

CT

CHRISTIANITY TODAY

APRIL 2014

**FROM BANK ROBBER
TO JESUS LAWYER** *p.80*

**CONFESSIONS OF A BAD
CHURCHGOER** *p.27*

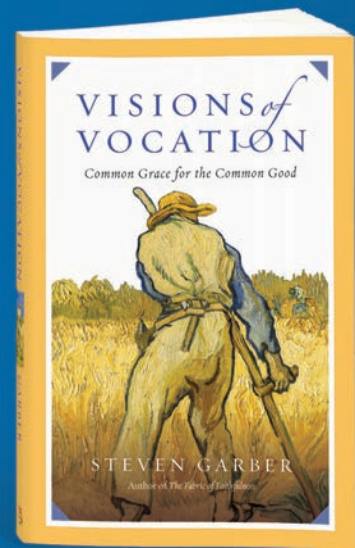
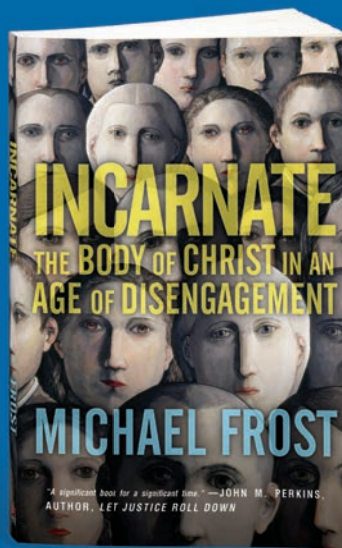
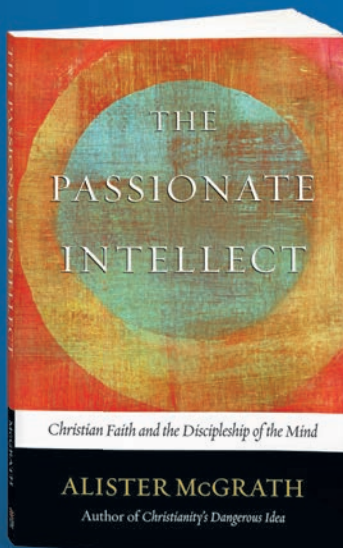
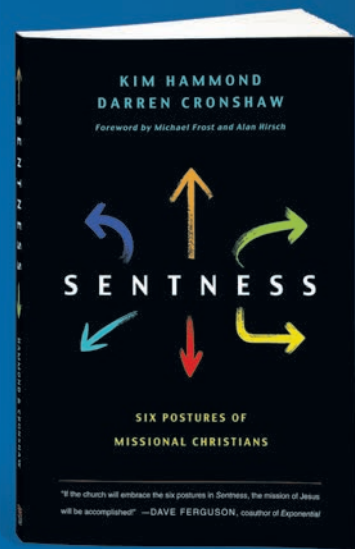
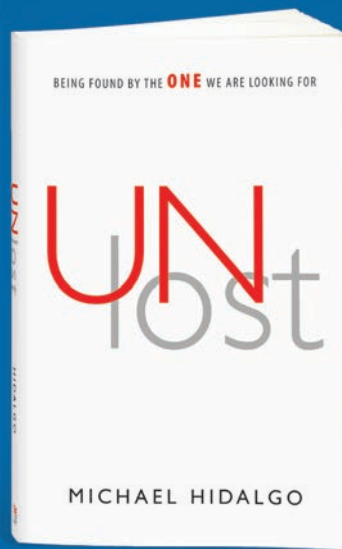
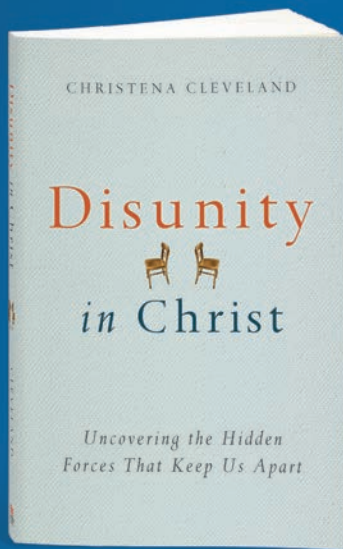
KOs FOR CHRIST *p.54*



Finding Mr. Wright


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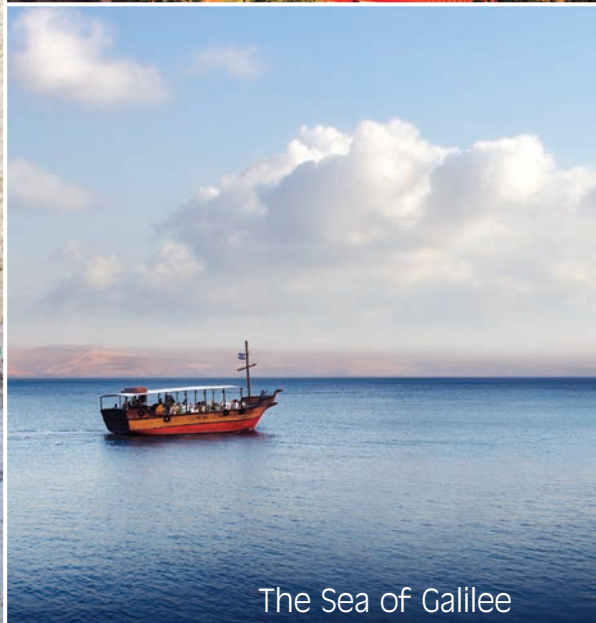
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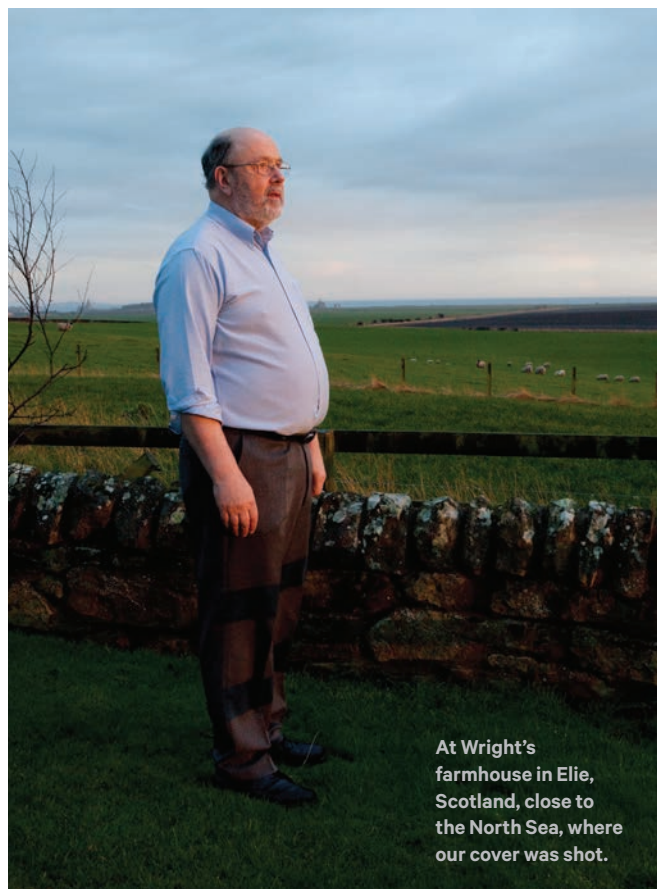
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Though Mark championed the ultimate fighting piece (see p. 54), his favorite sport is the least violent.



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Tim looks forward to spring cleaning, when he works to keep his Chicago sox white.



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EDITOR'S NOTE



QUEST FOR THE HISTORICAL WRIGHT

N. T. Wright told us his plans 15 years ago.
How they have panned out.

TED OLSEN *Managing Editor, News & Online*

IF THIS ISSUE'S COVER STORY (p. 36) is your first introduction to N. T. Wright, you can't blame us. He's been all over this magazine for years. As recently as September 2013, we interviewed him about his book on the Psalms. But he hasn't been on the cover since 1999, at the end of his tenure as dean of Lichfield Cathedral.

In that profile, by Tim Stafford, Wright ruminated about why so many Bible scholars had been hostile to orthodoxy. "Sometimes it's senior scholars who look back with a certain embarrassment to a time when they were quite conservative themselves," he suggested. They'd been excited about the Bible, then went off to college and discovered unorthodox theories at the same time they discovered new foods and new ideas home life hadn't provided. "Probably they learned to disbelieve in the miracles of Jesus at the same time they first had sex. For them this stuff is part of liberation. To say maybe the conservative position is right is really to undermine their lives."

Wright never says it outright, but I wonder if this is one reason why, as Stafford put it, "Wright paints on big canvases with brilliant colors; he writes symphonies, not cantatas." Discovery is intoxicating. I'm not the only one of my friends who came across a Wright speech, book, or article shortly after college and was enthralled by the grand scale of his vision and the enthusiasm with which he preached it. I was hitting ntwrightpage.com weekly, downloading new sermons, conference videos, and op-eds he was writing for British papers. I made a pilgrimage to Westminster Abbey when he was canon theologian to hear him preach. *Liberation* isn't far off from how it felt, except that it was a freedom to embrace a big vision rather than to cast off a small one.

"When you really do business with the Bible at the fullest historical and theological level, then it is passionately and dramatically relevant, life changing, and community changing," Wright told Stafford. That was before Wright became a household name, before he was going on Comedy Central's *The Colbert Report* alongside Cookie Monster, before Wheaton College and the Evangelical Theological Society were devoting entire conferences to his understanding of the Bible. As his time at Lichfield wound down and we asked what he wanted to do next, Wright responded,

I suppose I would like to kick-start a biblical renewal within the church—not simply a renewal of private piety, though God knows if you got the sort of renewal I am talking about, it would drive people to their knees, it would fill their hearts with joy, it would challenge them at every possible level.

Seems the man is getting his wish.

CT



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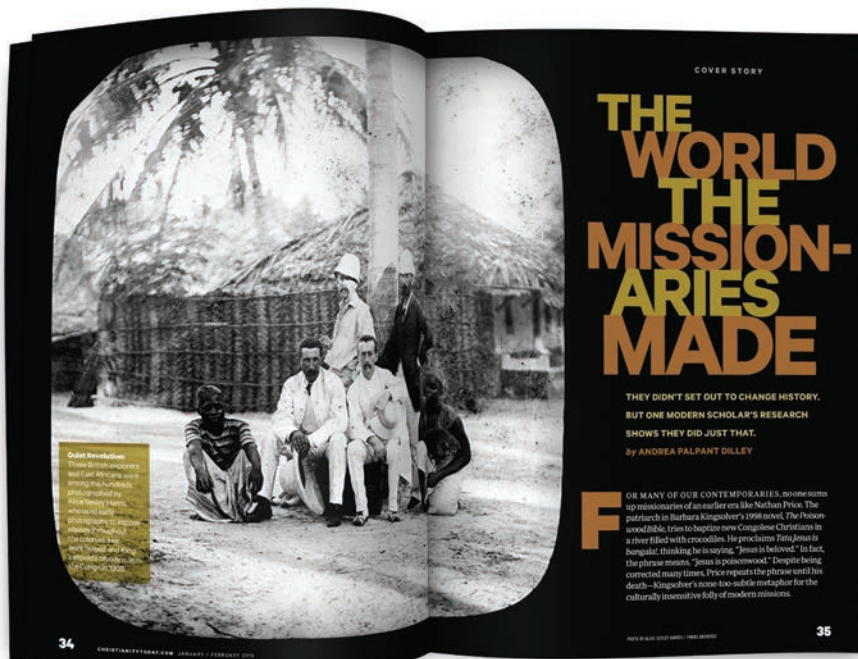
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REPLY ALL



Protestant missionaries were only allowed in the Belgian Congo.

Lilla Langford
Clifton, New Jersey

Now well into my 80th year, for the first time I have been feeling glad that I won't live much longer. I think this every time I learn about a colossal challenge against which I am able to do virtually nothing: a national debt now over \$17 trillion, declining moral standards, and international misery and warfare that seem irresolvable.

Then I read your January/February issue, which included "Is the \$17 Trillion Federal Debt Immoral?" "Why Kids' Stories Need a Dose of Darkness," "The World the Missionaries Made," "Why We're Losing the War on Poverty," "Through Many Dangers, Toils, and Snares," and "To the Ends of the Earth." Yes, things are bad, but yes, there is hope. Thank you, *Christianity Today*, for hope.

Robert C. Hull
Westlake, Ohio

IS THE FEDERAL DEBT IMMORAL?

Much of the \$17 trillion U.S. federal debt is indeed immoral, but not necessarily for the reasons provided by the authors in Open Question. Perhaps the best explanation is by the late economist James M. Buchanan.

In a democracy, politicians generate spending programs that benefit their constituents while leaving part of the bill to future generations. As a result, the cost-benefit analysis of public goods becomes distorted, and government spending is greater than it would be if the government were required to balance its books. We have lived as many as 71 years with a federal budget deficit (73 years if we don't count the Social Security surplus).

The burden to repay all this government debt rests with tomorrow's taxpayers. This is immoral because future

THE WORLD THE MISSIONARIES MADE

After reading *CT*'s cover story, I realized I was standing on the shoulders of giants. My parents were missionaries in Tanzania, where they preached, built churches, and provided medical care. There were no believers when they arrived; when they retired, there were scores of thriving churches.

Today I lead the world's largest Protestant association of Christian schools. We are humbled and overwhelmed by the passion of today's pioneers as they disciple the next generation of indigenous leaders. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, Bishop Marini Bodo is one striking example. As a Protestant leader who oversees nearly 20,000 Christian schools under his umbrella organization, he was educated in a school run by missionaries more than 65 years ago.

Daniel Egeler
President, Association of Christian Schools International
Colorado Springs

As a former missionary to the Democratic Republic of Congo, I found the article tremendously encouraging. One clarification: Page 38 shows a map where the Republic of Congo (formerly French Congo) rather

than the Democratic Republic of Congo, is highlighted as the sphere of activity of Alice Seeley Harris. Both countries are called "Congo," but it was supposed to illustrate that although abuses occurred in both,

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generations end up facing a financial obligation that is the result of spending and borrowing decisions in which they had no participation, whether directly or through elected representatives.

Jerry H. Tempelman, CFA
New York City

WHO OWNS THE SERMONS?

We were gravely disappointed by “Who Owns the Pastor’s Sermon?” by Bob Smietana. Having advised hundreds of pastors and churches on this question for over 35 years, we believe this is an important matter. Unfortunately, we think the article does more harm than good, particularly in the “What’s a Pastor to Do?” section. Smietana says, “When it comes to intellectual property rights, pastors and churches have three basic options.” This statement isn’t true or helpful. The options he outlines are not really options at all.

First, pastors were told they “can set up a separate nonprofit ministry, which holds the copyright to [their] sermons.” This option doesn’t enable a pastor to own his intellectual property. The ministry would own it and would be subject to the exact same private inurement restrictions that

apply to a church.

Second, pastors were told they can do “all [their] writing . . . on personal time, using [their] own computer and software.” But when is a pastor’s personal time? Many if not most pastors are “on call” around the clock.

Finally, pastors “can assign all [their] rights to the church.” Pastor Mike Glenn is quoted as saying, “At some time, the church might decide to give me the rights.” Under the law, Glenn will only be able to obtain the rights to what he created if he pays the church fair market value for those rights. A “gift” of those rights to him from the church would be private inurement.

We are concerned about the legal advice that pastors will take from this article. We’d highly encourage pastors to focus on its last three paragraphs, which discuss a real solution that has proven successful for numerous pastors and churches over the past three decades.

Sealy, Matt, and Curtis Yates

Yates & Yates
Orange, California

SPICING UP THE TRINITY

Congregationalists consider themselves

a noncredal association. However, in our local church, we recite a creed each Sunday, as a reminder of what the church has identified as the boundaries of orthodoxy. We say the Nicene Creed once a month, but we recite what we call the “ecumenical version”: we leave out “and the Son.”

We see no need to prolong the Great Schism, not only because our pianist is Russian Orthodox, but also because we consider ourselves to be in fellowship with every true church regardless of denomination. We do not want to put a stumbling block in the way of Christian unity. Why include words that are not needed and that only serve to offend half the Christian world?

Bob Hellam

Pastor, Church of the Oaks
Del Rey Oaks, California

I was pleased to see that the Global Gospel Project is looking at the doctrine of the Holy Spirit this year. It might do well to begin by identifying the Holy Spirit rightly. A sentence in the explanatory paragraph reads, “Recently the Holy Spirit—specifically its [sic] role inspiring the expressive, charismatic spiritual gifts. . . .” If I recall my

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elementary school grammar correctly, it is an impersonal pronoun and thus totally inappropriate for the Holy Spirit.

Gary Higbee
Kirkland, Washington

EDITOR'S NOTE: We inadvertently called the Holy Spirit an it instead of the more traditional he—which rightly emphasizes the personal nature of the Spirit. Our apologies for the confusion.

THROUGH MANY DANGERS

I enjoyed reading Gerald L. Sittser's review of Timothy Keller's new book, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*. Most people naturally pull away from pain and suffering. We don't understand this part of the world we live in. But even Jesus said there will be many tribulations in the world, but to be of good cheer, for he has overcome the world.

I plan on purchasing this book, not because of impending doom in my life, but because I desire to continue to learn about my Savior, who also suffered in this world but overcame it.

Beth Hopper
Glendive, Montana

NET GAIN

Responses
from the Web.



"When it comes to energy, imperfect is not the same as immoral."

L. Kenna [@LKenna2](#)

"Fucking Isn't a Four-Letter Word,"

by Chris Horst.

"I wept reading this. Then I got angry for my wife, daughters, sisters, and women. Now I'm praying for guidance."

Thabiti Anyabwile [@ThabitiAnyabwil](#)

"How I Beat Back the Darkness after Rape,"

by Halee Gray Scott.

"Even as a person who connects with God far better through quiet alone time, I understand the huge importance of being a part of a church family. I can feel the difference in how I handle situations when I have been attending church regularly."

Mel Evans, [CT online comment](#).

The Exchange: "Should I Stay or Should I Go Now?" by Ed Stetzer.

"If you wonder how a Molinist thinks about providence and football, @CTmagazine has us covered!"

Justin Taylor [@between2worlds](#)

"William Lane Craig: God Hears Your Super Bowl Prayers," interview by Kate Shellnutt.

"Nabeel Qureshi is the real deal. His absolute passion and love for the lost and his discipline in studying and understanding the Scriptures compelled me to reexamine my own walk. He is engaging, humble, and incredibly intelligent. I encourage anyone to attend his speaking engagements and to support his efforts in reaching Muslims with the truth."

Mark Snyder, [CT online comment](#).

"Called Off the Minaret," by Nabeel Qureshi.

"It looks like @ct_movies' review of *I, Frankenstein* is more entertaining than the actual thing."

Biola CCCA [@BiolaCCCA](#)

"I, Frankenstein," by Timothy Wainwright.

200

A

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Sybil Redmon
Stage 4 Pancreatic Cancer Patient
Montgomery, AL

“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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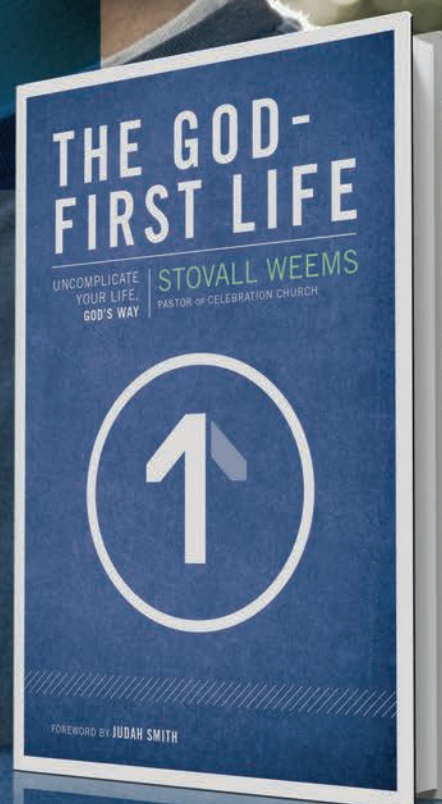
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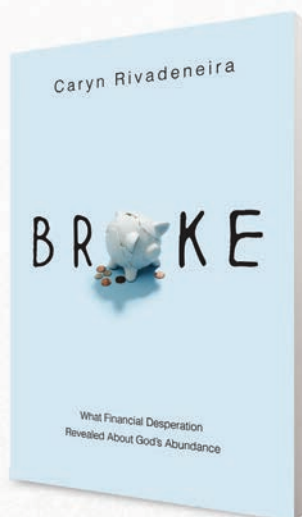
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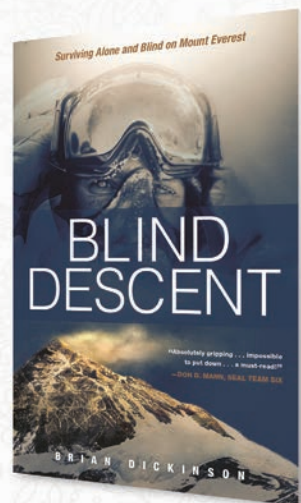


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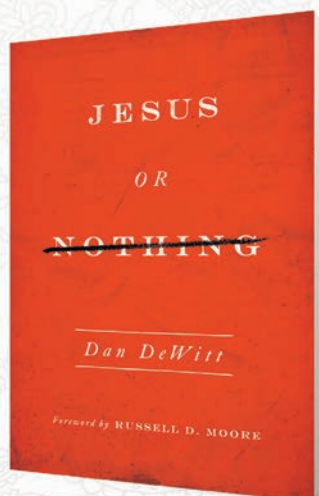
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Brian Dickinson, a former Navy rescue swimmer, was 1,000 feet from the summit of Mt. Everest when his Sherpa had to stop and he had to climb solo. Upon reaching the top, he became snow blind and had to descend by faith, not sight. Don't miss this extraordinary adventure and faith journey.

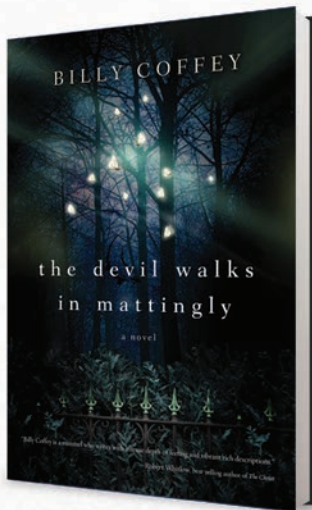


JESUS OR NOTHING

Jesus or Nothing counters common misconceptions about the Christian faith, challenging us to think carefully about the choice between Jesus or nothing. This winsome book describes the rock-solid foundation for life that Christians enjoy in and through the gospel—offering an explanation for our existence, grace for our guilt, and meaning for our mortality.



To order, please visit: MomsDadsGrads.com



THE DEVIL WALKS IN MATTINGLY

Novelist Billy Coffey returns with a tale reminiscent of “Flannery O’Conner with its glimpses of the grotesque and supernatural” (*BookPage*). Redemption is what three tortured souls, secretly complicit in a young man’s death, long for most – and it’s the last thing they expect to receive. In the shadow of their hidden sin, each has withered. But what has not been laid to rest is bound to rise again....

EVERY MAN’S BIBLE

Now available in the NIV and NLT, the updated *Every Man’s Bible* has thousands of notes for the battles every man faces. With new contributions from Tony Evans, Tony Dungy, and others, the *Every Man’s Bible* is the perfect gift to help men tackle the toughest issues — from stress at work to integrity at home.



HANDS-ON BIBLE

Jesus taught with hands-on lessons and illustrations. The *Hands-On Bible* uses the same experience-based learning to communicate God’s Word in an active, understandable way. With hundreds of fun, memorable lessons, the *Hands-On Bible* is packed with activities and experiences that invite kids to crawl inside the Scriptures and do God’s Word!

