the heresy “modalistic monarchianism” denounced by name in any song. “That's not the Scriptures that's confusion, / and it takes stabs at the hypostatic union,” raps the Louisville, Kentucky-based artist, before explaining the hypostatic union (the union of Jesus' divinity and humanity). Rap group 116 Clique, named after Romans 1:16, defends biblical inerrancy by using the term *theopneustos* (God-breathed)—also not

COURTESY OF REACH RECORDS



Trip Lee

The gospel rap movement has close ties to the NBA, and it's fitting to call Trip Lee the Russell Westbrook (Oklahoma City Thunder point guard) to Lecrae's Kevin Durant (the Thunder's small forward). The two are a dynamic duo. Trip, born William Lee Barefield III in Dallas, was disciplined by Lecrae in high school. A decade later, he won a Stellar Award, sold tens of thousands of copies of his albums, and wrote *The Good Life* (Moody Publishers).

Lee is known for his distinct Southern drawl and lyrics that capture the hope present in Christ amid the pressures of materialism, sex, and fame. An excerpt from the poignant “Take Me There,” based on a real-life story of a woman facing death: “She know sickness might get her and death might grab her / But she ain't scared of death 'cause she's trusted in the Master / Was buried but he rose up a few days after / So death may attack her but death cannot have her.” Trip recently announced that he will transition to pastoral ministry.



Shai Linne

Shai Linne is a Philadelphia rapper-theologian who emerged from what could be called the “underground” Christian rap world. In both mainstream and Christian rap, the “underground” is known for its lyricism and storytelling. Beats are often sparser; the sound is grittier. Linne avoids comparisons to other artists, but he reminds some of “conscious,” intellectually challenging rappers like Mos Def or Talib Kweli.

Linne is associated with Lamp Mode, a thriving record label that features rappers like Stephen the Levite, Hazakim, and Timothy Brindle. His recent album, *Attributes of God*, includes songs on the hypostatic union (the divine and human in Jesus), the self-sufficiency of God, and the Trinity. If rap has a reputation for being shallow, that caricature meets a ferocious challenge in Linne’s content.

the most common of lyrics, rap or otherwise.

The new hip-hop artists aren’t simply adapting apologetic arguments into their lyrics. Instead, they are modeling a broadly Reformed system of Christian doctrine, which is characterized by an emphasis on humanity’s depravity, God’s sovereignty, and divine election. Many of the leading rappers are associated with prominent Reformed pastors: Shai Linne and Trip Lee have both interned at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., led by popular pastor Mark Dever, and Lecrae and Tedashii regularly quote John Piper. Just as rapper will.i.am wove lines from President Barack Obama’s speeches into his songs during the 2008 presidential campaign, the preaching of well-known Reformed speakers—many of them Southern and white—is interspersed through the new Christian hip-hop music.

At first blush, this seems absurd. After all, hip-hop is far more akin to Malcolm X than to Cotton Mather—and for good reason. Some of the reigning defenses of 19th-century slavery were offered through the prism of Reformed theology, especially in its Presbyterian and Baptist forms. The Southern Calvinist concept of the “spirituality of the church” called white Southerners to “simply preach the gospel” and “avoid politics” during the Jim Crow era—which meant propping up state-sponsored terrorism against African American citizens. Even in the culture-redeeming Kuyperian strain of Reformed teaching, the apartheid of 20th-century South Africa stands to remind us that even the best

theology can be used to evil ends.

This history hasn’t gone unnoticed in Christian hip-hop circles. Artist Propaganda prompted an Internet firestorm with his blistering song “Precious Puritans,” which sought to remove the halos off the wigs of the dead white men revered by contemporary Reformed Christians:

You know they were the chaplains on
slave ships, right?
Would you quote Columbus to
Cherokees?
Would you quote Cortez to Aztecs?
Even if they theology was good?
It just sings of your blind privilege,
wouldn’t you agree?

Even so, the broadly Reformed tenor of contemporary hip-hop isn’t incidental, hopping aboard a faddish movement. Myers is right: form matters—and so does artistic tradition. We see this in the two largest attempts by Christians to appropriate existing pop-culture art forms in the last several decades: Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) and Southern gospel.

Starting in the 1960s and early ’70s, CCM drew largely from Top 40 pop music, a genre fixated on the awakenings—especially the romantic awakenings—of adolescence. “I think we’re alone now,” “we’ll be together forever,” “I miss you so much” are nearly universal tropes, regardless of decade. When Christians critique CCM as “Jesus Is My Boyfriend” tunes, they are not off the mark. At

the level of form, this connects Justin Bieber singing, “If I was your boyfriend, I’d never let you go,” and songs calling worshipers to close their eyes and picture themselves embraced by Jesus forever in heaven.

Country music, meanwhile, often taps into more adult themes. Love is everywhere, of course, but fans are more likely to hear about love across the lifespan. It’s Conway Twitty singing about how even when his wife’s hair is gray and she is old, he’ll still love to lay her down (a theme also picked up by Lecrae in a song to his wife). Moreover, the country genre—again, demanded by the music itself—often reflects on emotional angst: loss, pain, regret, longing, and nostalgia for home.

Southern gospel and the hymnody closely associated with it tend toward the same emotional language. Songs about brokenhearted Mama pleading with her son “Don’t Take Your Guns to Town” are not unlike hymns pleading with sinners, saying that Jesus is patiently waiting to enter their hearts, and “Oh, how he wants to come in.” Contemporary Christian pop isn’t well equipped to explain the Chalcedonian formula or address the existence of evil in a good creation, any more than boy bands can really discuss the ethics of divorcing a spouse with Alzheimer’s disease. Southern gospel, like country music, can explore sin, but it typically does so from the point of view of an individual having made bad decisions, more in grief than in rage or defiance. If country and gospel music are in the company of psalms of lament, hip-hop

is in the territory of psalms of imprecation (compare Psalm 58's "Break the teeth in their mouths, O God" with 50 Cent's "If you got a glass jaw, you should watch your mouth, 'cause I'll break your face").

SNOOP DOGG, MEET JOHN CALVIN

To some degree, the new hip-hop is broadly Reformed because neo-Calvinism—at least as it is filtered through youth conferences and popular teachers—is "hot" at the moment. But that's too facile a connection. Hip-hop itself, even in its rawest, most "secular" version, is unwittingly Calvinist, because it has always had a realistic vision of sin. Hip-hop sees structural and social evil as a given, to be endured and raged against rather than appealed to.

At its best, hip-hop identifies the ugly realities of urban communities under assault by poverty, violence, and racial injustice. At its worst, it seems to celebrate the horrors of gang violence, rape, and misogyny, hostility toward gays and immigrants, and an anarchic gun culture. The controversial "edge" of hip-hop can be recognized from such songs as

N.W.A.'s calls to kill police to Snoop Dogg's explicit portrayal of women as sexual playthings to rapper Tyler the Creator's jarring lyrics, controversial even in the hip-hop community: "Come take a stab at it faggot; I pre-ordered your casket."

Hip-hop isn't the first form of pop culture to highlight and sometimes celebrate violence and depravity. Country and folk music do as well—though it's most often couched in a sense of regret for a past that can't be changed (Johnny Cash "shot a man in Reno, just to watch him die"), or with a wink in the eye and a shrug of the shoulder (see Hank Williams Jr.'s substance abuse). Rap and hip-hop present an in-your-face defiance of moral norms, along with a personal brand formed around them.

The "gangsta" image so prominent in hip-hop is part of this. The gang is seen as a community, a cadre of happy warriors like the pirates of the American past, who were also immortalized in song and story. Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls (Notorious B.I.G.) were both gunned down in an East Coast–West Coast rapper feud,

and their deaths fueled the mythology of the dangerous world of hip-hop. The slain artists are memorialized almost as martyrs, sung about in new rap songs that call for revenge against their killers.

Some, such as Yale sociologist Elijah Anderson, worry that artists such as Tupac, 50 Cent, and Notorious B.I.G. contribute to an unfair—and socially dangerous—image in the American imagination that "the ghetto" is "a dangerous, scary part of the city," and that homicidal rage is "inextricably intertwined with blackness." This sort of racial stereotype can lead, Anderson notes, to the kind of white fear-mongering seen most brutally in such atrocities as the murders of Emmett Till and Trayvon Martin.

The "scariness" of gangsta rap to the white middle class means it is as often a political target as a means of political action. And the raw violence and sexuality of so much hip-hop is often pegged by white Christians as another piece of evidence that America is "slouching toward Gomorrah." But that's a poor narrative—especially biblically speaking. In the opening pages of Genesis, after the Bible narrates the development of music, we see Lamech singing a song, seeking revenge against his enemies and the sexual conquest of multiple women.

It's also an uncharitable narrative. Much of hip-hop is at root about frustration with the Fall, not a celebration of it. Honestly assessing a world that seems without mercy leads naturally to a Darwinian self-protection—fight back against what can kill you, by any means necessary. When the future looks intolerably bleak, with poverty and racism woven into the very fabric of reality, why not embrace your lot in life and get ahead while you can?

The life experiences of hip-hop's leading artists have taught many of them that the "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" theme of Western culture (and optimistic advertising campaigns) is a myth. Their willingness to say this honestly, without fear, resonates with listeners. In this sense, hip-hop is as anti-Pelagian—as

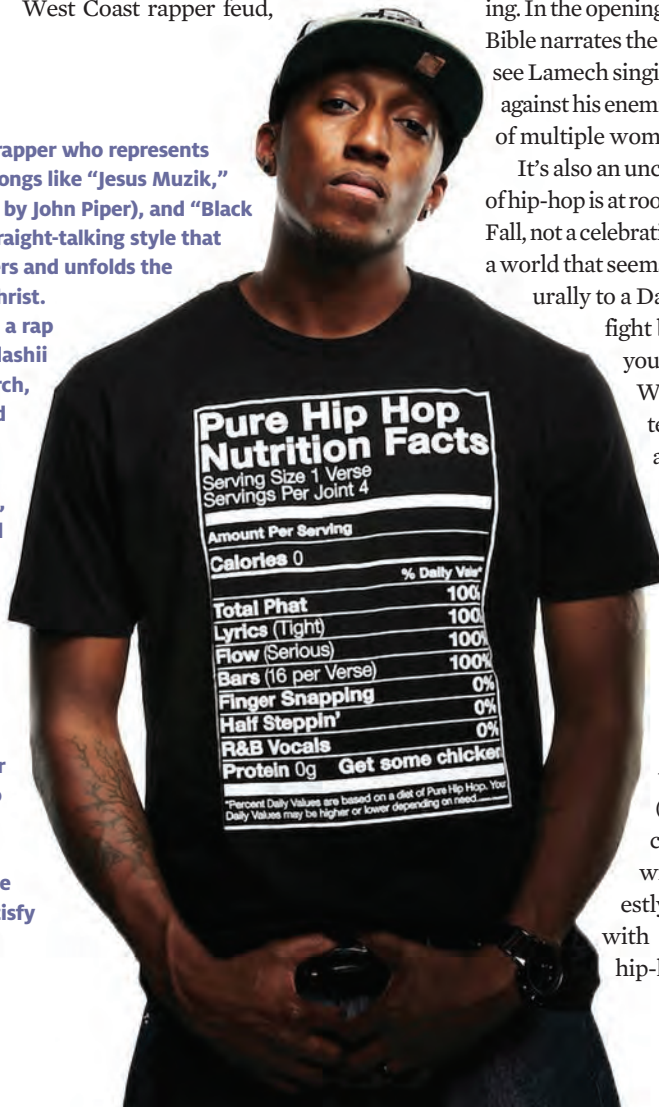
Lecrae

Lecrae Moore is the Grammy Award-winning rapper who represents the face of the gospel hip-hop movement. In songs like "Jesus Muzik," "Don't Waste Your Life" (based on the sermon by John Piper), and "Black Rose," Lecrae has developed a hard-hitting, straight-talking style that speaks to the everyday realities of fallen sinners and unfolds the cosmic solution to the problem of evil: Jesus Christ.

Lecrae, who was born in Houston, created a rap imprint, the 116 Clique, with fellow Texan Tedashii (a chart-storming member of the Village Church, led by Matt Chandler). And he's president and cofounder of Reach Records, which produces many of the movement's top artists.

Lecrae's versatility is reminiscent of Jay-Z's, though like much of the contemporary gospel rap movement, Lecrae's primary sound is Southern, not East Coast. Throughout his career, he has favored big bass and big hooks (choruses), though his recent album, *Gravity*, uses numerous sonic templates.

The past few years were remarkable for Lecrae. With about 600,000 followers, his Twitter account shows him popping up all over the place, from numerous NBA locker rooms to Michael Jordan's 50th birthday party. But despite his accomplishments he locates his satisfaction in Christ alone. Outside of Jesus, he tweeted, "nothing and no one . . . will ever satisfy a heart designed for God."



Hip-hop's leading artists have learned that the 'pull yourself up by your bootstraps' theme of the American dream is a myth. They're as anti-Pelagian as Augustine.

skeptical of inherent human goodness—as Augustine was. It just lacks Augustine's corresponding teaching on the sovereignty of grace. So, the new Christian hip-hop isn't introducing themes of depravity; rather it picks up on these themes and carries them to the Cross. In other words, the new Christian hip-hop isn't so much about Calvinizing Christian music as about Christianizing Calvinist music.

Rather than deny the violent realities of humanity, they use Reformed categories of penal substitutionary atonement to make sense of it all. Christian hip-hop is Cross-centered in a way that previous Christian attempts to mimic pop culture weren't—and perhaps couldn't be. To be sure, the Cross and the blood of Christ are everywhere in CCM and Southern gospel. But in both genres, the cross and the blood seem merely symbolic. The cross is there, but its meaning is often left undefined, as the real goal of “looking for a city” and “moving up to Gloryland” stands in the foreground. Hip-hop puts the spotlight on sin and justice and reckoning, on the sinner who, hidden in Christ, has already borne the wrath of God and walked out into the newness of resurrection life.

In the new Christian hip-hop, rage against the machine is replaced with the Spirit's “groaning” for kingship to be visibly restored through the unveiling of Jesus' lordship. “We live in a cold, cold world,” Tasha Catour sings over Lecrae's litany of ills, from violence, sex abuse, and poverty to sugar daddies and “McDonalds selling poison.” “A lot of people thinking I'm on a hopeless endeavor,” he concludes. “I know someone who can change the weather forever.”

SWAGGER LIKE US

But if Christianity (especially in its Augustinian and Reformed forms) fits well with hip-hop's rage against a fallen world, can it ever reconcile with the genre's ubiquitous swagger and boasting? Pop-culture expert



Beautiful Eulogy

One of the ironies of rap is this: No genre is more grouped as a stereotype, and yet few are more diverse. Beautiful Eulogy, from Portland, Oregon, has been called “coffee-shop rap” in comparison to mainstream hip-hop. Though not every rap fan craves a quieter, more contemplative style, the description is fitting: This is artisanal rap, carefully crafted and created.

Beautiful Eulogy, composed of Braille, Odd Thomas, and Courtland Urbano, does indeed make beautiful music (as do reflective rappers like Through Hymn). They can switch styles with ease—Lecrae has featured them, and Braille was notably a featured artist in *Urb* magazine—but the trio excels at songs that glorify God. Group members have known their trials, but songs like “Beautiful Eulogy” reveal in soaring lyrics that where sin is strong, grace is stronger still.

Myers is right: A sub-Christian aspect pervades the constant braggadocio, and that is one of the defining characteristics of rap. Some suggest it goes back to Muhammad Ali's boxing-ring rhymes about his superiority over his rivals. Even the most commercially mainstream hip-hop artists can affect a prideful stance that makes Frank Sinatra's “My Way” seem monastic.

But this swagger isn't what it first appears—even in the hip-hop lyrics themselves. A common theme in hip-hop is hypermasculinity, expressed through power and conquest, true—but also common is a heart-cry of lament against an absent father. Eminem rages against his father, “‘cause he split, I wonder if he even kissed me goodbye.” Jay-Z sings of being “a kid torn apart once his pop disappeared.” He asks the void, “Do you even remember the tender boy you turned into a cold young man?”

Yes, rap lyrics boast of material prosperity and limitless sexual novelty, but is there anything more vulnerable than a man crying out for the missed chance to say, “Abba,” or to

hear a father say, “You are my beloved son?”

And this is perhaps the most immediate point of connection, jumping the boundaries of race and class in America. Adolescents in gated communities and private schools can't identify with gang violence or poverty, but they know the private hell of a father who walks away.

Christian hip-hop picks up on this longing, but places it in a cosmos where fatherhood and identity are reclaimed in the gospel—and in which familial abandonment doesn't mean a never-ending cycle. Lecrae, whose drug-addicted father left the family, sings of his preconversion longing to be just like the male role models in his life, mimicking their misuse of sex and drugs. “I got this emptiness inside that got me fighting for approval because I missed out on my daddy saying, way to go,” he sings.

Lecrae ended up finding himself in the gospel. He cries out, “I made a mess but you say you'll erase it, I'll take it. You said you

Could it be that Christian hip-hop is less another wave of evangelical marketing than a critique of it?

came for the lame, I'm the lamest. I broke my life but you say you'll replace it." This changes the sense of masculinity toward breaking the pattern: "I got a little son now and he do whatever I do." Here is the bowed-head repentance Myers doubted. And it fits quite well with the form of hip-hop musically and, more significantly, is deeply resonant with the sort of broken-heartedness that Jesus commends.

Even when it celebrates sin in base ways, secular hip-hop's swagger points not only to the universal pull to glorify the self, but also to a secularized doctrine of election. The artist announces he is special, evident from his physical power, wealth, and success, and the women who love him. Christian hip-hop doesn't evaporate this swagger but instead redirects it to Jesus. The artist's dignity is found not in himself but in the resurrected One, who stands triumphant before his Father and announces, "Here I am, with the children God has given me" (Heb. 2:13, NET).

Interestingly, in Christian hip-hop, theological debates are less often about Arminianism versus Calvinism (both of which teach a doctrine of election and undeserved mercy) than about rebutting prosperity gospels and liberation theologies (both of which have perverted doctrines of election and teach earned favor). Perhaps these artists are especially aware of the latter errors because they've heard them sung before—and have seen where they lead.

The sense of being a chosen people is an important theme in folk art of all sorts, especially among people who have been marginalized. Slave spirituals echoed the election of Israel in Egypt in order to remember that, whatever slaveholders and their chaplains said, God had his eye on his people and would deliver them. Appalachian mountain music celebrated the dignity of country people, and laughed at their cultured despisers'

stereotypes of them. Antiwar folk songs pointed to the destiny of the seemingly politically powerless youth with "the times, they are a-changin'."

Christian hip-hop retains this sense of personal identity through election, but again frames it in terms of union with Christ. Christian hip-hop boasts, yes, but it seems to be

using the medium to do exactly what Paul did: "boasting" in his accomplishments only to throw them all aside and "boast" instead in the Cross.

This theme is especially important for combating social or familial or economic fatalism. Christian hip-hop communicates with urban youth and beyond them to the rest of the culture, "You are not merely the sum of your background experiences." The music combats predestination with more predestination: the predestination of drugs, gangs, and family background with the predestination of a God who chooses what the world dismisses to bring about his purposes.

OPEN TO PARODY

So *can* the Sermon on the Mount fit in the genre of hip-hop? Myers is right—it's hard to imagine the Beatitudes rapped. But it's

also hard to imagine the Sermon on the Mount in an apocalyptic text, or a war-song of David, or an imprecatory psalm. In the multitude of genres, God's Word points to a kaleidoscopic reality that coheres in a very complicated Person, the Lord Jesus.

The gifts of the body, left isolated, result in the chaos of competing self-interests. But used together, they build the church. The various musical expressions of the big themes of God and the world can, left isolated, cramp the prophetic word. But when these forms—including hip-hop—are in concert with one another, they can call Christians to learn old truths in surprising ways.

There are pitfalls here, to be sure. The evangelical-industrial complex can ruin any medium with marketing and kitsch. And hip-hop brings with it a particular vulnerability to the kind of self-parody that serves neither hip-hop as an art form nor, more importantly, the gospel as a truth claim.

Several years ago, comedian Jamie Kennedy introduced the character of an aspiring hip-hop artist named Brad Gluckman, or



Alex Medina/Tyshane

In their engagement with hip-hop, listeners generally only know rappers. Outside of pioneers like Timbaland or Dr. Dre, producers—those who craft the song behind the lyrics—are generally known only by enthusiasts.

Production levels in the Christian rap world rose dramatically in recent years, with a good chunk of the talent coming from the young side of an already young medium. Two stand out: Alex Medina (right), a Queens native who is now studying at the Southern Baptist Boyce College, is in his 20s but shows talent to rival the majors. With its gladiatorial beat, his song "Falling Down" set the tone for Lecrae's *Gravity*.

Even younger is Tyshane, son of gospel reggae artist Papa San. His song "Black Rose" on Lecrae's *Church Clothes* mixtape sounds like the work of a producer for rapper Rick Ross. Instead, he's an unassuming high-school student in Florida who tweets about high-school stuff.

Legacy Artists

Many of the genre's trailblazers continue to record. The earliest group to achieve major recognition was an East Coast outfit: Cross Movement, whose group "ciphers" (in which everyone raps a verse) rivaled those of the chart-topping Wu-Tang Clan, albeit with better theology. (Check out the song "House of Representatives" and Ambassador's "What Do You See," a mesmerizing meditation on the Atonement.) In the South, Grits made major moves starting in the late 1990s, producing the classic album *Grammatical Revolution*. On the West Coast, artists like T-Bone (right) combined bold rhymes with laid-back beats.

KJ-52's career spanned numerous forms and made waves with "Dear Slim," addressed to Eminem. T-Bone, the super-group Deepspace 5, L.A. Symphony, Mars ILL, TobyMac, and others have all made notable contributions to the sprawling genre.



"B-Rad." Kennedy's character would arrive on the scene with sagging pants, a backward baseball cap, and an affected street slang, talking about his hard life growing up in the 'hood. The joke was that this 'hood was a beachfront gated community in Malibu, California, where he lamented waiting in long lines at "Star-bizz-ucks."

Kennedy's character was modeled somewhat after the '90s one-hit wonder Vanilla Ice, who talked about growing up on the perilous streets of inner-city Miami before reports suggested those streets were in a

gated community in the Florida suburbs. But more than that, the character mocked affluent white American youth culture consuming the "edginess" of musical genres from hip-hop to death metal, all while safely cocooned from the dangers of gang violence, urban poverty, racial injustice, police brutality, domestic violence, and drug trafficking.

But could it be that Christian hip-hop is less another wave of evangelical marketing than a critique of it? Could it be that this generation of hip-hop artists is less about making rap safe for Christian kids and more about making the faith as dangerous as it used to be?

Maybe Christian hip-hop is not about using hip-hop as a "bridge" between evangelical faith and urban youth. Instead, maybe it's about building a bridge in the other direction: a bridge of empathy for a largely white, middle-class church to a fatherless, economically forgotten, and sometimes angry youth culture. If so, maybe it can help pull American Christianity out of its white middle-class ghetto and into the vastness of the kingdom of God—a kingdom that has room for both Jonathan Edwards and Jay-Z. ✦

Russell D. Moore is dean of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, and author of *Tempted and Tried: Temptation and the Triumph of Christ* (Crossway). He will start in June as the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission president.

