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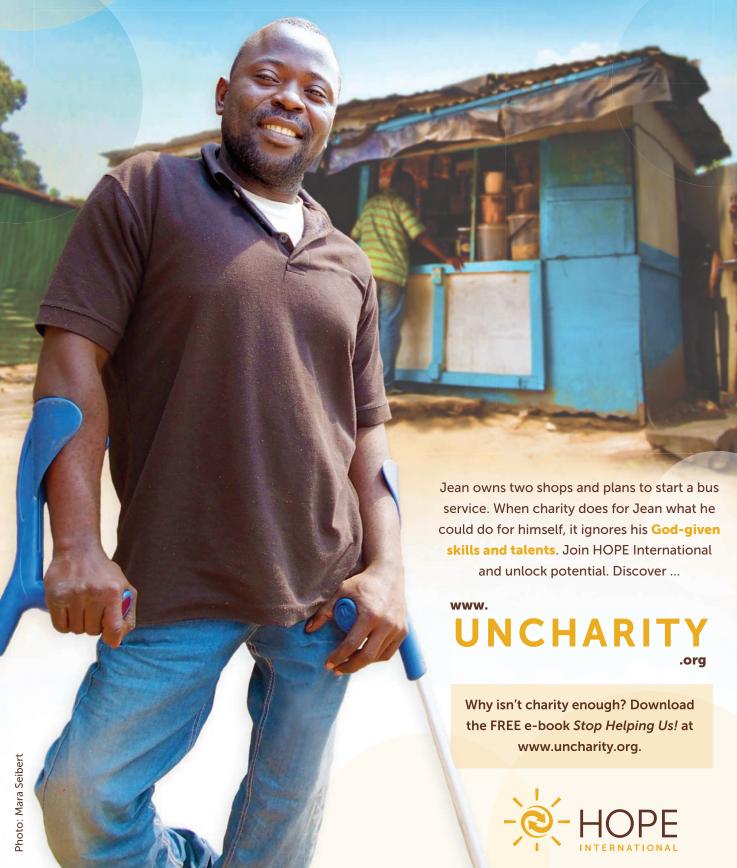
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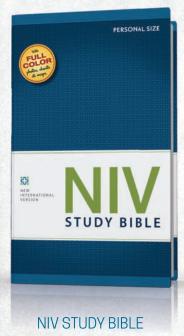
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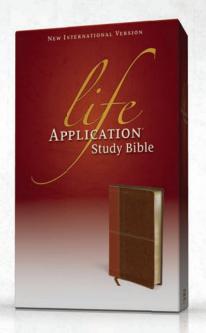
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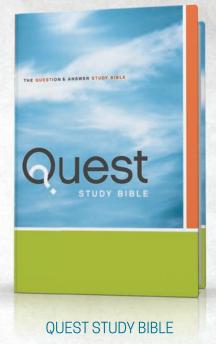


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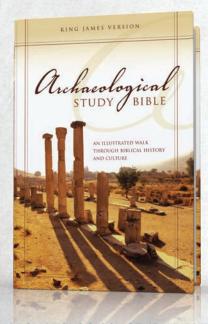


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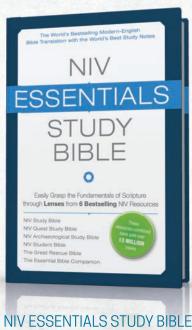
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"It's easy to respond to an ice-cream cone with 'Great!' **But where** does our exaggeration leave us when we must put words to our great God?" p.32



ON THE EDGE OF EXTINCTION

For Mideast Christians, 2014 has been a year of bloody disaster. Could this be the end for these earliest churches?

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John and his wife, Anne, honor the memory of their oldest daughter, Suzanne, who died after battling cancer 23 years ago, now longer than they had her.

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Megan (p. 32) will blow out

36 candles on her favorite

carrot cake this month.

Jacob Walsh, Wes Jakacki, Andie Moody, Josh Wood

FOUNDER Billy Graham 1956 LEAD EDITORS Carl F. H. Henry 19

Billy Graham 1956 Carl F. H. Henry 1956–68 L. Nelson Bell 1956–73 Harold Lindsell 1968–78 Kenneth S. Kantzer 1978–82 V. Gilbert Beers 1982–85 George K. Brushaber 1985–91 Terry C. Muck 1985–90 David Neff 1993–2012

CHRISTIANITY TODAY

(ISSN 0009-5753) is published monthly (bi-monthly January/February and July/August), by Christianity Today, 465 Gundersen Drive, Carol Stream, IL 60188. Periodicals postage paid at Carol Stream, IL, and at additional mailing offices. ©2014 Christianity Today

POSTMASTER

Send address changes to Christianity Today, P.O. Box 37060, Boone, IA 50037-0060;
800.999.1704. Canada Publication Mail Agreement #: 040029733.
Registration #: 126028836RT0001. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to:

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Claude is a certified foodie, having recently attended the South Beach Wine and Food Festival's Chicken Coupe, hosted by Andrew Carmellini.

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Christianity Today is indexed in Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature; Christian Periodical Index; Religion Index One: Periodicals, Religious and Theological Abstracts; Book Review Index; and Academic Abstracts and Magazine Article Summaries.

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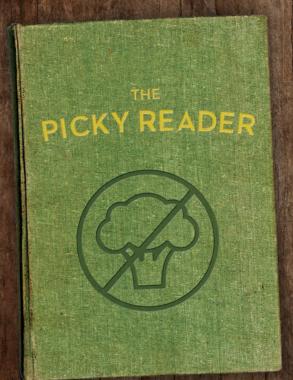
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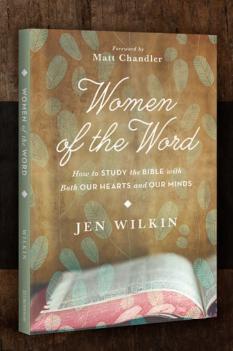
- ☐ You avoid most of the Old Testament because it's difficult to read
- ☐ You choose your daily reading using the "open-your-Bible-and-point-toa-random-passage" method
- You prefer to read books about the Bible instead of the Bible itself
- ☐ You ignore Revelation because... well, what does it mean anyway?

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:: CROSSWAY



EDITOR'S NOTE

HILIP JENKINS HAS BEEN preparing to write this issue's cover story (p. 36) for a long time. Starting in 2002 with *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, Jenkins, distinguished professor of history at Baylor University, has published books on global Christianity, lost Christianity, and wars fought in the name of Jesus—each one shedding fresh light on our faith history.