5

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NEWS



WITNESS



SANCTUARY

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC: As fears of genocide flipped focus, churches in Boali (above) and other cities sheltered hundreds of Muslims from reprisal attacks. Senior leaders disputed calling anti-Balaka fighters “Christian militias” and Séléka fighters “Muslim militias.” The Alliance of Evangelical Churches pledged to take action against Christians who “distort Jesus’ gospel” by not pursuing reconciliation. “Our battle is spiritual, not carnal, and should be carried out on the knees and not with weapons in hand.”





PHILIPPINES

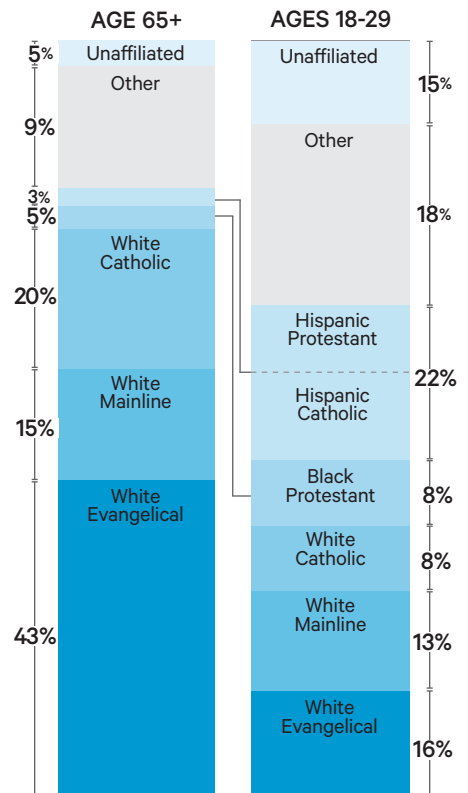
WORLDWIDE WALK

← On behalf of Haiyan victims, Christian sect Iglesia ni Cristo set the Guinness World Record for charity walks in single (175,509 people in Manila) and multiple locations (519,521 people in 54 countries). Meanwhile, churches praised efforts by the Philippine Evangelical Disaster Response Network, founded after a 17-nation summit weeks before the typhoon hit.

ROMEO RANOCO/REUTERS/NEWSCOM

PRO-LIFE DIVERSITY

The coalition of Americans who believe abortion should be illegal is growing more diverse among millennials:



PUBLIC RELIGION RESEARCH INSTITUTE / BROOKINGS



SOUTH KOREA

Founder of world's largest church embezzled funds

One of Seoul's most prominent pastors, David Yonggi Cho of Yoido Full Gospel Church, was convicted of embezzling \$12 million in church funds in order to help his struggling son. A court ruled the 78-year-old had arranged to buy stock from his son at three times the market value and had evaded \$3.2 million in taxes. Cho's three-year prison sentence was suspended, but he was fined \$4.7 million. He apologized in a sermon, saying, "God forbid, if God calls me back today, I will still be able to go to the kingdom of God," according to China's *The Gospel Herald*.

Winter Olympics. So did its parliament's ousting of pro-Russia president Viktor Yanukovich after pro-European Union protests crippled Kiev. Overlooked was the unusual choice to lead the predominantly Orthodox nation until May elections: Oleksandr Turchynov, a well-known evangelical pastor and politician. "He preaches on a regular basis at one of the Baptist churches in Kiev," said Sergey Rakhuba, head of U.S.-based Russian Ministries. He thinks Turchynov, who helped end import taxes on Bibles, may change the post-Soviet mindset among newly proud evangelicals that "a true Christian can't necessarily be a politician."



UKRAINE

Orthodox nation picks Baptist pastor as president

Ukraine's showdown with Russia over Crimea drew global attention after the

Fired president sues cccu over 'intentional failure' findings

Claiming his former employer breached his contract and tarnished his reputation, Edward O. Blews Jr. has sued the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities



"I'm not upset. We're Christian missionaries."

Karen Short of Australia, on North Korea jailing her 75-year-old husband for 13 days for distributing tracts at a Buddhist temple in Pyongyang on Kim Jong-il's birthday. **REUTERS**

(cccu). Blews, fired less than 10 months into his presidency after a "careful investigation," disputes that his conduct constituted "intentional failure" and argues the ccu should pay him the remaining \$2.2 million of his contract. The umbrella group stated it was "surprised and disappointed" that Blews stepped away from a required biblical mediation process, but "stands ready to defend its decision."

Pentecostals mend 100-year racial rift

In 1917, prospective missionary Alexander Howard asked the Assemblies of God (AG) to send him to Liberia. Because he was black, AG leaders refused. So he formed the United Pentecostal Council of the Assemblies of God (UPCAG), which today boasts 18 Liberian churches. The two denominations remained separate for nearly 100 years—until a four-year reconciliation process resulted in a February partnership to "mend the divide." The UPCAG was "birthed in 1919 because of racism," said George O. Wood, superintendent of the AG (whose U.S. membership today is 40 percent minorities). "Now, the Lord has brought us together again."



ISRAEL

Christian Arabs recognized for first time

A new Israeli law distinguishes between Christian and Muslim Arabs—whether they want it or not. The Knesset bill recognizes Christians as a separate minority and gives them employment representation on the Advisory Committee for Equal Opportunity alongside ultra-Orthodox Jews, new immigrants, and women. Supporters say the law will ease discrimination against Christians as a minority within a minority. But most Arab Christians will refuse the unprecedented offer as a ploy to divide Israeli Arabs, predicts Munther Na'um, chairman of the Association of Baptist Churches in Israel. "We have the same traditions, the same culture," he said. "It will be difficult to separate us."

Bob Jones fires, rehires abuse investigators

Bob Jones University (BJU) will allow a firm it fired to finish assessing the school's response to abuse allegations after all. BJU terminated the investigation by GRACE (Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment) amid a presidential resignation and concerns over GRACE's methodology. But weeks later, the school rehired GRACE (which was fired similarly once before) after the group "satisfactorily addressed" its concerns. BJU apologized for the "added anxiety" and praised alumni who "demonstrated great courage to share their stories in an effort to help us improve." GRACE hopes that its report brings "healing for hurting souls, along with positive institutional changes."



KENYA

Pastors protest pay-to-preach laws

Some of Kenya's 47 counties are mulling making money by charging clergy for evangelizing beyond church walls. Hundreds of pastors protested a Nyeri County bill that proposed daily rates ranging from \$58 (in rural areas) to \$117

(in stadiums)—steep costs in a country where public evangelistic events often last from three days to one week. Pastors in Busia defeated a similar proposal, while Nairobi tried to charge clergy between \$463 and \$580 a day to use two of the capital city's largest parks, which are popular venues for evangelistic meetings. Christians are divided on the issue. Some argue that churches are not businesses to be taxed. Others want to stop pastors from exploiting their positions by selling holy oil or promising salvation for a fee.

Fraudbuster cheated his church out of \$3 million

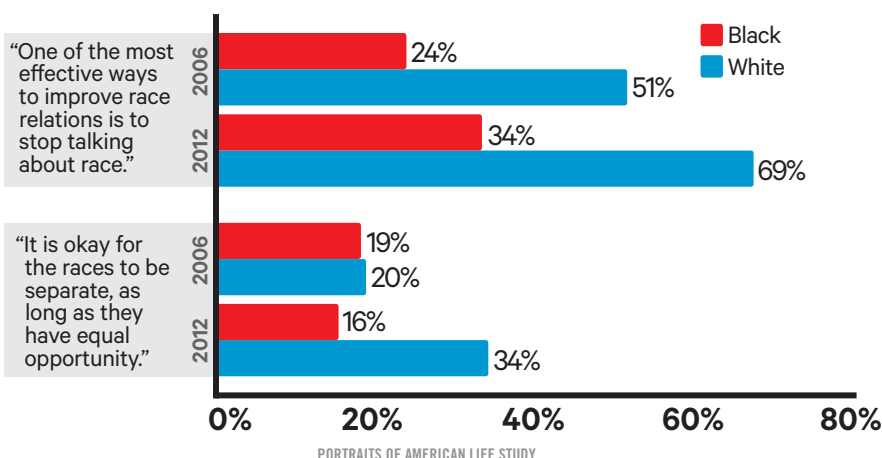
Barry Minkow, an ex-conman turned watchdog who claimed he saved Christian organizations from billions of dollars of fraud, has been convicted of embezzling \$3 million from his own church over a decade. Minkow, who pastored San Diego Community Bible Church (and once graced CT's cover), pleaded guilty to opening unauthorized bank accounts, forging signatures, and using church funds for personal benefit. Already serving five years in prison for a 2011 conviction for insider trading, Minkow could have five more years added to his sentence.

Harvard hosts world's largest Bible class

More than 22,000 students from 180 countries took Harvard professor Laura Nasrallah's class on the apostle Paul's New Testament letters, using a free massive open online course (MOOC) platform. Meanwhile, Pat Robertson's Regent

A GROWING GAP

How black and white evangelicals now think about race.



University launched its own mooc platform, Luxvera, joining Taylor University and Biola University in offering free education online. Christian educators have divergent opinions on moocs; some view “person-to-person interactions” as essential to Christian transformation, while others see moocs as a biblical example of “giving without expecting anything in return.”

Parents jailed after faith healings fail

Herbert and Catherine Schaible will serve between three and seven years in prison for watching their eight-month-old son, Brandon, die last year from untreated dehydration and pneumonia. The Pentecostal parents' sentence for third-degree homicide was one of the harshest ever handed out to a faith-healing couple—primarily because the Schaibles, who believe “Jesus shed blood for our healing,” were already serving a 10-year probation for the death of their 2-year-old son, Kent, from untreated pneumonia in 2009. “You’ve killed two of your children,” the judge told the Philadelphia couple. “Not God. Not your church. Not religious devotion. You.” The Pew Research Center recently found that only about a quarter of white evangelicals support the right of parents to refuse medical treatment for a child.

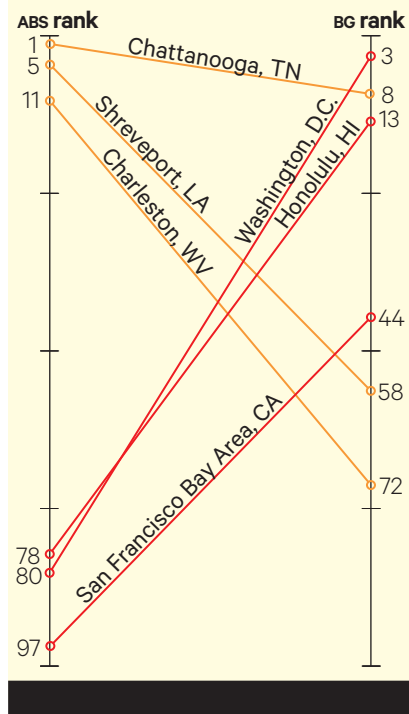


CUBA

Bonhoeffer-inspired pastor arrested after D.C. trip

A Baptist pastor in central Cuba who once appeared on *CT*'s cover symbolizes how travel has gotten easier for the island's surging Christian population—even as practicing the faith gets harder. Mario Felix Leonart Barroso issued a 30-point challenge to his Communist government during an unusually high-profile trip to Washington, D.C., last fall. Citing Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Bible Readers vs. Searchers
The American Bible Society (ABS) ranked 100 cities by how many residents read and believe the Bible. BibleGateway.com (BG) ranked the same cities by pageviews. One takeaway: Many cities that read the Bible the least seek out its verses online the most.



as inspiration, he tweets and blogs in favor of religious freedom. He was confined to his home as part of a larger crackdown on dissidents, his sister told Christian Solidarity Worldwide. In a sign of the times, his wife, Yoaxis, live-tweeted his house arrest.

Adventists assess why 1 in 3 members leave

The Seventh-day Adventist Church boasts 18 million members worldwide, but

it also loses 43 people for every 100 it converts. Altogether, the denomination lost one-third of its members over the past 50 years, according to the first Adventist summit on retention. Researchers found that most members depart not over doctrine but over personal struggles such as marital conflict or unemployment. Therefore, the key to growing membership may not be adding new faces, but taking care of the people who are already there, leaders suggested. One example: South Africa, where the rate of new memberships has slowed, but retention of current members has significantly increased Adventist churches' ranks.



EGYPT

Korean bus bombed during Holy Land pilgrimage

A suicide bomber killed four people and injured 14 others as a tour bus carrying South Korean Christians attempted to cross from Egypt to Israel to visit biblical sites. The Presbyterian group had saved for years for the 12-day trip in celebration of their Jincheon church's 60th anniversary. This was not the first time Korean Christians have been targeted while traveling. In 2007, after a 43-day hostage situation in Afghanistan left two Korean missionaries dead, South Korea banned its citizens from traveling to certain majority-Muslim nations.

Carman's cancer cured in time for spring tour

Less than a year after announcing his diagnosis with myeloma, an incurable form of cancer, Carman Licciardello, 57, says he's cancer-free and ready to take 100 stages on his comeback tour this spring. After Carman, who garnered 10 platinum records, was rejected by many Christian music labels over the past 12 years, fans responded to the former CCM star's dramatic diagnosis by pledging more than \$530,000 for his new album and music video. Carman credits God with saving him from an infection he caught during chemotherapy. He told his Facebook fans, “I guess God put me in a deep sleep like Adam and pulled out a surprise.”



“When he comes, we’ll know.”

Sarah Eiferman, a Jerusalem real estate agent, on the many leases that require tenants to vacate apartments once the Messiah returns so that owners can enjoy the “world to come.” CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR



Persecution

Vietnam Is Getting Better, and Worse

Some see small signs of freedom even as the country moves up the list of top persecutors.



U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry scheduled a visit to a Catholic Mass in Vietnam to highlight the country's limited religious freedoms.

Secretary of State John Kerry's December trip to Vietnam was meant to improve relations and urge greater protection of human rights in a country that climbed three spots on a list of the world's worst persecutors of Christians.

Kerry attended Mass in Ho Chi Minh City, a move faith-based adviser Shaun Casey called a step "beyond rhetoric to highlight religious freedom."

Life Without Limbs evangelist Nick Vujicic's visit seven months earlier was even more notable, said Reg Reimer, former missionary and longtime advocate for religious freedom in Vietnam.

Vujicic went before more than 60,000 Vietnamese in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, sparking hope that the Communist country may be easing its religious restrictions.

"Nick's visit was a bright spot in Vietnam's long, dreary, turn toward a better way of treating religions," Reimer said.

The visit indicated that some in the Vietnamese government are comfortable with foreigners publicly sharing their faith, said Institute for Global Engagement (IGE) president Chris Seiple. "It is also in Vietnam's self-interest to be known as open to such things."

It is encouragement sorely needed. Vietnam's Decree 92, which went into effect in January 2013 and was meant to clarify earlier laws, allows religious groups to legally register. But before they can preach, perform sacraments, or choose their own leaders, they must have worshiped for 20 years without disturbing the government.

The 2014 World Watch List, a ranking from Open Doors of the countries that most persecute Christians, put Vietnam at No. 18, up from No. 21 last year. Meanwhile, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) again recommended that the State Department designate Vietnam a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC), citing at least 13 Vietnamese imprisoned for religious practice or advocating for religious freedom. (Though the USCIRF has recommended Vietnam be a CPC since 2001, the State Department has kept it off the list since 2006.)

The U.S. House of Representatives voted 405 to 3 in August to prohibit aid

increases to Vietnam if it doesn't make significant progress in human rights, including ending religious abuse and returning confiscated property to churches.

Vietnamese political leaders are inconsistent on religious liberty, said Nina Shea, director of the Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Freedom. "There is some liberalization, and then some crackdowns, particularly when they feel they can get away with it, out of sight of the international view," she said.

While democracy isn't always necessary for religious freedom, accepting ideological pluralism is, and Vietnam hasn't done that, she said.

But it is beginning to allow a little, Seiple said, citing IGE's ability to gather and train more than 2,600 church leaders and government officials over 18 months. "Where there was no space to have these conversations, there now is," he said.

Seiple and Reimer both say that Vietnam's religious controls can be inconsistent and unpredictable, but abuses like forced recantations are less frequent.

"Strategically, the dial has shifted from persecution to isolated harassment," Seiple said. "Now, it still stinks to be harassed, to have your church registration denied, or have people listen in on your phone conversations. But you're not being tortured. By and large that has disappeared. We've seen in a very short period of time a significant and strategic change. On the other hand, there is a long way to go."

No. 18

Rank of Vietnam among the countries that most persecute Christians.

OPEN DOORS WORLD WATCH LIST

No. 9

Rank of Vietnam among the countries with the largest number of Christians living as minorities. Vietnam's 7,170,000 Christians make up 8.2 percent of its population.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra



Higher Education

End Missionary Debt!

It's the new mantra at many colleges, universities, and nonprofits.

When she graduated from Bethel University in St. Paul, Minnesota, Karen Johnson believed God had called her to Japan. Two years later, Johnson still lives in Minnesota, working multiple jobs as she strives to pay off \$43,000 in student loans.

"I needed this degree to be able to do [missions work]," said Johnson, who majored in biblical and theological studies and youth ministry. "But my degree has held me back."

Because of binds like Johnson's, colleges, universities, and other programs have begun initiatives to make sure student debt is not a barrier to missions work. Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia, for example, will soon put millions of dollars toward forgiving student loans for missionaries.

Many schools are starting or enhancing loan repayment programs "because the landscape has changed dramatically," said Luke Womack, founder and executive director of the GO Fund. Launched in 2012, the nonprofit helps graduates of any

school, requiring only that they minister to unreached people groups. "The rate of tuition continues to skyrocket each year," he noted.

In the three decades since 1983, average tuition and fees at private four-year institutions rose by 153 percent, according to the College Board. And according to the Project on Student Debt, seven in ten 2012 college graduates had student loans, with an average debt of \$29,400.

"What [mission agencies] told us over and over is that the number-one barrier to getting people to live and work overseas was debt," said Johnnie Moore, senior vice president for communications at Liberty. "They called it the black hole."

Liberty's program launches in May 2014 and has no cap on funding or recipients. Money comes from Liberty reserves and is open to any graduate serving overseas. Those accepted receive up to \$30,000 per individual, with 20 percent of the total debt paid each year. More than 60 people have inquired about the program.

Messiah College in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, also launched a debt-forgiveness program, in early 2013. Two missionaries are enrolled, one in Jordan and the other in Kenya.

Messiah's program came about when a donor made a "significant gift," said Jon Stuckey, director of development. The school wants to grow the endowment. "Our goal is [to] make sure anyone who truly feels called to the mission field can follow that call of God on their heart without worrying about the student debt they may have incurred," said Stuckey.

Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois, already has a debt-forgiveness program, which has supported missionaries in Mexico, Mozambique, East Asia, and Thailand, among other locations.

Many mission agencies will not accept graduates with significant debt. The International Mission Board requires personnel to have less than \$1,500 in unsecured debt; New Tribes Mission asks candidates to be free from debt, but considers individual circumstances; and SEND International requires candidates to be working to pay off debt.

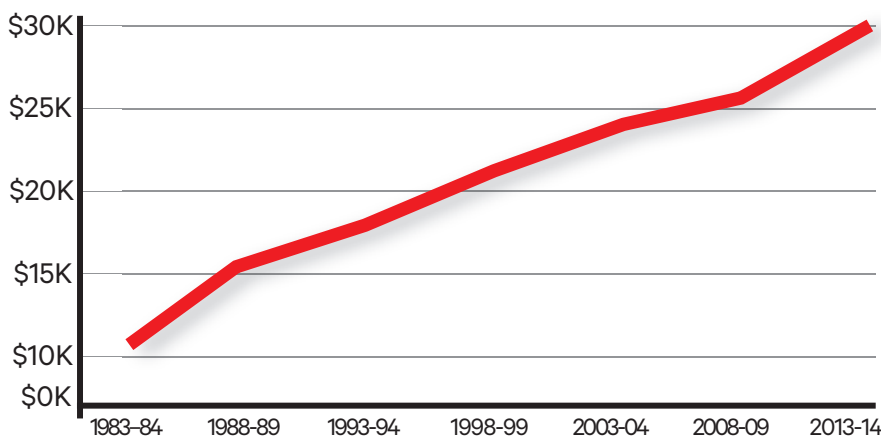
San Diego Christian College offers a loan-forgiveness program for missionary pilots. Two organizations, MedSend and the Southwestern Medical Clinic Foundation, do so for medical missionaries from any institution.

While she strives to pay off her debt, Johnson has applied to the GO Fund. When she is debt free—which may take six more years—she plans to go to Tokyo with SEND.

For administrators at Liberty, the motive is compelling: "We believe this is the first generation that can see the completion of the Great Commission," Moore said. "We're entirely convinced of it."

Katherine Burgess

Tuition and fees in 2013 dollars, private nonprofit four-year colleges:



SOURCE FOR CHART • COLLEGEBOARD, TRENDS IN COLLEGE PRICING 2013

Which Scientists Believe

Millions identify themselves as evangelicals, but few are at research universities.

A new study found that 2 million of the nation's 12 million scientists identify as evangelical Christians. In other words, if you were to convene all the evangelical scientists, they could populate the city of Houston.

The finding is the first to be made public from the largest study of American views on science and religion, which sociologist Elaine Howard Ecklund and her colleagues at Rice University and the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) wrapped up in early 2014. Seventeen percent of scientists said "evangelical" describes them "somewhat" or "very well," compared to 23 percent of all respondents.

It's a dramatically higher percentage than found in Ecklund's 2010 survey of

scientists at top universities: only about 2 percent identified as evangelical. The new survey, by contrast, focused on "rank and file" scientists, including those in health care, life sciences, computers, and engineering.

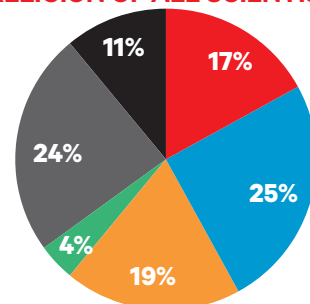
The new survey also found that the same number of people in the general public perceive hostility by religious people toward science as perceive hostility by scientists toward religion—about 1 in 5. But among evangelical scientists, a strong majority (57 percent) perceive hostility from scientists toward religion. That suggests Christians in scientific fields have negative experiences with fellow scientists in the workplace regarding their faith.

Evangelical scientists are more active in their faith than American evangelicals in general, the survey indicates. They are more likely to consider themselves very religious, to attend religious services weekly, and to read religious texts at least every week.

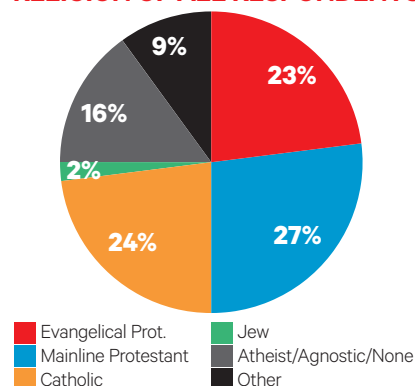
As scientists at AAAS plan to engage more evangelical Christians—the group has new initiatives with both the National Association of Evangelicals and the Association of Theological Schools—they're hopeful that scientists who are evangelicals will serve as mediators.

"We ought to maybe think of them as a type of boundary pioneer of sorts, able

RELIGION OF ALL SCIENTISTS



RELIGION OF ALL RESPONDENTS



ELAINE HOWARD ECKLUND,
"RELIGIOUS UNDERSTANDING OF SCIENCE"

to live well in both worlds," Ecklund said. "Radical collaboration is not something that's likely to be a headline, but maybe it ought to be."
Christine Herman

Under Discussion

Compiled by Ruth Moon



Q: Are spontaneous baptisms healthy for the church?