Propaganda

Born Jason Petty, Propaganda is not really a rapper but a slam poet. Propaganda's hard-hitting lyrics opened many eyes to this discipline and rendered him the poet laureate of the Christian rap movement.

Now associated with the Humble Beast label, Propaganda formerly rapped with the Tunnel Rats. Then and now, he's tackled tough topics, including the "Precious Puritans," the thorny subject of historical Christian racism, and the challenges of being a godly father. His content, like an Old Testament seer's, unsettles, but is grounded in a big vision of God and his saving work, powerfully spelled out in the "G.O.S.P.E.L." video that ignited Christian social media feeds a few years back.

—profiles compiled by Owen Strachan



[PROFILE]

The

Michael Cromartie
is guiding media elites
into a more accurate view
of conservative Christians.
By Timothy Dalrymple

W

HEN RICK WARREN ARRIVED at the Faith Angle Forum in Key West, Florida, in May 2005, the megachurch pastor addressed one of the last remaining groups in America that knew almost nothing about him: journalists. In the room

were 20 of the most influential voices in media, including *New York Times* columnist David Brooks, best-selling author Malcolm Gladwell, and *The New Yorker's* Elsa Walsh. Although *The Purpose Driven Life* had already sold 25 million copies, says Brooks, "I'm not sure many in the room had heard of him."

For many elite journalists at the time, modern American Christianity was a strange and vaguely menacing hydra featuring the heads of Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, and the crazed sandwich-board prophet who breathed fire in their general direction on the local street corner. Yet here was Warren, an exemplar of evangelicalism's West Coast variety, a species redolent of sunshine and casual conviviality. He distributed handshakes and hugs and thoughtful compliments on recent columns and reports. "Suddenly you saw a very different world," says Brooks. "This was not some fringe preacher. That had an impact on the group."

Now, eight years later, a new evangelical standard-bearer,

A RARE TALENT

In the world of American media, an invitation to the Faith Angle Forum, now in its 14th year, is a golden ticket, and the man sending out the invitations is Michael Cromartie, a beltway believer whose meandering political and religious journey has rendered in him a rare talent for friendships on both sides of the aisle.

Cromartie converted to Christianity as a teenager in the Vietnam War era, proclaimed himself a progressive pacifist, and joined a Christian commune. Shortly after joining Chuck Colson's then-new Prison Fellowship, however, he was literally mugged by reality when thieves invaded his hotel room in Denver in 1978 and left him bound and gagged. (Cromartie managed to convince the burglars to leave his new tie so he could still attend his meetings with dignity.) That experience and Colson's influence produced a paradigm shift, and Cromartie went on to work for the conservative Ethics and Public Policy Center, where he is now vice president and director of the Evangelicals in Civic Life project. From his perch on M Street five blocks from the White House, he has served as a *consigliere* for conservative Christians in the nation's capital.

He has also helped countless journalists, whose only map to evangelicalism reads *HERE BE DRAGONS*, chart a more finely drawn geography of the American Christian landscape. In fact,

Shepherd

Tim Keller of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, is addressing the same assembly. The move from Warren to Keller speaks to how American Christianity has changed in the interim. Whether the media have kept apace on such changes is debatable. There's no question that the mavens of mainstream media are still wont to treat "fringe" figures as central ones. Witness the elevation of Qur'an-burning Florida pastor Terry Jones to the status of an evangelical icon and a convenient counterpoint to radical imams on the Muslim side—in spite of the fact that Jones has no leadership or influence among American evangelicals. Yet it's also true that top journalists and columnists seeking Christian comment on social issues today are less likely to seek out the controversialists and the firebrands than to contact thoughtful representatives like Keller or scholars and statesmen like Mark Noll or Richard Mouw. All of these leaders, in fact, have cultivated relationships with writers and broadcasters at the Faith Angle Forum.

SCOTT SUCHMAN

the concept for the forums took shape as Cromartie received one call after another from knowledgeable journalists who wanted to know whether all evangelicals hate sex, or whether he could provide contact information for the author and publisher of the Book of Ephesians.

Cromartie could have easily joined the drone of evangelical complaints over the media's unfair treatment. In 2009, 52 percent of evangelicals—the highest percentage of any major religious group—told the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life that they felt the media was "unfriendly" toward religion. When the Freedom Forum's First Amendment Center asked clergy whether they believed that "most religion coverage today is biased against ministers and organized religion," 58 percent of mainline Protestants agreed strongly or somewhat, compared to 70 percent of Catholics and a soaring 91 percent of conservative Protestants. As scholars Bradley R. E. Wright, Christina Zozula, and W. Bradford Wilcox reported recently in the *Journal of Religion & Society*, conservative Christians

'We're sometimes asked, "Why are you bringing that person, who wrote some misinformed pieces?" That's precisely why. The argument is not advanced if all you do is curse the darkness.'

~ Michael Cromartie



are the “most likely” of all religious groups “to view the media as negatively targeting their faith.” (Not all evangelicals are “conservative Christians,” but the vast majority are. It is this segment that has been misunderstood most by the media.)

Complaining that you’re unfairly treated in the papers is, of course, as old as the papers themselves. Yet conservative Christians have plenty of examples. From perpetuating rumors that Sarah Palin banned library books in Wasilla, Alaska, like some small-town theocrat, to assuming that intolerant evangelicals would not support a Mormon as President, to engaging in opportunistic feeding frenzies over Todd Akin and Richard Mourdock’s embarrassing comments on rape and abortion, mainstream media so often seem eager to highlight the worst and the weirdest. Too often they seem blind to or blithely uninterested in the best and the brightest lights in American evangelicalism. When *Washington Post* reporter Michael Weisskopf stated in a news story in 1993 that conservative Christians are “largely poor, uneducated, and easy to command,” he was not reporting a fact but revealing an operating assumption for too many journalists who have little or no acquaintance with their subject matter.

A REAL BIAS

Studies, too, lend credence to evangelical complaints. While evangelicals receive plenty of attention and frequently positive coverage from local media, on the national level the coverage is disproportionately unfavorable. In one study, *The New York Times* was found to be twice as negative in its coverage of evangelicals as local newspapers in Atlanta and Dallas. This is, of course, not entirely surprising. Elite journalism is closely allied with elite academia, as fresh ranks of journalists spring every year from academic programs

and many top journalists retain close affiliations with universities. On such campuses, according to a 2012 study from the Institute for Jewish and Community Research, faculty harbor far more negative attitudes toward evangelicals than they do toward any other religious group. Worse, evangelicals are overwhelmingly identified with political conservatism, and political conservatism is rarely loved in journalism’s most exclusive precincts.

When mainstream media treat evangelicals poorly, the question is whether the mistreatment stems from real animosity against evangelicals among the largely secular media in Washington, D.C., and New York, or whether it’s due to simple ignorance and the limitations of journalism itself. Cromartie found the latter.

“Journalists have a vocation to get at the truth,” he says, but many find religion “a universe of discourse that’s unfamiliar to them.” With the support of the Pew Foundation and the Pew Forum, then, Cromartie hosted a series of lunches in Washington that expanded into the three-day Faith Angle Forums, first in Maine in 1999, then in Key West and now in South Beach, Miami. *The Economist*’s Adrian Wooldridge calls them (in his book *God Is Back*) “one of the most pleasant as well as one of the most instructive experiences in journalism.”

The forums would fail, of course, if they pushed a political or religious agenda. Cromartie invites the finest scholars, and some religious leaders, to provide journalists with deeper and more nuanced views of people of faith. He aims to help “journalists who are liberal and conservative and work for important outlets to become better informed about this extremely important part of American life.” Presenters

Meet the Press: At the 2013 forum in Key West, Cromartie (center) led debates alongside Reuel Marc Gerecht from Foundation for Defense of Democracies (left) and *The Atlantic*’s Jeffrey Goldberg.

COURTESY OF FAITH ANGLE FORUMS

have ranged from Jim Daly of Focus on the Family to former Pakistani ambassador Husain Haqqani, from Walden Media's evangelical president Michael Flaherty to Jeffrey Goldberg of *The Atlantic*, Rabbi David Saperstein of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, and Jean Bethke Elshtain of the University of Chicago.

The forums let scholars like Peter Berger and James Davison Hunter share their work with the men and women who raise the sluice gates of our public information channels. At one forum Hunter debated Alan Wolfe on the topic of the culture wars, and the debate exploded onto the Internet and spread further through a book published by the Brookings Institution. Hunter says the experience was "intense, stimulating, and very exciting." The Faith Angle Forum, he says, is "a wholly unique form of cultural engagement" that is "neither politicized nor partisan," but "takes seriously the vocation of journalism and seeks to serve those who inhabit that vocation through education and collegiality." The public then benefits, he believes, from "a better informed and more discerning group of elite journalists."

The forums may be "one of the best kept secrets in journalism," as ABC's Dan Harris called them, but their influence is easy to trace. Immediately after the Warren session in 2005, Brooks lauded in a column the transformative work of Christians like Warren in addressing extreme poverty in Africa, and *Washington Post* columnist E. J. Dionne Jr. opened his book *Souled Out* with an extended quotation from Warren's talk. The session, says Dionne, gave him a deeper and more sympathetic understanding of Warren "as a fuller human being." A 2009 session with Francis Collins ended with the famed Christian geneticist, who now directs the National Institutes of Health, singing and playing a worship song on his guitar. Peter Boyer was so fascinated that he wrote an admiring profile in *The New Yorker* of one of the world's foremost scientists finding harmony between science and faith.

Sociologist and Gordon College president D. Michael Lindsay found that that the number of times he was consulted or quoted in articles or columns multiplied after he presented to the forum. Indeed, says Dionne, one of the most positive effects of the forums has been to highlight the work of profoundly talented scholars who are also profoundly devout. "It's hard to hear someone like Mark Noll," says Dionne, "and then pretend there aren't seriously intellectual evangelicals."

A TRUE BELIEVER

Pew no longer bankrolls the conferences, so Cromartie pulls together smaller grants to keep them going. Recent economic turmoil has made finding funding difficult, but Cromartie remains a true believer. Evangelicals are still misunderstood, but that's only cause for greater engagement. He says, "We're sometimes asked, 'Why are you bringing that person, who wrote some misinformed pieces?' That's precisely why we're inviting them."

"We want them better informed. The argument is not advanced if all you do is curse the darkness."

Ross Douthat, a devout Catholic and the youngest *New York Times* columnist in the newspaper's history, has become an avid supporter and member of the forums. The conferences "vindicate evangelicals' sense that the media has particular deficits when it comes to understanding religion in general and evangelicalism in particular," and also show that evangelicals "are wrong to see it as a gap forged from malice, bias, and antipathy." If the press "just doesn't get religion," to quote CNN political analyst William Schneider, it's "a deficit of knowledge and not of sympathy or interest," says Douthat.

"Most reporters go into the business because they're curious, and if you present them with something interesting, they'll listen," agrees Brooks, whose late-night conversations with Christopher Hitchens at the forums are the stuff of legend. "You can complain or you can be helpful. Mike has chosen to be helpful."

Tim Keller arrived at the most recent Faith Angle Forum, in March, to explain the faith and future of American evangelicals. He presented an image different from Warren's but no less compelling—more urban, cultured, and intellectual. Today's younger generation of Christians, he says, are more complex politically, more multiethnic, more likely to enter the cultural industries and be "captivated by the idea of sacrificial service and pouring themselves

out for the poor." Pressed repeatedly on evangelical opposition to same-sex marriage, he explains that evangelicals see sex "not as a consumer good but a form of self-donation." Evangelicals believe that "male and female have unique glories" and marriage must bring those glories together. This makes sex "a kind of Eucharist for married people, a reunion of the alienated genders."

Whether or not it convinced the skeptics in the room, it was a winsome response. Afterward, Keller said events like these "destroy stereotypes and clear

away the fog." He only wished, he said, there could be more events to accommodate more journalists, and more pastors could experience having to justify their views in public language.

Of course, without Cromartie's affable guidance and enthusiasm for his friends on both ends of the spectrum, the forums could not have navigated the treacherous waters of faith and politics for so long. At the 2005 session, several journalists pressed Warren on the issue of damnation. The questions were pointed, the atmosphere tense. Cromartie intervened: "Questions about eternal destination are best handled over the cocktail hour soon to follow."

And discussed over cocktails they were, in the warm evening air in Key West, by Warren and many of the country's leading journalists—much as, in South Beach eight years later, Keller and another group of writers and columnists adjourned from their discussion for a friendly lunch. Such is the singular accomplishment of Cromartie, who decided that lighting a candle was better than cursing the darkness. ✦

Timothy Dalrymple earned his doctorate in religion from Harvard's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, and is now director of content of the evangelical portal at *Patheos.com*.

'Most reporters go into the business because they're curious, and if you present them with something interesting, they'll listen. You can complain or you can be helpful. Mike has chosen to be helpful.'

~ David Brooks, *The New York Times*

[THEOLOGY]

What We Talk About W





When We Talk About Rob Bell

His latest book once again helps evangelical Christians see the road they travel on.

By Mark Galli

AS FAR AS I CAN TELL, any classic, middle-of-the-road Christian can offer a hearty “Amen” to a great deal of Rob Bell’s theology.

The former pastor of Mars Hill Church believes God exists and can be experienced and yet cannot be contained by rational explanations. He affirms the divinity and humanity of Christ, as well as the Resurrection. He believes the Spirit

is active in our lives and in the world. He believes the Bible is authoritative at some level—that is, he always tries to understand his life in light of his reading of the Bible. He is indignant about self-righteousness and injustice, and contrary to popular opinion, he actually believes in a judgment: He says people who abuse and exploit others and creation will not participate in the glorious restoration of heaven on earth. Yes, he holds out hope that perhaps everyone will someday be saved, but in one sense, so do many evangelicals. Even God is said to wish that no one should perish.

So unlike some of my other fellow believers, I cannot say, “Farewell, Rob Bell.” Instead, I think of him as my brother in Christ.

This may surprise readers who believe I wrote *God Wins* to refute Bell’s controversial theology. Only in part, though that part is not insignificant. I mostly stumble over his epistemology—his understanding of how we come to know what is true, and by what method we determine how to live authentic lives. As I argued in the book, this is precisely my concern about evangelical faith as a whole. The thesis in my book and in this essay is that in this respect, Rob Bell is not only an evangelical, but an evangelical’s evangelical, the evangelical *par excellence*.

This is admittedly a sweeping and dramatic assertion, which cannot be worked out in the course of an essay. But let me sketch in broad terms what

MONTAGE • PORTRAIT: DALEY HAKE PHOTOGRAPHY / LANDSCAPE: ISTOCK

I mean. I'll use Bell's latest book as the primary example—not because it is unusual, but precisely because it so perfectly represents what's going on in large segments of Christianity today.

WHERE THEOLOGY BEGINS

So, where does Bell locate the source of faith and theology? His new book is titled *What We Talk About When We Talk About God* (HarperOne), and it's natural to expect epistemology—how we know what we know when we talk about God—to come into play. And it does, and it's embedded all through the book. Some examples (my italics for emphasis):

When I talk about God, I'm talking about a reality known, *felt*, and *experienced*. . . (page 62)

When God is described as father or mother or judge or potter or rock or fortress . . . those writers are talking about *something they've seen, something they've experienced* and they are essentially saying, "God is like that." (89)

So, when we talk about God, we're talking about our brushes with spirit, *our awareness* of the reverence humming within us, *our sense* of the nearness and the farness, that which we know and that which is unknown. (91)

In other words, Bell believes our knowledge of God is grounded not in doctrine, the Bible, the preached Word, the sacraments, our institutions, or even what Jesus revealed (all ways theologians ground our knowledge of God), but in our experiences and our intuitions—especially that sense many have that there is a deeper reality in, with, and under this life. This is an appeal to general revelation, how God makes himself known naturally to the world. Classically understood, these intuitions also include an awareness that we stand under divine judgment for our sin, but Bell does not go there. Nor does he hint that we might ever doubt our intuitions—he assumes we can trust them.

Of course, not everyone intuites the things Bell suggests we all intuit. For example, one night on a fishing trip with my son, gazing up at the vastness of space, I said, "I wonder if people find it harder to believe God these days because we don't get to look at stars like this anymore, living in lighted

cities as most of us do."

My son, who majored in physics, replied, "Well, some people look at the vastness of the universe and conclude that it points to the meaninglessness of human life on earth." One person's intuition that "there must be something more than science tells us" is another person's intuition that there is nothing more.

That said, there are some people in whom God has begun a good work, and they resonate with the intuitions that Bell identifies. In using this approach, Bell aligns himself with the

Romantic tradition, which arose as a reaction against the rationalism of the Enlightenment era. As I noted in an earlier essay for CT, this approach is very much in line with 19th-century liberalism, especially with the theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), who championed in a systematic way the "religion of feeling." The point is not that Bell is nothing but a liberal. Rather, the point is that Bell's attraction to a religion of feeling has been and is shared by American evangelicals. By us.

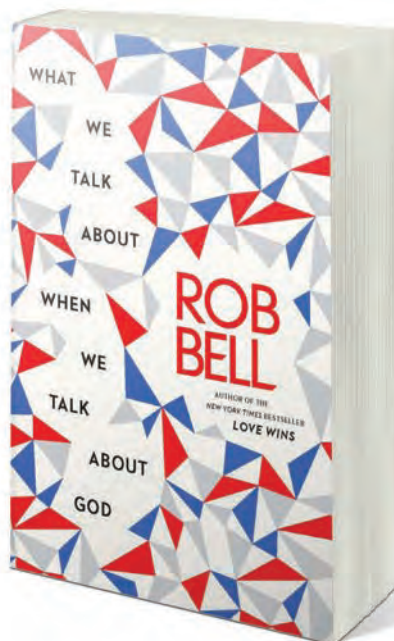
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OUR RELIGION OF FEELING

The stereotypical evangelical expression of this is found in the born-again experience, which first became a phenomenon during the Great Awakening in the 1740s, when it was called "the new birth." It was rationalized—meaning, it was reduced to mere technique—by Charles Finney, and it has become a stock technique of revivalists ever since. The preacher works up in his audience feelings of shame, guilt, and impending doom (judgment), only to release them with the promise of forgiveness if people repent of their sins and accept Jesus Christ as their Savior. This results in an extraordinary psychological experience for individuals, many of whom look back to this occasion as the moment they were "saved." (I do not question the authenticity of all such experiences, nor God's ability to use them even when they are emotionally manipulative. I went forward at such an altar call as a teenager, weeping uncontrollably as I repeated the Sinner's Prayer. God apparently is willing to use even tainted means to awaken us to his grace.)

Among the more balanced revivalists, like Billy Graham, this conversion moment is characterized as a "decision," a rational act of faith and trust—thus, Graham's radio program was called *The Hour of Decision*, and his magazine, *Decision*. One thing that separated Graham from many others was his refusal to manipulate emotions.

But this has not been the case with a great many revivalists, from the camp meetings of the Second Great Awakening to the



local revivals in fundamentalist churches all across America, like those I experienced as a teenager in the Felton (California) Evangelical Free Church. The annual revival was part of the “church year,” a time when youth especially were driven to emotional despair, only to be raised to new life if we would, once again, go forward and recommit our lives to Christ.

In many Christian circles, though, the proof of conversion is not the decision to go forward, but the *experience* of remorse and release that accompanies the moment. In these circles, one is assured of salvation not because one merely said the Sinner’s Prayer, but because of the experience surrounding it. Otherwise one is suspected of mere formalism.

This need to prove one’s faith by the drama of one’s conversion experience goes way back. To become a full member of a New England Puritan church—to be baptized, take Communion, and vote—one had to convince church leaders of his genuine conversion experience. The point is this: There is a significant strain of evangelical religion that grounds genuine knowledge of God first and foremost in the experience of faith. That’s how you *really* know you are saved and part of the family of God.

Until recently, this sort of experience was understood to be unusual, perhaps a once-in-a-lifetime experience. There was no expectation that this sort of event would repeat itself (well, except at annual revival meetings). It was assumed that these were extraordinary visitations of the Spirit, and that one would expect to live the rest of life without such experiences.

That understanding has changed radically in the past couple of decades, and again, Bell expresses this in ways that are representative of much of evangelical teaching today (*italics added*):

I believe God wants us each to flourish and thrive in this world *here and now as we become more and more everything we can possibly be.* (18)

When Jesus talked about faith, he talked about fruit. . . . You *tasting, seeing, encountering, and experiencing* full life of God and never being the same again . . . gaining *a living, breathing awareness* of the love of God and sharing it with others. (148)

I believe that you are *already experiencing* the presence of God with you in countless ways every single day. (122)

The implicit promise is that one can experience God 24/7/365, if only we open our eyes to his presence all around us.

This reflects a growing trend in contemporary spirituality, which has its roots in the pioneering work of Richard Foster. To be clear, Foster is not enamored with experience as such, and actually makes a point to remind his readers that the dark night of the soul is a regular, if not usual, experience—especially for

those most mature in the faith! God’s seeming absence is what so often characterizes the life of God’s saints, from John of the Cross to Mother Teresa. But evangelical readers are instead most fascinated with the practices that will awaken us more deeply to God’s daily, hourly presence.

One recent example is Margaret Feinberg’s latest book, *Wonderstruck: Awaken to the Nearness of God* (Worthy). I read the book in galley form, and actually endorsed it, because Feinberg is a friend and there is so much in the book I happen to like. Her unbounded enthusiasm is evident from the beginning:

God invites us to look up, open our eyes to the wonder all around us, and seize every opportunity to encounter him. (27)

God is not merely at your fingertips but within your grasp. (27)

Open your arms and your eyes to the God who stands in plain sight and works miracles in your midst. . . . Pray for—and expect—wonder. . . . Live awake and aware because the wonder awaits. (28)

***We’re implicitly
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if only we open our eyes
to his presence all
around us.***

As followers of Jesus, we have the opportunity to live each day in wild amazement of God. If we pay attention, we can begin discovering the wonders all around us. (173)

Two pastor friends make the same sort of promises to their congregation. In a recent sermon, the

senior pastor told his parishioners to “seek wonder” and said that if we journey with Jesus in this life in openness, we “will know joy.” The following week his associate told the church to “open yourself to the God of wonders. Give him your scarcity and he will turn it into opportunity.”

OVERSELLING GOD

There is a lot of truth in all this. The Christian life is not mere assent to doctrine or the faithful performance of ritual, but an invitation to encounter the living God. With the eyes of faith, we should be able to see more wonder. This is why I am not loathe to attend this church nor averse to endorsing Feinberg’s book. For certain personalities, this sort of thing is the perfect cup of tea. And for those of us who tend to be less bubbly—well, it never hurts to hear that God’s grace can make itself known from time to time in our daily routines.