But nothing could have fully prepared him to write about what has happened in 2014. The rise of the Islamic State (ISIS OF ISIL) has all but extinguished the Christian presence in Syria and northern Iraq, where believers have lived since the first century. Jenkins is skilled at exposing readers to the big picture, explaining the history underneath news headlines, and offering a glimpse into the future. During years of study on ancient churches of the Middle East, he's had many of what he calls "light-bulb moments."

"My favorite was discovering the Church of the East and its 15th- to 16th-century list of its early leaders and prelates," he told me. These leaders, he believes, were preserving the memory of the church founded in Antioch, which later moved to Edessa (modern Turkey). The Church of the East was then led by two men who owed their authority to their descent from Joseph, the husband of Mary. "What we see in the modern world, with the Assyrians, Chaldeans, and the rest, is a direct descendant."

Another light bulb went off for Jenkins in August 2004, when the Zarqawi network car-bombed several active churches in Baghdad and Mosul. "I was dumb enough to ask, *Don't they realize what they are doing here?* But of course they knew very well. That sickening event certainly shaped my approach."

To complement Jenkins's essay, editors have compiled a timeline of 14 centuries of Christian–Muslim encounters (p. 38). According to Islamic tradition, in the 7th century, Muhammad turned to a Christian relative for insight into his first vision. Jenkins invites us to try to locate today's events on a divine timeline. This echoes cr's editorial view on the Middle East nearly 60 years ago, in November 1957:

It is difficult to interpret God's mysterious hand in history, and even more difficult for us to understand the relation of immediate events to his ultimate plan. At the same time, we should always confess that the sovereign God watches over people and nations and that all are subject to his judgment.

The body of Christ in the Middle East will survive the current conflict. And, if the global church embraces the Ephesians 4 call to unity and maturity in Christ, it may very well thrive.



LIGHT-BULB MOMENTS

Seeing connections between today's Mideast church and the first church.

TIMOTHY C. MORGAN Senior Editor, Global Journalism



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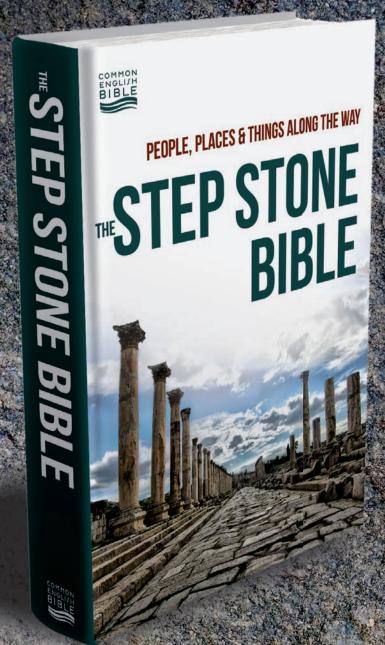
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REPLY ALL



'TIL DEATH DO US PART

What a beautiful idea in Wesley Hill's cover story: vowed siblinghood. As a lifelong celibate single, I, too, find the thought of such friendships, perhaps even including *adelphopoiesis* ceremonies, enormously appealing. Perhaps that would answer the persistent loneliness so many people in the church, both single and married, seem to know.

Alice Morgan

Charlottesville, Virginia

In my mid 20s, I sensed a call to celibacy and to living solely for God. I finally agreed to it if God would provide intimate friends of both genders. But Christians often don't know what to do with people like me. I'd like to have more friendships with married people. And as Kate Shellnutt commented, many people try to get all their emotional needs met by their spouse. I could never understand the idea of cutting off friends after marriage.

But I suspect that many of us lack deep friendships because we are unwilling to be open and transparent with others. We want to be strong and independent. Both result from sin. Happily, in heaven, we won't have these issues. We won't be thought of as being gay or weird, but can enjoy intimate friendship forever with those we couldn't get to know here on earth.

Dan LaRue Lebanon, Pennsylvania

I DIDN'T MARRY MY BEST FRIEND

I appreciated Kate Shellnutt's article on marriage and friendship. Perhaps best friend is one of those word combinations that has lost some of its power and meaning with time and overuse. To me, best has always implied one thing: that because of its quality, it stands alone. Many years ago, I asked God to give me a "best friend." Instead the Lord, in his wisdom, gave me many wonderful friends, as well as a husband. To call any one of my friends "the best" didn't seem quite right. As I look back, my husband wasn't really my best friend when we married, but over time he has become the friend I count on and value above all others.

Carol Josefson Decatur, Illinois

THE MIDLIFE CHURCH CRISIS

In the Her.meneutics column, writer Michelle Van Loon fairly assesses that churches cannot neglect any age groups. But what about maturity in the life of a Christian? What about church as consumer culture—"if they don't have what's feeding me, I'm going to stay home"? There's a difference between empty nesters as a mission field and Christians pulling back from church rather than leading ministry to reach the people to whom they relate and understand.

Amanda Kahle Richards

Facebook

We had a similar experience to Van Loon's when we attended a new church that had a contemporary and a traditional service. Since we attend a contemporary service at home, we decided to go to that one. On the way in, a woman in her 30s with her children and husband stopped us to say, "I think you're in the wrong service. This is for younger people."

I tried to explain that we attend a similar service at home. I love most contemporary Christian music. I don't think she got what I was trying to say.

Will we return to that church? Maybe she should have said, "I think you're in the wrong church."

David Vohar

Fredericksburg, Virginia

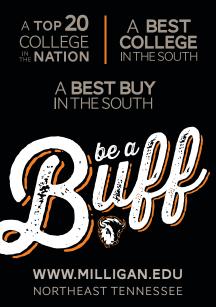
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IT'S ALL GIFT

"The Midlife Church Crisis" irritated me. But just when my temper was ready to explode, I turned the page to "It's All Gift." Columnist Andrew Wilson gets it. Our work is all about the spiritual gifts that God has given us to steward. I get frustrated when I feel forced into a ministry I am not suited for, just because of the age of my family. I am equally frustrated when I know people who are gifted in certain areas of ministry, but feel that their duty is now done. It's as if being a disciple is not a lifelong commitment. Thank you for balancing these viewpoints.

Bekki Holzkamm

Hettinger, North Dakota

OPEN QUESTION

In answering, "Should Christians resist greater government surveillance?" Rachael Jackson errs by writing, "Jesus, after all, was executed as a threat to the Roman government of Palestine."