Southern Baptist pastor Steven Furtick made headlines for the careful orchestration of his megachurch's "spontaneous" mass baptisms. Baptisms at his Elevation Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, grew from 289 in 2010 to 3,519 for the first eight months of 2013.

YES

NO

"There's no particular problem with baptism immediately following conversion; practices changed in the early church. If the church has nothing in place to encourage faith formation, that's a problem. But one can't make a strong case that catechesis needs to be before baptism."

Joel Green, professor, Fuller Theological Seminary

"Demanding that we delay baptisms to ensure against false professions is to pursue a good objective in an unbiblical manner. We should be concerned with people who make false professions of faith. But we should not protect against that by robbing genuine believers of a resource God intended them to have."

J. D. Greear, pastor, The Summit Church

"I'm all for baptizing a person as soon as possible, but we must be cautious and exercise discernment. Not all spontaneous baptisms are wrong. But I would argue for more time—not less—before baptizing one who confesses Christ as Lord. Not a whole year. But definitely more time than two praise songs."

Tony Merida, pastor, Imago Dei Church

"There needs to be a time of education, conscious reflection, and prayer. This shouldn't be raced through. The New Testament says baptism is a one-time-only sacrament. You are making a commitment before God that is as serious as a heart attack."

Ben Witherington, author, *Troubled Waters: Rethinking the Theology of Baptism*

"Baptisms with slipshod interviews to ensure candidates really know what it means to follow Christ are unethical. Baptism is a sign of union with Christ in death, burial, and resurrection. So baptizing a person who hasn't been born again is speaking falsehood about the gospel."

Russell Moore, president, Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission



Politics

India's Christians Shrug

The country's likely next leader is a Hindu nationalist who has suppressed other faiths. Why church leaders aren't worried.



VIVEK PRAKASH/BLOOMBERG VIA GETTY IMAGES

Narendra Modi, leader of India's divisive Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), will almost certainly become the country's next prime minister. But given the party's platform of Hindu nationalism and association with religious violence, it's surprising that many Christians aren't concerned about his election.

The reason? Modi is promising jobs.

"Believers... don't have any difficulties with Modi. In fact, they applaud his developmental efforts," the head of the Jacobite Syrian Church told reporters in January.

Since the economy peaked at 9.3 percent annual growth in 2011, growth has plummeted to about 5 percent. India's Christian minority has long backed the Congress party, which has been in power since 2009. But corruption, scandals, and ineffective economic policies have tarnished the party. "Congress can no longer be sure it retains the trust of the poor, the Dalits, the tribals, and the minorities, [who] voted for it all these years," John Dayal, cofounder of the All India Christian Council, announced on his blog.

The nation's economic downturn has allowed for the resurgence of the BJP, the Hindu nationalist group that governed India from 1998 to 2004. Many Christians have accused the BJP of inciting violence against Christians and Muslims.

Modi, 63, has been chief minister of the

western Indian state of Gujarat since 2001. To the delight of India's corporate class, Gujarat now accounts for 72 percent of all new Indian jobs.

But Modi will find it hard to distance himself from one of India's worst recent cases of religious violence. In February 2002, Hindu rioters killed 1,000 people, mostly Muslims, in Gujarat. The attacks have been labeled a pogrom, taking place after 58 Hindu pilgrims died in a train fire that Muslim radicals allegedly started. Human rights groups believe Modi incited violence against Muslims by blaming the fire on Pakistan. Others accuse the Gujarat government of failing to stop the postfire ethnic cleansing. In 2010, India's foreign minister compared the riots to the Holocaust.

Modi's political star rose after a special investigation absolved him of any wrongdoing during the 2002 riots. But since then, critics have accused him of discriminating against religious minorities to further develop the Hindu middle class. Both the United Kingdom and the United States have refused to grant him a visa. And U.S. Congressmen Frank Wolf, Joseph Pitts, and Chris Smith have led the charge to keep the visa ban in force, even as Modi has led the race for prime minister.

Bishop Taranath Sagar, president of the National Council of Churches, an

Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist party has restricted evangelism and conversion around the country. But even the secular Congress Party has passed anticonversion laws in recent years.

umbrella group representing 12 million Christians, says Modi has been emphasizing economic development. But once in office, some fear he may be pressured to further advance the Hindu nationalist agenda (*Hindutva*), which his party has promoted in recent years. This would include tough anticonversion laws, a crackdown on public criticism of Hinduism, and further limits on religious minorities. The BJP has pushed for anticonversion laws in several states, and Modi himself signed into law one of the most infamous ones in 2003.

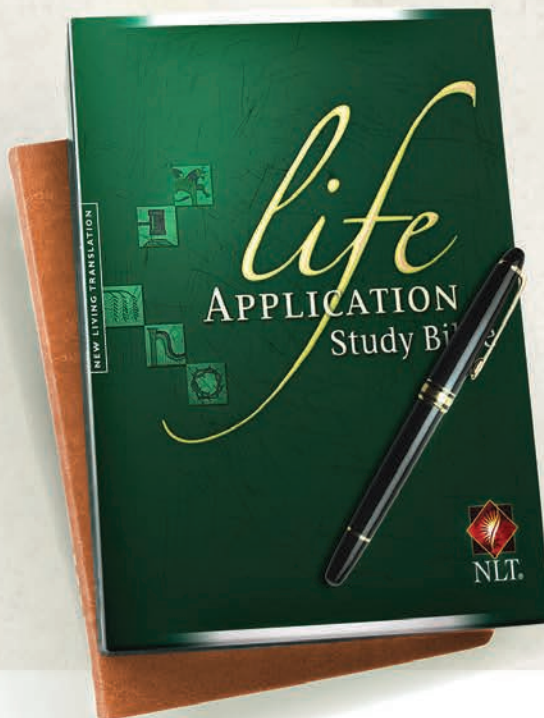
"You can look at Modi as a Nebuchadnezzar or a Darius in Babylon, who helped the Jewish remnant there—or you can look at him like a Herod, who is synonymous with the persecution of God's people," said church studies professor Dexter Maben, who teaches at United Theological College in Bangalore. "We believe we have to engage with the new leader and the government and see how we can live in peace and live the Christian faith in the cultural context. It will be a challenge, but a welcome one."

Steven David in Bangalore, India

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Seamless Faith

Faith is learned when it is woven seamlessly into the fabric of everyday life.

by Traci Smith

Filled with easy-to-organize traditions, ceremonies, and spiritual practices for many of life's stressful and faith-filled moments, this is a resource parents will rely on for years to come.

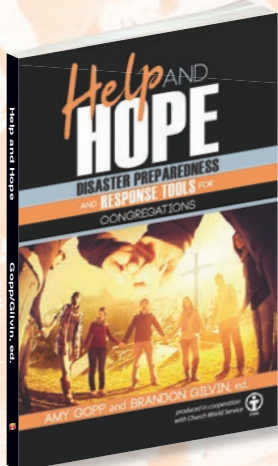
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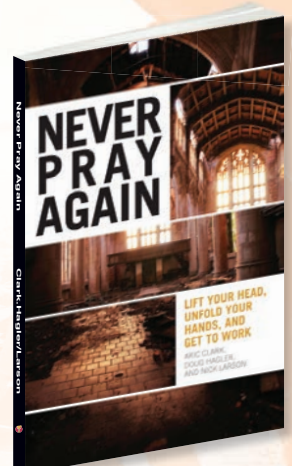
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VIEWS



ISTOCK

WHERE WE STAND

AN OPEN APOLOGY TO THE LOCAL CHURCH

Though much have I attended you,
late have I loved you.





DEAR CHURCH,

I trust that this letter finds you sustained by your Groom as you face bombings and threats in one hemisphere, and attacks of a more offhand sort in the other. By now you have likely received word of a popular blogger confessing his boredom with your recent Protestant iterations. At the least, I was heartened that it sparked a lively discussion about who you are and what exactly the Spirit had in mind when he showed up in Jerusalem some 2,000 years ago to kick off this whole crazy thing.

Outside your walls, you continue to be derided for all manner of intolerance and backwards thinking. But inside your walls, it seems you are quite the hot ticket these days. A whole generation of evangelical Christians has grown impatient with inherited ways of gathering together. From pastors like Eugene Peterson, we have learned to question modes of worship that mimic the mall and the stadium. From theologians like Robert Webber, we have discovered a much richer history than our Sunday school teachers ever mentioned. We bandy about words like *ecclesiology* and *sacramentality* to demonstrate our new, sophisticated ways of thinking about you. And when the popular blogger confessed to finding you a bit hard to get through, we were ready to pounce with charges of individualism and narcissism, and proclaim our love for you, the institution.

You might think I'm throwing my lot in with your strongest defenders. After all, I've attended one of your high-church Anglican iterations for seven years, and I've watched with disdain as peers shop for an "awesome" or "powerful" worship experience (and attractive members of the opposite sex). Instead, I'm writing to apologize. While claiming to have loved you as Christ does—like a spouse—I have loved you like an on-again, off-again fling. My steady attendance suggests a radical commitment to gathering with your

My steady attendance suggests a radical commitment to gathering with your people. But many Sundays, my heart is still in it for me.

people. But many Sundays, my heart is still in it for me. And while I think the blogger is ultimately misguided about you, at least he's not leading you on.

Here's where I need to confess my true feelings, Church: The romance of our earlier days has faded. The longer I have known you, the more I weary of your trying character traits. Here's one: You draw people to yourself whom I would never

giving you money—when I still have student loans to pay off? I am there not to be served but to serve, of course. But I do wonder when these investments will pay off. A bit of appreciation from fellow members would help.

While we're at it, let me make one more confession: I resent how much you want to go out these days. I don't understand why we can't stay inside and recon-

nect over a cup of wine. After a stressful workweek, I want to be renewed and refreshed. I admit to finding our morning routine a bit snoozy as of late. But do you think going out and mixing it up with refugees and orphans and mumbling homeless people is what we need? Granted, their needs are a bit more tangible than mine, but I'm starting to think mine are being ignored entirely.

Well, this letter turned out to be far more negative than I wanted. But with all the conversations about your central place in the life of God's people,

I needed to put all my cards on the table. And to apologize, because the aforementioned blogger and I are more similar in spirit than might be assumed. The difference is that I mask my Sunday morning self-centeredness with a "nuanced" theology of worship. I believe your Head would have choice words to describe me. Make no mistake: Until he changes my heart from the inside out, stoking in it an ever increasing flame of sacrificial love for you, I'm like a whitewashed tomb—or, to put more fine a point on it, a worshiper who in truth longs to get back under the covers.

In remorse—and hope,

KRB

CT

KATELYN BEATY is managing editor of CT magazine.



choose to spend time with. Every Sunday, it seems, you put me in contact with the older woman who thinks that angels and dead pets are everywhere around us. You insist on filling my coffee hour with idle conversations about golf, the weather, and grandchildren. As much as I wax on about the value of intergenerational worship, many Sundays, I long to worship alongside like-minded Christians who really get me, with whom I can have enlightening, invigorating conversations, whom I'm not embarrassed to be seen with in public.

It hasn't helped that it seems you want more and more of my time. Truth be told, it strikes me as a bit clingy. I've now served on the church board, played piano at worship services, and taught Sunday school. You also want me to keep

ISTOCK



Faith Without Words

Truly knowing God means more than describing him.

I tackled my first English essay in college with enthusiasm, a thesaurus, and a naive disregard for page limits. The paper came back with the following comment: “Carolyn, you’ve made some fine points, but unfortunately they are lost in a sea of circumlocutious wordiness.”

I’ve always loved words. A well-turned phrase can replace chaos with cosmos. Solomon likened words aptly spoken to apples of gold in frames of silver (Prov. 25:11). When a preacher parses some Greek or Hebrew, I’m astonished at the vistas of meaning that hide within a bit of syntax. Words are teachers, Swiss Army knives, and painters’ palettes. Given the right choreographer, they dance.

Yet, for all my love of language, I’ve been troubled by a growing sense that I need to pay more attention to wordless things. I don’t mean simply that “actions speak louder than words”—although they often do, and we should all be required to balance each use of “compassion” with at least ten compassionate acts. Lately I’ve been wondering: *Have I reduced the scope of what I can know to what I can articulate?*

Occasionally, something—a strain of music, a friend’s touch, a sunset, or simply a sudden sense of Presence—will “speak” to me. When that occurs, I have an overwhelming urge to put whatever’s happening into language. Otherwise, it doesn’t seem real. This impulse is particularly noticeable in my devotional life. Give me a prayer list or a passage to study, and I’m there. But ask me to sit silently in God’s presence, and I get anxious.

Ronald Rolheiser, a Catholic writer, distinguishes between meditative and contemplative prayer. In the former, he argues, we are active and verbal. In the latter, we are

passively inarticulate. When we try to perceive God, Rolheiser suggests, we’re often like a fish who asks his mother, “Where is this water we hear so much about?” First, the mother might set up a projector at the bottom of the ocean to show pictures of the sea. Then, she might say, “Now that you have some idea of what water is, I want you to sit in it and let it flow through you.” That difference—between thinking about water and actually attending to it—is like the difference between meditation and contemplation.

Epistemology (the study of *how* we know what we know) often emphasizes knowledge rendered in propositional statements: I “know” that $2 + 2 = 4$. But there is also “acquaintance-knowledge,” gained through direct encounter with another person, place, or thing. Many non-English languages have a distinct vocabulary to signify the profound differences between these ways of knowing. For example, the verb for knowing something factually is *wissen* in German and *sapere* in Latin, while “acquaintance-knowledge” is designated *kennen* (German) and *cognoscere* (Latin). The first kind of knowledge is general, abstract, and easily put into words. The second is individual, particular, and often hard to articulate. You find *wissen* in textbooks and creeds;

kennen comes through relationships and experience.

One of my favorite preachers says that, by Tuesday, he must “break the back” of whatever passage he’s going to teach on Sunday. In this mode he’s seeking *wissen*—knowledge of the text that he can codify, control, and explain to his congregation.

Alternatively, one of my favorite contemplatives says that his faith only flourishes when he lets a passage break him. He uses the practice of *lectio divina* (“sacred reading,” or dwelling on a text to listen for the Holy Spirit) in order to pursue a more direct encounter.

I believe both modes are essential. God indeed invites us to “come . . . reason together” (Isa. 1:18, esv). He also implores us to “be still, and know” that he is God (Ps. 46:10). In the earliest Latin Bible translation, the verb for “know” in this passage appears as *cognoscere*—acquaintance-knowledge—not *sapere*.

Perhaps it’s fitting that I devote my final Wrestling with Angels column to exploring the power and limits of words. We’ve exchanged a lot of them over the past five years, and I’m deeply grateful. Rest assured, I’m not giving up on language—you can count on my circumlocutious wordiness in future pieces for *cr* and, Lord willing, in songs and books to come.

Yet I hope to write without the assumption that everything knowable can be named in words. Our God is both the Word who became flesh (John 1) and the Spirit who “himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words” (Rom. 8:26, esv). Let’s swim not only in the sea of our own words and ideas about him, but also in his fathomless ocean of love. **CT**

**Give me a prayer list
or a passage to
study, and I’m there.
But ask me to sit
silently in God’s
presence, and I get
anxious.**

Go to ChristianBibleStudies.com for “Enjoy the Silence,” a Bible study based on this article.

If a cure for Down syndrome is found, should parents accept it?

To many families, the limitations are no match for love.



It breaks my heart. When she was 5, she could speak very well. But her verbal abilities sharply declined after that. I can't help hoping that one of the many cognition-improving medicines currently in clinical trials may be a "cure" to help her speak and make friends.

I worry that it will become a societal goal to eliminate these loving members of society rather than to help them reach their potential. Jérôme Lejeune, the renowned French pediatrician who discovered the genetic cause of Down syndrome, sought treatments that physicians could apply in utero. In the late 1960s, Lejeune, a Christian, became one of the most outspoken pro-life scientists at a time when prenatal diagnosis followed by abortion was growing common. He called such abortions "chromosomal racism."

I interviewed his daughter, Clara Lejeune Gaymard, who shares her father's pro-life convictions and wrote his biography. She told me that after her father spoke out on behalf of children with Down syndrome, his career slumped. "He was like a pariah," she said. "But he accepted that. He thought he was doing his duty."

A complete cure or better treatments may or may not come. But I agree with the "first, do no harm" code among ethical physicians. If chromosomal therapy is proven effective, long-standing, and not damaging to the personality and temperament of a child with Down syndrome, then I would welcome it for my daughter and encourage others to seriously consider it. But right now, it is urgent to convince expectant women who receive a prenatal diagnosis of Down syndrome that by mothering a child with special needs, they will get rare but dazzling

Leticia Velasquez Cure, But Don't Harm

For years, I have grappled with whether I would welcome a cure for Down syndrome for Christina, my 11-year-old daughter. I was once forced to answer the question on live television in New York. "Would you take Christina's Down syndrome away if you could?" talk-show host Michael Coren asked me.

Shocked, I stared into the camera and said, "I love her as she is. Down syndrome has shaped her, but it does not define

her. Yes, if there were a safe treatment to improve her memory and learning, I would give it to her."

It sounded like a politician's answer, but it is the truth. I love my daughter's loving and spontaneous personality. And I fear what a cognitive "cure" would do to affect her singular qualities, innocence, and complete lack of concern for the opinions of others. She has taught our family how to love unconditionally and approach God with childlike confidence.

Still, Down syndrome places real limits on Christina's life. She gets frustrated often by her inability to communicate effectively.

JAMES O'BRIEN

glimpses of the pure love of Jesus.

For me, parenting a child with special needs reminds me of Mother Teresa's "call within the call"—to special motherhood, my most blessed vocation.

LETICIA VELASQUEZ, editor of *A Special Mother Is Born*, blogs at *cause-of-our-joy.blogspot.com*.

Amos Yong Why Do We Seek a Cure?

An anyone who answers affirmatively to this question should ask themselves: Why should we seek a cure in the first place?

Most of us who know children with Down syndrome are blessed to be around them. Sin excepted, there is nothing inherently wrong with them. I am an older brother to a 38-year-old man with Down syndrome. He is just as capable of giving and receiving love as is our middle brother, albeit in his own way. He has taught me how to love and care for others, even as he has been as ornery as they come when he has not gotten his way.

My brother fully reflects the image of God, which Christ came to redeem. To pursue a cure for Down syndrome reflects a misunderstanding of how it uniquely identifies and characterizes individuals. To remove the syndrome is to eliminate the many ways in which each of their lives adds immeasurable value to the world.

To be sure, the impairments related to the syndrome are impossible to fully determine before birth. Some extreme conditions can be fatal for child or mother. In those cases, the health of the mother ought to be our primary concern. And researchers should invest in finding clear ways to remediate any specifically diagnosed effects related to the syndrome.

Further, we should persist in achieving new interventions to improve the quality of life of people with trisomy 21 (the technical description of Down syndrome) and their families.

In all of these cases, however, we ought not to presume that individuals or their caregivers are "suffering." More often than not, our assumptions about suffering are about our own poorly informed fears and anxieties. These distorted perceptions are internalized by people who might not otherwise agonize about the quality of life

that they lead.

I believe we should embrace the lives of those with Down syndrome because of how I see the church declaring and manifesting God's redemptive love for the world. So long as the church is around, there ought to be people and families ready to welcome these children into their lives. If some mothers feel overwhelmed by the prospects of raising a child with Down syndrome, we ought to be the first to provide the comprehensive support needed. This reminds parents that their child can flourish and that possibilities can be re-imagined. If parents are unable to rise to the task, then Christian families ought to have a chance to step in and provide these children with the love and care that facilitates children reaching their potential.

In such a world, few people will be worried about finding a cure for Down syndrome. Even better, we will have found a more important cure—banishing the stigma related to Down syndrome and healing the world of its contempt for a vulnerable but beautiful group of people.

AMOS YONG, author of *The Bible, Disability, and the Church*, is dean of the School of Divinity, Regent University, in Virginia.

Al and Ellen Hsu First, Do Research

Our younger son, Elijah, celebrates his ninth birthday in April. He has already benefited from enormous efforts to help him navigate his developmental disabilities due to Down syndrome.

These interventions improve his quality of life, and we receive them as gifts of common grace. So we are open to other potential treatments that could help him at genetic levels. In general, we support medical research that can unpack how things work and help us understand how Down syndrome affects the mind and body. At the same time, we are very cautious about claims that Down syndrome could ever be "cured."

Some reports about a potential cure have been misleading. Last summer, researchers at the University of Massachusetts discovered a natural "off switch" for the extra chromosome in cells in vitro. This opens up a promising new avenue for

chromosomal therapy, but lead researcher Jeanne Lawrence cautioned that actual treatment may be many years down the road.

Down syndrome is a genetic anomaly that has been hardwired into every cell of our son's body. It is highly unlikely that any medical technology will be able to rewrite the code at that chromosomal level. Down syndrome is more of a permanent trait, like eye color or ethnic heritage.

When researchers or media reports talk about a "cure" for Down syndrome, they are usually exploring ways to enhance cognitive ability and ameliorate some of the limitations. This is an imperfect analogy, but such treatments could either be like eyeglasses, or more invasive and permanent, like laser surgery.

Just as we wouldn't expect everybody to have corrective eye surgery, not every parent should be expected to accept a cure for Down syndrome. Many parents are reluctant to mess around with their child's DNA, seeing Down syndrome as a chromosomal difference to be accepted rather than a disease to be cured.

We have concerns that any cure would have unknown risks. Every new medical technology has unintended consequences, medical and physiological. There is already a rich-poor gap among children with special needs. Some have access to resources to help them function better, while others don't. As Christians, we should be aware of society's tendency to marginalize the have-nots.

Whether we would accept a "cure" would depend on the medical risks involved as well as the technical mechanisms of what would make the treatment effective. Some treatments may have significant personality-altering side effects even when they work. Parents would need to discern whether medical treatment poses a risk to their child's fundamental personhood or identity.

Our children are not problems to be fixed, but persons to be honored and befriended, regardless of their abilities.

We hope that as he grows, Elijah will have access to more possibilities to flourish. New research and treatments may well help him decide for himself what opportunities will be open to him. **CT**

AL AND ELLEN HSU are the parents of Elijah and Josiah. At InterVarsity Press, Al serves as a senior editor and Ellen serves as rights and contracts manager.

MUD ALIVE

N. D. Wilson is a best-selling author, observer of ants, and easily distracted father of five. His latest book is *Death by Living*.



God the Merrymaker

Our Creator loves fun. So why don't his followers?

We Christians are the speakers of light. We are the proclaimers of joy. Wherever we go, we are the mascots of the gospel, the imagers of the infinitely creative Father, and the younger brothers and sisters of the humbled and triumphant Word. We speak in this world on behalf of the One who made up lightning and snowflakes and eggs.

Or so we say.

Saying things is easy. Meaning them—in the realm of will and emotions—is harder. Knowing what they actually mean is more difficult still. Living out who we know we are and whom we follow with total consistency is, well... have you ever ridden a white whale by the light of a blue moon in a leap year?

We say we want to be like God, and we feel we mean it. But we don't. Not to be harsh, but if we did really mean it, we would be having a lot more fun than we are. We aim for safety and cultural respectability instead of following our stated first principles: that we are made in God's image and should strive to imitate him.

A dolphin flipping through the sun beyond the surf, a falcon in a dive, a mutt in the back of a truck, flying his tongue like a flag of joy, all reflect the Maker more wholly than many of our endorsed thinkers, theologians, and churchgoers.

Look over our day-to-day lives. How do we parent, for example? Rules. Fears. Don'ts. *Don't jump on the couch. No gluten in this house. Get down from that tree. Quiet down. Hold still.* We live as if God were an infinite list of negatives. He is holiness, the rawest and richest of all purity. In our bent way of thinking, that makes him

the biggest stress-out of all.