My concern, though, is that so many Christian teachers oversell, and therefore inevitably underdeliver—or better, put God in the position where he will underdeliver. I suspect that in many cases, they are merely using hyperbole to drive home a point, but I’m convinced that readers and listeners take such exaggerations literally *because they desperately want them to be true*. But there is no way anyone can “live each day in wild

amazement of God,” or that each of us can “flourish and thrive in this world here and now as we become more and more everything we can possibly be.” Such experiences happen now and then in this life, but will be fully realized only when sin and death have been defeated and love and peace reign in the coming kingdom, when finally every tear is wiped away, when we see God face to face (Rev. 21).

In the meantime, we live in this present age. And this present age is, according to Paul, an age characterized by groaning:

For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children

of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Rom. 8:20–23, ESV)

To be sure, we now also know joy, but only because the promise of our redemption is assured by Christ’s death and resurrection and made known to us by the Holy Spirit. But it’s not a present experience of *redemption*—of flourishing and thriving, of becoming all that we can be, of amazement

***The cost of
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at the immediate encounter with God each day—but the assured *hope* that redemption is coming. “For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience” (vv. 24–25, ESV).

To wait in patience is just the opposite of what we are often encouraged to do. Instead, we convince ourselves that we don’t need patience as much as willpower, because if we do everything right, we can make divine encounters a daily, ongoing, and enthralling experience. But with this comes the corollary: There must be something wrong with me, something lacking in my devotion, if I don’t have these experiences. By contrast, Paul’s admonition to wait in patience suggests that it’s normal *not* to have such experiences.

Yes, they do happen. In his grace God gives us periodic glimpses of the future, tastes of what is coming. This happens in those famous conversion experiences, and in healings, in miracles, in those moments when God’s presence is keenly felt. I myself have experienced a healing of severe pain in my leg. I have also almost been “slain in the Spirit” (but got hold of myself just in time!).

The whole situation is just **too** awkward to ignore,
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And as the Spirit leads, I speak in tongues. I have also had ecstatic experiences when the love of God penetrated my whole being.

And in a life of 60 years, I can count these experiences on one hand. Because I've had such experiences, I understand perfectly the desire to have them all the time, and to imagine that maybe there is a technique, a method, a way to pray, a way to be open and alert—something!—that will allow me to experience this daily. Believe me, I tried that for a while and discovered that, yes, I could manufacture something very similar to a genuine spiritual experience. But it soon became clear that the search for daily wonder was creating a religion of Mark Galli. It wasn't helping me love my neighbor, though it did help me judge my neighbor as relatively unspiritual, at least compared to me.

A NORMAL LIFE OF LOVE

I believe there is yet another reason we're fascinated with divine encounters: our boredom with the life God has given us.

Instead of a life of experience, Christ calls us to a life of love. And a life of love for the most part means attending to the tedious details of others' lives, and serving them in sacrificial ways that most days feels, well, not exciting at all. Rather than sweeping the kitchen, cleaning the toilet, listening to the talkative and boring neighbor, slopping eggs onto a plate at the homeless shelter, or crunching numbers for another eight hours at the office—surely life is meant for more than this. We are tempted to wonder, *Is that all there is to the "abundant" Christian life? Shouldn't my life be more adventurous if God is in me and all around me? How am I going to be all I'm supposed to be if I have to empty bedpans in Peoria? I would just die if I had to do that.*

Yes, you would. Jesus called it dying to self. Love is precisely denying the self that wants to glory in experience. The cost of discipleship most of us are asked to pay is to live the life God has given us, serving in mundane ways the people he has put in our path. To be free from the self and to discover such love is the essence of abundant life.

As Paul put it, in the final analysis love is not about speaking in tongues, having prophetic powers, understanding all mysteries or knowledge, having experiences of wonder, or being all we can be. Love instead "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things,

endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:7, ESV). Yes, endures. It endures now because it hopes. And it hopes because it has not yet been given in full what is promised, but only glimpses here and there, mere appetizers to the great kingdom feast.

It is not hard to see why the religion of experience—the experience that Rob Bell is now writing about—tempts one to make feeling an idol, or how a religion of feeling

leads to the watering down of great gospel themes. Historians of theology have shown such connections time and again. What's hard to understand is why so many Christians who claim they stand for the faith once delivered to the saints don't see that the road of experience leads nowhere except to the barren desert of the self.

Mark Galli is editor of *Christianity Today*.

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God Behind the Veil

His ways are hidden
from ordinary eyes, but
not from the eyes of faith.

By Bobby Grow

I WAS SITTING EXPECTANTLY in the doctor's office, waiting for the results of some tests. I had convinced myself that there was nothing wrong. At worst, it was a hernia; at best, a pulled muscle. The doctor finally entered, and he gave me the news: "I am sorry to tell you, we have found a large mass by your right kidney, and it looks cancerous." My stomach sank, my world spun, and I cried out to Jesus. Some further tests determined that I had a rare and deadly cancer for which there is no known treatment.

As a husband, a father of two young children, and a theologian, the news confronted me with the fact that life would change drastically. What would it be like for my kids to grow up without their dad? How would my wife handle all of this? Why would God allow this to happen to me, and where was God in the midst of this turmoil? As Christians, we all feel the gravity of life bearing down, and we all meet with trying circumstances that force such questions upon us.

Questions about God's presence—and apparent absence—hearken back to what Christians have traditionally called God's *transcendence* and *immanence*. Or, to use more biblical language, his apparent "*veiled-ness*" and "*unveiled-ness*."

Theologian G. R. Lewis writes of God's transcendence and immanence this way:

As transcendent, God is uniquely other than everything in creation. God's distinctness from the being of the world has been implied in . . . discussions of God's attributes metaphysically, intellectually, ethically, emotionally, and existentially. God is "hidden" relationally because [he is] so great in all these other ways. God's being is eternal, the world's temporal. God's knowledge is total, human knowledge incomplete.

JONATHAN BARTLETT

Lewis explains God's "otherness" through a series of comparisons between the finite (human history and humans in general) and the infinite (God's eternal nature and interior life). In other words, what we humans are not, God is. In his infinite life, God is above and beyond all that we are as finite beings.

NEAR AND FAR

But if God is transcendent—if his ways are unknowably above our own—how can we know him? Within the Christian tradition, several voices have spoken to this dilemma. A medieval Roman Catholic theologian, William of Ockham (1285–1349), is known for positing a "dualism" in God. By this, he meant that there are two ways to think of God and his presence among us. Ockham argued that God behaves one way in his "transcendent" life and another way in his "immanent" life (his activity in human history, primarily through the Incarnation). If God seems remote and secretive, that's because he can act differently "way above yonder" than how he acts in revealing himself in Christ.

The problem with Ockham's perspective

is that it severs God's transcendent life from his immanent life. As a result, Jesus Christ might not seem like the same God who has always lived in eternity. Dualistic thinking dissolves any necessary relation between the "veiled" God and the "unveiled" God in Christ. This introduces anxiety for those

When we look at Jesus we actually see God on full display.

who seek to know God: If God's revelation in Christ does not truly represent God's eternal nature, then sending Christ could have been an arbitrary gesture. God might well have reached out to humanity in a very different manner—or not reached out to humanity at all. And at any point in the future, he might act in an infinite number of unpredictable ways. If God's activity in revealed time doesn't reflect his eternal nature, we cannot be sure of Jesus' words to doubting Thomas: "If you really know me, you will know my Father as

well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him" (John 14:7).

About two centuries after Ockham, Martin Luther construed Ockham's categories quite differently. The result was to bring God's transcendence, his "hiddenness," closer to God's immanence—his revelation in Christ. Luther contended that God's hiddenness, or transcendence, shapes his activity in his immanent, revealed life.

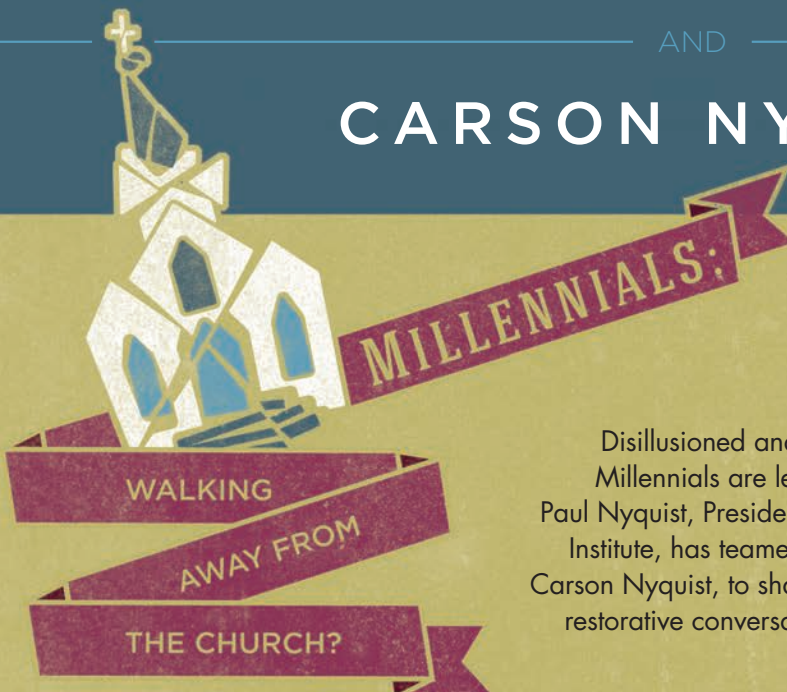
For Luther, the eyes and ears of faith give us contact to God's transcendent life, which to ordinary eyes and ears remains hidden. As the prophet Isaiah said, "'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, / neither are your ways my ways,' / declares the Lord" (55:8). Because God's ways are transcendent, his ways in his revealed life, in the life of Christ, remain hidden for those without faith. Only as we walk by faith and not by sight can we discern God's transcendent ways through looking at the life of Jesus.

Luther writes in his Heidelberg Disputation that the true theologian "comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross." For Luther,

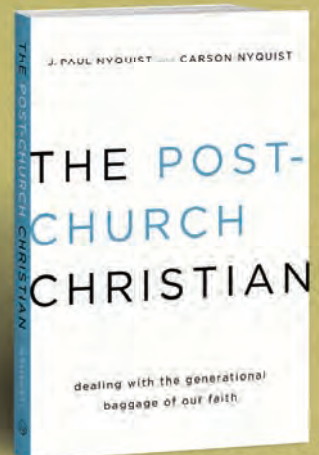
J. PAUL NYQUIST

AND

CARSON NYQUIST



Disillusioned and frustrated, many Millennials are leaving the church. Paul Nyquist, President of Moody Bible Institute, has teamed up with his son, Carson Nyquist, to share an honest and restorative conversation on this topic.



the suffering endured at the cross of Christ shows that God, even in his transcendence, meets us where we are, in the midst of our own suffering. He meets us in the lowliness of the manger, in the indignities of earthly existence, and in the agony of the Cross. In all this suffering, we see the character of our transcendent God—driven by love and grace, full of mercy and compassion, and moved by an unfathomable care for humanity.

Thomas Torrance, the 20th-century Scottish theologian, took something implicit in Luther's theology and made it explicit: There is no distinction between God's transcendent life and his immanent life. So when we look at Jesus we actually see God on full display. We don't have to wonder whether there might be a different God hiding up in eternity. Torrance wrote in this vein:

It belongs to the essence of the Gospel that God has come among us and become one with us in such a reconciling and miraculous way as to demolish the barriers of our creaturely distance and estrangement from him, and has spoken to us directly and intimately about himself in Jesus Christ his beloved Son. In him he has made himself known to us as God the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible, the one Lord and Saviour of mankind.

Thus, when we wonder what God is like in his transcendent, faraway life, we ought to realize, according to Torrance, that he is exactly the same God we encounter in the face of Jesus Christ.

WE DON'T HAVE TO GO ANYWHERE

Having looked at the mystery of immanence and transcendence through the eyes of some major theologians, how best to move forward? What can we say about moments in life when suffering and doubt overwhelm us, the moments when God seems absent?

I suggest we constructively combine some of Luther with all of Torrance. Both men understood that because God is love in his transcendent, inner life, he comes down to us in his immanent, revealed life. Therefore, God is the same God in eternity as he is in the realm of human history. And because God is love, he meets us right where we are, in our suffering squalor. He meets us as the suffering servant, obedient to the point of death on

the cross. We don't have to go anywhere to relate to a God like this.

When I found out I had cancer, I didn't know the answers to my most immediate questions. But God reminded me, as he wants to remind all of us, that he is not a God far away, but a God who has come near to us and dwelt within the very circumstances of our lives. He wants us to trust him with eyes of faith, believing that he reveals himself

redemptively in our darkest hours and deepest longings. His ways remain hidden to those without faith, but those with faith see the glory of God revealed in the face of Jesus Christ. When you see Jesus, you see the invisible God made visible. So look to Jesus. ✚

Bobby Grow is coeditor of *Evangelical Calvinism: Essays Resourcing the Continuing Reformation of the Church* (Pickwick Publications).

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How Silicon Valley entrepreneurs
are taking a leap of faith to create
technology that makes you more human.

Here's to the

A full-page photograph of Sonny Vu, a man with dark hair and glasses, wearing a dark blue blazer over a black shirt. He is standing with his arms crossed in a residential street in Daly City. In the background, there are yellow apartment buildings, parked cars (including a silver sedan and a teal car), and hills under a clear sky. The lighting suggests late afternoon or early morning.

Subtle Shine: In Daly City, Sonny Vu is creating technology you want to be seen wearing (including that device under his sleeve).

Misfits

By Andy Crouch | Photos by Jeff Singer

THERE ARE PLENTY of Silicon Valley stories that are worth telling. You can tell a story that goes back a generation, about Silicon Valley as the land of the engineers, the people who tinker and hack and iterate and refactor. There may be no place on the planet where smarts can take you farther than on this little peninsula—especially technical smarts, the ability to harness physics and math to human needs and desires. Technology at its best seems friction-free, and Silicon Valley is a place where the world seems pliable beyond our ancestors' wildest imaginations.

You can go further back and talk about the '49ers, the ones who converged on northern California during the first Gold Rush, leaving everything behind in hopes of striking a seam of abundance—a story that still seems relevant more than 160 years later. The gold is gone, but the sudden and arbitrary lightning strikes of riches are still here—neighbors in identical houses with similar jobs who end up with three or six zeroes of difference in their wealth. You may have to be fantastically hardworking and absurdly gifted to enter this lottery, but it's a game of chance all the same.

I'm here partly to listen for the echoes of these stories—but I'm also here for a different reason. I'm wondering what it's like to be fully immersed in technology and possibility and fortunes dangling within reach—all while following a first-century rabbi who lived the fullest human life ever lived, without a single piece of technological magic. If you have a dream, Silicon Valley is the place where you come to build it. I'm wondering what you build if the gospel has shaped your dreams.

WEARABLE TECH

Driving south from San Francisco, at the narrowest part of the peninsula, there's a gritty industrial interlude before the 280 freeway levels out en route to the affluent municipalities beyond. Here in South San Francisco and Daly City, tired service-industry workers trudge home from the bus stop to boxy houses on crowded side streets.

In a white-walled room tucked behind the garage in one of those unremarkable houses, Sonny Vu sits at a folding table, the kind you might see in a church basement. He's convincing a banker he doesn't need any money.

The banker is dressed in northern California business attire—tailored suit, no tie, a nice watch peeking out from beneath his sleeve. Vu is dressed in a black T-shirt, jeans, and flip-flops. He opens a MacBook Pro and talks through a presentation about the company he founded, Misfit Wearables.

There's no watch on Vu's wrist. Instead he wears a thin wristband that holds a tapered, dark-gray aluminum disk about the size of a quarter. This is Misfit's first product, Shine. It's a device that inspired 127 online articles about Misfit in the tech press, everywhere from *Wired* to *Mashable* to *TechCrunch*—"without anyone knowing what it did," Vu says, grinning. He pops it out of its holder and sets it on the screen of his iPhone. "This has been tracking my activity for the past week. I just set it here, and it uploads all my data. No cable, no Bluetooth," he explains as tiny lights blink around the circumference of the disk.

Shine is an activity tracker, a device to record how often and how

far you walk, bike, or swim. It's hardly the first to market—products from Nike, Jawbone, and Fitbit have already arrived—but Vu is betting that there is a place for great design in the geeky space of "wearable technology." Apple's iPod was a late arrival in the personal music player market in 2001, but soon dominated the category thanks to its elegant design. In the same way, Vu aims to make technology you actually want to use—and wear.

Vu hands the disk to the banker, then to me. Its surface is perfectly machined, the blank beauty we've come to associate with high-end technology. It's strangely alluring. "We showed this to women, who are the hardest group to get to accept wearable technology," Vu says. "We didn't tell them what it did. We just asked, 'Would you wear this?' And 20 percent said yes. They would wear it just as jewelry even if it had no function."

Vu runs down the list of investors who are already committed to Misfit: former Apple CEO John Sculley, Vinod Khosla, one of the most renowned venture capitalists in the Valley, and a host of other firms. They've invested millions. A campaign on the crowdsourcing site Indiegogo, where customers could reserve one of the first Shine devices for \$79, raised nearly \$850,000.

All this for an activity tracker? Part of my agreement with Vu is that I won't write about Misfit's future product plans. By the end of the day it's clear that Shine is just the beginning. Not that I find out much about Misfit's future product, code-named "Mars."

Later I walk up to the second floor to get a snack, past what would normally be the house's two bedrooms. Each room now hosts half a dozen engineers and their computers around a large common table. Within a few minutes of my coming upstairs, the doors quietly close.

Vu's meeting wraps up. The folder the banker has brought with him, pitching his global firm's ability to help startups raise capital, is never opened. As he leaves, it's pretty clear he has made the transition a lot of people seem to make when they spend time with Sonny Vu—from thinking he has something to offer Vu, to hoping he can convince Vu to let him in on the next big thing.

ON THE DOWN LOW

You discover two things pretty quickly when scouting stories in this part of the world. First, how many Christians there are. This is not the Bible Belt by a long stretch—pastors, church planters, and ordinary Christians describe the kind of cosmopolitan secularity that's familiar to residents of London or New York. But in the past decade the San Francisco Bay Area has seen a resurgence of vital churches, such as Reality SF, the church Sonny and his wife, Christy, attend with 1,200 others. Ask about Christians at the top of major Bay Area companies,



Getting Fit: Bart Munro and Kevon Saber (right) in Fig's Palo Alto office.



'We're not a Christian company. I'm not sure such a thing exists. We're trying to build a world-class company where God is the senior partner, more so than a place for Christians to work.'
Kevon Saber, cofounder, Fig

and you get a far longer list than you would in, say, New York City.

The second thing you discover is how few of these Christians want to be identified by name in a story for *Christianity Today*, all the more so the younger and the more recently successful they are. In no other place we've covered for This Is Our City, even the far more secular city of Portland, Oregon, did we encounter such diffidence about being publicly identified as a Christian.

I meet with a managing partner at one of the top venture capital firms in the Valley. "I don't want to be known as a Christian venture capitalist," he tells me. "I want to be known as an excellent venture capitalist who happens to be a Christian." But this doesn't mean he hasn't thought deeply about how his faith has moved from a sacred-secular dichotomy to a much more integrated sense of vocation. "My calling is to serve, minister to, and love the entrepreneurs who will build the technology that will change the world. If they have a Christian who is on their team and advising them, to help them make the right decisions, that can make a huge difference." There are three epicenters of global influence in the United States, he tells me—media in Los Angeles, finance in New York, and technology here in Silicon Valley. And from what he sees, "God is bringing his

colonels and generals into Silicon Valley—something is happening."

For now, many of those influential people want to stay on the down low, even as they curate their social media platforms with unsurpassed skill and dedication. But a few founders have taken a different approach.

PURSUING TRUTH

On the wall at Fig's subleased offices, located in a small Palo Alto office building, are four large cards: "Affirming human worth." "Pursuing truth." "Cultivating authentic community." "Becoming and achieving." Tacked to each card are corporate logos—new-economy darlings like Zappos and FedEx, companies that set the pace for Fig's core values.

On the bookshelf in the conference room where I meet with Fig cofounders Kevon (pronounced KAY-von) Saber and Bart Munro, you can find New York pastor Pete Scazzero's bestseller *The Emotionally Healthy Church* and *The Complete Personalized Promise Bible* sharing space with *The Product Manager's Desk Reference* and Patagonia founder Yvon Chouinard's alterna-business manifesto, *Let My People Go Surfing*.

Like the other Christians profiled in this story, Saber and Munro

are not in the least interested in starting or running a “Christian company.” And also like the others, they relentlessly ask how their Christian faith shapes the company they have founded and run.

For Saber and Munro, it's about *flourishing*. We end up in a full-on whiteboard-assisted discussion about the meaning of the word—these are the kind of Stanford Business School grads who think with a marker in their hands and draw four-quadrant diagrams at the drop of a metaphor. Where Misfit makes devices, Fig makes apps, designed to harness smartphones to help people pursue wholeness of soul, spirit, and body.

Fig helps its users set clear goals for physical and spiritual growth and follow through with the help of friends. The idea came straight from Saber's own experience. “In my early 20s, while building my first startup, my health took a rapid decline. Over nine months I watched my health decline to the point where I had trouble getting out of bed due to chronic fatigue. That's when I realized that wellness is not something that is nice to have—it's a core lever in my own fruitfulness.”

Saber and Munro had been prayer partners and close friends for four years before they started Fig. When they set up the company, they took a different route to compensating their employees. Most Silicon Valley startups pay their early employees peanuts (“rent and ramen money” is how Sonny Vu put it at one point), keeping them on the hook with stock options. But these options usually must be exercised within 90 days of leaving the company—meaning that getting fired or simply taking a new job before the company goes public can result in no reward at all. Saber and Munro overruled their doubtful lawyers to extend that period to several years—essentially, redistributing their investors' and their own gains, should the company succeed, to the employees.

This leads to some awkward conversations. “Many investors are simply looking for financial returns—as much and as quickly as possible,” Saber tells me. “But we strive to ensure that there is strong alignment between our mission, our culture, and our investors.”

Translated, this means a much smaller pool to raise money from, something Saber and Munro seem willing to accept.

Fig's commitment to “pursuing truth” involves a lot of experimenting—launching and relaunching versions of their product, seeking to figure out what actually works to foster healthy physical and spiritual habits. “We didn't want to go down the usual path to building a wellness business: get people really excited with a powerful hype engine, but fail to empower long-term results.” Instead, they have embraced “incremental learning” and a long view—“we are in the second inning of Fig,” Saber tells me.

After an hour of conversation, Saber and Munro invite me to join them as they add their wives and a few trusted counselors by speakerphone and spend the better part of the next hour in prayer. Even in spiritually experimental northern California, it must be an odd sight for their employees to see their bosses in a glass-walled conference room talking to God and asking for guidance. But this is

all part of Fig's pursuit of truth. “We need to pursue the adventure of growing intimate with God,” Munro says. “Growing in this is worth trial and error.”

What do nonbelieving employees think of bosses who spend part of the workday seeking intimacy with God? “Team members can get paid like professional athletes at Google or Facebook,” Saber says. “We disclose to them that we try to make decisions based on God's leading. They joined Fig because of our mission and culture.”