Although the Romans carried out the act, it was the Pharisees and Sadducees who consistently sent spies to follow Jesus to find reasons to persecute him. It was the chief priests and elders who urged the crowd to call for Jesus to be crucified when Pilate wanted to release him (Matt. 27:11–26). Jesus was not a threat to the Romans, but rather to the Jewish hierarchy.

Walter S. Hamerslough

Professor Emeritus, La Sierra University Lafayette, Colorado

CAPITALISM AND THE COMMON GOOD

Kevin Brown's article is in many ways admirable. However, some could easily come away with the impression that Institute for Faith, Work & Economics (IFWE) has a very simplistic (and unbiblical) view of the market.

At IFWE, we aim to analyze these issues first and foremost through the lens of Scripture. Our goal is to provide a biblical perspective on work and economics that not only shows our place in creation but acknowledges the fact that the Fall permeates reality to the deepest level.

We agree with Brown that externalities can occur, and that human interaction is subject to unintended consequences. We also say that everyone who participates in the market is fallen and capable of horrible evil. As Christians, what do we

want for people who live in the poorest and most oppressed places on the planet? We want them to thrive, to wake up each morning and be able to provide for themselves and their families, and to unleash their God-given gifts on the world.

IFWE'S book For the Least of These looks on the role of markets in alleviating poverty. In addition, our book due out in 2015 will bring together essays by theologians and economists on capitalism and free trade.

Hugh Whelchel

Executive Director
Institute for Faith, Work & Economics
McLean, Virginia

MARKET MATTERS

"Capitalism and the Common Good" and "The New Puritans" were encouraging but did not tackle the scale of change that is needed. Max Weber's The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism is one of the key theses on why capitalism thrived more in countries that embraced the Protestant Reformation, particularly Calvin's version. However, toward the end of the book, he recognized that if capitalism became detached from the Christian ethos, the managers of capitalism would become "specialists without spirit" or mere ciphers of their companies without a moral compass to guide them. Growth and profit are held above the common good.

Thankfully, economists and business leaders—as well as Anglican bishops with business backgrounds—are beginning to explore a new expression of capitalism that seeks to reduce the pay differentials to more reasonable ratios between the lowest and highest paid employees. I would also like to see large businesses, as part of their corporate social responsibility, commit to giving 1 percent of profits to nonprofits working with the poor.

If every reader of ctwrote to those companies in which they or their ministry hold shares, we would begin to see change. At present, company law in both the UK and the United States only focuses on returns to shareholders and ignores responsibility to the wider community in which those companies flourish.

Communism and modern market capitalism are both dinosaurs. It's just that one died before the other.

David Parish

Work Place Associate, London Institute of Contemporary Christianity London

NET GAIN

Responses from the Web.



"The cover stories on friendship in this month's @CTmagazine are stellar. Challenging my assumptions in more ways than one."

Trevin Wax > @TrevinWax

"I became a believer in 1981 at an InterVarsity meeting on a small campus. Would I have met God somewhere else if the group did not exist? Sure. However, that was a God-ordained moment."

Dennis Preston, CT online comment.

The Exchange: "InterVarsity 'Derecognized' at California State University's 23 Campuses," by Ed Stetzer.

"Communists tried to wipe out Chinese Christianity and only managed to make it stronger. What you are experiencing is certainly discrimination, and I'm very sorry for that. But as you so eloquently point out, the gospel will prevail, it always does."

Bill Holston, Tishharrisonwarren.com.

"The Wrong Kind of Christian," by Tish Harrison Warren.

"Thanks @MargotStarbuck for advocating finding the right reasons for self-acceptance in this bodyconscious world."

Julie Jung-Kim > @Julie JungKim

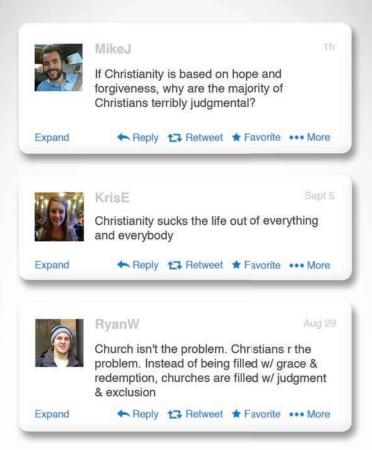
Her.meneutics: "Bringing Booty Back," by Margot Starbuck.



"If you were to look at what's been available specifically for women at the average Christian bookstore, you'd think all women are supposed to get married and start having babies as soon as they leave their teens."

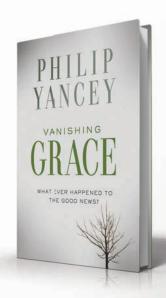
Amy Beth, Facebook.

"Put Down That Pink Bible," by Sharon Hodde Miller.



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Sybil Redmon Stage 4 Pancreatic Cancer Patient Montgomery, AL

I firmly believe God led us to Cancer Treatment Centers of America.

Life was good. I'd gotten a big promotion at work, my daughter was getting married, we had an awesome trip planned...then I received the news that I had pancreatic cancer.

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a future." Jeremiah 29:11 NIV



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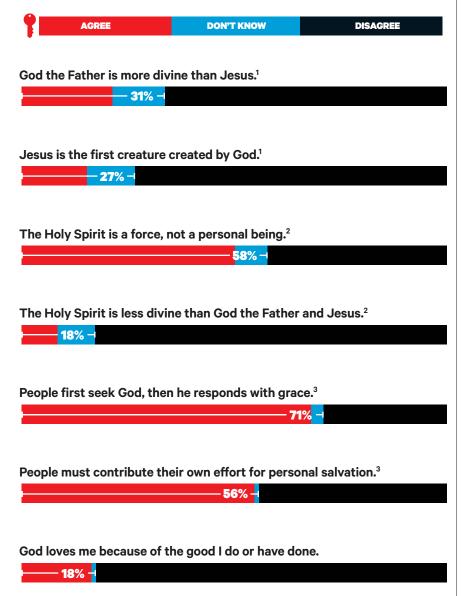
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GLEANINGS



Evangelicals' favorite heresiesHeretics are "alive and well," LifeWay Research and Ligonier Ministries found after measuring the "theological awareness" of more than 550 self-identified American evangelicals. The good news: More than 9 in 10 believe that Jesus rose from the dead and that heaven and hell are real. But many either agree with unorthodox teachings on the Trinity, salvation, and other doctrines, or are uncertain about their soundness.