But how does God parent? He gave us one rule at the beginning: "You must not eat from *that* tree." *Only one tree was held back.* Besides, he was giving us an entire planet. A hot star. Wild animals to discover and name and tame. Animals with fangs and sinews that rippled in the sun. He gave us the Dragon to beat that beat us instead. And then he stooped down to save.

So now we have two rules—love God, love others—along with imputed righteousness, grace for our failures, and a door through the grave into eternal life. Do we act like all this is true?

Our Father wove glory and joy into every layer of this world. He wove in secrets that would tease us into centuries of risk-taking before we could unlock them—flight, glass, electricity, chocolate. He buried gold deep, but scattered sand everywhere. And from the sand came all the wealth of our own age.

Our God made things simple and funny—skin bags full of milk swinging beneath cows. And also hard: Skim the cream, add sugar from cane grass and shards of vanilla bean from faraway lands, surround with water cold enough to have expanded its molecules and become solid. Now stir. Keep stirring. Now taste. And worship.

Wherever we go, we are the mascots of the gospel, the imagers of the infinitely creative Father.

Us: No more for you, Johnny. You've had enough.

God: Try the hot fudge.

God hung easily picked fruit on trees, and he hid the secrets of fine wine at the end of a scavenger hunt. He made horses with strong flat backs, lending themselves to an obvious use, and he hid jet wings behind the mysteries of steel and fossil fuels.

Without any creative help at all, our God made up peanuts and bulgy tubers. Squeeze out the peanut oil and boil it. Slice the tubers and throw them in. Now add salt from the sea.

Us: Those will kill you.

God: Take and eat.

We should strive for holiness, but holiness is a flood, not an absence. Are you the kind of parent who can create joys for your children that they never imagined wanting? Does your sun shine, warming the faces of others? Does your rain green the world around you? Do you end your days with anything resembling a sunset? Do you begin with a dawn?

We say that we would like to be more like God. So be more thrilled with moonlight. And babies. And what makes them. And holding on to one lover until you've both been aged to wine, ready to pour. Holiness is nothing like a building code. Holiness is 80-year-old hands crafting an apple pie for others, *again*. It is aspen trees in a backlit breeze. It is fire on the mountain.

Speak your joy. Mean it. Sing it. Do it. Push it down into your bones. Let it overflow your banks and flood the lives of others.

At his right hand, there are pleasures forevermore. When we are truly like him, the same will be said of us.

CT

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COVER STORY

*The Bible scholar's goal is to
massively revise the way we talk
about the Christian faith.*

*By many accounts,
he's already succeeded.*

SURPRISED *by* WRIGHT

By Jason Byassee

Photos by Sophie Gerrard

PEOPLE WHO ARE ASKED to write about N. T. Wright may find they quickly run out of superlatives. He is the most prolific biblical scholar in a generation. Some say he is the most important apologist for the Christian faith since C. S. Lewis. He has written the most extensive series of popular commentaries on the New Testament since William Barclay. And, in case three careers sound like too few, he is also a church leader, having served as Bishop of Durham, England, before his current teaching post at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland.

But perhaps the most significant praise of all: When Wright speaks, preaches, or writes, folks say they see Jesus, and lives are transformed. A pastor friend of mine describes a church member walking into his office, hands trembling as he held a copy of Wright's *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*. "If this book is true," he said, "then my whole life has to change."

The superlatives are striking, considering Wright's goal in his teaching and writing is to massively revise the way Christianity has been articulated for generations. Christian faith, for Wright, is not about going to heaven when you die. It is not about the triumph of grace over the law of the Old Testament. He says its key doctrine is not justification by grace alone, the cornerstone for the Protestant Reformers. The church has misread Paul so severely, it seems, that no one fully understood the gospel from the time of the apostle to the time a certain British scholar started reading Paul in Greek in graduate school.

"Apologist" and "revisionist" usually don't fit on the same business card. A significant New Testament scholar told me of the time he first heard Wright speak. "He sounds like the voice of God," he told a friend on the way out. Then he overheard someone else leaving the same lecture quip, "That guy thinks he's the voice of God." Which is Wright: divine emissary or grandiose misleader?

FOR CHURCH AND ACADEMY

As with everything, the answer depends on your vantage point. Wright speaks

with people who come with a wide spectrum of agendas. He has written point-counterpoint books with liberals like John Dominic Crossan and Marcus Borg. He and Reformed pastor John Piper traded book-length ripostes and have kept bloggers busy (and nasty) for years. Bart Ehrman, Barnes & Noble's favorite Bible disdainer, told me, "He's a very bright and learned scholar—deeply read, widely knowledgeable, and rigorous. And I disagree with about everything he says."

Wright's newest accolade is that he has written the most extensive work on Paul

in the history of Christianity. The two-volume *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (PFG) spans 1,519 pages. It is joined by two companion volumes, also from Fortress Press: *Pauline Perspectives*, a collection of essays dating back to the late 1970s, and *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*, a running engagement with the leading Pauline scholars of the past several generations. For most academics, either companion volume would serve as a magnum opus. For Wright, they were only his second and third most important publications of the year, culminating a 40-year career of Pauline work dating to his (unpublished!) dissertation on Romans.

Writing a profile of Wright is difficult in part because he is ordinary. He comes from what he calls a "middle, middle, middle church home, of a sort that probably doesn't exist anymore." He and his siblings were raised in the Church of England,

where they learned to attend to parish life and pray daily, or at least often. Wright describes hearing a lecturer early in his career appeal for more evangelicals in scholarship. So Wright shifted his career aims from church to academy. Later, a tutor at Oxford told him he had to choose between the two. At that moment, Wright knew he would never do any such thing. He still has not. He and his wife, Maggie, have four grown children. In *Surprised by Hope*, as well as other works, he describes himself as one of the least bereaved people he knows.

Wright has the balding pate, the wrap-around beard, and the bass voice Americans expect of their favorite British academics. He moves with the athletic gait of the one-time rugby player he is. He engages new people with a surprising informality. "Hi guys," he'll say to strangers, as if they are friends who have been waiting just for

A pastor friend of mine describes a church member holding a copy of Wright's *Surprised by Hope*. 'If this

him. He deals the self-effacing anecdote often. He tells of a groupie who said to his wife, "It must be heaven to be married to him, isn't it?"

"Maggie replied, 'It's more like hell, actually.'"

Wright's manner could come off as paternal and Gandalf-like, or grating and haughty, depending on your vantage. To open a stateside lecture a decade ago, he spoke of a colleague in the House of Lords who, bedecked in a wig and robes, stepped into a Parliament hallway full of American tourists. He saw his friend Neil down the hall, raised his hand, and shouted, "Neil!" The Americans, beholding this near-mythical sight, heard "kneel." They promptly did. Wright's implication was clear: Americans may think it appropriate to address him as "your grace," but when it comes to classroom and church, "Tom" will be just fine.

Though some find Wright uppity, he





Wright, 66, takes in a crisp winter sunset outside his farmhouse in Elie, Scotland, where he lives with wife Maggie. He lists among his leisure interests golf and hill walking.

member walking into his office, hands trembling as he held
book is true,' he said, 'then my whole life has to change.'

has no problem giving others their due. When I mentioned former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams to Wright, he positively gushed. There were often times when just the right thing needed saying among the bishops, he said, "and Rowan did it. And I would think, well, that's why he's archbishop." Arrogant or not, Wright has no trouble deferring to another's intellect and greatness.

He also has a pastoral side. Fans flock to Wright for words of blessing, as they did at a recent scholarly conference in Baltimore. Grant LeMarquand, an Anglican bishop and former student of Wright's, speaks of entering Wright's office one afternoon, distraught over his faith. After a question or two, Wright said, "Let's take a walk." They spent the afternoon together, breaking down the crisis. "He could have written a book that afternoon," LeMarquand jokes. Instead, he helped a student

think, and kneel.

Even so, Wright is a celebrity on the U.S. lecture circuit. When I saw him recently, he immediately noted he had been on the road 14 days straight (leaving one to wonder how often he is at St. Andrews). One Bible scholar explained the trouble in reading him: "Wright's a show. There is so much going on." So it is in his speaking. He is a bishop, he has that accent, he writes so much. American Christians have long imported intellectual heft from Britain. That also causes some misunderstandings. When Wright weighs in on social issues, for example, he is acting as a bishop in the Church of England. American divides between religion and politics have never held sway in the United Kingdom, and Wright's theology explicitly ignores them.

How do we weigh Wright's contribution to biblical studies, to the church, and

to the wider world? For the first, step back in time with me a generation.

BIGGER THAN BULTMANN

My parents and their siblings are about the same age as Wright. They attended colleges founded by confessional Christians. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, however, these schools famously shifted, such that their required religion classes taught students to sneer at Scripture. And my family learned well. An aunt told me about the opening prayer her first day of class: "Oh God—if there is a God." She still finds this edgy and interesting.

Now picture Wright as a student attending similar lectures. How could one overturn this status quo? What scholar could dethrone, say, theologian Rudolf Bultmann? Not so much in the weeds of Bultmann's thought—he's hardly read that

carefully any more, and two generations of theologians and biblical scholars have critiqued and overturned him. But more for Bultmann's position of eminence—the way he turned subsequent scholars into modernist questioners. Wright mentions Bultmann like an upstart prizefighter speaks of the reigning champ, as if he were saying, “Let me at him.” For Bultmann, Scripture is true only in our souls, and always wrong in its claims about history, miracles, and politics. Who could overturn him?

The scholar would have to be prolific; to return to the biblical default would require more than a monograph or two. Tenure at a world-class institution would not be enough. The scholar would have to be readable, urgent, and intense. He or she would have to be compelling to college sophomores and Ehrman readers alike. To pass through the challenge of historical criticism (which scissors out Scripture that doesn't fit modern beliefs about historical reliability) and come out the other side—to be more critical than even the critics. And he or she would have to exalt Jesus as Lord. Threading such a needle would seem impossible.

Except that it's now been done.

I asked Richard Hays, the New Testament scholar (to whom PFG is dedicated) and dean of Duke Divinity School, whether Wright is Bultmann's heir as the go-to scholar for intro Bible courses. Hays believes his friend has surpassed Bultmann. Wright has published more, in more areas, with more influence, than the one who had so impressed the professors who taught my family members. Soon students in Bible courses may sneer less and worship more.

Hays and I traded stories of Wright's prolific output. I saw Wright at a session of the Society of Biblical Literature, where he was one of the featured speakers on Lewis's legacy. He walked in with a blank legal pad. While the first two presenters read their papers, Wright scribbled notes. Then he took the microphone and spoke with nary an “um” for 25 minutes on all he had learned from Lewis. Hays shared a story of Wright staying at his house before preaching at Duke Chapel. He awoke at 5 A.M. on Sunday and, coffee in hand, proceeded to write a sermon he would deliver six hours later to a thousand people, again with elegance. How does he do it?

“The simple answer is the man is a genius.”



I laughed. Hays did not. “I’m serious about that.”

Of course, genius does not make one faithful, as Bultmann, Borg, and other great Bible scholars have shown. So what does Wright actually teach about Paul?

PFG, for all its sprawling complexity, is elegant in its simple structure. The first and last chapters explore Greek philosophy, Roman religion, and Jewish faith, thereby moving toward, and away from, the place and culture in which Paul wrote. These sections read like textbooks in the best sense. They’re sprawling and encyclopedic, drawing on primary sources and dueling with other scholars in the footnotes (Wright studied classics at one time). The middle portion examines Paul's worldview—not so much the things Paul looked at, but the spectacles he looked through.

Then the crown jewel: three chapters on the heart of Paul's theology. Here the sum is greater than the very impressive parts. Theology, argues Wright, is something Paul pioneered. Jews and Romans could talk about spiritual matters such as fortune, or unseen powers that require our placating. But theology does work among the earliest Christians (and us) that it never had to do for their predecessors. Theology does the work for Paul that circumcision, food laws, and Sabbath did for the old Paul, the zealous Jew Saul of Tarsus. It marked out a community as distinct from the world. It still does—just not nearly as biblically in most cases as Wright thinks it should.

Essentially, Paul laid a perfect foundation. But over time, says Wright, the church built the house on sand.

WHAT WRIGHT REALLY TEACHES

If this description of Wright's work sounds strange, you are not alone. It belongs to something called the “New

Wright so emphasizes in a friendly parody he sent it Abraham.”

Perspective on Paul” (NPP), a relatively recent theological discussion about what Paul really taught about salvation. NPP scholars—like E. P. Sanders, James Dunn, and Ben F. Meyer—believe that, instead of introducing anything “new” to church doctrine, they are going back to Scripture without the church fathers or the Reformers themselves, and all the unbiblical teachings they added on. The new perspective, says the NPP, is a rather old one.

According to the NPP (a phrase coined by Wright), Paul was not worried about where believers' souls would go after death. Christians of the late medieval period were worried about hell and felt they had to earn entry to heaven with works. This is the theology Martin Luther taught and wrote against, helping to ignite the Protestant Reformation.

But Jews of Paul's time were nowhere near so individualistic, so obsessed with the next life, so unfamiliar with grace as were the late medieval Christians. Instead of teaching about souls being saved from hell, say the NPP scholars, Paul is centrally teaching about God's faithfulness to Israel. He is showing that Yahweh is a God who

Growing up in Yorkshire, Wright pursued sports and music—and today is a trained guitarist, pianist, and trombonist. (Bob Dylan is a favorite.) His home is filled with tokens of love for four children and three grandchildren (below).

keeps his promises, and so can be trusted to fulfill his promises in history. NPP scholars actually think the works commanded in the law are good gifts from God. Paul doesn't say not to do them because you'll go wrong and think you're earning salvation. He says not to do them because the Messiah has come and the world is different now. All people can worship Israel's God and should do so together without ethnic division.

In defense of the NPP, I can't remember the last time I heard Israel included in a presentation of the gospel—even a long one. It leads one to wonder: What was God doing all that time with his chosen people? Wasting time?

Since the calling of Abraham, Jews had been unique in three ways: for their

monotheism (established in the *Shema*—“Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one”—the founding prayer that faithful Jews say to this day), *election* (God calls a specific people), and *eschatology* (God will save his people on the last day). Wright shows how the resurrection of Jesus reworks each of these central Jewish beliefs.

Wright argues that Christians believed Jesus was Lord very early in church history—not centuries later, after councils had “decided” that he was so. So when Paul invokes Christ in 1 Corinthians 8—“one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live”—he is referring to the *Shema*, reworking it in light of Christ. Paul is altering the Bible's cornerstone prayer to include Jesus of Nazareth.

And Paul doesn't even have to argue for it. Within a generation of the Resurrection, a Christology that ranks Jesus with the jealous God of Israel is not controversial. It simply is “common coin,” to use a Wrightian phrase. So, too, with the Holy

Spirit. The *shekinah* that is God's presence in the Scripture of Israel is the “spirit” (the lowercase reflects Wright's usage throughout PFG).

Election is similarly reworked in light of the Resurrection and the spirit. The relentless drumbeat driving this volume is that Paul's teachings are deeply *Jewish*. According to the NPP, Paul is clinging to his Jewishness. He has not rejected one religion for a brand-new one. In fact, he believes that the law is God's good gift of grace.

But this is where things get interesting. Wright so emphasizes the good news of God's electing grace that, in a friendly parody he passed on to me in our interview, “God so loved the world that he sent it Abraham.” The Pauline phrase beloved by the Reformers—“the righteousness of God”—is actually Paul's way of referring to the covenant people extended to include Gentiles as promised in Genesis 12:1-3, “the one family of Abraham,” says Wright. To belong to Abraham's family is to be marked as those who will be

the good news of God's electing grace that,
passed on to me, **God so loved the world that**



justified on the last day. This is what it means to be saved.

It is important to stop and note how dramatically Wright has reworked things here. It means, in part, that the evangelist at summer camp who asked me, “If you died tonight, why should God let you into heaven?” was wrong when he provided the answer, “For no reason other than that Jesus died in my place.” Righteousness in Scripture does not refer to the righteous Judge passing his righteousness to the defendant. According to Wright, passages like Romans 4 (God “justifies the ungodly”); Galatians 2 (“a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ”—though Wright and other scholars now say this is better translated “by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ”); and 2 Corinthians 5:21 (“[God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God,” *ESV*) are not about imputed righteousness. Instead, they are about God fulfilling his promises to Israel in Christ to remake the world through one Jew-plus-Gentile family.

Wright insists often on what he told an overflow audience at Wheaton College in 2012: “I love the doctrine of justification.” But it is not everything in Paul. It appears in only a few places in his letters. It is the wheel of the car, Wright says—not the whole vehicle.

‘CLEVER IN THE BRITISH SENSE’

So if Paul’s courtroom metaphors are not about imputed righteousness, what are they about?

They have a much narrower frame of reference, says Wright. In Jewish tradition, all people will stand before the judge on the last day, after their bodies are resurrected. For the Jews who came before Jesus, those who kept Torah will be judged faithful on that day—saved, in the truest sense. The badge of their faithfulness is observing Torah. Here, studying Jewish sources such as the Dead Sea Scrolls helps to clarify the Bible’s references. For those “in the Messiah,” faith, ratified in baptism, is the only badge that marks out in advance our judgment on the last day. So Paul’s courtroom references mean only that the judge rules the defendant is in the right, vindicated over against any accusation, and assured of resurrection on the last day.

This is where fellow Christians have objected most strenuously. Southern

God ‘puts people to rights’ so we could be on earth. **‘Never get so wrapped up in your forget what you are saved for.’**

Baptist Seminary president Albert Mohler has called Wright “clever in the British sense”—that is, too much by half. Theologian D. A. Carson and his colleagues and students at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School have generated a sort of anti-NPP publishing factory, often pointing out that Paul can stridently *disagree* with his fellow Jews, especially regarding their legalism. Being part of the historic covenant people is *not* salvation. John Piper’s book responding to Wright (*The Future of Justification*) cites endless quotations from Paul and the Reformers suggesting that indeed we have been “saved.” Wright starkly dismissed these rejoinders in his 2010 book *Justification*: “We are not in dialogue.”

In *The Future of Justification*, Piper accuses Wright of loving the new for its own sake. Academics are inclined to such enthusiasms, while the church is bound to tradition in a way the academy scorns. Yet Wright is not drawing only on obscure and recently unearthed texts. He is drawing on the Bible. Psalm 106 mentions Phinehas, a high priest of Israel who is willing to do violence to uphold the law. In Numbers 25, Phinehas drives a javelin through an Israelite caught in the act with a Midianite lover. Paul is heir of this tradition, a zealot ready to do violence to be “reckoned righteous” on the Lord’s day (Ps. 106:31). But one Jew has already been raised up, vindicated, shown to be in the right: Jesus. Now God is drawing all people to himself. “God is acting in a surprising new way—as he always said he would do,” Wright says, paraphrasing a graduate student.

Yet Carson and other NPP critics are right in one way: Many portions of Scripture sound much closer to the traditional understanding of Paul than Wright ever lets on. For example, Luke 18 contrasts a penitent sinner with a proud Pharisee. Romans 4:5 sure sounds like God justifies the ungodly, and 2 Corinthians 5:21 sounds like a wonderful exchange of God’s righteousness for our sin. If we deem Wright correct, we as Western Christians will indeed have to redo much of our accepted thinking on atonement,

justification, salvation, and church. Wright’s opponents ask, wisely: *Did the Holy Spirit really let the Western church run entirely amok from the day Paul died until the day Wright took up his pen?*

Why are conservative Protestant Christians bothering to read Wright anyway? If he is sidelining the courtroom—one of their key metaphors for explaining salvation and justification—why flirt with heresy?

“I have always had a high view of the Scriptures and a central view of the Cross,” Wright says. He insists repeatedly that any theory advanced about Paul must be tested with actual exegesis, and he reads the Scriptures as someone happy to be doing so. Most scholars talk about other scholars. Only a blessed few talk about the Bible. Fewer still talk about God.

Wright, while standing on the shoulders of many great scholars, tries to talk about God. And he speaks and writes with an urgency that suggests every sentence is even more essential than the last. If he were



to issue an altar call, folks would come.

WHAT WE ARE SAVED FOR

What would he say? “Paul’s message is so extraordinary,” Wright enthused at Wheaton College, “so iconoclastic, so God-exalting” that it should, and one day will, draw all people to their knees.

What is it? That Jesus Christ is Lord. His resurrection showed his claims to be the Messiah are true. Paul’s is a Jewish gospel to a Gentile world, announcing a king not just over a strip of land in Palestine, but over the whole created order.

God's putting-to-rights people salvation that you



Heralds now go out announcing his reign. All other lords, including Caesar, are false pretenders. And as people submit to his lordship, even the created order, groaning now as it longs for redemption, will breathe a sigh of relief (Romans 8 comes up as much as any passage in Wright's works). Creation longs to be ordered by the gracious stewardship of human beings. "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved," Romans 10:9 (ESV) proclaims. That is central to Wright's reading of Paul and of his gospel. No law court. No substitution. Just lordship and obedience, with resurrection showing that God is faithful to his promises to Israel, and so to the whole world.

"I've always felt in method most akin to the Reformers," Wright says when I ask him to compare himself to Lewis, Barclay, and his Bishop of Durham predecessor, J. B. Lightfoot. He wants to read the text in the original language over against any received tradition, however venerable. He finds it ironic that sons of the Reformation would cite tradition against him,

Wright's famed note board is where the ideas behind his 24-plus books and 18-volume New Testament commentary are fleshed out. He has 10 honorary doctorates, including from his current base, University of St. Andrews (above).

Yet Wright gives back with his left hand what he takes with the right, only better. "It's very Anglican," he says of his hope to make justification, heaven, and Christ's return more biblical. He's engaging critically with a doctrine, saying it's been wrongly understood, then going to the biblical sources and coming back to that doctrine with greater conviction.

In PFG's final chapter, on eschatology, Wright argues that God has acted in Jesus Christ to fulfill his covenant. He would never go back on his word and abandon Adam and Eve. He would never go back on his promises to Israel. The problem is that Israel itself is "in Adam." It is as fallen as the world it was called to save. He compares Israel to a fire truck sent off to fight a blaze only to fall into a ditch. It has to be rescued

referring to his opponents regularly as "neo-Catholics." This is not the lonely hero standing up against a corrupt tradition, as in some (false) renderings of Luther. Wright's is a newer tradition, the NPP offering a corrective to the ruling Protestant one.

in order to rescue others. Jesus as the faithful Israelite does what Israel according to the flesh would not do—indeed, in the dark wisdom of God, could not do. And now, his promises made good, God is opening his covenant to us Gentiles. God "puts people to rights" (another favorite Wright phrase) so we could be God's putting-to-rights people here on earth.

"Never get so wrapped up in your salvation that you forget what you are saved for," Wright intoned at Wheaton, again sounding the evangelist. God is saving the world through us, the one united holy church. Our being saved is bound up with our pointing to, and embodying in advance, the forthcoming kingdom.

The kingdom is clearly what motivates Wright in everything he does. And because of Wright's own faithfulness—to the God of the universe, and to his beloved church on earth—it is now motivating many more people besides.

CT

JASON BYASSEE is senior pastor at Boone United Methodist Church in North Carolina and author most recently of *Discerning the Body: Searching for Jesus in the World* (Cascade Books).

A photograph of a brick wall in a dimly lit room. On the left, a mirror reflects a warm light source. In the center, a black hat hangs on the wall. To the right of the hat, a sign reads "If you're SMOKING in my kitchen... you'd better be on FIRE!". Below the sign, a tufted leather booth is visible. In front of the booth, a small wooden table stands on a decorative metal stand. The overall atmosphere is cozy and rustic.