Still, “We're not a Christian company,” Saber says. “I'm not sure such a thing exists. We're trying to build a world-class company where God is the senior partner, more so than a place for Christians to work. We see business as a powerful instrument for aligning the human experience with its original design.

“Poverty, sickness, environmental degradation—we think God cares about these things and wants to be involved. So we believe he will be present when we ask.”

POTLUCK NATION

Misfit is building devices that track your every step; Fig is crowdsourcing the tasks of staying fit and pursuing personal and spiritual disciplines. Kevin Adler is trying to get people to host potlucks.

The founder of *inthis.co* (whose website describes him as “captain + chief stargazer”) did graduate work in the United Kingdom on how natural disasters and collective traumas affect community life. He left academia and entered the tech world to address one of technology's great paradoxes: the way technologies of connection lead to an increasing sense of isolation.

“The average number of friends that a user has on Facebook has gone from about 150 to 300 in only two years,” Adler tells my colleague Katelyn Beaty in an interview. “We're losing all sense of what a friendship actually means. We are more connected than ever before, yet all these people feel completely disconnected from the very communities where they met, the context of the relationships.”

So Adler is aiming to roll out technology that reconnects people to actual communities of shared experience. “Ninety percent of our social life right now is not being captured on any social network. It's based on actual experiences with people. We're developing a platform that takes your experiences from other sources, like Google Calendar, and lets you see who else was part of this experience. Over time, as we go to different events and activities, get-togethers, we'll see our relationship emerge as a byproduct of what we've done together.”

That's the big technological vision—but *inthis* is starting with something much simpler, the online potluck app. Adler himself has started hosting potluck dinners that break down the anonymity of fast-paced urban life. Over dinner, he poses a question like, “What's a resolution you've made that you haven't followed through on?”

“We've ended up having people who are tearful or sharing very personal things in a group of 40 or 45 people. It's nice to actually engage people and say, ‘These are my beliefs. What are yours? Here's why I do what I do.’”

How about if we make the purpose of business to make communities flourish, and to create opportunities for people to express their God-given capacities in meaningful ways?

Sonny Vu, founder,
Misfit Wearables

RISKY BUSINESS

Misfit Wearables, Fig, and inthis are offering very different products, and I found my way to their founders through completely different connections. But the three startups have one odd and interesting feature in common: They all are trying to solve problems that technology has helped create—our sedentary lifestyles, our isolation from one another—with more technology.

There are two ways to look at this. One is to say that we might all be better off shutting off our devices, walking over to our neighbors', and inviting them to dinner, rather than syncing our Google Calendars with a new experience layer while checking our personal wellness app and tracking our steps with a fancy pedometer. The first time I met Adler and heard his passion for restoring real human community in a virtual world, I wondered, *Then why are you building a web app?*

But there is a less cynical, and more realistic, alternative. Cultures don't change by rolling back the clock. They change when people create more culture, cultural artifacts, and institutions that address the deficiencies of existing culture. In their own way, each of these startups is identifying a real need and offering something new, with its own unique possibilities, that would never be created if we simply stood athwart history yelling, "Stop!" Spend even a little time with folks like this, and you sense your cynicism diminishing, and appreciation growing for the depth of their vision for human flourishing—and their willingness to do something about it.

It wasn't hard to see that each of these ventures was risky. Every one of the founders we interviewed for this story had been part of a startup that didn't succeed, as well as startups that succeeded on a modest level but didn't deliver the gold rush that investors require. "My first two ventures reached millions—but neither achieved massive commercial success," Saber told me. In most other parts of the world, that would be laughably false humility. In Silicon Valley it is perfectly appropriate modesty.

It also wasn't hard to see that the venture that is furthest along—Vu's Misfit—is the one that slots most neatly into consumer culture, with its personal, private device that helps individuals achieve basic fitness goals. Fig's vision of the pursuit of wellness cheered on by friends and family, let alone inthis's goal of reconstituting community in a fragmented virtual world, are much more daunting and far less certain.

HERE'S TO THE MISFITS

But Silicon Valley is highly tolerant of failure, and entrepreneurs by definition are energized by risk. What was inspiring about meeting Vu, Saber, Munro, and Adler was the way they are risking everything for their convictions about flourishing and faithfulness, casting their nets out into unfamiliar waters, building something that is good—not just for Christians but for the world.



Golden Dreams: The city of San Jose, in the heart of Silicon Valley.

Vu's Misfit Wearables was named after a famous television advertisement written and narrated by Apple founder Steve Jobs. "Here's to the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels. The troublemakers. The round pegs in the square holes." Interestingly, the word *misfit* came up in our conversation with Adler. "As human beings we have a thirst for belonging. But Silicon Valley is renowned as a valley of misfits," he says. "People here never quite felt like they fit in their communities and their institutions."

As a Christian with a knack for making money, Vu was a misfit in his own way. He spent years looking for models of Christians in business before he encountered the work of Seattle Pacific University's Jeff Van Duzer at an Urbana student missions conference. Vu has now attended four of the triennial conferences.

"Is there a creational, redemptive view of business?" Vu asked me the first time we talked. "How about if we make the purpose of business to make communities flourish, and to create opportunities for people to express their God-given capacities in meaningful ways? We actually incorporated that language into the legal fabric of our company. It was surprisingly difficult to get that into the corporate charter. But eventually we got it in."

Can wearable technology be part of human flourishing? Vu sees it as answering fundamental human longings. "People want superpowers. We aspire to extend our capacities, to be better—wearable technology can help us achieve that. We also want to account for our weaknesses, to correct bad habits. Wearable technology can help do that, too."

That's who we humans are, indeed—yearning for superpowers but dragged down by our own weaknesses. In fact, you could say we are all misfits. Technology has both given us powers we could never have imagined, and exposed weaknesses we never knew we had. Could it also be part of the redemption of both sides of our image-bearing, image-breaking nature?

If entrepreneurs like Vu succeed, maybe Silicon Valley will be known not just for silicon or gold, but for a better way of being human—a place where even misfits, or especially misfits, can flourish. ☩

Andy Crouch is executive editor of *Christianity Today*.

Stewards of Wealth Streams

Four Silicon Valley residents who are wielding their region's capital for good. By Roxanne Wieman

PAMELA WILHELMS, an environmental engineer and business consultant, was rounding the corner on the 44th floor of a skyscraper along the San Francisco Bay, when she stopped dead in her tracks.

"I turn to the left and see pictures of the company's landholdings and factories—in the same Central American country I'd seen the night before," says the San Diego native and Denver Seminary graduate. The previous night, she had attended a fundraiser for a nonprofit that digs wells in Central America. There she learned about a village whose water source had been destroyed by an American company upstream—one that looked awfully familiar.

"I didn't realize how complicit I was. By day I was helping leaders and executives go after their economic bottom line, and by night I was on the board of not-for-profits trying to clean up the mess," says Wilhelms.

"We're never going to create a sustainable planet as long as we have a false dichotomy that says nonprofits do good and for-profits make money."

Eight years later, the dichotomy is fading for Wilhelms and others who believe business can make more than profit. Call it the "for-benefit company," a niche but growing field where Wilhelms is applying her organizational consulting skills, White House service, and seminary training to get companies to pursue more than the traditional bottom line.

The companies Wilhelms has worked with—including Nike, Unilever, and Seventh Generation—seek a triple bottom line: economic, social, and environmental, so that their products benefit all three cultural arenas.

At first, she says, "People would just laugh at me and say, 'Nobody's ever going to measure a triple bottom line.'" But the laughter is fading, as some states are beginning to recognize the for-benefit company (or "B Corp") as a distinct business classification with legal protection to make long-term investments for a variety of stakeholders.

For Wilhelms, pursuing a triple bottom line is rooted in faith. "There is a deep theology to a lot of this thinking," she says. But she notes that sustainability is a common-good goal shared by people of many faiths and no faith at all. "We have to look systemically, and we have to bring together economists and ecologists and corporate leaders and government leaders and artists and everybody from the

whole system," she says.

Convening is one of Wilhelms's gifts and is the foundation of her new initiative, the Soul of the Next Economy. And Silicon Valley is the best base from which to do it.

"Silicon Valley is a place of amazing innovation," Wilhelms says. "It's also become the venture capital of the world." When choosing where to live in 2005 (between Washington, D.C., New England, and Silicon Valley), she learned that of the top 100 economic entities in the world (including governments), for the first time more than half were corporations. (Since then, that number has only grown—in 2011, 63.4 percent of the top 175 were corporations.) And a growing number of those are in the Bay Area. "I felt like my call was to be here," Wilhelms says. "It's such an important place because it leads [and influences] so much."

In other words, if not Silicon Valley, then where? Chances are you have a smartphone lying within a few feet of you right now. Was the coltan for that smartphone mined from a conflict area in the Congo? Were the workers who put it together among those who threatened mass suicide in the Chinese Foxconn factory last year? Many of these questions are answered in Silicon Valley, and they touch all of us—from the upstream of society all the way down to its most vulnerable members.

AMPLIFYING IMPACT

Russ Hall, cofounder of Legacy Venture, has seen the good that wealth can do. He is a fellow at the American Leadership Forum of Silicon Valley and a board member of a variety of philanthropic groups, including Stanford's Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society and the Global Philanthropy Forum. While Wilhelms is addressing how companies make 90 percent of their profits, Hall is addressing the 10 percent that many companies give to charity.

After a successful career in marketing and sales in Silicon Valley, Hall retired in 1999 to cofound Legacy and its sister company, Legacy Works. Highly influenced by Bob Buford's Halftime ministries, Hall and partner Jim Anderson wanted to harness venture capital—the early stage, high-risk investment so essential to Silicon Valley startups—with investors' desire to give back.

Here's how it works: Legacy Venture takes advantage of a charity tax break by helping their partners (LPs) invest in premier venture capital firms with minimal upfront costs. In exchange for such investment opportunities, LPs agree to donate all principal and profits to the causes of their choice.



Virtuous Venture:
Bay resident Russ Hall helps the extremely wealthy invest in charities and nonprofits—to the tune of \$1 billion.

JEFF SINGER PHOTOGRAPHY

“If you are lucky enough to be in venture, you often have a whole satchel of scattered things you’ve invested in,” says Hall. “At some point, you [have a] stock that’s done as well as it’s going to do, and [you] want to invest in something else. You’d sell it or you’d give that to your philanthropy because if you sold it, you’d have to pay the taxman.”

Since its founding, Legacy members have committed to invest more than \$1 billion. Hall describes it as “amplifying the size and effectiveness of people’s philanthropy.”

Legacy Venture may sound too abstract to have any real-world impact, but a visit to its offices proves otherwise. There, Hall points to colorful frames on the walls. Pictures of wells, of children under insect nets, of women selling fruits and vegetables at the market demonstrate the work funded by LPs. Hall holds up a pair of glasses that look like party favors—a large plastic screw on each side of the frame. These are adjustable prescription glasses and cost just a few dollars. Anyone can wear them, twist the screws until the prescription is right, and

‘Having a second, a third, a fourth home, a faster jet, more cars—that narrative doesn’t need to be fed. Philanthropy should be just as exciting as the lures of the world.’

Russ Hall, cofounder,
Legacy Venture

then break the screws off. It’s an invention funded by Legacy, and an example of Silicon Valley wealth used for good.

Silicon Valley is home to many of the *nouveau riche*, Hall says—a group that often wants to give back but doesn’t have the family history to teach them how. Legacy Works teaches investors about new charities and how to effectively serve boards. “We try to build this community that will hopefully do a better job,” Hall says. “The good and bad news of venture is it doesn’t work overnight. It takes a decade, give or take, to work. We’ve got their attention for a decade, so it’s a chance to draw them in, and maybe they get intercepted by a broader vision of what they can do.

“Philanthropy should be just as exciting as the lures of the world,” says Hall. “Having a second, a third, a fourth home, a faster jet, more cars—that narrative doesn’t need to be fed. Can we feed a narrative of how much good you can do?”

ACROSS THE FREEWAY

It’s one thing to talk about the effects of wealth worldwide. It is another to see the effects play out down the street. In Silicon Valley, that’s how far you have to travel—across the strategically placed U.S. Route 101—to see, as Wilhelms puts it, “what’s downstream from wealth.”

East Palo Alto is a city defined by its proximity: *almost* the end of the first cross-continental railroad, *almost* the headquarters of Facebook. It became the drug supplier to the Bay Area and, in the early 1990s, was deemed the murder capital of the United States. Today, it is a densely populated city with a majority Hispanic population (65 percent). Six percent are white and 16 percent are black. Its income per capita is 30.5 percent lower than the national average and 40.9 percent below the California average. Most residents work in the

service industry or in what few blue-collar jobs are available on the other side of the freeway. It’s an uneasy relationship—one made all the more uneasy as East Palo Alto has become expensive turf.

“A couple years ago, a lot of people began losing their houses,” says Blanca Medina, a housing counselor at the local nonprofit Able

Preserving EPA: Blanca Medina helps residents of East Palo Alto retain their homes amid pressure from regional buyers.



JEFF SINGER PHOTOGRAPHY

Works. “In East Palo Alto, we had about 200 properties go through foreclosure. A lot of these people, when they purchased their home, signed for a loan they could never sustain.”

It’s a story, of course, playing out in many other cities. But it’s particularly insidious in East Palo Alto, because it’s within the Silicon Valley region. East Palo Alto has the most affordable housing in San Mateo County. As property values increase around it, investors have begun to look toward developing East Palo Alto. Distressed and foreclosed properties are magnets for investors, who snatch them up with cash. Gentrification seems inevitable as East Palo Alto is swallowed up by the Silicon Valley boom.

“These people have lived in their homes for more than 20 years,” Medina says. “But because their payment went up, they can no longer afford to stay.” In the past six months, through an Able Works program called LiveAble, Medina and other housing counselors have rescued more than 40 homes from foreclosure. LiveAble counsels and advocates for homeowners who are more than 30 days delinquent on their mortgage note. The program is free, and Medina works with lenders and banks to negotiate a lower interest rate for a longer term. She aims to get the payment down to about 30 percent of the homeowner’s income.

“These homes carry a lot of memory,” she says. But Medina, a 26-year-old mother of two, is driven by more than sentiment: Owning

a home is essential to halting the cycle of poverty. She notes that children of homeowners are 20 percent more likely to finish high school and 116 percent more likely to go to college. And daughters of homeowners are 20 percent less likely to become teenage mothers—as Medina was.

At age 17, Medina was forced to leave her parents’ house when her daughter was born. She found shelter at the local nonprofit New Creations. They gave her a place to live, helped her care for her daughter and stay in school, and took her to church, where she “met God,” she says. “God has given me the ability to feel their struggles as if they were my own.”

In addition to being a housing counselor, Medina teaches single moms about finances and leadership, and mentors them in their careers. She also leads the women in an optional Bible study. “I think the biggest struggle for a single mom is finding resources and building a positive community. These women are extremely smart; they are leaders. Had I not met certain people from the community who are doing good, I would not have had as much opportunity, nor would I have the desire to reach out to the community myself.”

Breaking these generational cycles is what Able Works is all about. Started in 2005 by John Liotti and Marc Prioleau, Able Works seeks to address East Palo Alto’s deficits in education, banking, housing, and employment—deficits that appear even starker within Silicon Valley. “We started asking questions like, ‘How, in a community of 2.5 square miles, can there be 97 youth-serving nonprofits and still a 70 percent dropout rate?’” says Liotti, Able Works CEO and a local police chaplain. “How can a community

that’s literally a stone’s throw away from Palo Alto have check-cashing outlets as the primary banking outlet? And no grocery store?”

There’s a grocery store now—a busy Hispanic market with “the best tacos around,” says Liotti. And thanks to groundbreaking partnerships Able Works forged in 2007, a number of businesses and development groups have cropped up in the area. They’ve also educated thousands of kids—upward of 500 a week—through FutureProfits, a program that teaches underresourced high-school students about finances and life skills. Lasting change will come only when these systemic issues are addressed, says Liotti.

“The stuff we’re dealing with is long-term: education, housing, crime, systemic racism. It’s just this big thing that takes lots of care, lots of effort, and lots of time.”

“Slow and steady” isn’t a celebrated value in a startup culture like Silicon Valley. But each in their own way, Wilhelms, Hall, Medina, and Liotti champion patience, especially regarding wealth and its effects. What’s downstream (or down the street) from wealth is ultimately about the long-term consequences and benefits of a for-profit culture. It’s a question Christians in Silicon Valley must consider, because in the end, it’s also a kingdom question. 

Roxanne Wieman is curriculum editor for This Is Our City and serves as an editorial consultant for organizations such as Barna Group and Q Ideas.

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You Can't Think Your Way to God

Christian formation means shaping our loves, says **Jamie Smith**, not just educating our minds.
Interview by David Neff

IF THERE'S ONE REFRAIN coming from James K. A. Smith these days, it's that we Christians can't think our way into the kingdom. It may sound strange for a philosopher (at Calvin College) to downplay the role of thinking, but Smith is quick to see the inconsistencies between what we think and what we do. Indeed, he recently caught himself reading the Christian farmer-philosopher-poet Wendell Berry while sitting in the food court at Costco. Smith was struck by the dissonance: Berry is an apostle of mindful and earth-friendly food production and consumption, while Costco is the symbol of American supersized consumption.

When we try to think our way out of such inconsistencies, our behavior keeps coming back to bite us. That's because behavior is not driven by ideas. It is a bodily thing that reflects the way we order—or disorder—our loves and desires.

In 2009, Smith published *Desiring the Kingdom* (Baker Academic), in which he argued that in order to help college students put their desires in proper order, Christian higher education needed to incorporate worship and spiritual practices at a foundational level. This year, Smith published a follow-up, *Imagining the Kingdom*, designed to provide a rationale for, as the subtitle has it, “how worship works.” In the book, he interacts with two French theorists (Pierre Bourdieu and Maurice Merleau-Ponty) to understand how human beings use bodily rituals to shape their desires. Former CT editor in chief David Neff talked with Smith about how rituals—both religious and secular—inform our beliefs and affections.

In your book, you set forth what you call a “liturgical anthropology.” What does liturgy have to do with human nature?

Human beings are at their core defined by what they worship rather than primarily by what they think, know, or believe. That is bound up with the central Augustinian claim that we are what we love. Taking Augustine's teaching that what you love is what you worship and what you worship is what you love, I tried to come up with a model of the human person that appreciates the centrality of love. That propelled me to see that we are ritual, liturgical creatures

whose loves are shaped and aimed by the fundamentally forming practices that we are immersed in.

Secular rituals shape us just as much as sacred ones. You say that “the Devil has all the best liturgies.”

The core of the person is what he or she loves, and that is bound up with what they worship—that insight recalibrates the radar for cultural analysis. The rituals and practices that form our loves spill out well beyond the sanctuary. Many secular liturgies are trying to get us to love some other kingdom and some other gods.

What about Monday Night Football?

Monday Night Football, going to the mall—take your pick. We Christians should be aware that there's something at stake in cultural participation that we wouldn't have been concerned about if all we did was worry about the messages in culture. I am trying to wake folks up to realize that if these cultural institutions and practices



are formative, then the spaces that we inhabit *do* something to us. The stadium and the mall are examples of that.

You worry about “the chronological snobbery that disdains the old as so five minutes ago” and constantly pursues “fresh expressions.”

I'm worried that we absorb a sensibility from secular liturgies that makes us buy the story that our salvation is in novelty. It's not the sensibility we need in order to revitalize North American Christianity. The postmodern future of the church is in remembering things that we've forgotten. I am entirely indebted to the late Robert Webber's vision of “ancient future faith.” I'm just trying to dig down into the philosophical and theological roots of his intuition.

You describe Christian belief as the way we navigate the world—not what we confess. How do those two relate?

I wrote that in a context where I engage social theorist Pierre Bourdieu. He had an expansive notion of belief. He thinks your body believes things that your mouth could never articulate. The orthodox Christian tradition was launched with the Incarnation of God in Christ, the apostolic witness, and the Scriptures. But we inherit that rule of faith in two ways: first, in the creeds and confessions of the church (the articulated, explicit aspects of the faith), and second, in the liturgical heritage that hands down the know-how of the faith—our practices, our disciplines, our liturgical forms. Ideally, there's a feedback loop between those two things. If you had just the creeds and confessions without the practices of Christian worship, you would never get the full inheritance of what the Spirit has passed on to us. That inheritance is not owned by Constantinople or Rome or Canterbury. Rather, it is a common universal heritage of the body of Christ that can be renewed for any who call themselves Christians.

Many of the people who shaped modern evangelicalism were worldview thinkers: Carl Henry, Francis Schaeffer, Charles Colson. Yet you sound critical of using “worldview” as a way of relating to the broader culture.

Worldview is a gateway for me. I'm especially indebted to Schaeffer and to the Dutch philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd. Worldview language helped me see the expansiveness of Christ's claim on all of creation. I don't want to jettison it. I just think there are reductionist versions that tend to overly intellectualize Christianity. Worldview analysis isn't enough to account for the dynamics of our cultural immersion.

If you buy into a certain version of worldview that makes it central, you'll think action is the logical conclusion from the ideas and beliefs that you have in your mind. That's a naïve account of what actually generates behavior. In the history of the church, the spiritual disciplines were never just an informational process. They were formational disciplines that tried to capture our imaginations, not just inform our thinking.

Is there a way to get spiritual know-how apart from engaging in the spiritual disciplines?

I don't think so. I understand that evangelicals tend to see ritual as self-management and exertion—as “works.” If that's all that ritual is,

then we should be critical of it. But don't think of ritual and disciplines as expressions of the self. Think of them as what Craig Dykstra calls “habitations of the Spirit.” Spiritual disciplines aren't about showing that we're trying to pursue God. These are gifts that the Spirit inhabits. They are rituals that God invites us into to live into the power of the Spirit. They are the way that you put on Christ.

We evangelicals tend to think of worship as only an expressive activity. Because of that, we've lost the downward, God-initiated, formative aspect of worship. Whereas if you recover the sense that



God's initiative is at work, then the rituals and the disciplines are invitations to live into God's power, not ways for us to spiritually show off.

Let's take some case studies in ritual. First, a large number of Catholics and Anglicans have been schooled in the classic Christian practices, and yet they don't seem to live the faith. Then there is Alcoholics Anonymous. AA is every bit as ritualized as the classic liturgy, yet it is very successful. Why does one work while the other often fails?

Liturgy and spiritual practices should be attended with reflection. Roman Catholicism has not always done a great job of catechesis, of inviting people to understand why they are doing what they're doing. If you don't have that accompanying formation in the practices, then the practices become rote. I worry about romanticizing liturgy. It's good to have friends who are cradle Anglicans who are good skeptics about some of my claims.

In Alcoholics Anonymous, there is quite a bit of catechesis. A lot of the routine is trying to help people understand why it's important that they go through the motions. Rituals, routines, and liturgies need to be owned by those who participate in them.

Let's take two different rituals aimed at getting people to repent. Some traditions invite a revivalist to preach repentance every year. Other churches use Lent to call people to repentance.

JOHN HARRISON

Are these two things essentially interchangeable, or are they fundamentally different?