Persecuted Persians get new Bible translation

This fall, Iranian Christians marked two milestones—one somber, the other sweet. More than 500 prayer vigils were held worldwide for Saeed Abedini, an Iranian American pastor imprisoned now for two years. He is one of at least 60 Christians jailed on increasingly serious charges. The same week, Elam Ministries released a new translation of the Bible into modern Persian, giving the first copies to family members of martyrs. Hundreds of leaders from 40 countries attended the New Millennium Version's dedication, said Elam's David Yeghnazar. "The meeting was a magnificent proclamation of the global church's commitment to the Bible."

InterVarsity 'reinvents' **California ministry**

InterVarsity Christian Fellowship faces a "considerably more costly" task this year but sees a silver lining. After the nation's largest public school system, California State University, derecognized 23 chapters for requiring student leaders to be professing Christians, InterVarsity has been "developing a new style of campus ministry" that "doesn't rely on established campus structures." It also remains encouraged by record participation and conversions on 616 other campuses. Students "raised in an age where churches aren't teaching creeds" are refusing to drop doctrinal standards in order to maintain campus access, national field director Greg Jao told ct. "Students understand there is an irreducible biblical and theological core to their Christian faith. They're choosing to stand for it."

Calvary Chapel founder's children split over lawsuit

Chuck Smith, founder of the influential Calvary Chapel movement, received a hero's sendoff when he died in October 2013. But near the first anniversary of his death, Smith's eldest daughter sued his successor (her brother-in-law) over how the church treated Smith, his widow, and their intellectual property. Janette

The Book of Mormon is a revelation from God.

- 24% -

¹ Ruled out by First Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325); 2 Ruled out by First Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381); 3 Ruled out by Council of Orange (A.D. 529).



"It's only hors d'oeuvres for heaven."

Lecrae to pastor Louie Giglio regarding his success. His Billboard chart-topping blends of hip-hop and Reformed theology led Jimmy Fallon to make him the first Christian rapper to perform on *The Tonight Show*. RELIGION NEWS SERVICE

Manderson, who filed on behalf of mother Kay Smith, 87, claims that Brian Brodersen, now senior pastor at Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa, "schemed" to seize control of Smith's The Word For Today ministry and his stockpile of sermons. She also accused Brodersen of commandeering Smith's \$1 million life-insurance policy for the church. Her brother, Chuck Smith Jr., publicly disputed the lawsuit as "groundless, deplorable, dishonoring to our father," and said it would "quickly disintegrate" in court.

Gordon College faces accreditation scrutiny

The New England Association of Schools and Colleges discussed whether Gordon's prohibition on "homosexual practice" conflicts with the association's standards on nondiscrimination. The association. which reaccredited Gordon in 2012, asked for a report in September 2015 "to ensure that the College's policies and processes are non-discriminatory and . . . foster an atmosphere that respects and supports people of diverse characteristics and backgrounds." The school says its 12-15 month "period of discernment" is discussing pastoral response, not changing its policy. In June, Eastern Mennonite University decided to delay a decision on its ban on same-sex behavior, pending denominational debate.

UNITED KINGDOM



Christians lacked consensus on whether Scotland should separate from the United Kingdom. As did Scots overall, with a narrow majority (55 percent) rejecting independence in a historic and heated referendum. Instead, the Evangelical Alliance Scotland was more concerned that Scots "unite and build a new Scotland with Christian values at the heart." National director Fred Drummond asked Christians to model reconciliation between Scottish nationalists and British unionists. "It is time to show grace and kindness to the other side," he said. "We must love our neighbor."

James MacDonald: We disciplined elders unbiblically

Harvest Bible Chapel founder James Mac-Donald confessed to his 13,000-member congregation that he and his elder board were wrong for denouncing three former elders as "false messengers" in September 2013. "Our church discipline of a year ago was a failure in many respects," said Mac-Donald, in part due to a "complete lack of a biblically required restorative component." The megachurch has "lifted all discipline" from the elders, who were accused of seeking division and told to stay away from Harvest after they spoke out against a "culture of fear and intimidation" and a lack of financial transparency. "Our discipline condemned them," said MacDonald, asking forgiveness. "We lost sight of the biblical priority of seeking a redemptive solution to our differences." He said the groups have reconciled.

'Back to the Bible' defends firing pastor

Shortly after a series of media interviews as Ebola survivor Nancy Writebol's pastor, John Munro was removed as a radio Bible teacher and placed on paid leave by his North Carolina megachurch amid separate investigations. Charlotte's Calvary Church soon cleared him of an employee handbook violation, which Munro described as "an innocent error of judgment." But Back to the Bible stood by its decision to fire its lead Bible teacher for undisclosed behavior

MINISTERS' MENTAL HEALTH



1in4

Protestant pastors who say they have "personally struggled with mental illness," such as clinical depression, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia. About half say they were diagnosed.

LIFEWAY RESEARCH. FOCUS ON THE FAMILY



"detrimental to [its] mission of leading people closer to Jesus on a daily basis." CEO Arnie Cole disputed "harmful" rumors that it was "being unfair" to Munro, assuring supporters that it had "prayerfully followed biblical as well as legal principles." For now, past host Warren Wiersbe has returned to the 75-year-old program.

Christian college lets divorcing president keep his job

After trustees from one of the largest Christian colleges "agonized with the decision," they agreed that president Phil Schubert could remain at Texas's Abilene Christian University even though his wife filed for divorce due to "irreconcilable differences." The board explained to faculty and staff that while it believes in the "covenant of marriage," it also believes "strongly in the power of grace in a broken world and the call to be peacemakers." Many Christian schools have strict guidelines that only

permit employees to keep their jobs if they divorce for a spouse's adultery or desertion.

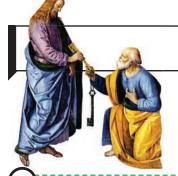
STATEL Private Christian schools threaten strike after cuts

Christian educators publicly stated they would strike over sharp cutbacks (up to 35 percent) in government funding and other "oppressive steps" by Israeli education officials. The Jewish state recognizes the private schools, which serve primarily Arab Christians, but has said its primary responsibility is to public schools. The funding decline may force some of the 50 Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant schools, which serve approximately 30,000 students (including non-Christians), to close; some have been open for 400 years. Administrators said the schools "meet a need that the state has not fulfilled," and warned the Ministry of Education, "Don't stop us from carrying on our mission." Botrus Mansour,

head of Nazareth Baptist School, told ct the schools "provide a great education" that "helps to keep the Christian presence and mission in the Holy Land."