A THREAD CALLED GRACE

*How I came to stop hiding
and face the biggest secret
of my early life.*

By JONATHAN MERRITT



CT EXCLUSIVE

*"Hush, Dorothy,"
whispered the Tiger;
"you'll ruin my
reputation if you are not
more discreet. It isn't
what we are, but what
folks think we are, that
counts in this world."*

L. FRANK BAUM, *The Road to Oz*

H

AVE YOU EVER had a struggle that you held beneath the surface of your life? A secret that you packed in a box you swore never to open? I've carried mine since childhood. And when I awoke on July 26, 2012, I had no idea it would be exposed, not just to my family and friends, but posted online for the world to see.

As best I can remember, my secret began early, around age 7. That was how old I was when Michael, a much older boy who lived in a brick house near the front of our Atlanta neighborhood, began to sexually abuse me.

His family and mine had been friends for years. One evening, when he was spending the night in my room, Michael told me that boys could have secret kinds of fun. As he spoke, he put his hands in places never touched except by undergarments. My body froze.

Afterwards, I was too paralyzed by fear to tell anyone what had happened. I should just forget about it and move on, I supposed. But I couldn't move on, for it would happen again. And again.

I can't tell you how many times it occurred. I remember three occurrences vividly, and when I let my mind wander, I can still see the events in my mind like I'm watching an 8mm film. I guess it doesn't matter how many times it happened, only that it did. And it singed a part of my soul in a way I can't explain. Something inside of me had been bruised. The best way to let it heal, I determined, was to deal with it myself.

*No one can help me.
No one can protect me.
No one can fix what hurts.
I. Am. On. My. Own.*

With these thoughts, I crammed all

DAN BIGELOW

the pain and emotions and memories into a box. I tossed the box into a bag and wrapped the bag in duct tape and rolled the whole wad in a steel chain. On this chain, I clamped a lock whose key had been thrown away. And I buried it in my memory.

This is going to be my secret. No one ever has to know.

For a time in my early life, I felt the freedom to forget and exhale. But the liberty would not last.

Early Attractions

By age 10, thoughts of suicide plagued my mind. I was so suffocated by my secret that I believed only death would provide me the space to breathe. I remember walking into my room one day, locking the door, tying a brown leather belt around my frail neck, and trying to hang myself from my bedpost. It never occurred to me that the attempt was futile; I was taller than the wooden column.

As I contemplated how I could exit this world quickly and with the least amount of pain, I sat down and penned a three-page letter to my family. I shook and muffled sobs as I shared everything I had never mustered up the strength to speak. When finished, I placed the drenched pages into an envelope and taped it to the bottom of a dresser drawer. *If I ever get up the courage, I'll kill myself. But at least in death, they'll truly know me.*

The next few years of my life seemed to go well, until middle school arrived. These years are awkward even for children with pristine pasts. Your face flares up with acne, kids discover how to be extra cruel, and your body begins to change with the influx of adolescent hormones. For me, this spelled trouble.

I felt attracted to pretty girls, though none of them gave me much attention. But I also felt myself drawn to boys. I stuffed these attractions in my mind's box. I was the son of a prominent evangelical pastor, and if anyone found out about these attractions, I'd be dodging stares and whispers in the supermarket.

In high school, I had several healthy relationships with girls but was insecure beneath my façade of confidence. In college, I embraced studies as a welcome escape. I dated a few girls from time to time, but the turmoil inside kept me from letting myself get too close to anyone. I didn't feel like much of a man, and even

when I was attracted to a girl, I felt I could never love her as I wanted to.

Recently I've been asked what kind of connection I see between these adolescent feelings and the childhood abuse I experienced. Did the abuse shape my adolescent and young-adult experiences, or were those parts of me already there? I'm certain I don't know the answer, and I'm not sure anyone does except God.

By 2009, my writing career was in full swing. I was entering my late 20s and enjoying much success. I wrote an opinion column for *USA Today* titled, "An Evangelical's Plea: 'Love the Sinner.'" I asked readers to abandon self-gratifying monologues and harsh language and clichés. "Now is the time for those who bear the name of Jesus Christ to stop merely talking about love and start showing love to

our gay and lesbian neighbors," I wrote. "It must be concrete and tangible. It must move beyond cheap rhetoric. We cannot pick and choose which neighbors we will love. We must love them all."

The article was written with my secret lockbox in view. I was not just asking that we do a better job loving our neighbors; I wanted to know I could be loved too.

In response to the article, I was contacted by a gay blogger who wanted to dialogue about what I'd written. Over many months, we communicated by e-mail and text messages. I began to grow comfortable with him, and finally, I shared with him my story of struggle.

When I was traveling through a city near him, we met for dinner, and as we were saying goodbye, we had physical contact that went beyond the bounds of

DAN BIGELOW



Did the abuse shape my adolescent experiences, or were those parts of me already there? I'm certain I don't know the answer, and I'm not sure anyone does except God.

friendship. Afterward, I went back to my hotel room by myself and lay there, sorting through my clouded emotions.

Alone.

The blogger and I ceased communication soon after, and I never saw him again. But years later, the day I feared finally arrived.

It's Time

The e-mail sender line read "Google Alert,"

and the article it linked to was written by the blogger I'd met for dinner. Though he hadn't shared every detail, he was threatening to.

With tears running down my face, I fell to my knees next to my kitchen table.

"Lord, I can't do this. I'm not ready. I'm not strong enough."

My heart heard the reply: *It's time.*

I sat in silence for a bit—five, maybe ten minutes—before my cell phone rang. A friend was calling to tell me he'd seen

the same story, but not from the original post. A Christian blogger had already picked it up.

The following days tasted bitter, and I received a lot of unhelpful advice. One friend told me to "throw the gay community under the bus and save yourself." Another, a high-powered publicist, said I should kill the story by digging up garbage on the blogger. But I couldn't shake Jesus' words that those who live by the sword die by it also. My platform as a writer allowed me an opportunity to test that maxim, but rather than attack or defend, I opted for honesty. I shared my story through an interview on a good friend's website. Every keystroke was a struggle, but the words I heard that fateful morning rang in my ears: *It's time.*

The lock on my box had been shattered, and I was already beginning to be liberated from its captivity.

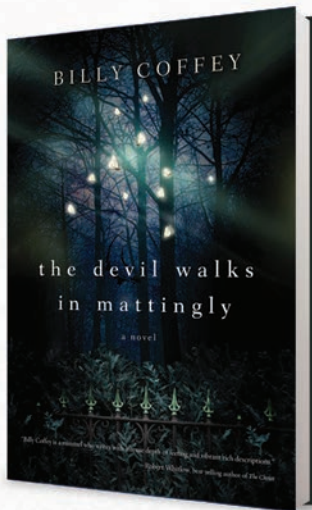
Having been raised in a pastor's home, I am acutely aware of what others think about me. I notice the looks, monitor the whispers, and manage the perceptions. Growing up, my two brothers and I sometimes had fights while riding to church with our parents in our minivan. But after arriving at church, smiles replaced scowls. We'd hold hands even though we wanted to pull each other's arms out of their sockets. Our tone changed from scathing to saccharine. And as years of this behavior progressed, I became skilled in wearing a mask.

"I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked," Adam told God in Genesis 3:10 (NASB), "so I hid."

The human inclination is to conceal when we feel exposed or vulnerable. I wanted to hide from the pain and confusion, so my mask rarely came off. I lived behind it.

Hiding behind a disguise was crushing and conflicting because at my core—at everyone's core—is a desire to be known. I want others to see me, both the beautiful and wretched parts. And often my desire to be known is almost as strong as my fear





THE DEVIL WALKS IN MATTINGLY

Novelist Billy Coffey returns with a tale reminiscent of “Flannery O’Connor with its glimpses of the grotesque and supernatural” (*BookPage*). Redemption is what three tortured souls, secretly complicit in a young man’s death, long for most – and it’s the last thing they expect to receive. In the shadow of their hidden sin, each has withered. But what has not been laid to rest is bound to rise again....

EVERY MAN’S BIBLE

Now available in the NIV and NLT, the updated *Every Man’s Bible* has thousands of notes for the battles every man faces. With new contributions from Tony Evans, Tony Dungy, and others, the *Every Man’s Bible* is the perfect gift to help men tackle the toughest issues — from stress at work to integrity at home.



HANDS-ON BIBLE

Jesus taught with hands-on lessons and illustrations. The *Hands-On Bible* uses the same experience-based learning to communicate God’s Word in an active, understandable way. With hundreds of fun, memorable lessons, the *Hands-On Bible* is packed with activities and experiences that invite kids to crawl inside the Scriptures and do God’s Word!

The essence of who I am is far more shaped, influenced, and guided by my spirituality than by my sexuality.

of being known. My secret was intended to shield me from more pain, but it only isolated me from those with whom I needed to share my true self. I became more a performer and less a person.

"I not only have my secrets, I am my secrets. And you are yours," Frederick Buechner said. "Our secrets are human secrets, and our trusting each other enough to share them with each other has much to do with the secret of what it means to be human."

The months after my story was posted online were some of the most humanizing of my life. I sat cross-legged in my living room one night as friends surrounded me, laying their hands on my back and shoulders, grasping my arms. One by one, they prayed for grace and mercy and strength and divine presence. Hot tears fell off their

cheeks and landed on my neck and arms, mingling with mine as they ran down.

That evening, I became more "me" than I'd ever been. For once, I wasn't trying to burnish my surface. I was finally able to lower my shoulder, drop my mask, and just exist in the present.

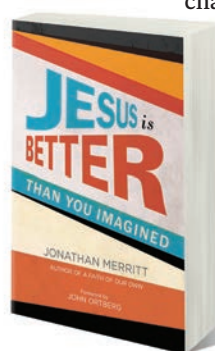
What's in a Name

I find comfort in the Old Testament story of Jacob. In Genesis 27, he tells his father, "I am Esau." With his eyes set on blessings and inheritance, Jacob finds himself captured by the desire to be someone else. He wants to be the better one, the brawnier one, the beloved one, the first-born. Jacob wants to be Esau.

As time unfurls, Jacob learns to pursue God, and a transformation happens. In Genesis 32, he is asked, "What is your name?" to which he replies, "Jacob."

When it comes to the importance of names, the ancients were worlds apart from us modern Americans. Ancient names capture who a person is and what marks him or her as an individual. Isaac means "laughter," Abimelech means "my father is king," and the prophet Isaiah called his first son Shear-Jashub, or "a remnant shall return." Moses means "to draw out." The name was given because his adopted mother drew him out of a river, though God had something bigger in mind.

Names mattered, and when one was changed, it was more than a legal matter to be handled at the county courthouse. It signaled a shift in identity. God changed Abram and Sarai's names to Abraham ("father of a multitude") and Sarah ("queen") as a reminder of his promise to make them parents of a great nation. Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter ("rock") to signal his



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So Jacob's subtle shift turns out to be significant. The closer God drew Jacob in, the more comfortable Jacob became with who he was—both the smooth spots and the rough edges. He was ready to be fully used because he could honestly face who he had been and who God had created him to be. As he learned to trust God, he learned to be honest with the story in which he was intertwined like a strand of a cord.

This is part of what Jesus meant when he said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you." The Hebrew concept of peace or *shalom* literally translates into "wholeness," and it means having everything needed to be fully and wholly who God has created us to be—physically, emotionally, and psychologically at peace. This is what Christ offers: an opportunity to be free by understanding who we are in the context of who God is and what God wants for us.

As the furor died down after I was "outed," reality set in. I took a month off to travel, rest, and reflect. As I opened the secret spaces and invited God in, he rushed in like a flash flood. God bathed me with grace and mercy and provision,

proving again that he can be trusted with those sore and sensitive places.

More Than Feelings

When this storm swept through my life, I didn't know what God was up to or if he was even involved. But the storm helped me see God in ways I had never before considered. Sometimes God lets our house burn down so we can better see the sun rise.

Though I'm still on a journey toward honesty, I can't help marveling at what God has accomplished. When I consider the freedom I now experience, I praise him. When I see others finding freedom, I rejoice yet again. God's mercies really are new each morning.

I've also realized that the key to moving from secrecy to honesty is not telling the whole world, but rather giving God permission to speak into the dusty recesses of the hidden places, and letting him become a conversation partner as I sort through the rubble. In a celebrity age, everyone feels they have a right to know about every intimate detail of others' lives. But often the ones who demand to know the most deserve to know the least.

When people today ask me how I identify myself, I never quite know how to answer. It doesn't seem authentic to label the whole of my being by feelings and attractions, and those parts of me tend to be somewhat fluid. I am far more than my feelings, so I don't answer that question. Not because I want to evade others but because I want to stay true to myself.

The essence of who I am is far more shaped, influenced, and guided by my spirituality than by my sexuality. And I'm quite comfortable there. When the wounds of my heart cry out loud for healing, when shame attempts to suffocate me, or when I'm especially discouraged over my most tragic failures, I find myself holding on to a thread.

A thread called grace.

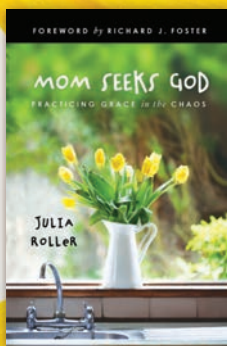
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JONATHAN MERRITT is senior columnist for Religion News Service and author most recently of *Jesus Is Better Than You Imagined* (FaithWords). This article is adapted from the book *Jesus Is Better Than You Imagined* by Jonathan Merritt. Copyright © 2014 by Jonathan Merritt. Reprinted by permission of FaithWords, New York, NY. All rights reserved.

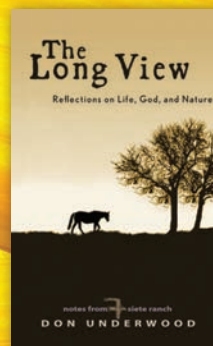
The perfect gift ideas for Mother's Day, Father's Day, or Graduation



Know When to Hold 'Em
Invites fathers to embrace the risk, challenge and reward of parenting



Mom Seeks God
Useful advice to help moms grow in their faith as they face the daily challenges of family with grace, patience and prayer



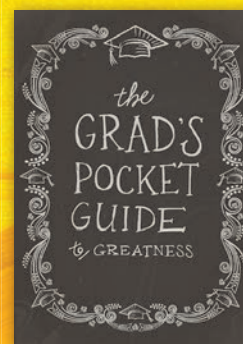
The Long View
A compilation of 30 years of finding deep meaning in the everyday experiences of life



A Blessing on the Way
280 devotions that take the mom-to-be from pregnancy to birth



Everything That Makes You Mom
Quotations about moms the world over add reflection and wit



The Grad's Pocket Guide to Greatness
Encouraging words to take the grad from school to the real world



THE BROKEN, MESSY—

— GLOBAL GOSPEL PROJECT —

—AND HOLY— CHURCH

DESPITE
APPEARANCES,
GOD IS REMAKING
IT IN HIS IMAGE.

BY DIANE LECLERC

CHARLIE WAS AN ACTIVE 11-YEAR-OLD with autism. His parents had been thinking about attending church. They decided it was time to try to find a congregation that would love them, and love their son. About halfway through Sunday school one morning, Charlie's parents were summoned. The volunteers couldn't handle him. They were asked to find another church, because this church "just couldn't meet his needs." Other churches conveyed the same sentiment. The family finally gave up and decided that attending church was too hard.

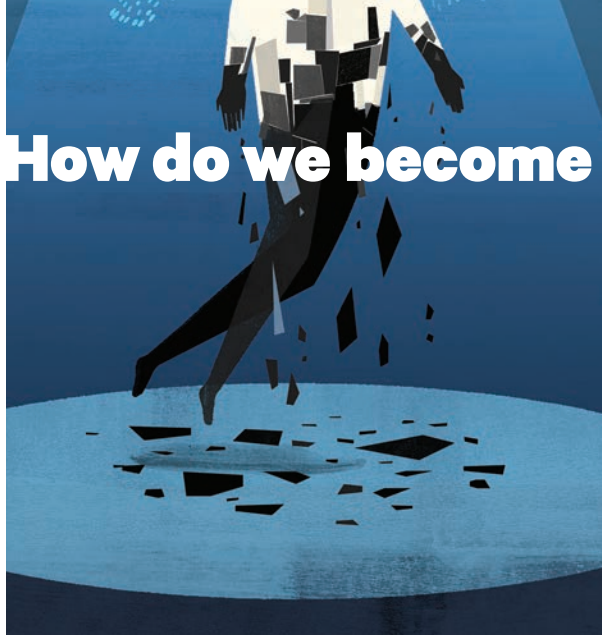
We all know people who have been hurt by the church. People who have been so offended, wounded, or even abused that they have given up on it. Perhaps you've had this experience yourself.

Church is sometimes dysfunctional, uncomfortable, cross-purposed, and painful. We have pastors who fail God, themselves, and their congregations. We endure grumpy, self-righteous criticism reminiscent of the Pharisees. We fight each other, sometimes to the point of parting ways for good. Some observers say we are in danger of losing a whole generation of embittered souls who believe the church has lost its relevance and neglected their needs.

And yet we continue to call the church *holy*. According to the Nicene Creed, the church has four classical marks:

KEITH NEGLEY

How do we get holiness? How do we become



It is “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.” We confess that the church is formed through the Holy Spirit and participates in God’s own holiness. Sometimes we call it the “spotted bride” of Christ. At other times we proclaim, in the words of a 19th-century hymn, “’Tis a glorious Church, without spot or wrinkle.” How, then, do we explain the seeming contradiction between what we believe *about* the church and what we experience *in* the church? Is it wishful thinking to proclaim the church holy? Are pain and heartache just inevitable?

BECOMING WHO WE ARE

If there were ever a dysfunctional church, it was the church at Corinth. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians reads like a laundry list of problems. Every chapter presents at least one issue where the church is missing the mark. There are scandals, disagreements, confusion, and outright sin. Members quarrel, proudly taking sides against each other. They hurt and alienate one another.

And yet, at the very beginning of the first letter, Paul addresses members as those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be saints. Despite all their failures, Paul does not forget what Christ can do in and through them. He points them to their God-enabled potential. In a sense, Paul tells them: “You are holy. Now become who you are.”

How can the Corinthian church be both holy and not holy? One way to explain this paradox is through the concept of Christ’s “imputed righteousness.” We usually apply this to persons, but it also applies to the church corporate. To have Christ’s righteousness “imputed” to us means that it belongs to us and counts in our favor. It means having his righteousness cover over our sinfulness, so that God can perceive us as righteous, even though we aren’t. Despite lacking any holiness of our own, we are clothed in the “white robe” of Christ’s holiness. To claim that the church can enjoy imputed righteousness is not to ignore its failings and shortcomings. But it does remind us

of an important aspect of holiness: It is *derived* from another source.

Human beings derive their holiness from the unique holiness of God. “I am the Lord, who makes you holy” (Ex. 31:13; Lev. 22:32). “I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. . . . I am the Lord, who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy” (Lev. 11:44–45). “Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am the Lord your God” (Lev. 20:7). “You are to be holy to me because I, the Lord, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own” (Lev. 20:26). Scripture shows a connection between God’s holiness and our holiness that must not be forgotten. Our holiness is derived from relationship with God. Wesleyan theologian David Thompson writes:

Characteristically in the Old Testament, *holy* describes someone or something in a defined relationship. Someone or something has been separated from the profane or the unclean to specific relationship with God. . . . What is described relationally on the one hand as holy (separate) or on the other as profane/common is described ritually as clean or unclean. Thus, in these contexts clean and unclean do not substantially describe the condition of the person or thing, but characterize it with respect to its relationship to the divine. To be clean in this sense is to be holy—set in relation to God; to be unclean is to be unholy—out of and unfit for relation to the divine. In either case, the point is proper or improper relation to God.

The church is the new Israel. If we are in a proper relationship with God through Christ, his righteousness is imputed to us.

Still, the church remains far from what it is called to be. Is this all we can expect—to continue failing and allowing God’s righteousness to cover for us?

No, our holiness goes further. Not only

are we *perceived* as holy by God because of Christ’s righteousness. Not only is holiness derived from elsewhere. God also seeks to *remake* us as truly holy, to change us from sinners to saints who live in holy communion with each other. God first declares us holy. But he then gradually imparts the holiness that enables us to “become who we are” as the church. We really are transformed from the inside out. Imputed righteousness must be followed with imparted righteousness.

WITH OUTSTRETCHED HANDS

It is important to distinguish between true and false meanings of holiness. It is very easy, for instance, to equate holiness with avoiding sinful acts. But this was the underlying disagreement between Jesus and the Pharisees. A Pharisee attempted to follow religious laws perfectly. But Jesus pointed out again and again that what matters most is the condition of the heart. They could technically call themselves faultless (as Paul does in Philippians) and yet fall short of what Christ values most: the life of love.

If we define human holiness as being sinless, we have defined it merely by an absence. But holiness is never a passive condition of having abstained from certain wrongs. It requires the purposeful desire to walk rightly. The best definition of holiness, then, is love—an active, engaged, embodied love for God, each other, and the world.

In the context of the church, holiness means living out this call of love in relation to one another. In 1 Corinthians 12,

the sort of people who naturally love others?

Paul outlines how a holy church should function.

First, the church's purpose is to represent Christ on earth. We become the body of Christ in his bodily absence. We are to go where Christ would go and do the ministry Christ would do. We are to minister to the poor, the outcast, the stranger, and the vulnerable. We are to feed them, invite them in, heal them, and show them hospitality. Our hearts are cleansed by God; this impels us, as the church, to get our feet dirty in the world's messiness. If the church is to be holy, it must fulfill its ultimate purpose as Christ's body, with outstretched hands.

Second, the church is meant to fulfill its purpose by living with each other in a vital, *interdependent* way. There is no individualism in the body, no such thing as a solitary Christian. The ear or eye cannot say of another part, "I don't need you." Rather, every part of the body needs every other part if the body is to fulfill its purpose on earth. Although we are called to love the whole world, there is a particular love we owe to each other. When one part mourns, all mourn. When one part rejoices, all rejoice. We depend on each other when life becomes difficult. We depend on each other to lift our praises to God. If the church is to be holy, it must be characterized by relationships of mutual love and care.

Third, the body of Christ is called to value all of its parts in equal measure. This would have been surprising to Paul's audience. "Equality" was not a concept in Greco-Roman society. Everyone had a particular part to play, but it was very clear who had value—who had power and authority—and who didn't. Paul dares to proclaim that in God's economy, the less presentable parts have equal value. The "disabled" parts are treated with special honor. If the church is to be holy, it must affirm that every part—every person—is highly valued, equally needed, and deeply loved.

And, of course, 1 Corinthians 12 is followed by chapter 13, the grand "love

chapter." Paul implies that all the problems he has addressed up to this point would work themselves out if only love reigned as it ought. Love is at the very center of holiness. Love is how holiness expresses itself. We could even venture to say that *holiness itself is love*.

SURRENDERING OUR LIVES

If love is what holiness is and does, the only question remains: How do we *get* holiness? How do we become the sort of people who naturally love others? The answer is that God makes us this way. *Sanctification* is the word we use to describe *imparted* righteousness, the kind that moves us beyond imputed righteousness—beyond God's perception of us as holy because we're clothed in holiness belonging to Christ.

God seeks to make us truly, actually holy, and he has commanded that we cooperate with this process. When we first come to Jesus Christ, God begins making us holy. We then grow spiritually. One element of this growth is what theologians call "progressive sanctification." This means that we are being transformed in our inner being to become more like Jesus. Progressive sanctification also involves being renewed in the image of God. God's essence is love. God's image in us is our capacity to love and be loved. As we grow in sanctification, we grow in our renewed capacity to love as Christ loved, and we grow in our willingness and ability to surrender our lives to God.