A wide repertoire of Christian practices can accomplish the call to repentance. But if something is going to be a liturgical practice, it can't be just a single event. We have to do it over time and cycle back through it. The camp-meeting model almost has a liturgical calendar aspect to it.

In my Pentecostal background, it was also attended with bodily practices. The altar in Pentecostal renewal is the site of confession.



If you had just the creeds and confessions without the practices of Christian worship, you would never get the full inheritance of what the Spirit has passed on to us.

It's a very physical, very affective experience when someone lays hands on you while you kneel at an altar.

What characterizes historic Christian observation of Lent is the narrative shape of the story that those practices embed us in. There is something about the fullness of the whole counsel of Scripture implanted in those practices. Unfortunately, in some of the free-church repertoire, certain aspects of the story can drop out, and therefore we miss the opportunity to be formed by that chapter of the story.

In some Baptist churches, the practice of baptism itself is declining.

In my Reformed church, people are baptized only once. But when a family brings a child to be baptized, we all relive our baptism. And we relive that part of the story because it is a congregational practice, as opposed to something that happens at the end of summer camp. The ritual itself involves the congregation in the story. God's covenant promises are marked on the child, and the parents make promises in response to God's promises, but then the whole congregation promises to be cofamily with that child and those parents. That's a rich enactment of the biblical notion of covenant, and it's a tangible expression of the church as first family.

That's true of all the life-cycle rituals in a church.

This is a reason to revisit the Christian funeral. Every funeral I go to is training for my own death, and learning how to live and to

hope as a community.

My burden is that a lot of North American Christianity has reduced worship to expressive practice, where the most important thing is that we are sincere in our expression. We think of worship as primarily upward expressions of us to God. Whereas, if you recapture the formative, God-oriented action in worship, in funerals, in baptisms, and in the Lord's Supper, there is something at stake in making sure that the shape of the ritual tells God's story, so it gets planted in us.

You write that rituals not only form us as Christians, but they conscript us into the story they tell. Conscript is a very strong word. Some people feel their religious upbringing conscripted them against their will.

I invoke the conscription metaphor to recognize that in fact, we are recruited to visions of the good life apart from our conscious choosing. It's not a question of whether you're being conscripted to some vision of the good life; it's *which* vision of the good life.

Of course, we want everyone to own the Christian faith as their own. On the other hand, if you don't recognize the power of secular liturgies to conscript your imagination to other visions of the good life, you won't come up with adequate countermeasures. We can't simply say conscription—or recruitment—per se is a problem. We hope the imaginations of the kids in our homes and our churches are captured. It shouldn't be coercive, but it is not just presenting information and then leaving the decision to them. It's not really just a decision; it's whether you have been enfolded into the right story.

What do you mean when you call for an "erotic comprehension" of the faith?

To say that we are desiring creatures is to say that we are erotic creatures. It is sad that the notion of the erotic has been co-opted by pornography. For Augustine, *eros* meant much more. Many of us have imbibed from Swedish theologian Anders Nygren an opposition between *agape* (the love that gives) and *eros* (the love that desires). But Augustine's understanding is that *agape* is rightly ordered *eros* toward God. *Agape* doesn't erase our nature as erotic creatures. I'm trying to overcome the dichotomy between the two while also recognizing that a lot of what passes for the erotic in our culture is completely disordered.

Christian formation, you say, is not just teaching us to see the world from a particular perspective but also intending the world to be a certain way. How does that relate to the renewed emphasis on justice among younger American Christians?

The biblical vision is not just a vision of my own personal salvation. It is God's renewal of all things. The end we hope for is shalom, the flourishing of all creation. That means reordering injustices and the disordered social life. The whole point of worship is actually our sending, to go out and do cultural renewal and caretaking. The renewed appreciation for a more holistic sense of justice we see among younger evangelicals is a great expression of that.

I am concerned that it is so easy to let passion for justice replace other aspects of the biblical vision. The only way that we can have our imaginations primed to pursue the biblical vision of justice is to be regularly immersed in the practices of Christian worship. They keep re-centering us in God's story so we aren't captivated by the latest progressive fad. That keeps us anchored. ✚

New Light on Bible Prophecy

Robert Finley has written a book which many pastors and Bible teachers say makes much more sense than most other prophetic teachings which are popular today.

Some Highlights

1. The Great Tribulation—66-70 A.D.

The book of Revelation was written in 66 A.D. to reveal that **"the time was at hand"** for the great tribulation foretold in Matthew 24:21. Millions of Israelites in Judaea, Samaria and Galilee were killed during that frightful 3½ year period, which culminated with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. The author maintains that no further (future) "tribulation period" is foretold in the New Testament.

2. The Antichrist—Muhammad

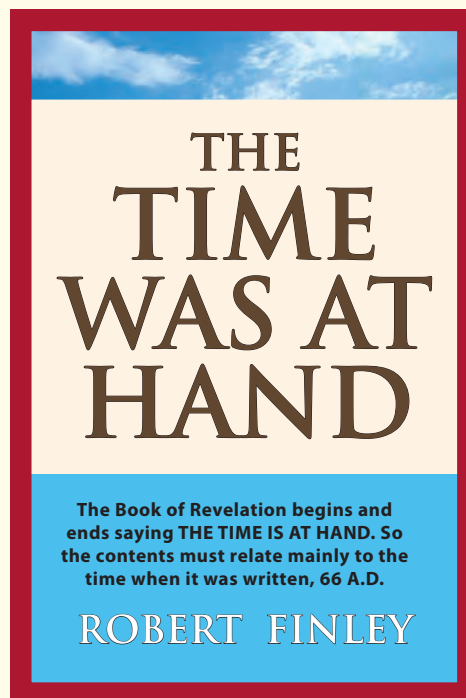
For 900 years, 650-1550, many church leaders were saying that Muhammad was the Antichrist: not "against Christ," but the one who took His place for millions of people, as an anti-climax follows a climax. Robert Finley says they had it right, even though Martin Luther and other reformers said the Pope was the Antichrist. This caused them to ignore Islam temporarily, but over 14 centuries Muhammad's cumulative influence has been greater than that of any man who ever lived, except Christ Himself. There will be no future Antichrist comparable to Muhammad.

3. The Second Coming—Missionary Eschatology

When His disciples asked for a sign of His return, the Lord Jesus said, **The gospel must first be published among all nations** (Mark 13:10). He never said all nations would be Christianized. Rather He said that His gospel would **be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come** (Matthew 24:14). Nothing is said in the New Testament about His return being related to political events in greater Palestine. Rather, as God promised Abraham, when our Lord has a witness, **a people for His name**, within all the 7000 nations on earth He will come again. That's why New Testament prophecies give top priority to foreign missions, and Dr. Finley's book emphasizes "missionary eschatology."

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OPINIONS AND PERSPECTIVES ON ISSUES FACING THE CHURCH

Viewpoints



We are too quick to apply our own accustomed grid of faith and praxis. Let's give God thanks for those who follow a road less traveled.

Luci Shaw
Bellingham, Washington

Ranking the Radicals

I read with great interest about the new radicals ["Here Come the Radicals!" March]. However, I am troubled by our tendency to label anything that diverges from standard practice, as if to say, "Let's give it a name, allocate it a slot in our Christian belief system, set it apart, evaluate it, and assign it a grade."

Jesus asks a unique obedience of each of us. We are too quick to apply our own accustomed grid of faith and praxis. Let's give God thanks for those who follow a road less traveled.

LUCI SHAW
Bellingham, Washington

Although I have been inspired by the "radical" genre of books, Matthew Lee Anderson put his finger on some of my reservations about them. Last year I wrote a book. The editor liked it, but he said that Christian publishers would never take a chance on a writer without a "national platform." This highlights the paradox Anderson notes: You have to be nationally known in order to speak out about the lowly Savior. How radical is that?

LISA GRAY
Livermore, California

"Here Come the Radicals!" was informative but also odd. It talks about a "radical movement" but gives little evidence any such movement exists. What we have, rather, is another string of hot-selling books critiquing popular Christianity.

The oddest thing about the article is the superficial comparison to Keswick. These books and Keswick both stress more radical Christian commitment. But that's about as far as any comparison goes. It is not helpful to lump a bunch of popular books together, call it a "movement," and then compare it with a movement that has existed for over a century—and which has had shifting and diverse manifestations. Keswick may be (and has been) critiqued on several fronts, but that is largely beside the point for this article.

The focus on worship is good, but also beside the point; I suspect most of these radical authors would agree. The article falls into either/or rhetoric that obscures the point of these authors.

HOWARD A. SNYDER
Wilmore, Kentucky

The apostle Paul—a radical follower—taught the Corinthian believers that

TOP 3

What got the most comments in March's CT

29%
Here Come the Radicals!
Matthew Lee Anderson

13%
The Future of Today's Christianity
Mark Galli and Andy Crouch

10%
The Love Shack
Interview by Mark Galli

READERS' PICK

The most praised piece in March's CT



The Sabbath Swimming Lesson
Susan Wunderink

those who remained unmarried could give their undivided attention to the Lord's affairs. But in the same letter, he made allowances for those who would marry and also taught that those parts of Christ's body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.

By all means, let's celebrate those whom the Lord calls to amazing deeds of love and sacrifice. But for leaders who are tempted to teach that all the "real" disciples of Jesus will exhibit similarly "radical" lifestyles, perhaps they should first consider, "There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord" (1 Cor. 12:5).

JAMES RIGNEY
Picaune, Mississippi

Addressing Sex Abuse

In regards to "Investigator or Prosecutor?" [April], it's important to note that the "difficulty of vetting abuse claims" is not the issue here. (And if it were, the story should have delved into the whole fact-finding process and detailed the differences in approaches between a faith-based organization and a secular one.)

The true issue here, the newsworthy crisis, is that an organization that hired Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment (GRACE)—only after intense public pressure through a social media campaign by the victims—never fully cooperated with GRACE, and

COMMENTS? QUESTIONS?
CT'S EDITORS WOULD LOVE TO HEAR THEM.

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waited until the last minute to pull out and switch to a private team that promises them confidentiality and control. The reality is that the Association of Baptists for World Evangelism (ABWE) has been caught, once again, behaving badly. Their firing of GRACE was reprehensible, and their excuses don't hold up to scrutiny. Instead of shining a spotlight on the many strange accusations of ABWE, the article let their assertions stand and even used one of their false accusations as its title.

NAME WITHHELD BY REQUEST

"Investigator or Prosecutor?" missed the main story. The story is not whether an investigative team with a combined experience of more than 100 years investigating and addressing child sexual abuse matters did its work with professionalism and according to best practices. (One member of our team coauthored a textbook used by law enforcement nationwide in the investigation and prosecution of child abuse.) It is not whether a team acted more as prosecutors, "building a case rather than finding facts," as alleged by ABWE. (For the record, a prosecutor's job is to search for truth, not "build a case.")

The story is about an institution that hired GRACE to conduct an independent investigation into how it handled a

missionary physician who acknowledged sexually abusing a child. An institution that required the child to sign a "confession" implicating her involvement in this abuse and asking "God's forgiveness." An institution that sent the perpetrator back home and never informed anyone outside of the organization that he had sexually victimized a child, instead communicating that he had been sent home because of "immoral conduct." A child abuser who returned home to operate a family medical practice for over 20 years.

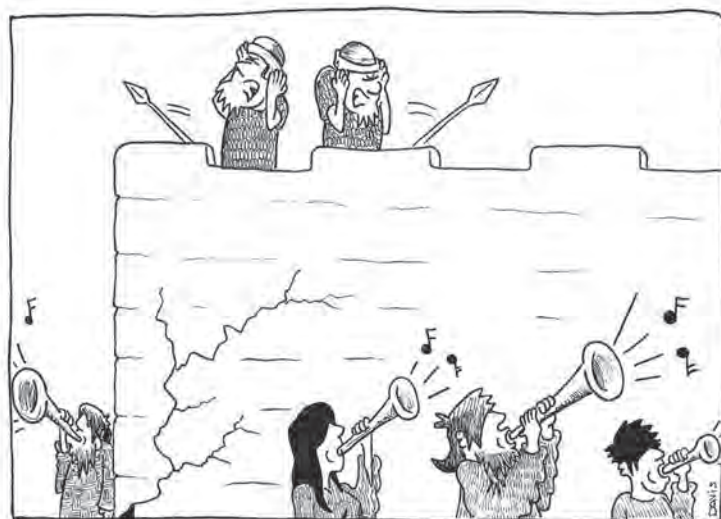
The story is about many brave and tenacious abuse survivors who labored for over a decade to get ABWE to address these fundamental failures. It is about an institution that fired GRACE after its investigation had been concluded and only weeks before publication of the final report, and unilaterally decided to prevent those same abuse survivors from learning what GRACE uncovered during its 20-month investigation.

The great tragedy is that this story is true.

BOZ TCHIVIDJIAN
Executive Director, GRACE

CORRECTION

In March's *Under Discussion* ["Should an Iowa dentist have fired his attractive assistant?"], the third response from the left was from Greg Smalley.



God unleashes the destructive power of Smooth Jazz on the Wall of Jericho.

compiled by Elissa Cooper

WORTH REPEATING

Things overheard at CT online.

"He shouldn't be expected to have a public position on every hot-button issue."

Robert Pelfrey, noting that Tim Tebow might have canceled his appearance at First Baptist Church of Dallas for many reasons. Christians said Tebow wasn't standing up for his faith.

Speaking Out: "Tebow's Big Fumble," by R. Albert Mohler Jr.

"There are bigger issues of cultural copying we need to address."

Shirley Fontaine, discussing how we are quick to judge current fads while we forget how pagan rituals influenced celebrations like Christmas and Easter.

Her.meneutics: "The Problems with Christians Doing the 'Harlem Shake,'" by Kate Shellnutt

"I don't have to qualify my thankfulness by worrying that I don't agree with everything he believes."

Darrell Hart, who is grateful for Pope Francis and his compassion for the poor.

"Why Pope Francis Excites (Most) Evangelical Leaders," by Ruth Moon

"I was told that if I failed miserably, suffered disease and financial tribulation, but attended his class, it would be worth it, just to sit under his tutelage."

Sling Patterson, remembering seminary professor Howard Hendricks.

CT Liveblog: "Died: Howard Hendricks, Longtime Dallas Seminary 'Prof' and Mentor," by Kate Shellnutt

"Our hope may be in the Lord, but there's nothing wrong with being excited about what Mark's leadership will bring to the faith and our world."

johnfromberkeley, congratulating Mark Labberton on becoming Fuller Seminary's president.

CT Liveblog: "Fuller Seminary Picks Preacher of 'Dangerous Acts' as New President," by Melissa Steffan

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Higher Ed at a Crossroad

Why the local church should care, and what it can do.

I recall the moment it became clear to me that American Christian higher education was in trouble. It was May 2008, and I was visiting the South African Theological Seminary in Rivonia, near Johannesburg. As the website puts it, the school focuses “on equipping you for service, right where you are in your local church.” To this end, it offers distance education only. This is no fly-by-night startup, but is accredited by the South African Council on Higher Education. It offers bachelor’s degrees, master’s degrees, and doctorates in theology.

And at pennies on the dollar. The school intends to educate African pastors who can’t afford to leave their ministries, move to greater Johannesburg, and study for two to three years. In addition, the programs have to be affordable. Affordable indeed: An M.Th. degree is a two-year program that costs \$2,000 a year. At a typical American seminary, that is about the cost of *two classes*.

Naturally, students from the West can enroll—at a fraction of the cost of attending schools on their own continents—and still receive a degree recognized by a national accrediting body of a developed nation.

Compare this with the situation in North America, where the cost of tuition at American colleges (public and private) nearly doubled as a percentage of median annual earnings between 2001 and 2010, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. But the rise in tuition apparently is not keeping up with the cost of a traditional on-campus education. A 2012 Bain Brief study, “The Financially Sustainable University,” found that a third of all American colleges and universities were not

financially sustainable. The list of financially troubled schools includes some Christian colleges. Critics argue that the Bain Brief is needlessly alarmist, but no one disagrees that we have a problem.

For people in the pews, many of whom are swimming in debt from their own college and seminary days (or from their children’s education), the response is often, “Good! Maybe *they* will finally get the message—tuition has just gotten out of hand.” Or, “Well, *they* have a problem, don’t *they*?”

They certainly have a problem, and *they* well know it. But what many local churches don’t fully recognize is that their problem is actually ours.

We in the local church tend to think of Christian higher education as a service industry. We look to it only when we have a student ready for college or seminary, or when we have a staff opening and need the schools to give us the names of qualified candidates. Christian higher education is there to grant accredited degrees and vet pastoral candidates.

Yes. And so much more. Many churches don’t get the “so much more.”

In Chicagoland, I’ve attended churches that have taken full advantage of their location: They regularly invite professors from local Christian colleges and seminaries to preach and teach. This enriches the biblical, theological, and practical understanding of these congregations in palpable ways, even if the impact can’t be charted on a graph. This has not only matured disciples, but professors

and their institutions walk away more deeply appreciating the questions of Christians in the pew. This, in turn, only enhances the relevance of their scholarship.

But what can the local church, a far distance from such institutions, do? First, even distant churches can create budget line items to once a year fly in a teacher to give a daylong seminar or even a week of classes—this is

well within the reach of even modestly sized churches. And certainly local churches should consider using some of their benevolence giving to support Christian higher education.

But today we have an unparalleled opportunity.

Distance is no longer the obstacle it once was. From video lectures burned on DVDs to live streaming to chat rooms, more Christian colleges and seminaries are the proverbial click away from every church in America.

Here is our hunch: If churches begin asking schools for such resources, financially strapped schools will figure out how to make this education happen at an affordable cost. Many are already taking steps in this direction. Some will probably offer some classes for free as a way to market their school. The point is that many schools won’t invest in such an effort unless there is some inkling of demand.

As noted, this sort of thing can greatly enrich both discipleship and scholarship. To be sure, this is not all that can be done to increase the bonds between the local church and the not-so-local college or seminary. This alone won’t meet all the daunting educational challenges we face together. But increase those bonds we must, or else it’s not just the schools that will falter, but also the local church. ☩

BY **Mark Galli** EDITOR

Today we have an unparalleled opportunity: Christian colleges and seminaries are the proverbial click away from every church in America.



*Learning from
Latter-day
Saints*

What can Christian leaders learn from the surge in Mormon youth missionaries?

RAISE EXPECTATIONS

Greg Stier is founder and president of Dare 2 Share Ministries and author of *Firing Jesus*.

If we're honest, when most of us see those young, clean-cut Mormon missionaries knocking on doors, we quickly assume that the hip, relevant, "just show up" youth ministry strategies in our Protestant circles are vastly superior.

But are they? Mormons expect a lot from their teenagers: They ordain their young men into the ministry at age 12, expect their young people to attend seminary every day of high school, and ask them to serve in the field upwards of two years. Needless to say, we don't.

Mormonism pushes its kids harder and takes them farther than even the most ardent Protestant youth ministry. Can you imagine a youth group that challenged each of its teenagers to meet at 6 A.M. every day of the school year to learn about Christianity? That's exactly what Mormons do with their high-school students. We get excited if our teenagers gather around a pole at 7:15 A.M. to pray once a year.

When typical Christians graduate from high school, they grab their books and go off to a college dorm. When typical Mormons graduate from high school, they grab a bike pump and go on a mission.

Those high expectations pay off. Young Mormons know what they believe and why they believe it. They've hammered out their theology on evangelical doorsteps. Their hearts and minds have been steeled and sealed into Mormon orthodoxy through their intense commitment.

Maybe that's why Mormons give more and work harder than their Christian peers. Maybe that's why the religion is expanding while a majority of former Christian youth-group attendees are fleeing the church.

Don't get me wrong. I don't want our teenagers to believe Mormon theology, which has tended toward works as righteousness. Trying to earn God's favor through human effort is not going to help any teenager, whether Mormon or Protestant.

But what if we had higher spiritual expectations for our teenagers? What if we presented the Great Commission to them as the ultimate cause? What if we mobilized them through intentional, relational evangelism to spread the gospel at their schools every day? What if we inspired them to be fueled by grace and love, not religious duty or pressure?

I'm not saying we ought to copy Mormons' specific strategy. I

can't foresee our teenagers racing Mormons to the door in a battle of the bicycles. We do, however, need to adopt their perspective. We need to challenge our young people. We need to cast a vision for Christ's message and mission and turn them into kingdom advancers.

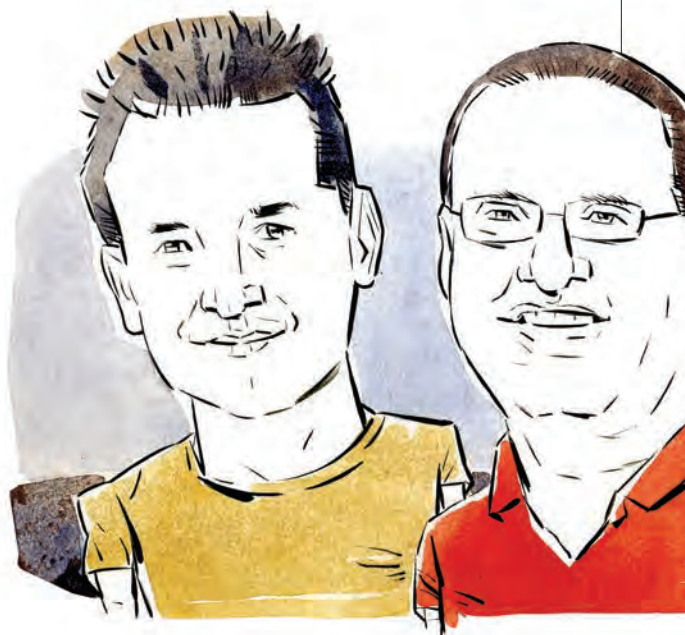
Let's learn from Mormons and instill in our young people a passion for Christ and his cause—making disciples who make disciples.

PUT CHRIST FIRST

John Divito is a former Mormon, a graduate of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and administrator for the Midwest Center for Theological Studies in Owensboro, Kentucky.

The impressive Mormon missionary response is not what it first appears. The recent surge is the fruit of young men and women being raised in Mormon culture. To understand the rise in those applying to become Latter-day Saint (LDS) missionaries, we first need to identify the root that produced the fruit.

Mormon culture is saturated with a worldview requiring works in order to gain eternal life. The Book of Mormon teaches, "It is by grace that we are saved, *after all we can do*" (2 Nephi 25:23, emphasis mine). Contrast this with Ephesians 2:8–10, which reminds us we



are saved by grace through faith apart from our works. Imagine being raised in an atmosphere where you're told, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48, KJV) in your daily living. Achieving eternal life is the outcome of obeying your church and its living prophet, and your progress is tracked by church leaders.

We must understand the call for Mormon missionaries in this context. Since missions is considered a priesthood duty for LDS men, church leaders and family encourage all young men to respond to the call of service. While young women are not under the same mandate, they are also encouraged to serve. In either situation, Mormon missionary work is critical to one's eternal future.

In light of this, we should not be surprised at the flood of applications that followed the LDS First Presidency's announcement that it was lowering the minimum age requirement for missionaries. These young people are eager to serve so they can earn God's favor through their faithfulness.