Wheaton College stops studying evangelicals

After more than 30 years and 30 books, the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals at Wheaton College will shut down December 31. Founded by historians Mark Noll and Nathan Hatch in 1982, it examined topics such as the impact of foreign missions on North America, the financing of American evangelicalism, and evangelicals' relationship to mass media. While funding played a role in the decision, spokesperson LaTonya Taylor said, the "history and influence of evangelicalism in American life was [once] understudied," but today "more scholars and institutions have come to understand [it] as a valid subject of academic study."



Under Discussion

Compiled by Ruth Moon



Q: Does my local church have authority to declare that I am not a Christian?

Jesus may have given the apostle Peter, representing the church, the "keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 16:19). But 9 in 10 self-identified U.S. evangelicals told LifeWay Research they don't believe the church has such authority.

"Jesus charged the church with responsibility for its members. Those who are not behaving as Christians are to be held accountable, and the ultimate form of accountability is church discipline where someone who refuses to repent of known sin is removed as a member."

J. Carl Laney, Bible professor, Western Seminary

"Of course the local church has this authority. This is actually its responsibility, and it is exercised by every congregation that requires a credible profession of faith for membership—though the church cannot declare this with eternal certainty."

R. Albert Mohler Jr., president, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

"Many U.S. evangelicals think not. But historically, the church clearly has the right to say someone is not living in harmony with the gospel and to separate from them. And if being a Christian includes membership in the community of faith, then this does call their salvation into question."

Brad Harper,Bible and theology chair,
Multnomah University

"If a church carefully follows the procedure in Matthew 18:15–20, there comes a point where the church must say that someone is deliberately defying Christ's teaching and cannot be considered a believer. Yet Paul's letters show that this was applied only to the most heinous cases."

Craig Keener, biblical studies chair, Asbury Seminary "Church membership, made visible through the ordinances, is a public affirmation of someone's profession of faith.
Church discipline is the removal of that affirmation. The latter is not a denial that someone is a Christian; it's the statement that the church is no longer willing to affirm someone's profession."

Jonathan Leeman, author, *Church Discipline*



Nigeria Church Life

Antibodies or the Almighty?

Ebola outbreak highlights African views about God's healing power.

hen the deadly Ebola virus appeared in Africa's most populous country this summer, one of the first people Nigerian health officials turned to was a megachurch pastor.

Temitope Balogun (T.B.) Joshua and his Synagogue Church of All Nations (scoan), which boasts 50,000 weekly worshipers, are a continent-wide phenomenon. Zimbabwe's tourism minister recently cited statistics that 60 percent of Nigeria's tourists visit scoan to explain why the struggling nation was betting big on church tourism. One tragic piece of evidence: When a scoan guesthouse collapsed in September and killed 115 people, 84 of the victims were from South Africa.

Many are drawn by Joshua's bold claims of healing powers, spread by his Emmanuel TV empire. People have died in stampedes seeking his "anointing water," including four in Ghana last year.

So the Lagos State health minister visited scoan and asked Joshua to publicly discourage Ebola victims in Liberia, Guinea, and Sierra Leone—where the highly contagious virus has killed more than 3,000 people—from seeking his healing.

Joshua obliged and issued a warning: "What makes you a good citizen makes you a good Christian.... Obey the law of your land by not crossing the borders of your nation with Ebola virus."

He then airlifted more than 4,000 bottles of anointing water to Sierra Leone, explaining that it contained the power of God and could heal Ebola. (Meanwhile, 60 Zimbabweans who visited scoan were under observation by health officials, who asked other citizens to suspend such trips.)

Spiritual and medical ailments are inextricably linked in Africa, says J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, professor of African Christianity at Trinity Theological Seminary in Ghana. For many Christians, Joshua is the charismatic "revealer of secrets" who can diagnose supernatural ailments and their causes.

"Once the disease is spiritualized, its solution can only come from the man or woman of God with the power to deal effectively with evil," he said. "Joshua is seen as such a man."

Joshua, among Nigeria's wealthiest pastors, has been refused membership in the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria and Christian Association of Nigeria because of unorthodox doctrines. Gideon Para-Mallam, regional secretary of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, dismisses Joshua as an "imposter."

But faith healing like Joshua's is practiced in most African churches, says Candy Gunther Brown, editor of *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing*. "It's not a specialty ministry like it is in the United States," she said. "It is a characteristic of African Christianity, whether it's an Anglican. Presbyterian, or Pentecostal church."

Faith healers at times clash with the medical community. Nigerian pastor Ituah Ighodalo garnered criticism after claiming that God's anointing, the words of Jesus, and the laying on of hands would



Claims of curing HIV/AIDS and other diseases have long kept foreigners flocking to T. B. Joshua's megachurch in Nigeria.

cure Ebola. He later explained he was not trying to encourage physical contact with Ebola patients but attempting to highlight Jesus' healing power.

Aiah Foday-Khabenje, president of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa, emphasized the material nature of the outbreak. "We should not say this is a result of sins of the affected nations or persons," he said. "It is just one of the challenges of this fallen world."

However, it's rare for the sick to only rely on medicine, said Brown. "The norm is pluralism and experimenting with whatever will help—even when that means crossing religious traditions and combining religions and medicine."

The striking growth of Christianity in Africa—from 5 to 48 percent of the continent's population over the past century—is closely linked to the popular appeal of divine healing, said Brown.

"It's a question of which spiritual source of power we are going to look for," she said. "There's the perception that Christianity works better than any of the alternatives." Sunday Oguntola and Ruth Moon

Segregated Surveys

How politics keeps evangelicals white.

he Assemblies of God, one of America's largest and fastest-growing denominations, celebrated its 100th birthday this year. Almost all of its growth has come from ethnic minorities, who compose more than 41 percent of its 3.1 million American adherents.

But on many national survey reports of religious Americans, those nearly 1.3 million evangelicals are invisible because they are not white.

Major survey organizations such as Pew Research Center, Gallup, and Public Religion Research Institute often split non-Catholic Christians into the historical categories of black Protestants, mainline Protestants, and white evangelicals.

"It's not uninteresting or incorrect to look at evangelicals as a whole," said Greg Smith, Pew's director of U.S. religion surveys. After all, he notes, two-thirds of "black Protestants" identify as evangelicals. "It's a pragmatic decision. If you don't separate out black and white evangelicals, you will miss the link between race, religion, and politics. On many important social and political issues, these are just very different groups."

The "black Protestants" category actually includes Christians of any ethnicity who attend historically black denominations. Such churches traditionally had radically different social missions than those in majority-white groups, and congregants typically engaged politics differently than their evangelical and mainline counterparts. Pew reported that in the 2012 presidential election, 95 percent of black Protestants voted for Obama, compared with 20 percent of white evangelicals.