This surrender (the Wesleyan Holiness movement of the late 1800s called it "entire devotion") is not a chore. It is the only proper response to God's love for us. If we truly understand God's love in a deeply personal way, knowing ourselves to be accepted and forgiven, we will naturally surrender our hearts to God. As we grow in our understanding of what God has done for us and in us, our love for God will grow as well. In Romans 8, when Paul

felt assured of God's love, the Spirit testified that he was a child of God. And what was Paul's response to this deep sense of acceptance? He cried out to God with passion and a sense of intimacy, "Abba! Father!" In this sense, our love for God comes from our experience of God's love for us.

Entire devotion means a deep, consistent love for God. This kind of complete surrender displays a singleness of heart toward God, leaving no room for rivals. If sin amounts to idolatry—idolatry of self or of others—then entire devotion is the cure. When we devote ourselves to God entirely, we enable him to work deep in our hearts, transforming us into people who love God, the world, and each other.

DON'T STAY PUT

This does not make us more than human. Even in a church full of surrendered believers, human frailty alone will lead to problems. But many problems in the church are caused by sin. And we are never told to stay put in our sinfulness. Paul expected the Corinthian church to change and grow. God expects the same progress in our churches today.

Yes, the church is holy because God, on the basis of Christ's imputed righteousness, proclaims it so. But if we desire to move beyond being called holy—if we desire to *be* holy—then we must cooperate with such grace. In this sense, the holiness of the church is dependent on the holiness of its people. But always and forever, the holiness of its people is dependent on the sanctifying grace of God, who is in essence holy love.

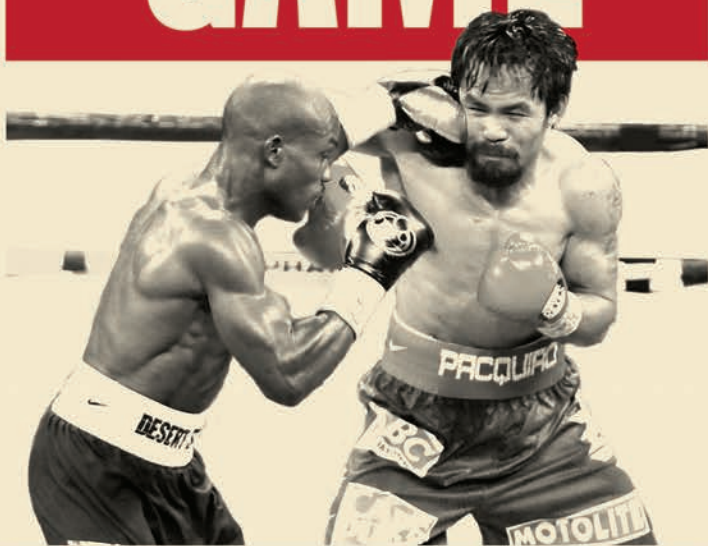
We are God's people. The church is God's church. God, help us to become who we are.

CT

DIANE LECLERC is professor of historical theology at Northwest Nazarene University in Nampa, Idaho. She is the author of *Discovering Christian Holiness: The Heart of Wesleyan-Holiness Theology* (Beacon Hill Press).

The answer is that God makes us this way.

THE HURTING ★ GAME ★



A BOXING COACH PONDERES

THE MORALITY OF ★ *Watching* ★ COMBAT SPORTS

By **GORDON MARINO**

THIS APRIL

★★★★★ *Manny* ★★★★★

PACQUIAO

**WILL APPEAR AT THE
MGM GRAND—LAS VEGAS**

to fulfill what he believes is his calling: to beat

★★★★★ *Tim* ★★★★★

BRADLEY

to bloody exhaustion. A world-class professional boxer,

Pacquiao has been called a

"Bible-quoting Maniac" by

RICK WARREN

and attributes his
stunning 55-5 record to Providence.



Pacquiao is hardly the first professional athlete to bring God into the game.

**BUT BOXING and MIXED
MARTIAL ARTS (MMA) —
KNOWN AS**

"Combat Sports"

wherein man-on-man violence is the end goal—raise unusual ethical questions for Christian fighters and spectators alike. Meanwhile, some ministry leaders have used MMA to attract young men in a

"Chickified Culture."

"Jesus Didn't Tap" is the name of a Christian MMA clothing line, as well as a mantra for a high-octane Christian masculinity espoused by the likes of Mark Driscoll. "Human cockfighting" draws millions of dollars and spectators—as well as concern over violence for violence's sake.

CT invited "boxing philosopher"
Gordon Marino to enter the ring of
debate. —THE EDITORS

T

HE EYES are the windows of the soul, or so the proverb goes. The eyes tell all. Look into a person's peepers, and you glimpse the inner workings of his or her psyche.

Our souls, however, are also tinged by what we absorb through those windows. Jesus said as much in Matthew 6:22–23:

The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness.

One of the many reasons we Christians frown upon pornography is that we believe pornographic images intensify the urge to treat and experience other people as objects. Jesus warns, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt. 5:27–28). Looking and acting are intimately bound together.

It is not only the erotically charged eye we need to keep tabs on. We do not want children sitting spellbound for hours before violent movies or video games, because we’re convinced that gobbling up gruesome images will darken their hearts and render them numb to appalling things.

There is, in short, a powerful draw to violent and even gruesome images. Rubbernecking of this sort goes all the way back to at least the time of Plato, who wrote in *The Republic*, Book IV:

Leontius, the son of Aglaion, was going up from the Piraeus... when he noticed

corpses lying by the public executioner. He desired to look, but at the same time he was disgusted and made himself turn away; and for a while he struggled and covered his face. But finally, overpowered by the desire, he opened his eyes wide, ran towards the corpses and said: “Look, you damned wretches, take your fill of the fair sight.”

To judge from the throat-slitting fare in movies and on television these days, I sometimes think we have clicked our channels to kingdom numb, that we have lost sight of the long-recognized fact that what we take in through our eyes affects who we are.

CULTURAL TRENDS

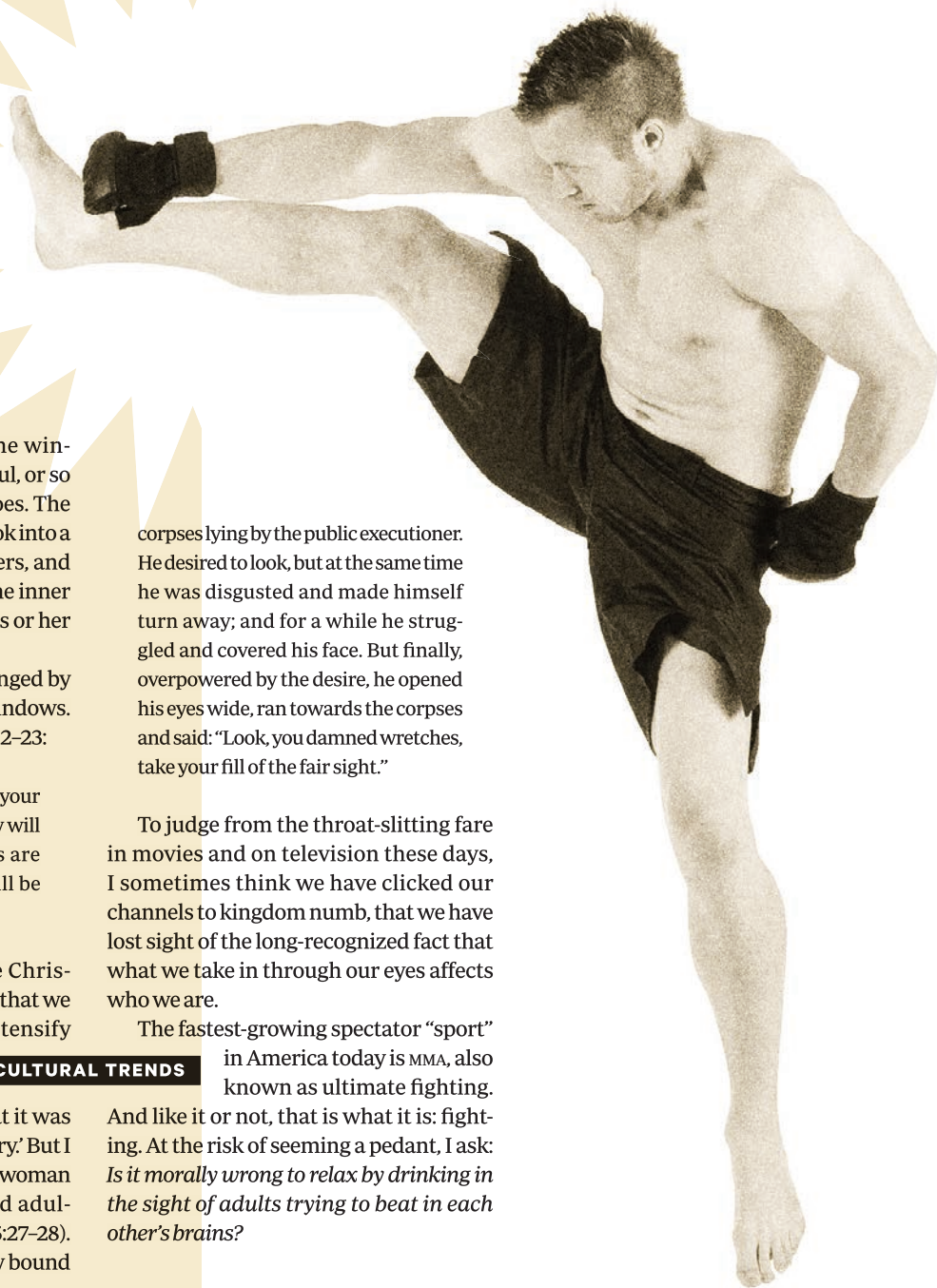
The fastest-growing spectator “sport” in America today is MMA, also known as ultimate fighting. And like it or not, that is what it is: fighting. At the risk of seeming a pedant, I ask: *Is it morally wrong to relax by drinking in the sight of adults trying to beat in each other’s brains?*

Humility and Regret

From the opening bell, let me confess that I am a boxing trainer and writer. For decades, I have been profoundly involved in the culture of stylized violence. Still, much as I love and even honor the hurting game, I often find myself wincing and turning my head away from someone taking a pounding in the ring. And let’s not pull any punches: Incapacitating blows and knockouts are what fight fans—be it of the MMA or boxing ilk—demand to see.

In 2013, the purveyors of violence

came up with a new gimmick—BKB or bare-knuckled boxing—to quench our thirst. Rather than the usual 18-by-22-foot ring, combatants slug it out in a very small circle, the kind you might find in the middle of a basketball court. This entertainment gambit is aimed at an audience that groans about not getting enough “real” fighting from the fight game. Who knows what might be next? Whatever it is, make no mistake about it: It is fueled by an American taste for blood spectacles not far removed from the Roman Colosseum.



A few years ago, I worked the corner in a televised fight. It was the third round, and although my boxer was landing a punch here and there, he was getting hammered by an up-and-coming prospect. I know how dangerous the hurricane blows can be, and there was no way I was going to let my fighter get hurt. Near the end of the third stanza, a big punch came

through the gates of his gloves. He wobbled but didn't go down. I drew a very deep breath and tossed in the towel. Unless your guy is on the cusp of very serious injury, in boxing it is almost taboo for the corner to run up the white flag. The crowd went frothing mad. It was as though I had cheated them out of their hard-earned cash by depriving them of the knockout

they knew was in the offing.

Often the best way to understand something is to recognize the way it makes you feel. This goes for people and events. And as I walked my fighter over to the doctor and began applying ice to his swollen eyes, I could not help feeling sickened. I was participating in a spectacle in which people entertained themselves



not by appreciating the technique of an American martial art or the courage that participating in that sport requires, but by savoring the sight of someone being knocked unconscious while trying to make a few dollars.

Of course, there is violence in other sports (e.g., football, hockey). Nevertheless, when it comes to the gridiron arts, fans are not going to moan just because no one has visited the emergency room. The target in football is the goal line, not your opponent's chin.

Boxer Manny Pacquiao is a devout, born-again Christian. He has earned world titles in eight weight divisions and was anointed "Fighter of the Decade" by the Boxing Writers Association of America. Before one bout, I pressed Pacquiao about the apparent conflict between his concussive craft and his devotion to the God-man, who insisted his followers turn the other cheek. There was silence. Worried that I had stepped over the line, I said, "I'm sorry if I offended you with that question."

The Pac Man said, "No, it is a good question. I think it is wrong that we try to hurt one another, but I also think that God will forgive us [him and his opponent] because it is our calling."

I could have pushed: "But why would God give you a calling that was sinful?" Instead I backpedaled and left it at that—that is, at ambivalence.

Yet Pacquiao's silence and comment spoke volumes. Though faith is fervent among modern-day gladiators (and championed by nationally known pastors like Mark Driscoll and Ryan Dobson), make no mistake about it: One would have to be a virtuoso of self-deception to imagine that our Lord Jesus would have been in a front-row seat at the klieg-lit den of voluntary human punishment.

Perhaps those of us who thrive on arena combat ought to do so,

à la Pacquiao, with a sense of humility and a tinge of regret.

Negotiating Fear and Anger

The home I grew up in was loving, but it also included fights on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday nights. As a child, the fights had me quivering in bed; as an adult, they have made me an insomniac. Given this personal history, I suppose it isn't surprising that I would find boxing and the question of who could do what to whom

naturally compelling. But boxing was more than that to me.

The fighting arts are a workshop for emotions that define our character. The kind of individual we become is largely determined by the way we negotiate such elemental emotions as fear and anger. Today there are few opportunities to get into the ring with these feelings, which, depending on your background, can be near overwhelming. Participating in boxing or MMA can teach a person to modulate and gain control over such emotions. For this reason, the devout Christian and minister (and former heavyweight champion) George Foreman once confided to me, "Boxing makes young people less violent."

I recently talked with Teddy Atlas, a world-famous boxing trainer (including for Mike Tyson) and commentator. Atlas reasoned that when boxing is properly taught, you learn respect for yourself and your opponents. "Paradoxical as it may seem, you are actually on a journey into

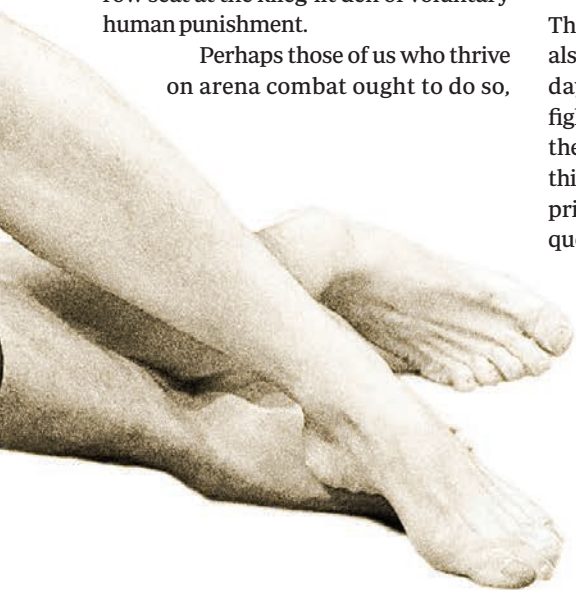
★ ★ ★ ★ ★ AT THE RISK of seeming a pedant, I ask:

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TRYING TO BEAT IN

★ each other's ★
BRAINS?



yourself with the person you are fighting against,” he said. “That is why you see that amazing closeness at the end of a fight, with the fighters hugging each other. There is nothing like it in other sports! That is because both fighters, winner and loser, know very well the pain and the fear they have successfully walked through.” Just climbing through the ropes or into the cage is enough to provide a powerful experience of success, and that sense of accomplishment often becomes a foundation to build upon.

Of course, sitting in front of your flat screen won’t do the same trick. But now and again, even watching the bruising arts can be uplifting. For example, my face was hot with tears watching Joe Frazier and Muhammad Ali leave it all in that ring in their epic 1975 Thrilla in Manila—even to the tragic point when they became ghosts of themselves. There in the squared circle was a shining object lesson of the commitment we are always preaching to our kids.

Yet for the most part, people gorge their senses on the freedom that fighters express in unleashing destruction. That is, in part, why Tyson, who never lived up to his promise as a boxer, enjoys a fame far surpassing that of the men who triumphed over him. Like a cartoon superhero, Iron Mike acted the part of the incarnation of pure rage, and many of us in the *Office Space* world can easily plug into that.

Let’s be honest. Life in the valley of the shadow of death is abuzz with reasons to be angry and frustrated. And there are few socially acceptable outlets for expressing these natural, raw-edged feelings. Part of Friedrich Nietzsche’s disgust with Christianity was his sense that Christians were out of touch with the anger bubbling beneath their brows, an ire that he detected in, among other things, our marvelous penchant for passing judgment.

A half-century ago, addressing the morality of boxing, Catholic theologian Richard McCormick wrote,

Regardless of what answer we come up with, it is both a sign and guarantee of our abiding spiritual health to face issues at their moral root. It is never easy to question the moral character of our own pleasure and entertainment.

The decisive question for Christians is, *What is going to bring in the light and make us more loving, kinder human beings?* On that score, I must confess that upon

exiting the arena, I have seldom sensed that a night at the fights punches up our ability to love our neighbor. And yet, different people need different medicine.

Perhaps a night of flying kicks and fists can help some of us parry the malicious feelings that might otherwise harden our hearts. But those of us who need our gladiatorial combat shows should never forget the humanity—and in the case of boxing, the vulnerability—of those who are risking their health for our entertainment and anger-management therapy.

CT

GORDON MARINO is professor of philosophy and director of the Hong Kierkegaard Library at St. Olaf College. He is a professional boxing trainer, an award-winning boxing writer for *The Wall Street Journal*, and editor of *The Quotable Kierkegaard* (Princeton University Press).

★ **PERHAPS** ★
those of us who thrive

ON ARENA COMBAT

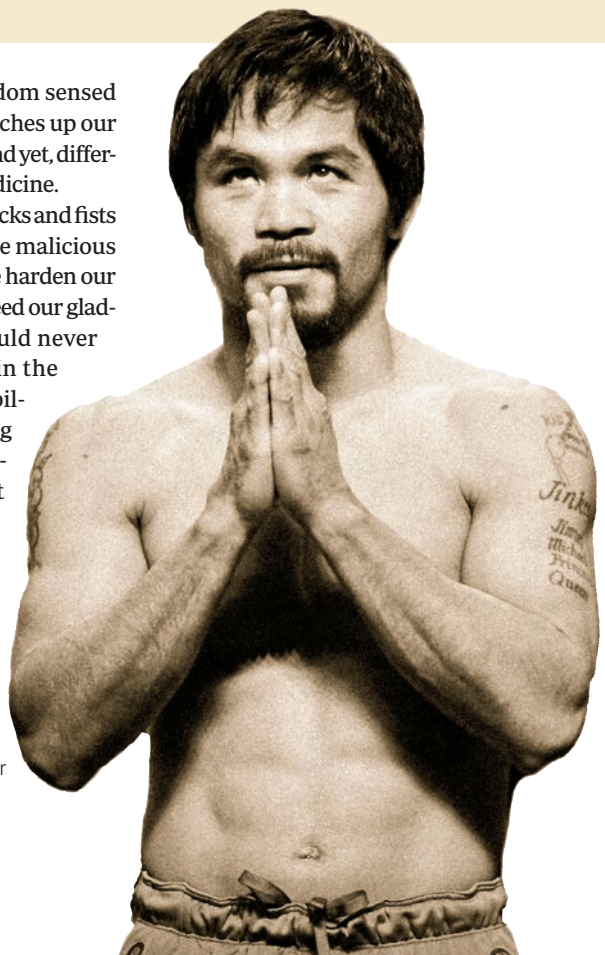
ought to do so with
a sense of

Humility

★ and a tinge of ★

REGRET.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★



JEFF BOTTARI / GETTY IMAGES

There's no limit to who can be reached by a digital church

Your mission hasn't changed. But the world has. It's a world that no longer exists solely within the four walls of your church. To grow and keep people engaged, you must move outside those walls and build a digital church. One that combines the power of podcasts, mobile apps, social media, and streaming video.

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Why the World Is Becoming More Violent

After being beaten by Muslims in the Central African Republic, a disabled man (suspected of being a Christian militia member) rests following medical treatment by a Human Rights Watch worker.



Sociologist **Rodney Stark**
unearths why global religious
hostility is on the rise.
Interview by Daniel Philpott

I

N A LATE FEBRUARY, predawn raid in Buni Yadi, a town in northeast Nigeria, Islamic militants locked the doors of a boys' dormitory and set it on fire. At least 59 students perished in the flames. The militants were linked to Boko Haram, a terrorist group that seeks to establish an Islamic state in Yobe, Nigeria.

The mainstream media cover these kinds of horrific attacks, which are often motivated by simmering religious hostility, according to recent data from the Pew Research Center. But rarely do media cover the larger, global story of religious intolerance. That's the challenge that Rodney Stark, professor of social sciences and codirector of the Institute for Studies of Religion (ISR) at Baylor University, and Katie E. Corcoran (an ISR postdoctoral fellow) took on in their new book, *Religious Hostility: A Global Assessment of Hatred and Terror*. They found that one critical difference between conflicts of the distant past and today is that national armies once fought wars on religious grounds, whereas today, militant civilians—not soldiers—are the main combatants. Daniel Philpott, professor at the University of Notre Dame and author of *Just and Unjust Peace*, interviewed Stark, best known among CT readers for his research on the early church and the Crusades.

Why do we need another book on religious persecution and intolerance?

Much of what has been written about terrorism and the Middle East simply isn't true. There was the recent, widely publicized claim of 100,000 Christians a year dying for their faith. That's pretty stunning. When I found out how that 100,000 number was calculated, I realized it was absurd. More likely, the number was less than 7,000 a year.

Another reason for our project was the infatuation with the Arab Spring. People should have known better. President Hosni Mubarak was a tyrant, but he replaced Anwar Sadat after Sadat was assassinated by the Muslim Brotherhood. And why? Because Sadat had made a treaty with Israel. Mubarak had many flaws, but he suppressed the Egyptian fanatics, the ones who killed Sadat. If you look at Gallup World Poll data, when Egyptians were allowed to choose freely in an election, they chose a tyrant—one dedicated to attacking Christians, Jews, and Arab moderates.

Egypt's army has reinstated Mubarak's policies. That's good—probably. But we missed the whole spectrum of events. We decided to write a book that looked at real data to figure out what was going on in the world.

What surprised you?

The most stunning finding: It had been widely reported by people who were looking at survey data that majorities throughout the Middle East disapproved of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center. Then I discovered something. The reason that overwhelming majorities disapproved is because they think it was a frame-up done by George W. Bush. Among those who accept that it was committed by Arab terrorists,



MARCUS BLEASDALE / VII

most of them approve of the 9/11 attacks. That shocked me. Overwhelmingly, people approved to the extent that they rightly understood what happened on 9/11.

You continually stumbled across data showing Islam to be especially problematic in stirring up hostility. What's your explanation?

Most Middle Eastern nations have several Muslim groups that have been bitter enemies for centuries. As Mubarak modeled it, the old ruling elites in these countries managed to sit on this hostility reasonably well to keep peaceful relations going.

But these rules have broken down. Some 75 percent of the people who died from religious hostility in 2012 were Muslims killed by Muslims. Then the terrible bitterness among them gets fanned by the enormous anger in these countries toward the West: the jealousy arising from poverty; technological backwardness; and then, of course, being appalled at the West's immorality, especially as depicted in the media.

But we must be careful not to blame the "unwashed Arab street" for all this. The elites, the most educated people throughout the Middle East, share these views.

Are you distancing yourself from the claim that Islam is inherently violent and intolerant because of its theological or scriptural teachings?

Religious violence isn't something new in the world. Lord knows there were 90 brands of Christianity all busy hating each other not long ago. Tolerance is hard to come by. I hesitate to think there is anything peculiar to the Islamic tradition. There is a problem, to be sure, in that Muhammad butchered people for their irreligion. But the fact is, Christians have killed each other by the millions too.