The Mormon missionary surge should remind us of the empty promise of legalistic religious service. In fact, we can take a cautionary lesson from it, since a performance-based approach to Christianity easily finds its way into our evangelical churches.

We call our children to be obedient, but don't point them to Christ, who was obedient for us. We call them to godly living, but don't direct them to Christ as the substitute for our ungodliness. So when we urge our young men and women to serve sacrificially at home and abroad, the call is too often separated from the gospel. We've functionally taught them that the Christian life depends on what they do rather than who they are in Christ. This leads either to pride ("I can do it!") or to despair ("I can't do it!").

Instead of encouraging missions by appealing to our young people's need to serve or to the benefits they'll gain, youth leaders should motivate them to gospel-centered service by guiding them to Christ. He has taken our unrighteousness and exchanged it for his righteousness through the Cross.

In Christ, we have the security and the strength to faithfully serve him in love. May our youth go into the world and make disciples of all nations, having



been reconciled to God and entrusted with the message of reconciliation.

MOTIVATE BY GRACE

Kara Powell is executive director of the Fuller Youth Institute and teaches youth and family ministry at Fuller Theological Seminary.

Adolescence opens the curtain on a new season of questions for teenagers and emerging adults. Often standing at center stage among the questions that captivate young people is, "What can I do to make a difference?"

The Mormon Church's missions program gives young people a vibrant stage on which to wrestle with that question and pin down answers. There is a God-given spark embedded in humankind that burns especially bright in adolescents' developmental hunger to impact others. By lowering the age of eligibility for service, Mormon leaders have fanned the flame for teenagers eager to change the world around them.

Sharing the stage with this question of significance is the question of community: "To whom do I belong?"

In an era when parents are more given to chauffeuring than disciplining their children, and screen time is more common than face-to-face conversations, young people are looking for rites of passage that help them feel like part of a tribe. The 18 to 24 months spent in pairs, small groups, and local communities give Mormon teenagers and emerging adults a tangible milestone of belonging to a larger movement.

The surge of Mormon missionaries shows that young people are willing to make great sacrifices in order to answer these two questions. Yet the question that will follow the others into the spotlight and eventually upstage them is, "Why do I serve?"

Unfortunately, young people are often motivated to serve by a convoluted mixture of divine calling and the desire to feel better about themselves and their position in the world—often a privileged one. That sort of guilt-based motivation brings short-term results, failing to plant the deep roots that produce fruit that lasts.

Christians have, among all religions, a unique core that motivates our service. That core is grace—amazing grace. Among all potential motivations for serving, grace takes top billing.

As the Fuller Youth Institute has learned in our Sticky Faith research, teenagers aren't best motivated to serve by the desire to feel better. The ideal motivation for service is responding to God's transforming grace. Service motivated by grace develops deeper faith and a lasting commitment to God's kingdom work. As we love telling children and teenagers, we serve and obey so that our lives become great big "thank you notes" back to God for all he has done for us.

The Mormon Church has found a powerful outlet for a young person's desire to experience purpose and connection. If we as Christians can combine that desire with a sense of God's extravagant grace, we may experience a similar surge of missions involvement among Christ followers of all ages.



Onward, Christian Couple

How marriages can survive deployment—with some help from the church.

We military wives are proud people, with our camo-print purses, yellow ribbon bumper stickers, and a deep love for our husbands and country. We bristle when warned how military life can deplete a marriage. We'll tell you that *our* marriages are only strengthened by the moves, distance, and unpredictability of military life.

During the first decade of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, though, the military divorce rate climbed gradually every year, from 2.6 percent to 3.7 percent. Not until 2012, as troops began to withdraw, did the divorce rate slip for the first time, down to 3.5 percent. Army officials attribute the decrease to better marriage counseling and support programs.

In Army terms, "Healthy relationships contribute to the maintenance of a healthy Army and a secure future force. With increasing demands placed on soldiers and families, to include both frequent deployments and duty relocations, intimate relationships are fully tested." Sir, yes, sir!

Soldiers train and travel away from home beyond the typical 9 to 5 schedule, gone for up to a year at a time when deployed to the Middle East or on cruise overseas. While apart, their spouses carry the load of household responsibilities and, oftentimes, full childcare duties, along with an additional load of worry, loneliness, and stress.

But a less-discussed challenge—one that churches need to know about—is how deployment can test a couple's faith. While a husband and wife may start off on the same spiritual page, they can't support one another in the same ways during deployment. Many spouses are forced to journey with God alone. And like any challenge, a deployment can either draw military spouses into a closer relationship with God—or cause them to question him and fall from faith.

A Florida State University study on religion and military families cited how deployed soldiers tended to dedicate more time to Bible study and prayer at war, while some spouses skipped out on church and experienced periods of doubt. When reunited, their differing beliefs put them at greater risk for dysfunction, the researcher said.

I experienced the opposite: I grew more dependent on God the year my then-fiancé was in Afghanistan. When weeks would go by without a word from him, I worried something was wrong. My small group listened to me, heard me cry, and prayed. My husband and I shared prayers in letters, affirmations during the occasional Skype call, and Bible studies in care packages. But nothing could replicate for him the Christian community

I was experiencing firsthand.

"We're always changing, but when we come back together after a deployment, the changes are a lot more noticeable," says Sara Horn, founder of *Wives of Faith*, a support group for Christian military wives. "It takes time.

You say, 'I need to learn what you experienced, and you need to learn what I've experienced, and together, we need to grow.'" At *Wives of Faith.org*, women from across the service—active-duty, reserves, and retired—find comfort in knowing they're not alone.

Such comfort can be offered in church communities, which can pray for the country's leadership, for soldiers' safety, and for the families they leave behind. They can provide a support system for wives who need comfort, solidarity, or practical help. Church members often happily help with yard work,

fix a meal, or babysit.

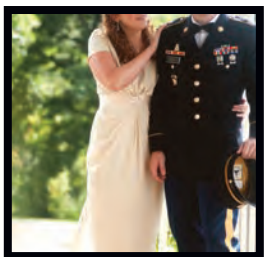
Now, at a church outside of Fort Campbell, Kentucky, my husband and I regularly hear our pastor acknowledge our reality and that of many married couples who find themselves spiritually divergent. Churches that minister to military couples can't assume that everyone in the pews is in a marriage to a Christian whose beliefs line up with theirs. We must help wives and husbands minister *within* their marriages and share and embody the gospel to one another.

A fellow Army wife told me how she wanted to quit church after suffering a miscarriage while her husband was deployed. From a distance, though, he had turned to God for solace and wanted them both, when he returned, to attend church together. She reluctantly joined him and to her surprise, found it a place where she could work out her doubts and mend her relationship with God.

This tension is not unique to the military. Faith can drift for many different reasons. At church, married couples may not feel comfortable admitting their relationship isn't as "equally yoked" as it once was. We need to speak about this situation from the pulpit, to continually acknowledge the pressures our marriages face, to keep both spouses from falling away from Christian community.

As we recognize Military Spouse Appreciation Day on May 10 and enjoy a three-day weekend for Memorial Day, consider taking some time to pray for our military service members and their families. And while you're at it, pray for *all* couples in your midst who need to be spiritually united once again. ✚

Kate Shellnutt is associate editor of *Her.meneutics* (ChristianityToday.com/women).



A deployment can either draw military spouses into a closer relationship with God—or cause them to question him and fall from faith.



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A Tale of Two Analogies

Was Jesus an entrepreneur or a politician?

The Sunday after President Obama delivered his second inaugural address, my pastor preached on Luke 4:14–21, the story of Jesus' reading from the Isaiah scroll in his hometown synagogue. After reading about God anointing a prophet to preach good news to the poor, bring release to the captives, and sight to the blind, Jesus applies the text to himself: "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

This, my pastor said, was "Jesus' inaugural address"; framing it that way seemed natural. Just as the President had used his inaugural to outline the ways he would work over the next four years to make America better, Jesus used Isaiah 61 to outline his kingdom agenda.

I was relieved when my pastor didn't launch into a sermon on civil religion, the subject of his postinaugural Facebook posts. Instead, he focused on how Jesus' agenda dovetailed with our congregation's mission statement.

When I mentioned "Jesus' inaugural" to a coworker, he said that his pastor had labeled Jesus' use of Isaiah 61 differently. The passage was, he said, Jesus' "elevator speech."

Elevator speech is a term from the 1990s. In the early days of Web development, aspiring innovators prepared themselves for brief encounters with venture capitalists. If they could present their vision in the short span of an elevator ride, they might get the capital needed to bring vision to reality.

At first, I reacted negatively to labeling Jesus' announcement an "elevator speech." Because of the term's marketing overtones, it called to mind one of the worst books ever written about Jesus. In his 1925 bestseller *The Man Nobody Knows*, advertising pioneer Bruce Barton cast Jesus in the role of *über*-salesman and visionary organizational leader.

Barton was a man of his times. Like many other Protestants of the early 20th century, he was in revolt against evangelical religion.

He particularly disliked the wimpy, victimized Jesus he had been shown in Sunday school. He thought the typical teaching about the Cross—Jesus as a willing sacrifice trying to appease an angry God—undermined the strength of Jesus' leadership and organizational innovation.

Barton ripped Jesus' saving work out of his gospel and substituted one great idea at its heart. It was "so much more splendid than all previous ideas," Barton wrote. Jesus "invited frail bewildered humanity to stand upright and look at God face to face! He called on men to throw away fear . . . and claim the Lord of Creation as Father."

This idea, he said, is "the basis of all revolt against injustice and repression, all democracy. For if God is the Father of all men, then *all* are His children and hence the commonest is equally as precious as the king. No wonder authorities trembled."

Barton was a younger contemporary of German theologian Adolf von Harnack. Like Harnack, he rejected the orthodoxy of the creeds and was more interested in the practical application of the Christian religion than in its theology. And Barton's words sound amazingly like these from Harnack, uttered 25 years before Barton wrote his book: "[T]he whole of Jesus' message may be reduced to these two heads—God as the Father, and the human soul so ennobled that it can and does unite with him. . . ."

Barton helped to gut the gospel out of American Protestantism just as Harnack had done in Germany.

A lesson from Barton: Applying a contemporary filter to the words of Scripture can easily mask their meaning. Nevertheless, we inevitably see Scripture first through eyes conditioned by our own culture and experience. It is our only point of departure.

Let's turn back to the two sermons and their analogies. One used a political metaphor (inaugural speech); the other, an entrepreneurial metaphor (elevator speech). Both preachers used their analogies to catch attention, but neither was shackled by them as Barton had been. Both moved easily to a genuine encounter with the text.

Despite my initial concerns, I believe these analogies have their virtues: An inaugural speech is both programmatic (here is what I propose to accomplish) and inspirational (these are the values we hold that should make it possible for us to achieve this together). Jesus' synagogue reading was both inspirational and programmatic. It was also political: It outlined what God wants for his beloved community.

The virtue of the elevator speech analogy is that it focuses on innovation and encapsulates a *potential* reality. With a clear vision, a properly equipped and supported visionary will move toward the right goal. Without a clearly defined goal, high-sounding ideals will languish.

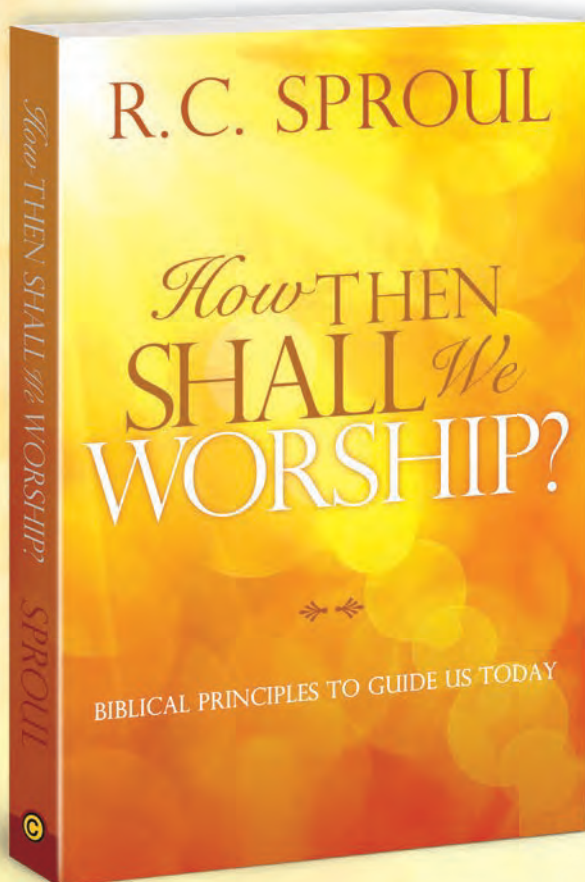
Thanks to these analogies, I now hear Jesus' speech more acutely. I hear the hunger of the entrepreneur and the (com)passion of the social reformer. In the right hands, the analogies made the Jesus on the page come alive.



We inevitably see Scripture through eyes conditioned by our culture and experience. It is our only point of departure.

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Dr. R.C. Sproul is the founder and chairman of Ligonier Ministries and the author of more than eighty books. A beloved speaker around the world and a well-respected academic scholar, Dr. Sproul teaches on the radio program *Renewing Your Mind with Dr. R.C. Sproul*, which is broadcast in forty countries.



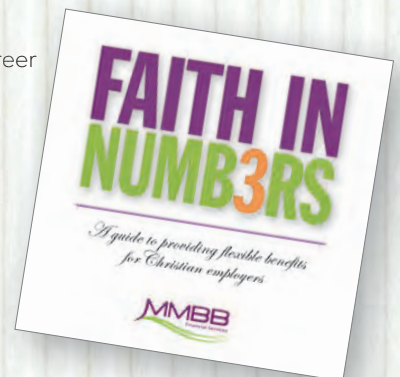
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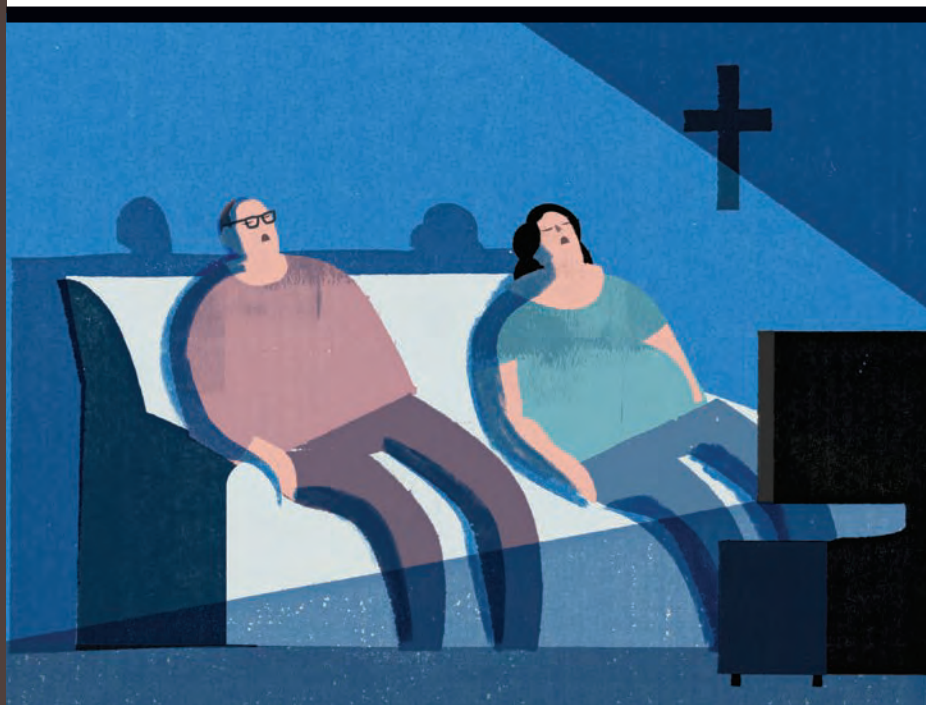


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BOOKS, MOVIES, AND THE ARTS

CT Review



KEITH MEGLEY

Blasé Believers

Christians, says Richard Stearns, have everything they need to finish Jesus' mission—except the willpower. By Collin Hansen

Some Christian leaders contend that we are divided and ineffective in our witness because the Western world has turned against us and the church has abandoned the truth of the gospel. Others see a hostile, hurting world and blame the church for failing in compassion for the kind of sinners Jesus joined for dinner.

And then there's Richard Stearns, president of World Vision and a former corporate CEO, who faults the church for a lack of will to finish the mission Jesus left behind for us. Following up on his successful first book, *The Hole in Our Gospel*, Stearns observes in

Unfinished: Believing Is Only the Beginning (Thomas Nelson) ★★★★★ that "affluent, comfortable, and distracted" Christians no longer burn with passion to change the world. Yet we still want to know our lives matter. We want to know we're living out God's purpose for us. We don't want to confine our Christianity to Sunday morning. Stearns seeks to reinvigorate our Christianity with zeal to resume the revolution launched by Jesus so we can storm the very gates of hell.

But if we're going to finish the mission, Stearns warns, we'll need fewer cheerleaders and more drill sergeants commanding from

our pulpits. Consumer-oriented churches, popular among Western Christians, draw especially pointed criticism from Stearns.

"Better the church should shrink than risk losing its God-given purpose and identity," he writes. "A community of true disciples authentically living out the teachings of Scripture is far more attractive than a latte bar or a Vegas-style musical performance."

Stearns peppers *Unfinished* with biblical quotations and does not shy away from Jesus' hardest teachings. He challenges readers with his own story of giving up a great deal of money and prestige when he left the corporate world for the nonprofit sector. But he does not suggest that all Christians must follow his example. Rather, he encourages Christians to pursue their unique calling by serving where they are before considering whether God would take them elsewhere.

He also doesn't just fault his business-class peers for their excess. He challenges every one of us to consider whether we've really taken up our cross and followed Jesus in obedience to his command. Stearns reminds us that Jesus promised we would find abundant life only when we give it up. This book includes some of the best, clearest advice I've seen on how to do this, especially for younger Christians who itch to serve God in radical ways. Patience and faithfulness, Stearns tells us, are the keys to discovering our calling. When you're available, faithful, and thoughtful in service, then you can trust God with the outcome of your life. Start small as you dream big. And ask yourself these deceptively straightforward questions posed by Stearns:

Have you adopted kingdom values and principles, worked to change your bad habits, forgiven those who have wronged you, been loving to others, been generous with your money, become part of a local church,



volunteered at church for the more humble jobs, put others ahead of yourself, and tithed your income?

For youthful radicals, such questions may bring necessary pause. But more mature Christians may wonder whether anyone can withstand such scrutiny if he dares answer honestly.

OUR KING IS ENRAGED

In a divided church, leaders across the theological spectrum will agree on at least one thing: God is not happy with us. And that's the general tone Stearns strikes in *Unfinished*. Faulting Christians for prioritizing career, lifestyle, social lives, and happiness, Stearns says, "I have no doubt that our King is also enraged . . . and brokenhearted." Stearns argues throughout the book that the church today has all the resources, knowledge, size, and power to fulfill God's mission for us. We lack only the will, and Stearns aims to shame us into action.

Interestingly, Stearns does not target nominal Christians or the passive masses.

Faulting Christians for prioritizing career, lifestyle, social lives, and happiness, Stearns says, 'I have no doubt that our King is also enraged . . . and brokenhearted.'

After all, they're not likely to read this book or any other of its kind. He writes to fairly serious Christians like the ones who picked up *The Hole in Our Gospel* to read with their small group or Sunday school class. These are Christians who probably serve in their churches and seek to grow through regular Bible reading and prayer. More specifically, Stearns is worried that too many Christians have glutted themselves on knowledge. God wants our obedience, he says, not our doctrine.

But you need doctrine to answer key questions about obedience: How do you know you've done enough to please God? How can you be sure he'll regard you as a good and faithful servant? Stearns helpfully repeats the gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection for sinners. But he could have more explicitly reminded readers that no matter the measure

of our obedience, all must return again and again to the grace of God that preserves and protects.

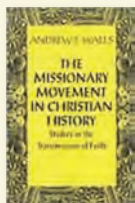
The many examples of faithful Christians cited by Stearns depend on this grace. These wonderfully inspiring Christians, ordinary believers like you and me, give up not just their money but their very selves for the sake of Jesus, his kingdom, and their global neighbors. Stearns wisely goes beyond just telling us what to do. He shows us Christians who have done it in the power of the Holy Spirit.

THEY HATED HIM

If they haven't started squirming already, readers will really start to feel the heat around chapter four, titled "Magic Kingdom, Tragic Kingdom, and the Kingdom of God." Stearns asks a painfully practical question:

MY TOP 5 BOOKS ON MISSIONS

By Brian M. Howell, author of *Short-Term Mission* (IVP Academic, 2012)



THE MISSIONARY MOVEMENT IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Studies in the Transmission of Faith

ANDREW F. WALLS
(ORBIS BOOKS)

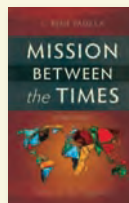
Erudite and accessible, this collection of essays from a former missionary to Sierra Leone and founder of the Centre for the Study of World Christianity in Edinburgh stands as one of the best works available on the dynamics of mission, culture, and the gospel.



THINGS FALL APART

CHINUA ACHEBE
(ANCHOR)

The late Achebe, a Catholic Nigerian and Nobel Prize-winner, was one of Africa's preeminent novelists. *Things Fall Apart*, his poignant look at late-19th-century colonialism, is not an antimission screed. Rather, it's a cautionary tale of how mission can serve as liberator or oppressor.



MISSION BETWEEN THE TIMES

C. RENÉ PADILLA
(LANGHAM MONOGRAPHS)
Padilla is one of Latin America's most noteworthy evangelicals. Now more than 25 years old (and reissued in 2010), Padilla's call to integral, holistic mission remains a prescient reminder that the gospel is not either evangelism or justice, but always and forever both.



TRANSFORMING MISSION

Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission

DAVID J. BOSCH (ORBIS BOOKS)
This is a classic work on the theology of mission by the late South African theologian. Translated into dozens of languages, Bosch's schema of mission "paradigms" has influenced mission theology throughout the globe.



TRANSLATING THE MESSAGE

The Missionary Impact on Culture

LAMIN SANNEH (ORBIS BOOKS)
Through careful historical and cultural analysis, Sanneh argues that the translation of Scripture into African languages provided a key bulwark against the onslaught of European imperialism. The book, now in an updated edition, remains a pivotal text in missionary studies.

"How can we hold in one hand the truth that Jesus loves the poor, the widow, and the orphan, yet hold in our other hand the tickets to our upcoming Disney vacation?" You would expect nothing less from the president of the largest Christian aid organization. Stearns has seen more than his share of suffering around the world. Yet he remains sensitive to these great needs.

At a time when hope is hard to find, Stearns remains optimistic that Christians can make a difference about global poverty and maybe even earn the world's respect and admiration in the process. Stearns observes, "[L]oving our enemies, living with integrity, caring for the sick, feeding the hungry, and being generous with our possessions don't ever seem to divide or make enemies."