40%

Assemblies of God adherents (U.S.) who are ethnic minorities.

20%

Southern Baptist churches identifying as 'non-Anglo.'

When classifying religious groups, surveys focus on adherence to a set of beliefs, a set of behaviors, or group membership (depending on the topic), according to Corwin Smidt, research fellow with the Henry Institute at Calvin College.

Because a respondent's race is often strongly linked to political and social behavior, it's usually an important category for researchers. Since evangelicalism is still largely white in the United States, only very large surveys have enough respondents from each race for accurate analysis.

However, treating race as a dividing demographic among Christians fosters misunderstanding, said Smidt. His recent research found that faith affiliation carries more weight than race or education level. He found that evangelicals from different demographic backgrounds—including race, education, and theological mindset—still share similar beliefs and religious behaviors. For instance, they go to church and pray at about the same frequency.

Ethnic minorities are flocking to evangelical churches in growing numbers, said Michael Emerson, sociology professor at Rice University. In the past five years, the Assemblies' non-white membership climbed by nearly 20 percent, while white membership grew by only about 2 percent. In the 15.8 million—member Southern Baptist Convention, "non-Anglo" churches now account for 20 percent of its nearly 50,500 congregations.

"The default image that most people have in their heads is of politically conservative white evangelicals," said Brian Steensland of Indiana University's Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture. "That's never been fully accurate, but it's increasingly becoming less accurate."

Steensland has helped nuance the ways surveys measure evangelicals. But most of the time, researchers can't divide their sample into more accurate groups because they become too small for statistical analysis. In addition, researchers like to compare results across time, and that means using the same categories.

But as the evangelical world diversifies, the importance of measuring it accurately becomes more acute, says Emerson.

"Measurement, though it seems dull, is of utmost importance because it shapes how we think about reality," he said. "It shapes the categories that we think matter, and then we start looking at those categories and thinking they are real." Ruth Moon



Christmas Gift Guide

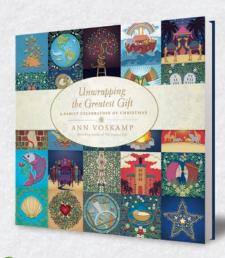




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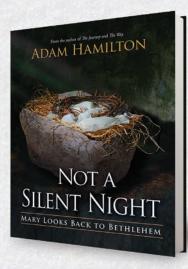
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by Ann Voskamp

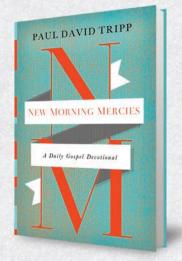
Don't let the Christmas rush distract you from focusing on Jesus. Take your family from Eden to the manger to the Cross with Ann Voskamp's new Advent family devotional suited for families with kids ages 3 and up. Join Ann Voskamp in seeing the full meaning of Christmas. Pick up *Unwrapping the Greatest Gift*.



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by Adam Hamilton

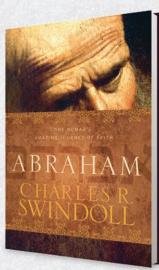
In his new book for Christmas, popular author Adam Hamilton begins at the end, with Mary at the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ; travels back in time as she witnesses his life and ministry; and ends at the beginning, with the Christ child, Mary's beautiful baby, born in a stable.



New Morning Mercies

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This devotional by best-selling author Paul David Tripp offers daily encouragement through 365 gospel-centered meditations, equipping readers with the good news that they need to trust in God's goodness, rely on his grace, and live for his glory—day in and day out.



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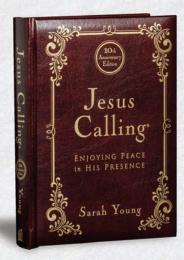
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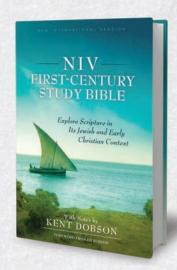
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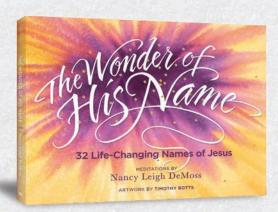
In this special 10th anniversary edition of the bestselling devotional Jesus Calling®, Sarah Young shares her prayer journal with you—including over 100 additional scriptures she selected for this special edition. Experience a deeper relationship with the Lord as you savor the presence of the One who will never leave you.



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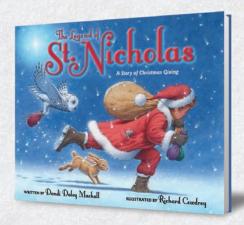
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The Wonder of His Name

by Nancy Leigh DeMoss

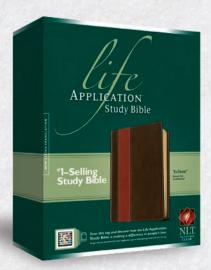
His name is Wonderful, yet Jesus is known by different names in Scripture and thus, also in heaven and earth. Know and love Him better through 32 meditations on Jesus' life-changing names written by Nancy Leigh DeMoss and illuminated by the inspiring artwork of Timothy Botts. Immerse yourself in *The Wonder of His Name*.



The Legend of St. Nicholas

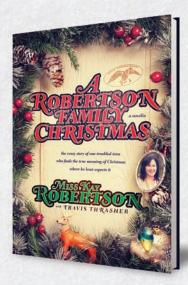
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Who was the original St. Nicholas? Read the story of a young man named Nicholas, who was moved by the plight of the poor and needy. Nicholas spent his life secretly helping the poor all over the world, giving gifts on Christmas Eve to remind people of the greatest Gift of all, Jesus Christ.



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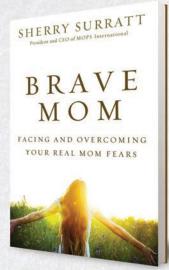
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by Miss Kay Robertson

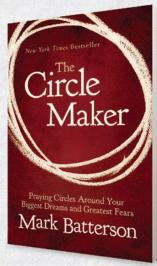
A holiday novella about a troubled young man who is surprised to win a contest giving him the opportunity to join the Robertson family for Christmas. He ultimately finds hope, love, and acceptance in their faith-filled environment. Miss Kay Robertson has teamed with Travis Thrasher to bring this heartwarming and humorous story to life.