Pakistan reported the highest rate of religiously motivated atrocities in 2012. What is it about the country that puts it at the top of the list?

Pakistan's curse is that they are not only split up among the Shia and Sunni and smaller Muslim sects, but that the Sunni have been heavily backed by the Saudis, which affected their education. The Sunni have been educated into a radical nasty brand, at least compared with the Shia, who are in turn being armed and backed by the Iranians.

So Pakistan is a little battlefield on which outsiders have been pouring an awful lot of gas. Pakistan is next to

On the outskirts of Bangui in the Central African Republic, youth from a Christian neighborhood loot and burn the homes of local Muslims.

Afghanistan, so the Taliban has made inroads in Pakistan and has a long history of involvement with al-Qaeda. Pakistanis are victims of outside interference.

Media report that in the Central African Republic, Christians are resorting to violence against Muslims, as a reaction to Muslim violence against Christians. Does this call for you and Corcoran to revise your findings from 2012, that little to no religiously motivated violence among Christians exists in the world today?

Yes, it does, although we made it clear that in Nigeria, Christians were beginning to strike back. Who would expect otherwise when you have the enormous number of murders that were going on? You had people driving by on motorcycles and shooting everybody in a restaurant or the like on religious grounds.

Focusing on the West, you and Corcoran find evidence that evangelicals aren't so different from the general

Religious violence isn't something new in the world. Lord knows there were 90 brands of Christianity all busy hating each other not very long ago. Tolerance is hard to come by.



PERRY NOBLE
NEW YORK TIMES
BEST-SELLING
AUTHOR

population in their attitudes about church and state. So why are they often perceived to be more theocratic?

They have been very misrepresented by the press, which basically doesn't like religious people, particularly if they go to church and aren't lukewarm about it.

But who are the evangelicals? Usually they are defined on the basis of denomination. They are thought to be in conservative denominations like the Baptists and Nazarenes, and then you look at the Episcopalians and Presbyterians and say, "Well, these are not evangelicals." But if you ask people whether or not they are evangelicals, you find that half the people in so-called evangelical denominations don't accept the term *evangelical*, and that a whole lot of people in the nonevangelical denominations do define themselves as evangelicals. Fourteen percent of Roman Catholics identify themselves as evangelical.

Evangelicals differ from the liberal press on church-state matters, but they are not different from other Americans on these issues. They do differ from Americans in that they go to church more frequently and are far more likely to witness to their faith (inviting others to their church or prayer group). They are much less likely to believe in Bigfoot, Atlantis, astrology, ghosts. They are far more favorable toward Israel.

Do these stereotypes about evangelicals come largely from the media?

Sure they do. When I was a reporter, if

you were a religious person you kept it to yourself.

By the way, there are more religious people in those newsrooms than anybody realizes. At a recent press conference, we revealed some of the results of the Baylor National Religion Surveys, and I mentioned that 52 percent of respondents said they had been rescued by a guardian angel. This attracted the attention I thought it would. Two different members of the press, when nobody was looking, pulled me aside and said, "It happened to me."

You and Corcoran argue for religious pluralism as a source of tolerance and support for religious freedom—a theme that you have returned to many times in your scholarship. By your theory, pluralism leads to peace. But in Pakistan, the factions are killing each other.

Initially, of course, pluralism leads to war. The most dangerous thing is having two, three religious groups in a society. If you had only one, there'd be nothing to fight about. Of course there never really is one—there's always variation within it. We miss, even among Sunnis, the enormous diversity within Islam, just as Muslims fail to grasp the diversity within Christianity. Neither is monolithic.

I'm echoing Adam Smith, whose great insight was that if you want religious peace, you need an enormous number of religious groups, all of them way too small to amount

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

WINNING THE WAR AGAINST WORRY

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 63

to much on their own. It's in everybody's interest to create a civil religion, papering over the diversity because any one of the groups could be crushed. The United States is a good model of that. I'm sure the founding fathers would have established a church if there had been a 60 percent Anglican population. Instead, they had to invent rules to govern religious freedom and the separation of church and state. There was no established church, because there was nobody dominant enough to play the role.

Couldn't it also work the other way around—that only when there is a relaxation of authoritarianism can more factions and a diversity of views emerge?

Saudi Arabia is not a good place to suggest you are not a very orthodox Sunni. So it depends on the time and place. The authoritarian regimes in the past century have been sitting on a powder keg and keeping it from exploding. It's really hard to say how all this can work out. You know, democracy isn't really the answer to intolerance.

Right. Even when we say *democracy*, don't we have to distinguish between democracy defined as elections and liberal democracy, which has freedoms and rights and free spaces as well?

It's important for Americans to realize we are spoiled. We have a pretty good situation. But this is all very recent and very precarious. Hitler came to power in a democratic Germany; Mussolini was elected. Democracy has never ensured tolerance.

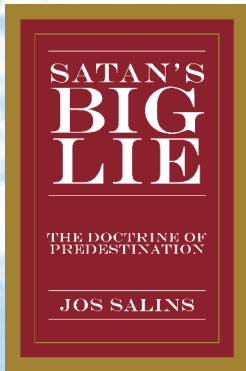
Go back to ancient Athens, where twice, following a war with another city-state, citizens voted to kill all the men and enslave all the women and children. The wonderful British democracy excluded Roman Catholics from Oxford and Cambridge until the 1890s. Our own great civil rights struggle was in the 1950s and '60s.

Why are we still surprised when the overwhelming majority of Egyptians think the nation should be ruled by Muslim law (Shari'ah)? And why should we be surprised when they elect a president who promises to implement it? Elections are tolerant only to the extent that the voters are. The point is that democracy is nice, but it doesn't necessarily answer questions of tolerance.

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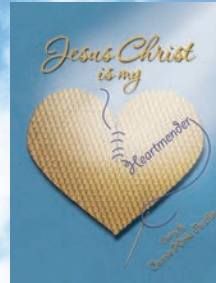
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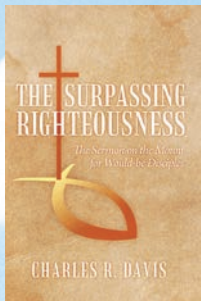
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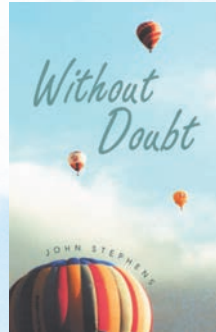
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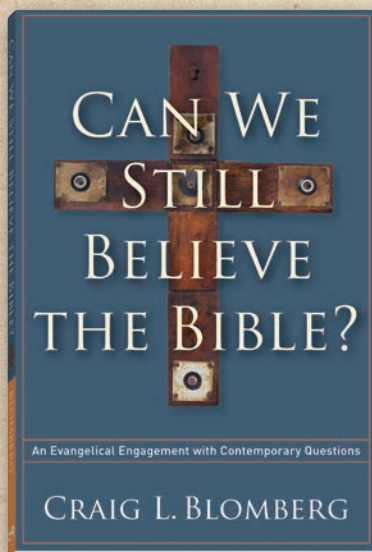
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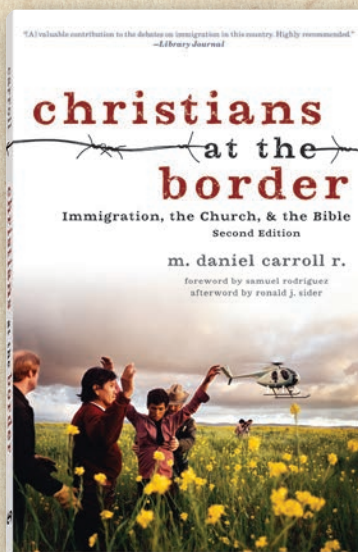
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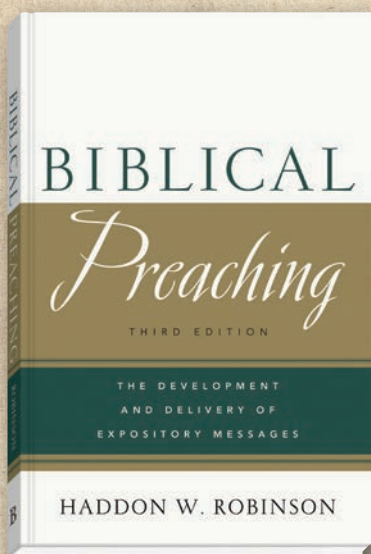
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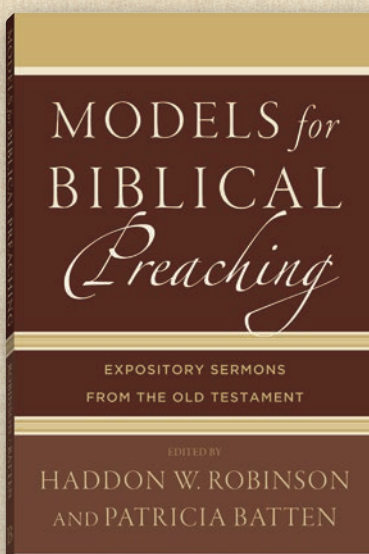
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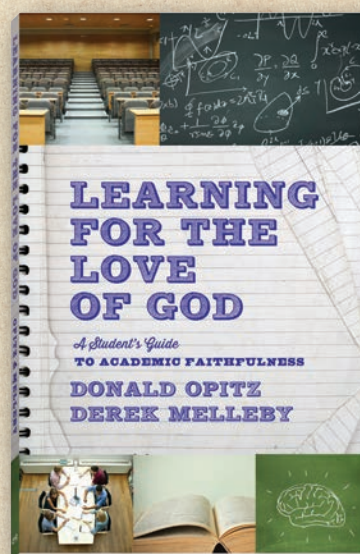
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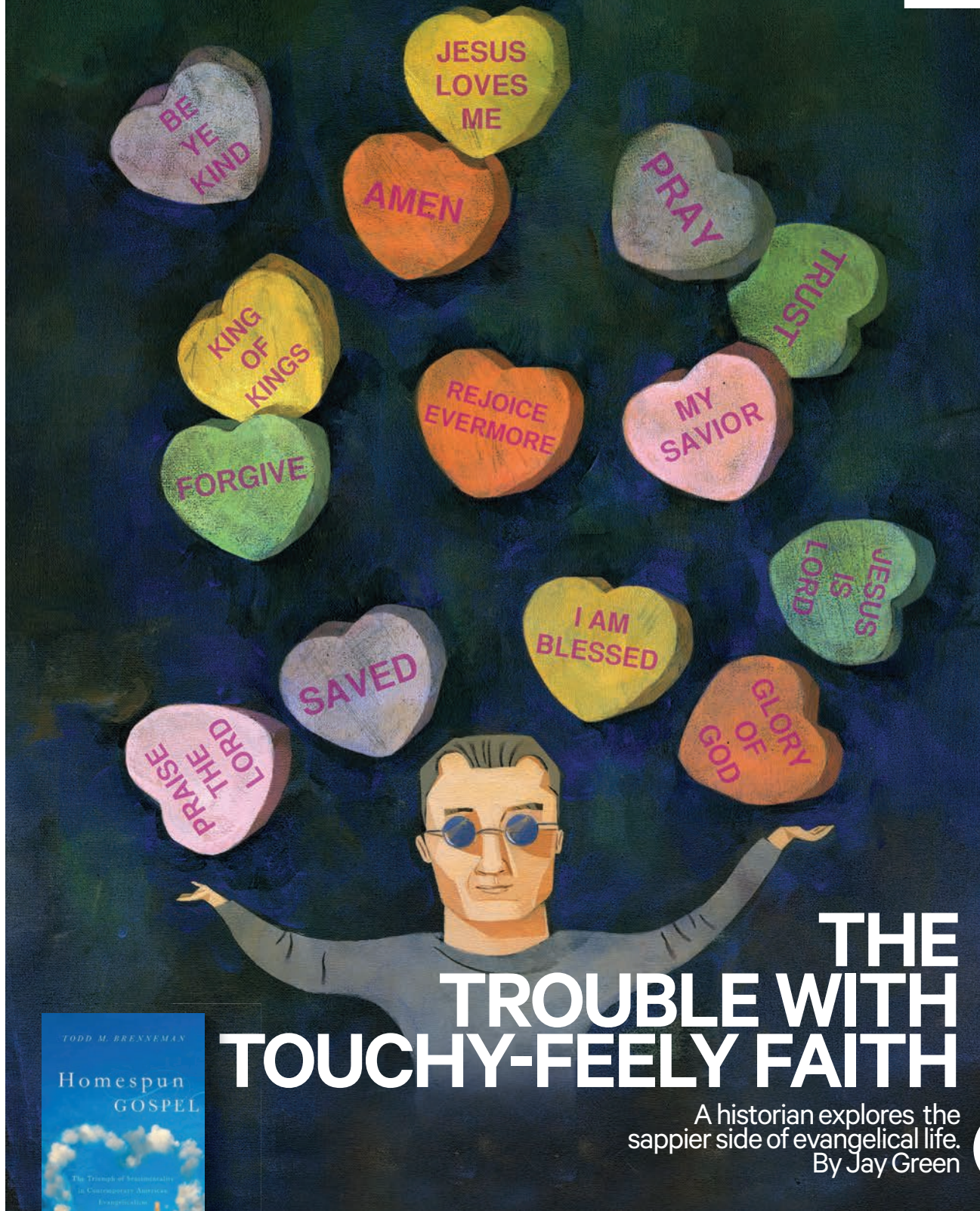


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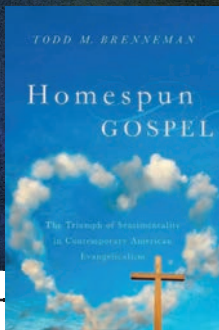
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REVIEWS



THE TROUBLE WITH TOUCHY-FEELY FAITH

A historian explores the sappier side of evangelical life.
By Jay Green



AMANDA DUFFY



Journalists who covered the 2014 “origins” debate between creationist Ken Ham and evolutionist Bill Nye were able to avail themselves of two ready-made narratives about American evangelicals. One underscored the tensions between traditional evangelical beliefs and those of a modern secular society. The other highlighted evangelicals’ presence and participation in American public life. Of course, the Ham–Nye debate offered fuel for both storylines at once.

Among journalists and scholars, the keys to understanding and interpreting evangelicals have long been their distinct theological beliefs and their values-based activism. Even many self-proclaimed evangelicals use these benchmarks to explain ourselves to ourselves. This is why we elevate figures like Billy Graham, a paragon of evangelical *belief*, and (take your pick) James Dobson or Jim Wallis, who together represent the spectrum of evangelical social *action*, to typify our movement.

But historian Todd M. Brenneman wonders if the beating heart of evangelical identity lies elsewhere, perhaps most centrally along the aisles of the local LifeWay Christian Store. In *Homespun Gospel: The Triumph of Sentimentality in Contemporary American Evangelicalism* (Oxford University Press) ★★★★★, Brenneman shifts the conversation away from beliefs and actions toward *feelings*. He shows how popular forms of evangelical expression traffic in familial and tender imagery: God as father, people as “little children,” and nostalgic longings for home and the traditional middle-class nuclear family.

Brenneman draws compelling links between the worlds of religious consumer goods—from Christian CDs, DVDs, and books to toys, home decor, and devotional art—and the “core evangelical message” of God’s love. These products, he argues, “construct religiosity as a practice of sentimentality instead of one of intellectual discovery.” This is why, in our search for spiritual resources at LifeWay, we’re likelier to encounter the works of Toby Mac or Bob the Tomato than Abraham Kuyper or Alister McGrath.

‘CULTURE OF EMOTIONALITY’

Homespun Gospel could very well launch a broad reinterpretation of contemporary evangelicalism. By placing sentimentality at its center, Brenneman challenges some long-standing assumptions about the movement’s contours and priorities. He argues that evangelicals’ “culture of emotionality” and “appeal to tender feelings” subtly shape both their beliefs about God and their manner of engaging the modern world. Sentimentalism elevates personal emotional needs—and their satisfaction through divine help—to evangelicalism’s highest priority.

Brenneman invites us to look closely at a popular yet understudied segment of evangelical discourse and commercial life. He focuses on the contributions of three celebrity pastors: Max Lucado, Rick Warren, and Joel Osteen. During the past 25 years, he says, these profitable “evangelical brands” have produced mountains of books and merchandise that reflect both the emotional and therapeutic appeal of evangelical teaching and the abiding popularity of sentimentalism.

Whether it’s Osteen’s invitation in *Your Best Life Now* to develop a “bigger view” of a God who wants nothing more than to ensure our happiness, or Warren’s attempts in *The Purpose-Driven Life* to elevate the self-authenticating experience of feeling loved by God, these pastors make personal—even narcissistic—feelings the centerpiece of evangelical spirituality. As Lucado shows in his aptly titled children’s book *You Are Special*, a Christian’s greatest ambition is not to have a rich theological grasp of God’s work as revealed in Scripture, but to rest in the simple fact that we are all his precious and dearly loved children.

It might seem, at first glance, that Brenneman’s thesis would steer attention away from intramural squabbles over Christian doctrine and culture wars.

Sentimentalism elevates personal emotional needs—and their satisfaction through divine help—as evangelicalism’s highest priority.

But the genius of Brenneman’s book is in reexamining old, familiar scenes through freshly adjusted lenses. Doctrinal disputes and cultural warfare may remain at the core of evangelicalism. But the stakes intensify when combatants frame the issues using emotionally charged imagery. In fact, Brenneman says, much of what passes for “evangelical discourse” in theology and public life is mere sentimentalized language that discourages careful reflection.

But does this assertion bear scrutiny? The evangelical world has plenty of popular voices marked by erudition and intellectual sophistication. How, for instance, does Brenneman account for the fame of pastors like John Piper and Tim Keller? Would he say that they draw on the same culture of emotionality—albeit with greater finesse—as Lucado and Osteen? Or are they rare exceptions that prove the rule? Readers can only guess.

To his credit, Brenneman does not succumb to what could easily become a mocking preoccupation with evangelical kitsch. He handles evangelicals with respect and treats sentimentalism as a category worthy of serious analysis. While many experts regard it negatively (as a manipulative tool used by the powerful to maintain their status), Brenneman recognizes a positive side. Citing philosopher Robert Solomon, who highlighted the power of sentimentality to “motivate individuals to constructive action,” Brenneman holds out at least the *possibility* that evangelicals could do likewise.

Brenneman shows how 19th-century evangelical literature, hymns, middle-class domesticity, and revivalism used emotionality to motivate social action. He cites Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and its role in mobilizing antislavery energy by appealing to feelings rather than intellectual or biblical arguments. These earlier evangelicals participated in a “shared sentimentality” that powerfully shaped public life.

Today’s evangelicals, by contrast, devote themselves to an intensely private, therapeutic brand of sentimentality. As Brenneman points out, self-contained emotionalism often undercuts their high-minded talk of cultural transformation. By making the therapeutic self “the center of the world” and “the focus of God’s attention,” evangelicals risk obscuring “the structures of power and inequality that exist in American society.” Ironically,

emotional appeals to a transforming vision end up entrenching them deeper within their own emotions.

A STURDY FOUNDATION

As a work of scholarship, Brenneman's *Homespun Gospel* is both highly original and not quite original enough. Throughout the book, the connection between evangelical sentimentality and broader American sentimentality remains unclear. In what direction does the influence run? What, in other words, does

Lucado have to do with Nicholas Sparks?

Are mother-daughter trips to the American Girl store or "holiday specials" on the Hallmark Channel examples of evangelical nostalgia seeping into popular culture? Or have evangelicals simply bought into the sappier side of middle-brow American life while adding a thin layer of theological gloss? Brenneman could have done more to address these questions.

Nevertheless, Brenneman's superb analysis lays a sturdy foundation for scholars who eventually will. Besides

setting a new and productive agenda for future studies of American evangelicalism, he invites evangelicals themselves to grapple with the problematic ways they experience the faith and pass it down to children. Strong and tender feelings toward God are vital, inescapable features of Christian faith. But *Homespun Gospel* reminds us that these same feelings come riddled with cultural and spiritual dangers.

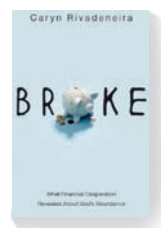
CT

JAY GREEN is professor of history at Covenant College in Lookout Mountain, Georgia.

Banking on the Great Provider

When money's tight, trust in God's abundance. By Alissa Wilkinson

Broke: What Financial Desperation Revealed about God's Abundance
Caryn Rivadeneira
(InterVarsity Press)



Though I haven't done it myself, I imagine it takes guts to write a book about money. We Christians are fond of judging one another's holiness based on material possessions or lack thereof. One problem, then, is that the minute you open your mouth about your dire financial straits, you bump into someone even worse off—someone who has to buy scratchier toilet paper, whose debt is higher, who genuinely has nowhere to live.

Another similar problem is that writing and publishing a book—at least in theory—requires the luxury of time and connections that many poor people simply don't have. Poverty can be as much a systemic and cultural problem as a matter of individual choices and unfortunate circumstances. One man's broke might be another man's affluent.

Finally, it stands to reason that a book about money, no matter its subtitle, will mostly attract people who need money. Most people who need money, even those who are trying to practice contentment, are looking for ways to get more money. Readers might expect a how-to guide. Some will come away dissatisfied.

All this is to say, my hat's off to Caryn Rivadeneira for gamely giving this genre a shot. In *Broke: What Financial*

Desperation Revealed about God's Abundance (InterVarsity Press) ★★★★★, Rivadeneira tells stories from her family's bout with financial insecurity and describes how the ordeal drew her into a deeper relationship with God. The family never landed on the street, and their struggles, she tells us, owed more to unfortunate circumstances and a few bad choices than to the larger social issues around poverty.

But that doesn't make the spiritual panic any less real. Anyone who has eyed a mounting pile of bills or grown up in a family where money is tight knows the feeling. Seeing guys asking for a buck on the subway six times a day didn't keep me from lying awake many nights last summer, staring at the ceiling, calculating again and again whether we'd have enough to cover rent, bills, student loans, and food that month. (We did.)

Broke isn't about reevaluating your financial priorities or calculating how much to put in savings each month. It isn't even really about how to avoid winding up in a jam. Instead, Rivadeneira does a tricky thing well: She alternates between the minute details of her own stories and 30,000-foot observations about their implications for our relationship with

the Great Provider.

This strategy mostly works, and Rivadeneira is not afraid to be the bad guy—the one who needs a big attitude adjustment. If the book has a weakness, it's that the narrative jumps around a bit too much for the reader to simply read from start to finish. It's never totally clear what happened, and why, and whether it really got fixed. These are things readers might find interesting.

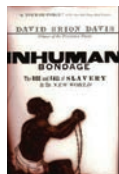
Then again, readers might look at Rivadeneira's story and come away unimpressed. They might wonder whether her situation was desperate enough to generate legitimate lessons about financial desperation. That would be a shame. Because the spiritual lessons found in *Broke*, while often simple, are still profound—particularly when they challenge us to shift our perception of what counts as "abundance." As a devotional or small-group reading, to be chewed over in bits and pieces, *Broke* can challenge us to re-center our perspective. It's a reminder that no matter how small our struggles, God's abundance is great.

CT

ALISSA WILKINSON is CT's chief film critic, assistant professor of English and humanities at The King's College, and editor of *OldEyes.org*.

MY TOP FIVE **Mark Noll**

In his more than 20 books (most notably *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*) and his university posts (first at Wheaton College, then at the University of Notre Dame), Mark Noll has played a pivotal role in reviving the serious study of history among Christians. Here he chooses **his top 5 books for inspiring a passion for history.**

**Inhuman Bondage** The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World*By David Brion Davis*

Davis wrote several important books on slavery before penning this summary volume. It begins with Aristotle's description of a slave as less than human, carries the story through the Roman, Byzantine, medieval, and early modern periods, and then expands on the crucial role that slavery played in funding European settlement in the Americas. Davis's sensitivity to the moral consequences of America's long toleration of slavery makes for painful but essential reading.