But is this true? If Jesus is our example in these acts of love, why did the world hate him and his apostles? Why did Jesus tell us the world would hate us for loving him? Surely we can all agree that the church should follow Christ's command to love our neighbors whether or not we ever receive thank-you notes. But when, for instance, we suffer for our heroic stands on behalf of the most helpless among us—the unborn, for example—we understand why we can't let the reaction of our neighbors dictate our agenda.

As Christians feel the Western world growing more hostile toward the church, it's tempting to blame ourselves. We specialize in the jeremiad that places the sins of the world at the church's door. If only we did more, gave more, loved more. Evangelicals are activists at heart. We never settle for the status quo.

Yet we also know the sin that finds refuge in the dark recesses of the heart. We long for Jesus' return, when he will take away our love of sinning and wipe away all our tears. We also know that until then, we'll disappoint—probably our neighbors, certainly ourselves. Somehow, though, God's grace will be enough. Somehow the treasure of the gospel, stored in our jars of clay, will testify to God's power. And somehow he will finish the good work he started in us. ☩

Collin Hansen serves as editorial director for the Gospel Coalition. He is the coauthor of *A God-Sized Vision: Revival Stories That Stretch and Stir* (Zondervan).

Divine Rehab

Whatever your addiction, God's grace is the only hope for a way out. By Laura Leonard

When Heather Kopp arrived at rehab, she didn't fear the physical agony of withdrawal or the chance that she would relapse. Rather, she worried she wouldn't fit in. A 40-something mom of two and a veteran of Christian publishing, Kopp had never been in jail or on the streets. Her husband drove her from their comfortable Colorado Springs home to a group facility where the other patients, she feared, would look down on her for not having fallen quite as far. She'd simply let a nightly glass of wine turn into two, which turned into a bottle, which eventually led to additional mini bottles hidden and secretly chugged in the bathroom. Soon enough, every moment of her life revolved around her next chance to sneak away for a drink. It was a bad situation, but it wasn't exactly the kind of flashy rock-bottom story that, say, sells memoirs.

But ***Sober Mercies: How Love Caught Up With a Christian Drunk*** (Jericho Books)

★★★★★ proves just how wrong she was to minimize the depths of her descent. Kopp's highly readable account draws the reader in, opening up a window into the mind of a burgeoning alcoholic. But as it moves through her rehab and recovery phases into her struggle to understand God's presence amid her alcoholism, the book grounds everything in a universal truth: Substance abuse is a physical manifestation of a spiritual addiction to sin. And everyone, it turns out, is an addict.

It takes only a few days at rehab before Kopp realizes that trying to come across as "relatable" to the other patients means she is positioning herself above them. The only reason any of them are there at all, she realizes, is a physical dependence on alcohol they have tried and failed to shake on their own. Through her recovery process and relationships with other recovering alcoholics, she begins to question her former ideas of who God is and what it means to respond to his love.

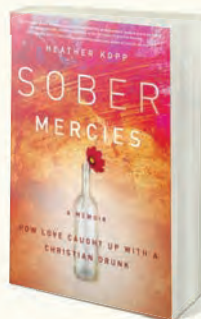
The intersection of addiction and faith is not new territory—Alcoholics Anonymous has led millions of addicts out of alcoholism through reliance on a higher power, and Mary Karr's fantastic memoir *Lit* offers a stunning portrait of this process in action. But this isn't a story of how addiction led Kopp to God, or how God pulled her out of addiction. *Sober Mercies* is, instead, a story of confronting the nature of sin and understanding more fully the necessity and beauty of God's grace. Through her battle with addiction, Kopp learned how to live toward the possibility of redemption by living one day at a time.

In a final scene, the author and a loved one reflect on how others view their sobriety: "They think I just resist temptation over and over because I'm a good person or because I have all this willpower. Can you imagine? How do you explain to people that it's not anything like that?" Recovery is a living example of the miracle of grace. When addiction removes the illusion of self-sufficiency, the addict must reach a point of surrender from which to accept grace without conditions, and to have confidence that God really is in control, no matter what. Those final three words are hardest to grasp for anyone who has ever felt like they have something to lose.

It's tempting for the nonalcoholic to read a memoir about alcoholism as a detached observer. We can marvel at the depths from which God can save a person from pursuits that bring only harm, pain, and grief—and thank him that we haven't fallen as far. But *Sober Mercies* reminds us that we are each living our own addiction story. And we can't

lose sight of the complete and total dependence on God's sustaining grace that offers any hope of a way out. ☩

Laura Leonard is associate editor of BuildingChurchLeaders.com and a contributing writer for Her.meneutics.



Touching the Problem

from **MORE OR LESS:**
CHOOSING A LIFESTYLE OF EXCESSIVE GENEROSITY

JEFF SHINABARGER (DAVID C COOK, 270 PAGES)

I had talked about doing it for a few weeks. Finally, I got off the couch and moved. I opened the door of the kitchen cabinet under the sink and took out two big black trash bags. I walked out through our front door, down the driveway, and began. . .

There was nothing glamorous about the work, but I reminded myself that sometimes it is important to work for your community even when it doesn't feel like you are doing much. I leaned over, and with just two fingers I gingerly picked up a cup and straw from a fine fast-food establishment called Checkers down the street. I tried not to think about what germs might be multiplying on this nasty cup and made a mental note to buy a pair of gloves for next time. I moved on down the street and picked up pieces from a broken pot on the sidewalk. I picked up candy-bar wrappers. A few liquor bottles. Beer cans. Coke bottles. Empty bags of chips. Glass fragments. A plastic bag. A syringe. (*Oh, God, protect me!*) Gum wrappers. On and on. It didn't stop. . .

A homeless guy I had never seen in my life yelled at me across the street. "Hey, I think you missed a few," he shouted. "Over there in the bushes, you missed a few." *Thanks (I think . . .),* I thought.

I picked up the trash in the bushes and realized my two bags were full, so I turned around and started walking home. As I walked back just four blocks, I saw more and more trash littering the streets and parking lots that I hadn't even touched and didn't have enough space for in my two measly trash bags. I put the trash out in our green trash bin and walked back in the front door. Done, but not done at all.

As I slumped down on the couch, trying to feel good about what I had done, I realized what I'd just experienced. It was a short story of what we all hope to do and what we all have to overcome and what we all hate to do and what we all need to do and what it takes to leave an imprint on this world.

We live in a world with so many problems. Media inundates us with image after image of overwhelming need. We want to make the world better. We want to change how we see the world. Sometimes just getting started is the biggest hurdle. Then we finally dive in

and realize that dealing with messes means we might get dirty. We actually have to touch the problem. Let me warn you now: there are plenty of chances to quit along the way to making a difference. But we can choose to sweat it out, tackle our feelings of discomfort, and work through the messiness of the problem.

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GLIMPSES OF ANOTHER LAND

Political Hopes, Spiritual Longing

ERIC MILLER (CASCADE BOOKS)



Many readers of *Christianity Today* will know Eric Miller from his pieces in the magazine, several of which are included in this splendid essay collection. You could start anywhere, but CT readers in particular might want

to begin with the essay entitled "Elusive Unity" (first published in *Touchstone*), which uses the life and work of Carl F. H. Henry to consider the vicissitudes of modern evangelicalism and the hope for Christian unity—"a unity always beyond our reach," Miller writes, "yet necessary all the same."

ESSAYS

A Fully Annotated Edition

HENRY D. THOREAU / EDITED BY JEFFREY S. CRAMER
(YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS)



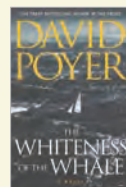
Henry Thoreau is one of those figures so towering, so encrusted with legend, so overly familiar, that we must rediscover him to see him at all. This well-conceived selection of 15 of his essays—the

latest in a series of annotated Thoreau volumes from Yale—is an invitation to do just that. Don't be put off by the word *annotated*. This is a book intended for the general reader. You can dip into the notes—placed in capacious margins—when ever you want, or ignore them altogether. One of my favorites is the essay "Walking," which includes this classic Thoreau sentence: "Any sportiveness in cattle is unexpected."

THE WHITENESS OF THE WHALE

A Novel

DAVID POYER (ST. MARTIN'S PRESS)



As the title suggests, this novel is a tribute to Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*. It's both a novel of ideas and a nonstop story of the kind that gets you in its grip on the first page. The protagonist, Sara Pollard, is a scientist

who joins a small, eccentric crew for a voyage in Antarctic waters. Their vessel, *Black Anemone*, is a state-of-the-art sailboat, "all white fiberglass and curves." Their mission, sponsored by the Cetacean Protection League, is to document and interfere with brazen incursions by Japanese whalers into protected areas. Best read in one sitting.

Chased by Grace

After fleeing her own broken life, **Sarah Theborge** learned to see God's image in her refugee neighbors.

Interview by Elissa Cooper

A

fter moving to Portland, Oregon, Sarah Theborge blogged about her unexpected friendship with a Somali refugee woman and her five young daughters. As Theborge prepared to sell the stories as a book to start a college fund for the girls, she realized that her own experience of being diagnosed with breast cancer at age 27—and the suffering and loss that came with it—was a part of their shared story. Theborge, author of **The Invisible Girls: A Memoir** (Jericho Books), spoke with CT assistant editor Elissa Cooper about seeing people who go largely unnoticed and uncared for, discovering she herself was one of them.

Before you met the Somali family, did you have experiences with immigrant or refugee families?

No. I always had an affinity for people who were marginalized, but when I was in Portland, I was still so broken from getting over the cancer experience that I wasn't looking to reach out to anybody. When I met the Somali family, it was personal. I loved them not specifically because they were refugees, but because they were beautiful girls created in God's image.

There's danger when you tell a story like this, because it tends to be the well-off white person swooping in and saving the black people. While the Somali family wasn't well off in terms of money, they were incredibly wealthy in terms of resilience, joy, and love. While I was helping them get on their feet, they were loving me and helping me heal. Things in our typical mainstream culture don't reach your soul the way that a little girl crawling in your lap or having a dance party to African music in the living room can. I helped them not freeze to

death or starve to death, but they saved my life more than I could have ever saved theirs.

Aside from some support from family, friends, and the church, you helped the family on your own rather than rely on a local charity. What would you recommend that others do?

There's not an exact formula, but the main thing is relationship. The biggest failing is not an institution that failed to take care of them; it is that we don't love our neighbors.

We don't *know* our neighbors. We need to know them and not be afraid to engage with them.

We're supposed to look to God. And God calls us to an incarnational love. He sent his Son in human flesh to dwell with us, to eat with us, to sit around the table with the sinners whom other people were afraid to touch. We're supposed to be living our lives looking at the people around us, not the government above us.

Invisible refers to many different kinds of people. How can we recognize them?

It's not just how we see the people around us; it's how we understand God. The reason why we care about invisible people is because God cares about us.

I always come back to the story of Hagar, this pagan who is pregnant with Abraham's illegitimate child. She's running away in the

desert, where she's probably going to die because she doesn't have any resources. And God goes after her. Why would God care about this slave girl? But he goes after her, and he loves her, and he sees her. And she names him *El-ro'i*, which means "the God who sees." That is an early example of the gospel: God comes after us in love

and mercy. It's an act of worship to live out the same story, to pursue someone in love and mercy who might not deserve it.

I had the literal experience of fleeing. I left the East Coast when my world fell apart. I realized that even though I had fled 3,000 miles away, God chased me across the country and encountered me when I was completely broken and didn't think he loved me anymore. When I met the Somali girls, my instinct was to go after them, because I wanted them to have the experience that I had, of someone chasing you down because they see you and love you.

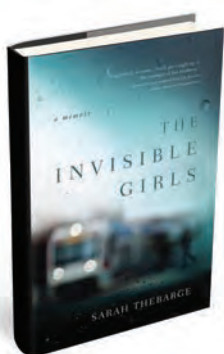
You heard some awful theology on suffering when you were going through cancer. How do you define suffering now?

When Christians would tell me, "Your cancer is a gift," I would say, "I don't think it's a gift. I think it's part of the curse and it's straight out of hell." Anyone who has had cancer will tell you that. It's awful. We tend to airbrush the Bible and throw Romans 8:28 on everything like a Band-Aid. But people who struggle in the Bible go through *horrible* things, both from sin and the consequences of others' sin. God works all things for our good and his glory, but that doesn't mean things feel good. It's a long and exhausting process.

That is why it was important to include my story in the book. Redemption doesn't mean anything unless you know the brokenness that got redeemed. If people want to display diamonds, they don't put them on white. They put them on black because of the contrast. When we're honest about our struggles and our pain, we are offering the black velvet backdrop. Only against that backdrop can God's grace—these beautiful, sparkling diamonds—really shine.

What should people expect to take away from your book?

I hope that people don't engage in the book and think, *Oh, that's someone else's story and that's great. Good for her. Good for them.* I hope that people break through their bubbles, go knock on their neighbors' doors, and have their eyes opened. I hope people will prayerfully consider how they can see and love invisible people. If each of us loved our neighbor, then we could all tell a story of the invisibles.



QUICK TAKES

More media of note.

BOOKS

► TAKING GOD SERIOUSLY

Vital Things We Need to Know

J. I. PACKER (CROSSWAY BOOKS)

★★★★ In 2010, J. I. Packer teamed up with Gary A. Parrett, professor at Gordon-Conwell Seminary, to write *Grounded in the Gospel*, which called for churches to rejuvenate the art of catechesis (systematic instruction in the essentials of the Christian faith). Now, in *Taking God Seriously*, Packer has taken the matter into his own hands, going beyond the call for catechesis to give a concrete example of how it's done. Chapters on faith, doctrine, the church, Christian unity, repentance, the Holy Spirit, baptism, and the Lord's Supper bear the author's signature clarity of style and firmness of conviction. Though Packer writes with an eye toward reversing the liberalizing trends within segments of his native Anglicanism, his

manual should appeal to committed Christians in many denominations. —Matt Reynolds

► SEVEN MEN

And the Secret of Their Greatness

ERIC METAXAS (THOMAS NELSON)

★★★★ George Washington, William Wilberforce, Eric Liddell, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Jackie Robinson, Pope John Paul II, and Charles Colson are all, to one degree or another, household names. Eric Metaxas wants today's generation of young men to look up to them, not unreasonably, as heroes and role models. In *Seven Men: And the Secret of Their Greatness*, Metaxas, already a biographer of Wilberforce and Bonhoeffer, serves up chapter-length portraits of each of these towering figures.

Despite the men's varied callings and achievements, Metaxas sees an underlying commonality: Each man, in his own way, embodied manhood at its best. Blessed with great powers, they used them not to prey on the weak and vulnerable, but to serve others and further noble causes. They habitually "surrender[ed] themselves to a higher purpose, of giving something away that they might have

kept"—political power, athletic glory, the psychic gratification of revenge, even life itself. Only in recovering this Christlike ethic of servant leadership, says Metaxas, can modern manhood rise above the depressing archetypes of domineering bully, emasculated wimp, and hapless sitcom doofus. —Matt Reynolds

► ORPHAN JUSTICE

How to Care for Orphans Beyond Adopting

JOHNNY CARR WITH LAURA CAPTARI

(B&H PUBLISHING GROUP) ★★★★★ In the opening paragraph of *Orphan Justice*, Johnny Carr invites readers to "imagine children lined up shoulder to shoulder all the way around the earth's equator. Now consider that all of the orphaned kids in the world would not fit in that line. There are too many of them." With approximately 153 million children deprived of one or both parents (according to estimates from UNICEF), adoption alone cannot solve the global orphan crisis. Carr, director of church partnerships at Bethany Christian Services, America's largest adoption and orphan-care agency, asks what else can be done. He pleads for greater attention to the web of injustices that draw

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orphans ever deeper into misery: issues like sex trafficking, HIV/AIDS, poverty, racism, horrific orphanage conditions, and abusive foster-care arrangements. Whether Carr's target audience has truly "relegated these social justice issues to the secular world" is at least debatable. But *Orphan Justice* does a fine job outlining the case that adoption can't be the only arrow in the evangelical quiver.

—Matt Reynolds

► GOD'S NOT DEAD

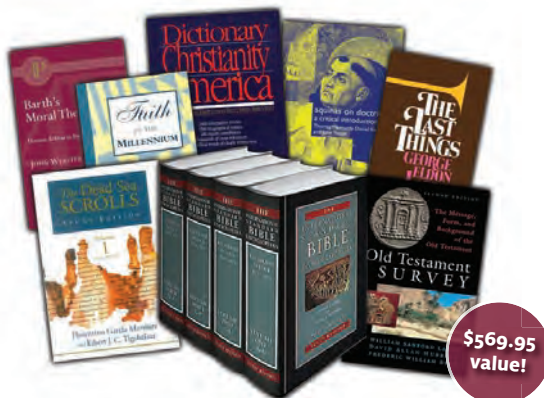
Evidence for God in an Age of Uncertainty

RICE BROOKS (THOMAS NELSON)

★★★★★ Many books on apologetics appeal mainly to those who already consider themselves reasonably well versed in the arguments for (and against) Christianity. Rice Brooks, a pastor in Nashville, focuses instead on equipping ordinary believers who don't aspire to replace William Lane Craig on the debate circuit, but still wish to offer compelling answers to skeptical friends. Brooks radiates hope that every Christian—not just a highly-trained few—can give a reasoned defense of the faith they profess. —Matt Reynolds

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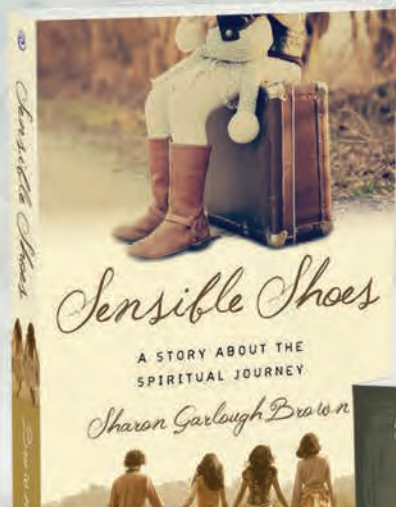
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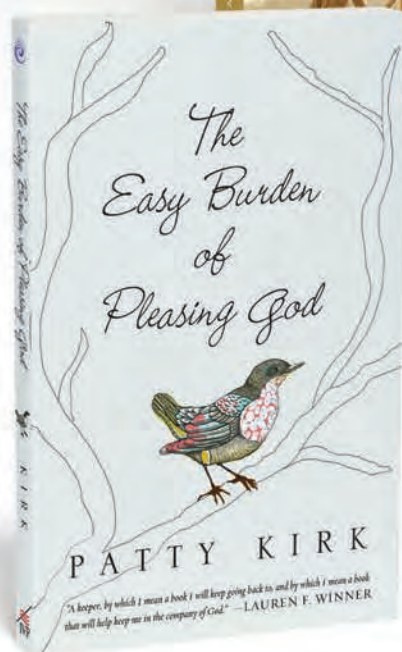
Great is Thy
Faithfulness

— READ WHAT MOVES YOU —



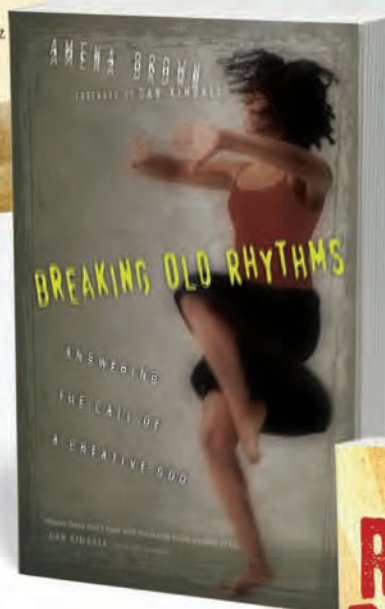
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—TOSCA LEE, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Havah: The Story of Eve*



"I adore this little book. It is somehow simultaneously challenging and comforting."

—LAUREN F. WINNER, author of *Girl Meets God*

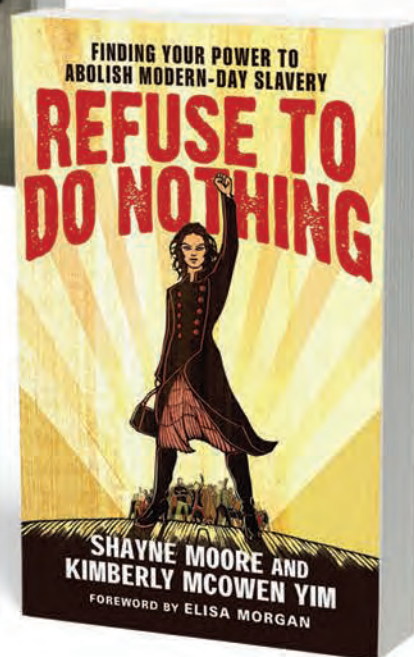


"A call for all who find themselves stuck in the mundane, drawing us to risk, push and open our full potential."

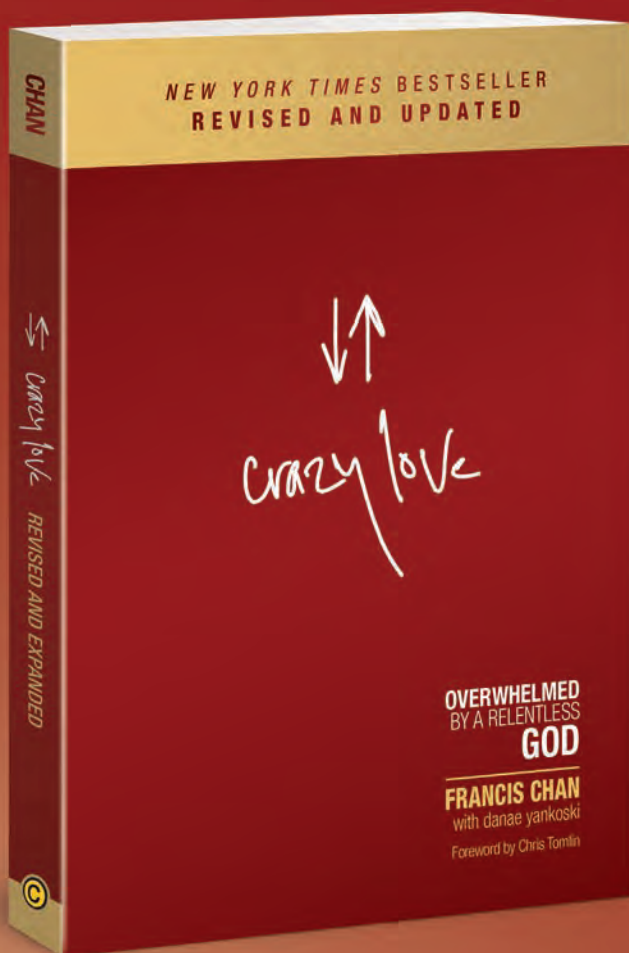
—LISA GUNGOR, singer-songwriter

"I pray that God will use this powerful and practical book to ignite in us a fierce resolve to engage this battle and that we will not rest until the last captive is freed!"