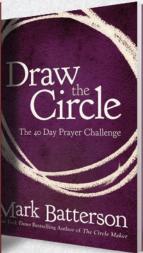


(7) Brave Mom

by Sherry Surratt

Every woman deals with fear as a mom. But Sherry Surratt, CEO of MOPS International, believes that fear does not have to define you or your relationship with your children. In her new book, *Brave Mom*, Sherry shares advice and insight that will equip moms with what they need to leave fear behind and live the admittedly messy life of parenting with confidence and joy. Zondervan.com.





⊕ The Circle Maker

by Mark Batterson

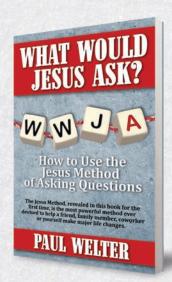
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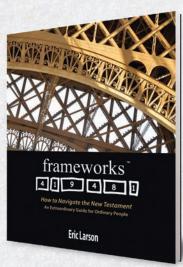
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In this new Christmas devotional, John Piper helps us prepare for that special day when we mark Immanuel's coming. Designed to be read December 1 through Christmas day, this encouraging new book helps readers refocus and meditate on the one thing that makes the Christmas season worth celebrating: the birth of Jesus.



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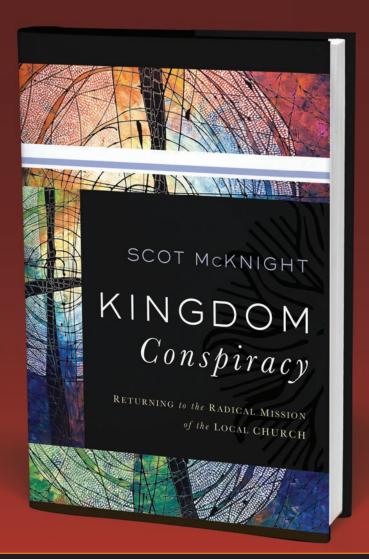
Frameworks, by Eric Larson, is a fresh and innovative guide through the New Testament that combines compelling stories, brilliant photographs, and simple maps/charts to provide readers with a rich visual context of Scripture. Presented in a beautiful format with large margins for note taking, Frameworks is the perfect companion to any study Bible.

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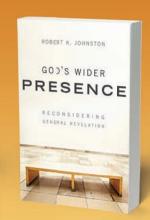


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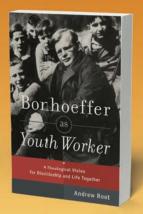


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AFTER THE REVELATIONS that NFL players Ray Rice and Adrian Peterson had abused wife and son, respectively, a national conversation erupted. One issue debated was whether playing professional football made it more likely for men to abuse their families. According to Benjamin Morris of FiveThirtyEight, domestic violence arrest rates among NFL players are lower than the national average by raw numbers. But factoring in income level, the NFL's domestic violence arrest rates are high, accounting for 55 percent of all arrests among NFL players.

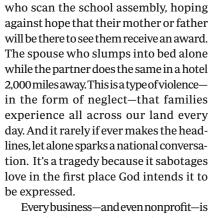
Whatever the domestic violence correlation is in professional football, the conversation about NFL culture provides a

When you combine business necessities with a sense of mission, the workplace can tempt one to sacrifice the family on the altar of success.

and how many jobs require employees to be away from their families for 100–200 days of business travel a year. It's not hard to imagine the toll this takes on family and one's personal life.

The upside to all this work is healthy growth in U.S. productivity, which potentially helps businesses increase profits and raise wages. But the downsides are many.

A 2004 review by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention concluded

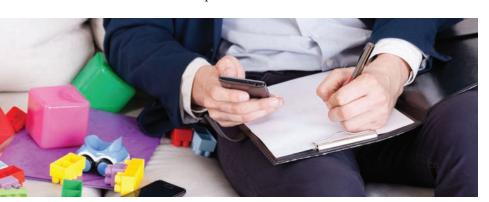


kids so many hours of the week. Children

Everybusiness—and even nonprofit—is tempted to foster a culture of overwork. I'm proud to say that Christianity Today does better than most (our standard workweek is 37.5 hours, for example). But to be frank, our managers and executives struggle to take vacation days and not work on weekends (I speak autobiographically here). When you combine business necessities with a sense of mission, the workplace can tempt one to sacrifice the family on the altar of success.

God intended for work to promote the general welfare (Gen. 1–2). American businesses and nonprofits do that in spades when it comes to improving lifestyles and helping the widow and orphan. But we will have done little for our social "bottom line" if we sustain a work culture that inflicts the quiet violence of neglect.

The most practical step forward is for workplace leaders to promote even more family-friendly work practices, like insisting on Sabbath days and weeks, flextime, family leave for various situations, paid maternity leave—whatever is appropriate in a given workplace. Simple steps like this have complex consequences in business, to be sure, but even one small step in the workplace can lead to a giant leap for the home.



chance to examine the broader relationship between all work life and home life. We believe there is a crisis brewing in the home because of practices in the American workplace. The way we work—no matter the nature of the work—inflicts the quiet violence of domestic neglect. We're talking about the culture of overwork.

Americans are working longer weeks than ever. The Center for American Progress (a liberal D.C. think tank) reports that 86 percent of men and 67 percent of women now work more than 40 hours a week. They are skipping vacations to boot. We Americans don't get that much to begin with. After 10 years of service, the average German gets 20 days of paid vacation, the English, 28, and the Finns, 30. Americans? Fifteen days—and we're not even taking them.

Add to that how many check work email at home and during the weekend, that in 16 of 22 studies, worker overtime was associated with poorer perceived general health, increased injury rates, more illnesses, and increased mortality. Two recent studies have linked long work hours to a higher risk of depression. One of them, in the June 2008 Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, sampled 10,000 people and showed higher levels of anxiety and depression in those who put in the most overtime. As for the effects on those close to us, in a 2007 American Psychological Association study, 52 percent of employees reported that their job demands interfered with their family or home responsibilities.

Can we hear the silent screams in the home? The husband who snaps at his wife and children because of work pressures. Or ends up in the hospital from stress-induced heart disease. The mother drowning in anxiety about leaving her

MARK GALLI is editor of Christianity Today.



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Can worship leaders and musicians avoid the temptation to 'perform'?

How to keep church services from becoming like *American Idol*.



Deanna Witkowski **Listen, Trust, Improv**

ecently, I attended one of the most beautiful music performances I have experienced in years. The concert featured a guitarist and pianist from São Paulo, Brazil, who were performing as a duo for the first time.

The musicians (formidable composers, performers, and improvisers) listened to each other so intently and responded to

each other so deeply that the room felt like a house of prayer.