**What Hath God Wrought** The Transformation of America, 1815–1848*By Daniel Walker Howe*

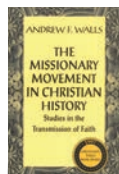
Howe's Pulitzer Prize-winning contribution to the Oxford History of the United States series is a page-turner, not least for its full attention to the religious dynamics of this critical period. Without hiding instances where religion exacerbated social strife, he shows that Christian energy and determination contributed at every stage to the startling rise of the American nation in a period of rapid change.

**Fundamentalism and American Culture***By George M. Marsden*

This superbly crafted and profoundly insightful account treats a subject—fundamentalism—of enduring significance for both American history and the modern history of Christianity. Marsden combines careful research, shrewd analysis, occasional humor, and unusual empathy for the subject.

**Chronicles of Wasted Time** 2 vols. The Green Stick (1972);*The Infernal Grove (1975) By Malcolm Muggeridge*

Muggeridge's autobiography is great, although it is hard to say what kind of history it represents. It is notoriously selective, and his later convictions strongly influence the narrative of his earlier life. Still, Muggeridge eviscerates the false gods of modern life with surgical precision.

**The Missionary Movement in Christian History** Studies in the Transmission of Faith *By Andrew F. Walls*

The essays in this volume combine history and theology with extraordinary effect, demonstrating how the worldwide spread of Christianity fulfills the character of the Incarnation. In Walls's depiction, Christianity in essence is a religion of translation—first the Word of God into human flesh, then Jewish forms of Christian faith into Mediterranean, then Mediterranean into Northern European, then spreading to the ends of the earth.



BILL KOECHLING



I Beg to Differ:
Navigating Difficult
Conversations with
Truth and Love
Tim Muehlhoff
(InterVarsity Press)



Against Argument Culture

Learning the art of civil, Christlike conversation. Interview by Derek Rishmawy

Blood pumping. Temperature rising. Voices thundering. Anger and confusion. Do all of our conversations about difficult topics—politics, family, finances—need to be this way? Tim Muehlhoff, a marriage expert and professor of communication studies at Biola University, doesn't think so. In *I Beg to Differ: Navigating Difficult Conversations with Truth and Love* (InterVarsity Press), Muehlhoff charts a path for navigating difficult conversations with grace and truth. Derek Rishmawy, a minister to students and young adults in California, spoke with Muehlhoff about combining modern insights from communication theory with timeless biblical truth.

What makes the subject of communication methods so urgent?

As a culture, we're losing the ability to talk about the deepest things in a tolerant and civil way. That's bleeding down into our personal relationships. Georgetown linguist Deborah Tannen calls it the "argument culture." You see it in American politics any time we try to talk about same-sex marriage, immigration, or other hot-button issues.

We have to find productive ways to communicate with family members, coworkers, and children, whether it's sharing our faith or talking about the kid's schedule that's gotten out of control. This book takes modern research on communication and develops a practical strategy for entering tough conversations in a productive way.

Many of us think that in difficult conversations, the key is to put aside our emotions in order to think "rationally." You say that's a mistake. Why?

Jack Gibb was the first researcher to identify what we call "communication climate." As soon as two people start talking, a communication climate develops, and it's made

up of expectations, trust, acknowledgment, and commitment. When presenting a viewpoint, Gibb says, one of the big mistakes we make is attempting what he calls "detached neutrality." This happens when I'm telling you something incredibly important that I'm really passionate about (finances, kids' schedules, work mistakes), and you're saying, "Okay, don't get emotional. Stay calm." The research shows that I'll simply up my degree of emotion until I get a response that matches my intensity.

For the conversation to make progress, you need to acknowledge the other person's emotions. It doesn't mean you agree with what they're saying, but you need to acknowledge that he or she is upset or passionate. If you don't, there will be a roadblock in the conversation.

What is the most neglected aspect of approaching difficult conversations?

We forget to ask, "Where do we agree with each other?" If I were to summarize all communication theory, I would say, "Start with agreement and then move to disagreement." John Gottman, a renowned marriage researcher, says, "The way you start a conversation is how you're going to end a conversation." If you and I are discussing theology and I start on a note of disagreement, we're going to end that way. It's called the rule of reciprocity—generally speaking, you'll treat me the way I treat you.

There are two levels of communication: the content of the conversation and the speakers' relationship. If I'm not acknowledging your feelings, or if I'm disagreeing and cutting you off, you're going to do likewise. The good news is that the opposite is true. So if I emphasize points of agreement or state my willingness to consider a different point of view, then you'll begin to mirror that attitude back to me. Our conversation will move forward in what theorists call a "positive communication spiral."



Tim Muehlhoff

Even in a book on communication, you discuss the spiritual disciplines of prayer, silence, confession, and worship. Why?

If you pick up any communication book on conflict, they're all going to identify what to do and not to do. Here's the problem: How, in the heat of the moment, can I remember to do the things that I know I should do?

A. W. Tozer said there are two different kinds of communicators. First, there's the person who looks inside himself for the resources to stay calm and abstain from sarcasm. By contrast, he says, the Christian communicator looks outside himself to Jesus, who says, "You shall receive power, a potent force from another world invading your life by your consent, getting to the roots of your life and transforming you into someone like Christ." So we need to yield to God's power from outside. The discipline to do that, though, needs to be in place before the conflict actually happens. As Dallas Willard would say, "You can't just walk up and hit a 90-mph fastball. It takes practice."

CT



Olivia Wilde and Jake Johnson from 2013 indie flick *Drinking Buddies* never veer into romance—and that's a good thing.

Long Live True Love

Hollywood is taking off its rose-colored glasses, giving us pictures of bonds that go deeper than romance.

The report is in, and the eulogy has been delivered. Romantic comedies are dead. I say that's good news.

Hollywood has long told us one big story about love: Romance is the reason for living. Meet-cutes. Butterflies. That moment when you think you've lost him forever, followed by relief and a kiss that sweeps you off your feet. Cue the swelling violins.

Rom-coms and grand romances have long ruled as one of the most reliable ways to entice viewers and sell tickets. Sure, we've also had movies about family members learning to love each other better. Once in a while we get a good buddy comedy. But "true love" has been

the big draw.

Schooled by Hollywood's version of romance, we filter our whole lives through rose-colored glasses. *Someday my prince will come*, we think. *I too can have a fancy magazine-editor job, lattes, stilettos, and the man of my dreams*. We rarely even say "I love you" any more outside of romance's embrace.

Lately, though, the soothsayers have forecast the end of the romance-driven movie. In 2013, *The Hollywood Reporter* reported on the genre's demise, quoting industry insiders who said "the meet-cute is dead." In January, Alexander Huls pointed out in *The Atlantic* that last year's romances—*The Spectacular Now*, *Enough Said*, *Before Midnight*—are more realistic

than their predecessors, portraying the challenges of romantic relationships rather than glossing over them.

But there's even better news. A host of recent movies and television shows—from *About Time* to *Frozen* to *Parks and Recreation*—tell a new story: Romance is not the only kind of love that makes life worth living.

About Time (directed by rom-com king Richard Curtis, who also made *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Love Actually*) was marketed as a rom-com. But viewers got something else. The movie has its head-over-heels love story, but that story is largely wrapped up one-third of the way through. From then on, the love that drives the movie isn't the couple's butterflies, but

Hollywood seems to be discovering that when we make romance the highest form of love, we're missing what love is all about.

their oddball friends and family.

Similarly, Disney's much-loved animated movie *Frozen* shows us that while romance is all well and good, sisterly love is the kind of love that will cast out fear. All the characters in the movie—and we in the audience as well—expect that the purest form of love is “true love’s kiss,” something that would be right at home with most of Disney’s animated offerings. Instead, *Frozen* mirrors John 15:13 (ESV): “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”

In the indie comedy *Drinking Buddies*, two friends who work together, played by Olivia Wilde and Jake Johnson, have such a great rapport that you spend the whole movie expecting them to get together. Even they seem to expect it. But the film inverts the conventions of romantic comedies: just when you think they’re going to cross the line between friends and something more, the story takes an unexpected turn. There’s something stronger between these two than attraction or potential romance, something difficult but enduring—and there’s nothing you’d call it but love.

Meanwhile, *Parks and Recreation*, one of the most sweet-natured and sincere shows on TV, has a few heartwarming romances, to be sure. But the show’s heart is in the friendships and mentoring relationships between Leslie, Ron, Ann, April, and the whole crew. Similarly, while romance has always been part of *New Girl*, it’s the friendships that hold the story together and keep us watching.

Even *30 Rock*, a sitcom that hinged on the ever more ludicrous romantic failures of its leads, had at its core the bond between two coworkers turned friends. Jack and Liz’s platonic relationship was

vital to both characters’ development. Jack, never good with his feelings, delivers a long-winded speech in the show’s finale about “a word that comes to us from the old High German . . . I am going to use this word to describe how I feel about you in the way that our Anglo-Saxon forefathers would have used it in reference to, say, ah, a hot bowl of bear meat or your enemy’s skull split—”

“I love you, too, Jack,” interrupts Liz. And he smiles. She gets it.

Even movies that seem to be romances turn out to have other kinds of love in mind—like *Her*, in which Joaquin Phoenix’s character falls in love with his computer. The more I think about it, I wonder if the “her” of the title is actually the computer at all—or if it’s the friend played by Amy Adams, the constant presence in the film, right to the final shot.

A HIGHER LOVE

Against all odds, Hollywood seems to be discovering that when we make romance the highest form of love, we’re missing what love is all about. St. Augustine characterized rightly ordered love, which he called *caritas*, as love that delights in its object, but follows that delight beyond the object to God. By contrast, wrongly ordered love, or *cupiditas*, is love that fixates on its object, seeking happiness there as its final end.

In other words, *cupiditas* ultimately stagnates. Once the object is acquired, the journey ends.

Rom-coms and romances traditionally end at the wedding—or even the first kiss. And while a wedding is a time-honored way to end a comedy, when that is the only story we can tell, we forget that

finally “getting” the girl, finally making it to the altar, is just the start of learning to love. More important, we forget that love is not just for people in romantic relationships. Real love occupies our whole lives.

This is something we learn in friendship, a relationship that, unlike romance, has no natural peak. There’s no final goal for friendship. Rather, friendship is an ongoing process of pursuing intimacy.

This is why psychologists, counselors, and social researchers—both Christian and not—report that one of the clearest predictors of marital success and happiness is friendship between the partners. While romance can stagnate and fluctuate, leaving us looking for the next emotional high, friendship is dynamic and moving. It is about living life together and maturing through loving one another. (There’s a reason why Jesus, who never married, did surround himself with close friends.)

So instead of ending with a kiss, *Drinking Buddies* ends with the two friends sitting side by side, eating lunch together—after considering romance, weathering a fight, and deciding instead to deepen their friendship. *New Girl* treats Nick and Jess’s romance as one storyline among many, including a quest to repair the friendship between two characters who had a broken, dysfunctional romance in the past. It’s friendship, not romance alone, that can go the distance. Friends (and family who treat one another as friends) are the ones who challenge us, ignite us, and rescue us from our own foolishness. Good friends push us to become more of who we were created to be. Even when it hurts, true friends are the ones, as Proverbs says, who are like iron sharpening iron.

It’s hard to say whether this emphasis will continue. Shows like *House of Cards* (in which the couple at the center use friendship and romance alike for dastardly ends) give us a more cynical picture of “antilove.” Others, like *Scandal*, continue to glamorize toxic romances. And at the movies, there will always be space for the cathartic thrill of experiencing a grand romance. But with any luck, maybe onscreen stories that focus on love between friends will also stick around, broadening our definition of love and pointing us—ultimately—toward the One who continues to make and shape us, every day.

CT

ALISSA WILKINSON is chief film critic for CT, assistant professor of English and humanities at The King’s College, and editor of *OldEas.org*.

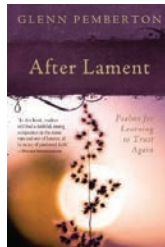


New & Noteworthy

Compiled by Matt Reynolds

“Just as the Book of Psalms provided the words we needed for lament, the Psalter also provides the guidance and language we need for negotiating the time after lament.”

~ Glenn Pemberton, *After Lament*



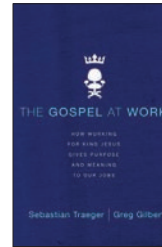
AFTER LAMENT

Psalms for Learning to Trust Again

GLENN PEMBERTON

(ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY PRESS)

You’ve endured a hellish period in life, cried out in agony, and now—thank God—the worst is over. Is it possible to move forward with contentment, as though nothing had gone wrong? Pemberton, Old Testament professor at Abilene Christian University, says it’s not so simple: “Once violent storms push us into seasons of lament, they do not go away without inflicting lasting damage or at least changing our relationship with the Divine.” Building on a previous book (*Hurting with God*) about his ordeal with chronic pain, Pemberton returns to the Psalms to seek wisdom on emerging from the valley of the shadow of death.



THE GOSPEL AT WORK

How Working for King Jesus Gives Purpose and Meaning to Our Jobs

SEBASTIAN TRAEGER AND GREG GILBERT (ZONDERVAN)

In *The Gospel at Work*, a pastor (Gilbert) and a web-savvy businessman (Traeger) team up to produce a primer on placing our jobs under the lordship of Christ. They show that getting straight on *who* we work for helps us avoid the twin temptations of idolatry (making work the pinnacle of life) and idleness (halfheartedly going through the motions, wondering what it’s all about). “Because when glorifying Jesus is our primary motivation,” the authors say, “our work—regardless of what that work is in its particulars—becomes an act of worship. We are freed completely from thinking that our work is without meaning and purpose, and we are equally freed from thinking our work holds some *ultimate* meaning.”

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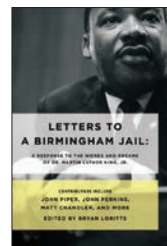
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LETTERS TO A BIRMINGHAM JAIL

A Response to the Words and Dreams of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

EDITED BY BRYAN LORITTS (MOODY PUBLISHERS)

Just over a half century ago, King sat inside a Birmingham prison cell and drafted one of history’s most incisive essays on divine justice, racial reconciliation, and Christian brotherhood. King’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” galvanized the civil rights movement and inspired later generations of politicians, social activists, and church leaders. In *Letters to a Birmingham Jail*, Loritts, lead pastor at a large, multiracial church in Memphis, gathers eight religious leaders of varying ethnic backgrounds (including John Perkins, John Piper, Matt Chandler, and Soong Chan Rah) to reflect on King’s legacy and the ongoing challenge of racial division in the church and the wider society.

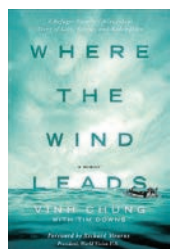


CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

A Global Reconnaissance

EDITED BY JOEL CARPENTER, PERRY L. GLANZER, AND
NICHOLAS S. LANTINGA (EERDMANS)

As Christianity has spread beyond its historic strongholds in Europe and North America, Christian colleges and universities have been founded across the developing world. This volume reports on the health of higher education ventures across the globe: in Kenya and Nigeria; in Mexico and Brazil; in China, India, and South Korea; and in places, like the United States, Canada, and Western Europe, where Christian colleges are already a well-established part of the landscape.



WHERE THE WIND LEADS

A Refugee Family's Miraculous Story of Loss, Rescue, and Redemption

VINH CHUNG WITH TIM DOWNS (THOMAS NELSON)

"For most Americans the final image of the Vietnam War was a grainy black-and-white photograph of an overloaded helicopter lifting off from the rooftop of the U.S. embassy in Saigon. When that helicopter departed, my story began." So writes Chung, a dermatologist and member of World Vision's National Leadership Council. Chung was born shortly after South Vietnam fell to Communist control. America's final withdrawal forced his family, along with hordes of other "boat people," to flee the coming oppression. Chung's remarkable memoir tells of perils aboard the South China Sea, rescue by a World Vision Mercy Ship, and resettlement in Arkansas—where, despite hard conditions, he would come to Christian faith and begin climbing an educational ladder that would lead to Harvard Medical School.

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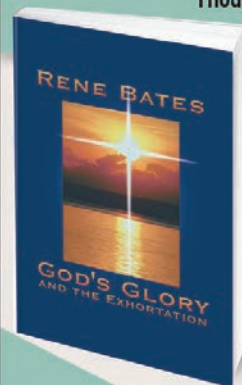
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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 80

enjoyed the process of solving legal puzzles for my friends, and so over the years, I took on fellow prisoners' cases, writing petitions they would then file in federal courts across the country, including the U.S. Supreme Court.

The odds of the Court hearing a case brought by a prisoner is less than 1 percent of 1 percent. And yet, the Court granted two petitions I had prepared for my friends. Fellow prisoners began calling me a "jailhouse lawyer."

Then another grace: Annie, my secret crush all through high school, began sending letters to me, and through hundreds of letters, phone calls, and visits, we became close friends.

I think many parents would have forsaken someone like me. But mine continued to pray for me. And my mom continued to send me Christian books, even after I told her to stop. I'd read those books and then wonder if God had forgotten about me. I wasn't quite ready for God, but I also couldn't rationalize the transformation I'd seen in the lives of my fellow prisoners.

Many mornings I'd walk over to visit my next cell-door neighbor, Robert, who was serving a 20-year sentence for a non-violent drug offense. We'd chat over a cup of instant coffee, which always seemed to have the consistency of sawdust and water. Robert would grumble about missing out on the lives of his children and how hard it was on his wife who was trying to hold the family together through two decades without him. Worst of all, he ranted about one of his friends who had turned against him and testified for the government at his trial. He said he wished that guy would die. It was clear to me that the bitterness of life and prison had consumed him.

One day I walked over to Robert's cell and watched as he smiled and danced around while sweeping the floor. My first thought was that he had scored some drugs. But when I asked why he seemed so different, I was unprepared for his response. "Shon, I'm with Jesus now," he said. Within days Robert had forgiven the man who had testified against him. Today Robert is back on his farm with his family, and once a week he treks back into prison to lead a men's Bible study.

Robert was neither the first nor the last

prisoner I saw experience a complete and utter life turnaround. These inmates had a great effect on me because I saw how grace can transform everyone, even prisoners—perhaps especially prisoners.

I was finding it harder and harder to rationalize myself away from God.

WISE COUNSEL

I was released from prison in April of 2009, during the heart of the recession, when no one, let alone a former inmate, could find work. But within months, another grace arrived: I found a position at a leading printer of Supreme Court briefs in Omaha, helping attorneys perfect their briefs.

When Annie and I got engaged, we decided that we wanted my friend, pastor Marty Barnhart, to officiate the ceremony. God bless him, Marty wouldn't agree to do so until we had gone through his premarital counseling.

Our first counseling session was, in a word, memorable. Instead of discussing marriage, Marty asked what we believed about Jesus. When he talked about grace, that free gift of salvation, I listened, especially when he said that I could be forgiven. "Yeah, even you, Shon," he said.

The next day I couldn't escape the feeling that God had been pursuing me for a long time and that if I'd just abandon my stubbornness and selfishness, and hand everything over to him, I would find redemption.

What does it mean to be redeemed? And how do you redeem yourself after robbing five banks?

The answer is, you don't. The answer is that you need some help.

In Ephesians 1:7–8, Paul writes that in Christ "we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us." To put it differently, because of our sins, none of us—and

surely no former prisoner like me—can be redeemed on our own. We need the gospel of grace, which says that each of us matters and has worth because we're made in the image of God. Grace says we are not defined by our failures and our faults, but by a love without merit or condition.

God's grace was enough to redeem me.

SURRENDER

Nearly five years have passed since I made the most important decision of my life: to surrender to this grace. Annie and I got married, and she too became a believer. We were baptized together at Christ Community Church in Omaha. We had a son whom we named Mark, after my father, a man of faith who passed away after a long battle with cancer while I was still incarcerated. And a few years later we had a baby girl, whom we named Grace.

We moved from Nebraska to Seattle so I could attend the University of Washington Law School on a full-ride scholarship from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. During this time, I've volunteered and served toward a goal of ending mass incarceration in the United States. I'm motivated by the belief that prisoners are not beyond the grasp of God's redemption. And we've been nourished by our church, Mars Hill in Seattle, where we have met Christians who live out their beliefs with grace and compassion.

After I graduate this spring, we will move to Washington, D.C., and I will begin clerking for a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit.

To say we have been blessed doesn't begin to cover it.

Through it all, from the amazing to the mundane, God loved us. Through it all, God has given us a purpose. For me that purpose revolves around repentance, loving my wife and children, sharing the grace I've been given, and using my legal knowledge to assist those who cannot afford a decent attorney.

Looking back over the course of my life, I can see that although I rarely returned the favor, God hotly pursued me. **CT**

To escape the men around me, I took a job in the prison law library. When I wasn't shelving books, I began learning the law.

SHON HOPWOOD is a Gates Public Service Law Scholar at the University of Washington School of Law and the author of *Law Man: My Story of Robbing Banks, Winning Supreme Court Cases, and Finding Redemption* (Crown Publishing/Random House).

TESTIMONY



BRIAN SMALE

Like a Thief in the Night

God's hot pursuit of a five-time armed bank robber.

By Shon Hopwood

It didn't take a moment of genius introspection to realize that doing life my way had led to nothing but disaster and destruction. It was the summer of 2009, and I had just completed an almost 11-year sentence in federal prison for my role in five bank robberies I had committed as a foolish young man. After my release, I moved into an apartment with the love of my life, Annie. Two weeks later I proposed. One week after that, we learned she was pregnant.

At age 35, I was about to become a husband and father, even though we had no money and no real plan for our future.

It may terrify some CT readers to know that I grew up in a Christian home in rural Nebraska with parents who had started a local church. When my high-school basketball career faded and college and the military fell through, I was left with a complete lack of purpose, susceptible to addiction and depression. When

my equally adrift best friend suggested we rob a bank, it struck me as a legitimate idea.

We robbed five banks, with guns, and scared the tellers and patrons half to death. I knew it was wrong. Still, I couldn't stop the easy money and party lifestyle that large sums of unearned money brought me. It didn't stop until the FBI tackled me inside the lobby of a DoubleTree Hotel in Omaha. A year later, I stood with shaky legs and a trembling spirit before a federal judge, who sentenced me to more than 12 years in federal prison. I was 23.

LEARNING TO LOVE THE LAW

Prison is not a place for personal growth. But there were small graces. To escape the men around me, I took a job in the prison law library. When I wasn't shelving books, I began learning the law. What I found was that I really

CONTINUED ON PRECEDING PAGE

A portrait of an older man with white hair and glasses, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and a patterned tie. He is resting his chin on his hand, looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background shows a bookshelf filled with books.

WORLD CHANGERS

Be wise.

[Proverbs 19:20]

Ron Blue has impacted thousands of lives sharing biblical truths on financial decision-making. And so it is with great excitement that Indiana Wesleyan University announces the opening of the Ron Blue Institute for Financial Planning. A collaborative partnership of IWU and Ron Blue, it is the first such Institute of its kind, offering personal finance curriculum and research from a biblical perspective. The Ron Blue Institute will be a world-changer – as students, financial advisors and organizational leaders seek financial “how-tos” in a setting of faith, wisdom and truth.

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68 milliseconds.

**The average time it takes
the human brain to react.**

**The time it takes for what is
inside of you to come out.**

**A clenched fist or a prayer of surrender.
A complacent ear or an obedient heart.
Fear of the world or compassion for its people.**

**What is in you will come out so
let the Word dwell in you.**



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