—CAROLYN CUSTIS JAMES, author of *Half the Church*



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SPECIAL ADVERTISING SECTION

Distance Learning 101

What you need to know
before you apply



Distance learning is a growing area of higher education. According to the 2012 Survey of Online Learning, enrollment in online degree-granting post-secondary institutions—as a percentage of total enrollment—increased from 11.7 percent in 2003 to 32 percent in 2011 (“Changing Course: Ten Years of Tracking Online Education in the United States,” Babson Survey Research Group and the College Board). In a statement released with the survey findings, Todd

Hitchcock, senior vice president of online solutions at Pearson Learning Solutions, states, “Learning is no longer limited to four walls—learning can happen anywhere—and it already is happening everywhere, every day. The growth of online learning underscores this need for quality, flexible education programs that meet the demands of our 21st-century workforce.”

Those directly involved with distance learning also see the reality of this growing field of study. Dr. Rebecca Hong, Ed.D., assistant professor in the School of Education at Biola University in La Mirada, California, says, “The landscape of online learning is expanding rapidly, and there is no doubt that we will continue to see the trajectory of online learners increase over the next few years.”

But ease of access doesn’t mean easy coursework. Today’s graduate-level distance learning programs provide a challenging, top-notch education with entrance qualifications and performance expectations in line with those of traditional university settings. In fact, the 2012 Survey of Online Learning states that “77 percent of academic leaders rated the learning outcomes in online education as the same or superior to those in face-to-face [classrooms].”

So if you’re considering a post-graduate degree program, what do these statistics mean to you? In a nutshell: you have more great options for going back to school than ever before. “It is so accessible to get a degree through online education. There are lots of ways to do it, and many different schools. And it will make you competitive in a global marketplace,” says Christian Greer, graduate of Pepperdine’s Master of Arts in Learning Technologies (MALT) program.

While this is certainly true, the amount of growth in this area of education and the variety of programs offered means choosing the right program for you isn’t any easier. There is a lot more information to sift through in locating the opportunity that will be a good fit. “It’s important to do your research. Don’t grab the first online

learning program you see, or you will be disappointed; all programs are not created equal,” says Greer.

When you dive into your research, the options will seem limitless. You’ll have to choose between online courses, hybrid or blended programs, cadre and cohort models. Programs may use Blackboard, Elluminate, Canvas, Sakai, Moodle, Google Groups, or Wikis. Schools may be accredited by the NEASC, NCATE, WASC, or others. Does it all sound like Greek to you? It’s okay. Take it one step at a time, rely on the experts for information, and ask yourself some key questions:

What do I want to study?

Once you know what you want to study, you can start looking for programs. Consider the reputation of the schools and whether or not their programs provide the degree or certification you’re looking for. Then dig deeper to find out which program fits your specific needs.

Biola University continually develops and evolves their distance learning options. “Biola started a variety of online classes in the early part of this century, but recently created a Distance Learning Department in 2009 to coordinate the implementation of online courses and programs across the whole campus,” says Ron Hannaford, Ph.D., director of distance learning. “Initially the M.A. in Christian Apologetics and M.A. in Science and Religion degree programs were commenced as blended online programs. Then in 2009, the M.A. in TEOL, M.A. in Education, and M.A. in Teaching were all commenced as 100 percent online degree programs. Since [that time] a vast range of individual online courses has been developed . . . from anthropology, art, and theology to special education, photography, and business.”

How do I learn best?

A common concern regarding distance learning programs is the lack of face-to-face interaction. Many schools, including Calvin Theological Seminary

in Grand Rapids, Michigan, have responded by developing blended programs that include on-campus face-to-face time, as well as technology that provides real-time interaction between students and professors. These programs are often referred to as “hybrid” or “blended.” Other schools have addressed this issue by adopting a certain structure for their programs. Two common terms for programs that require a core group of students to work and learn together throughout the program are cohort and cadre.

Margaret Riel, Ph.D., co-chair of the online Master of Arts in Learning Technologies program at Pepperdine University in Malibu, California, explains their program: “We have a cadre structure, which other schools also offer; but we are unique in beginning with a cadre camp that builds a strong cohesive learning team that leads to high levels of participation and completion rates. This initial relationship-building is critical for successful online interactions. Students often say they can ‘hear the voices’ and ‘see the faces’ of their colleagues. A midpoint meeting is held in conjunction with a national technology conference, and the program ends with an exhibition of work and graduation in the Los Angeles area.”

“We also use learning circles as a unique approach to collaborative learning,” says Riel. “All students lead one of the circle activities, and all students are engaged in collaborative learning on all of the circle activities. This individual ownership and group responsibility for the quality of all work is part of the structure that creates a highly cohesive team of students engaged in knowledge building.”

“Biola’s online classes and programs are designed to ensure that faculty can interact with and mentor students to help develop Christian character and knowledge,” says Hannaford. “Thus, online classes are generally smaller than on-campus classes, and they employ educational pedagogical theories that provide an academically rigorous education.”

Rebecca Hoey, Ed.D., director of online learning at Northwestern

College in Orange City, Iowa, says, "Our online courses and programs reflect Northwestern's commitment to seamless integration of faith and learning. We treasure community and are dedicated to nurturing community in our online programs. Class sizes are intentionally small, and students can expect to not only know their professor and classmates, but also develop a relationship with them."

What is my timetable?

Distance learning programs are structured in a variety of ways. Some allow you to start classes anytime and take as many or as few as you like—with no time limit for completion. Others require you to enter at a specified time and complete the courses within a certain time frame, starting and finishing with the same group of students. There are strengths to both approaches, so you'll need to determine your overall goal: Do you want to get your degree in bits and pieces, fitting it in around

the rest of your life? Or do you want to take advantage of an intensive accelerated program? Perhaps you want to do something in between?

Even within the same school, the various degree programs are usually structured differently. Yet each one is designed to fit the nature and requirements of that area of study, often including hands-on practicums and clinical experiences arranged at a location near you.

All of Northwestern College's programs, according to Hoey, are customized to fit specific educational requirements: "The three education endorsements are offered entirely online. Some courses within those endorsements are 16 weeks in length, and some are eight weeks in length. Two of the endorsements require student teaching and practicum, which takes place at an agreed-upon school setting. And students can begin any of the education endorsement programs during any term. However, our new RN to BSN

completion option will be structured so all students begin together during the same term. Nursing courses will be eight weeks [long], as will most cognate courses. Some courses will be 16 weeks [long], as determined by various academic departments in collaboration with the nursing department. Nursing students will take part in clinical experiences in hospitals and other health-care settings."

How will I use technology?

Technology has advanced the growth of distance learning and is a foundational piece of distance education today. However, a fear of technology or lack of skills shouldn't prevent anyone from pursuing a distance education. Schools are committed to choosing intuitive systems and providing the training and support necessary to make the technology work for students.

"Calvin has a full-time educational technologist who helps professors and

continued on page 87

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A photograph of a man, Keith Twigg, smiling and holding a white coffee cup. He is wearing a red and white plaid shirt. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people in a social setting.

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continued from page 81

students think more creatively about how learning happens both in our classrooms and online,” says Peter Choi, director of distance learning. And Pepperdine uses the approach of a technology camp to put everyone on the same page.

And while many programs push for the latest and greatest technology, others purposefully keep their program low-tech. For example, half the students in Biola’s Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (M.A. TESOL) degree

program are missionaries living around the world. “As long as you have a computer and access to the Internet . . . you can take the program online. We are intentional about low-tech requirements since many of our target teachers [live] overseas [and] have limited



Cari Fydirchuk,

Calvin Theological Seminary

At age 13, Cari Fydirchuk felt God’s calling to ministry. Now, 20 years later, she is pursuing her master of divinity degree through Calvin Theological Seminary’s distance learning program. When she first considered going back to school, it seemed overwhelming. “The thought of uprooting my family [so I could] attend seminary seemed an impossible task,” says Fydirchuk, who lives in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. “When I spoke with [someone in] the admissions department at Calvin, my heart skipped a beat. She said they were in the process of getting accreditation for an online master of divinity program that would start in the fall. For the first time, I realized this could be a possibility.”

After being accepted to Calvin, the challenges didn’t end. Balancing the life of a student with that of a mom, wife, and volunteer isn’t easy. But Fydirchuk believes it’s the best way to pursue her degree. “There is some flexibility to schedule the work around a busy life. At CTS they value our busy lives and hope that our life experience and studies complement and enhance each other,” she says. “I believe this approach better equips us for our future vocation as pastors.”

Fydirchuk encourages anyone who’s starting a distance learning program to make a schedule and get good support. “Set up a schedule for yourself to work and study. Try to stick with it on a weekly basis and allow it to become a regular part of your life. Communicate the schedule with your family and allow them to have input regarding your study time. This doesn’t affect just your life, but also your family, friends, church, work, and community. The more people you have committed to your study time, the better chance you have of success.”



Christian Greer,

Pepperdine University

Christian Greer not only studied through an online learning program, he now designs them as the vice president of learning initiatives at the Chicago Architecture Foundation. Greer completed the Master of Arts in Learning Technologies (MALT) program through Pepperdine University, which focuses on solving real-world problems through action research.

The intensity of the accelerated one-year program made it a huge challenge. “Working full-time and balancing school was not easy,” says Greer. “We had so many forums, posts, and projects to complete, it would make your head spin. Plus, every day we had to reflect online by blogging. It was intense.”

But in the midst of the coursework, deadlines, and demands of an online learning program, Greer says, the most important thing to remember is that it’s ultimately about learning. “Don’t forget to reflect. It’s more than just the activities, forums, and projects. It’s also about your learning.”



Alice Donawerth,

Biola University

When Alice Donawerth began her masters of education program through Biola University, she had two daughters living on Biola’s campus, and her son was finishing his master’s in engineering. “With four of us in college, it was crazy,” says Donawerth.

But she quickly found support in the online community and saw the amazing diversity of the students in the program. “I love working alongside people from all over the world—many of whom are on the mission field,” says Donawerth. “In one class a student was working in Indonesia. By the time I finished my schoolwork, which was usually around 2 A.M., she was just getting online. So we’d talk about what we were working on while living half-way around the world. It has been a rich and rewarding experience.”

Interaction with the other students can be challenging at times, but also lots of fun. Donawerth says, “My writing partner for a particular project was on vacation. As she traveled, she would stop each day at a Starbucks to get online so we could talk.”

Donawerth’s advice for new distance learning students is to fully engage not only with the coursework and professor, but also the other students: “The more time spent interacting with fellow students makes the class a much more in-depth experience.”

— J. J.



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access to the Internet," says John Liang, Ph.D., department chair of Applied Linguistics and TESOL, and associate professor of TESOL at Biola.

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The cost varies greatly between programs, as do opportunities for scholarships. So be sure to ask lots of questions before you apply. The history of and support for a school's distance learning programs can have a huge impact on how their tuition

is handled—and these factors are constantly changing. Northwestern's Hoey says, "Our online tuition is less than the tuition charged for traditional residential programs. However, there are no scholarships available to students in our online programs at this time, whereas there are significant scholarship opportunities for traditional students. That will change as we grow."

Calvin Theological Seminary's approach is the opposite. According

to Choi, Calvin's distance learning programs have the same cost as traditional enrollment. "But thanks to an anonymous donor," says Choi, "we are able to offer generous financial assistance to our distance students."

As you look into the costs, be sure to include any indirect expenses in your calculations—travel, computer hardware and software, time away from work, and so on—which can all impact the bottom line.

Is a distance learning program right for you? There's only one way to find out: Ask the questions, take the steps, and begin the journey of discovering your place in the world of online education.

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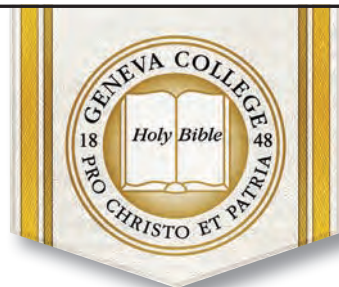
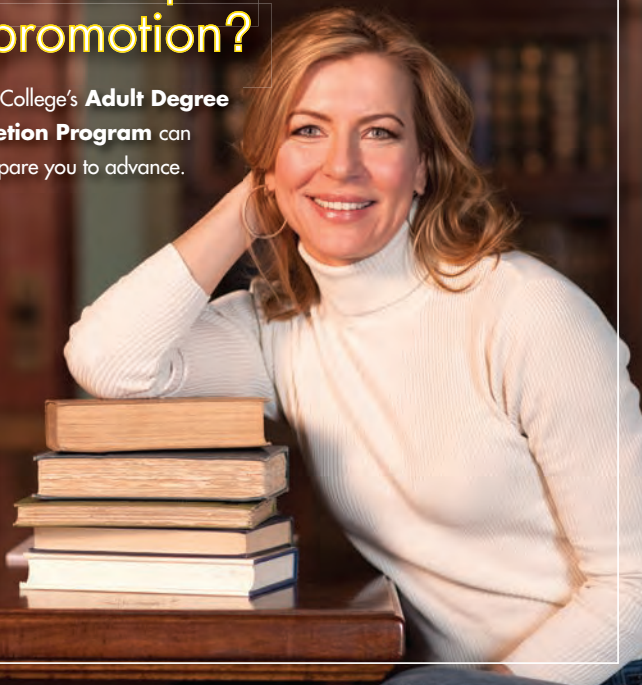
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Janna Jones is a freelance writer and award-winning editor based in Colorado Springs. She served as the editor of *Go!* magazine and currently contributes to publications and publishers including *Thriving Family*, *Clubhouse*, *Compassion International*, *HarperOne*, *Outreach*, and *Zondervan*.

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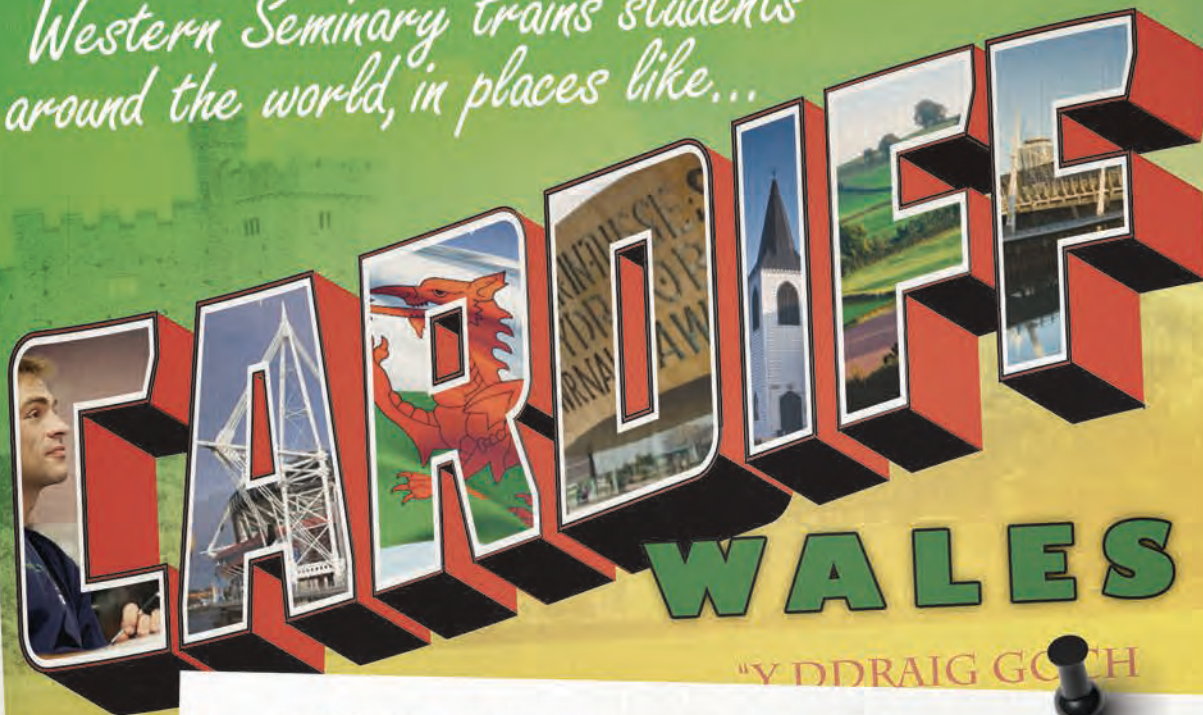
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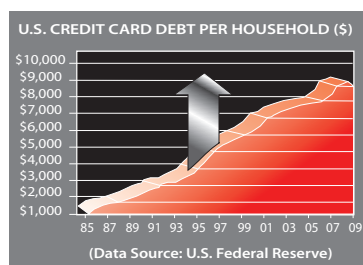
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Testimony [from 96]

revenge upon so many people—especially the cousins and close friends who had turned on our family and aided in their deaths and imprisonment.

When I was 19, my father became increasingly ill, and I was less able to care for him, becoming ill myself when I needed to wash him. Now, even my father was going to die while I watched.

One day I took a car and went driving—very fast—in a remote, dangerous area in the hills outside Tehran. I was hoping to die. I ran into a wall that kept people from going into the valley below.

When I got out, unscathed, I went to the edge of the hill and saw a big valley. I pleaded out loud: *Why did you take everything from me? I love my sister and she is killed. So I say to another friend, "You are like a sister to me," and she disappears. If I love someone, they disappear, and now my father, my teacher. Why? Why? Why? I cannot love all these people who killed my family. Can you kill them all?*

Then, as I looked down at the valley, a vision came over me. I saw thousands of people praying for their enemies instead of fighting. From that moment, the hate inside me began to weaken. The forgiveness started to heal me. From that moment, Somebody took me and helped me, though I was still very confused. I still had many questions, but for some reason, I was able to look at people and say, "I will forgive you."

I went on to find much success. I got married when I was 20 and started my business in finance and investments the same year. Since my business was popular, I bought cars and land and swimming pools, and eventually owned 13 companies. I was practicing Islam, but I still had many questions. And I had no peace.

THE SCENT OF GOD

At age 32, I journeyed to India to see if Buddhism might help. On a trip to Calcutta, I asked a fellow bus passenger if he knew of any good places to sightsee. He told me about Mother Teresa's ministry.

I got to the church very early, and a leader took us to a large shelter where there were many poor people who were very sick and in bad condition. The leader pointed me to one

man and said, "Take care of him." I couldn't believe it. He was just like my father. He bit my fingers when I tried to feed him. He had terrible accidents that I had to clean. He had Alzheimer's. Here I was, a businessman, helping someone for nothing.

Later, one of the leaders invited me to a baptism ceremony. It was all candles, many candles, and singing and clapping. I could see it was something about washing the head but I could not understand. I wondered, *Why are they so happy?* I couldn't understand this place, but I loved being there. For many years it lingered with me.

When I returned to Iran, I took more spiritual classes and decided to take a jour-

Then one Sunday I went to the church service at 11 A.M. I could not find my teacher from the class, so I stood in the back. I did not understand very much of the service, but I saw many people singing songs, joyfully. Then the pastor knelt in front and began to pray. I recognized one word: *Iran*. I realized that the 1,000 people gathered there with their heads bowed, on their knees—they were praying for Iran.

This is the Iran that teaches "death to America," the Iran that wants to kill your citizens and neighbors with weapons. And you pray for them? *Is this heaven? Are these angels?* Thousands of people praying for their enemies, showing love instead of

Thousands of Christians praying for their enemies, showing love instead of hate. Since I was a young man, this had been my vision.

ney every year to try and get answers to my questions. In 2008, I took the *hajj*, the traditional Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca, and that was a time of insight and forgiveness, even though there was still much I did not know. I could even forgive my uncle, who allowed my brother to be executed.

After the *hajj*, I decided I would do anything to find peace. I sold all of my businesses and gave all of the money and assets to my wife and family members. I decided I would follow any sign God gave me.

In 2009, a friend invited me to Sweden. While I was there, my one surviving sister called. After her torture and imprisonment, she had gone to the United States, and she now asked if I would come visit her. But I had no money and needed to return home, and relations between Iran and the United States seemed to preclude a visit. But through a miracle, my friend helped me to get a visitor visa for six months, and my niece got me a plane ticket. I arrived in Washington, D.C., in February 2010, intending to stay for two weeks.

During that time, my mother was also in town to visit my sister as she did every three years. She took me to an English class at a local church, because she knows I like to learn. I went with her and thought, *This smells of God. I smell the smell of Calcutta.* I kept going to the class.

hate. Since I was a young man, this had been my vision.

Standing in the back of that church, immediately I started crying, laughing, and dancing. I didn't care if someone I knew saw me. I was so happy. This was peace. This was heaven. I finally understood this was a place where I could know God, where I could know peace.

On May 9, 2010, at that church, I was baptized. I wanted to understand the Bible, and many people told me to start with the Book of John. I would read verses and think, *Yes, all of this happened to me.* This is not just writing, this is not just reading—this is my life on the page. This is true. I am the one lost sheep whom he went out to find.

When I see how good God is, how powerful and close is his Son Jesus Christ who died for me, how this made sense of all my pain and my hate, and how it helped me understand how to forgive myself and others once and for all—often my Bible is wet from my tears. In Jesus I could understand all blame, and all forgiveness. "I saved you," Jesus said. Now, I understand. ✚

Majid John (not his full name) lives with his family in Virginia. In 2011 he received a permanent visa to stay in the United States. Kate Harris is executive director of the Washington Institute.



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Forgiving Iran

Long before I knew the true God, he helped me release my hatred. By Majid John, as told by Kate Harris

I was 8 years old when the turmoil that fueled the Iranian Revolution of 1979 first started. From that time until I was 16, the government killed eight of my brothers and sisters. I witnessed this. Even my sister-in-law, who was two months pregnant, was murdered, even though Islamic law expressly forbids killing a pregnant woman. My mother and another sister were imprisoned. From age 16 to 19, I was left as the sole caregiver to my father, who was suffering from Alzheimer's disease. During this time Iran and Iraq were at war (1980–1988), and I lost many friends as well.

Everyone I loved—every person I cared about—died or was killed or taken to prison.

I could not understand this. And I became very angry. Forgiveness seemed out of the question.

I was born in Tehran, Iran, in the late 1960s, the youngest member of a large and well-known Muslim family. My father was a respected teacher and senior official in the government, serving in the Iranian senate under the shah and then as a leader in both houses of parliament for the transition government after the revolution.

VISION IN THE VALLEY

After the revolution ended in December 1979, I was invited to participate in many political activities because of my family name. But I

didn't join them. Instead, I argued with all of them in my mind—the government, other people, my own cousins. I was too young to make sense of things, and I hated all of them. I hated without knowing. I was not aware of how much I hated; it was just the way I was. There were so many questions I could not answer.

I was filled with rage because I saw everyone as responsible for my family's death—the shah, the new leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the revolutionaries, those resisting revolution. It seemed everyone had hate in their hearts, that there was no one with clean hands. I wanted to take

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THE
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Advancing Seattle Pacific University's mission to engage the culture and change the world is President Daniel J. Martin's first priority and the theme of his Inaugural Year. The tenth president of SPU, Martin was inaugurated in downtown Seattle on April 2, 2013. "SPU's mission is not only the essence of what a Christian university should be about," he says, "it is also the essence of my own calling."

Learn more about President Martin at spu.edu/inauguration.



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"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

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