Would the music translate to a Sunday morningworship service? Perhaps not. But what I saw was not an ego-driven, "look at me" performance. I saw openness to the moment, to creating something larger than each person's individual contribution. and to the people in the room. In turn, the audience responded as enthusiastic and attentive participants. The music became a shared experience.

In our places of worship, we often use

the word perform negatively, and we often relegate it to musicians and artists. But if the word liturgy means "the work of the people"—and we are all doing liturgy each week, whether we are Episcopalian or Southern Baptist-aren't we all working (performing) together to create worship?

As a jazz player, in order to find my own voice, I have studied the great masters-the saints-who came before me. Jazz and other musical styles that encourage improvisation can provide a living, breathing example of church. A jazz combo is a microcosm of community that works to make something larger than its individual parts. Each member has opportunities both to perform a solo and to support other soloists by providing accompaniment. This musical accompaniment-or companionship-is not fixed in advance. It occurs in response to what the soloist is playing. None of this can happen without listening to each other.

In order for a jazz combo to work, its members must trust each other. They must trust the other ensemble members and the overall sense that, as Julian of Norwich said, "All shall be well." Jazz musicians do not necessarily know exactly what they will play next. Because they are aware of their surroundings, have highly developed musical reflexes, and create sound to edify the group, they can serve as an ideal for church musicians.

Jazz harmony also can serve to deepen sung text. As an arranger, I love to reharmonize well-known hymn texts and have my trio accompany congregational singing. On many occasions, someone will come up to me after a service and share how a particular text was given new life

because of the musical setting and the way it was performed (yes, "performed"). Knowing that my work is creating openings for the Holy Spirit to move in others reminds me that I am part of the living body of Christ.

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C. Michael Hawn Keep Godly Focus

hen it comes to worship music, performance is somewhat of a dirty word, but it needn't be: Those who guide any aspect of public worship are in some sense performers. No one wants those who lead worship to be unprepared or sloppy.

While virtually all Christians can pray or speak in church, only a limited number who have been identified as possessing musical "talent" offer their gifts to corporate worship. Such talents can create a gap between those who have them and those who don't. I have heard church members say that they "have no talent" because they are not performing musicians. This isn't true.

At the same time, music is part and parcel to Christian worship and identity. Not all of the great religious traditions include music, at least music as we might think of it. But for most of Christian history, save the Middle Ages, congregational song has been the *sine qua non* of worship. Those who facilitate the people's singing in worship are probably less likely to be accused of being "performers."

Perhaps the perceived abuse of musical performance in worship comes from musicians who offer their gifts in ways that emphasize their artistic skills as soloists or ensembles separate from the congregation's participation. This is not a new problem. J. S. Bach was accused of playing the organ excessively in worship. The papal document "Trale Sollecitudini" (1903) was a statement meant to reign in a "theatrical style" of music "that appears less suitable for accompanying the functions of public worship."

A "performance" orientation toward worship depends largely on the experience and expectations of the individual

worshiper. One person's distraction is another person's prayer. Different musical tastes inform how a worshiper will respond.

Another issue is the architecture of the worship space. The spaces themselves place the leaders in positions that suggest they are performers more than facilitators of worship. The more sophisticated the technology—sound, lighting, visual displays—the more likely some will complain that the musicians have crossed the line from leading worship to performing.

The musical gifts of leaders are appropriate for worship as long as their message is essentially biblical, relates to some form of prayer—praise, adoration, thanksgiving, confession, intercession, invocation, blessing—and balances the people's song with their own offerings. Perhaps the ascription *Soli Deo gloria* ("For the glory of God alone") used by Bach, George Frederic Handel, and other musicians of ages past could be a starting place. The worship musician can broaden the statement just a bit: "For the glory of God and the worship of the gathered community of faith."

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Monique M. Ingalls Risk More Musically

n the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asks his disciples to "watch and pray" with him as he combats the powerful temptation to forgo the cross. First Peter 5:8 (ESV) instructs Christians to be "sober-minded" and "watchful" in order to resist the evil that surrounds them. To be watchful and vigilant implies that we must pay attention not only to our inward spiritual state but also to our sonic and social environments.

As worship leaders and musicians, we cannot avoid "performing" when leading public worship. However, we give into "performancism" when we conflate leading a congregation in worship with entertaining or pleasing a crowd. Avoiding it requires that we reframe our perspective. Here are a few places to start.

Watch what you say. Worship leaders and musicians must learn to notice the ways we communicate to the congregation. Spoken and sung words are only

two of the many ways we communicate. Our verbal message will ring hollow if an aspect of the medium potentially says something different. What are we communicating about the focus of worship if all our congregations can see when they are singing are the musicians' spotlighted faces on a big screen? What are we actually saying when we claim unity with other Christians across culture and time and never sing anything beyond the CCLI Top 25 (the copyright licenser that most churches use)?

Relinquish control. Performancism makes us think that aesthetic quality is more important than church members' participation. Many worship gatherings seek to create a wall of "perfect" sound that dominates, rather than supports, the collective voice. But corporate worship is much more than a Sunday morning singalong; it's a powerful, formative symbol for the Christian life. Are members participating meaningfully if they can't hear their own voice? As musical leaders, we must constantly seek creative ways to relinquish control of the collective sound and to cultivate the congregation's voice.

Don't conform. Performancism sometimes arises when leaders think they must conform to particular artistic and musical expectations. We are under constant pressure to adopt models from influential churches and the Christian media industry. If we are not careful, our music and worship can be determine d more by the cult of popularity than by what works in a local context. We should seek to cultivate the songs, styles, and messages that will build up our particular congregation.

Takemore musical risks. Experiment. When we have a steady diet of one style of music-be it pop-rock, gospel, or organ-led hymns-it's easy to trust in our own competency. It's strangely freeing to realize that the musical style we've mastered is only one among legions. For new sources of inspiration, seek out treasures from history and explore fledgling song traditions the world over. We are nourished when we draw from the depth and breadth of musical and worship traditions beyond our own. It is much harder to give in to performancism when we're constantly learning and growing. CT

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Almighty God in an Age of Exaggeration

If everything is awesome, then nothing is.

have never eaten an awesome meal. I've never driven an awesome car or taken an awesome vacation. I haven't danced to an awesome song or streamed an awesome video. I do, however, know an awesome God.

My history with the word awesome goes back to my childhood, when my fatheran amateur linguist and professional theologian-gently corrected my early attempts to apply that word (lit. "inspiring fright") indiscriminately. In our family, we reserved the adjective for the One whose name is great and awesome (Ps. 99:3).

My dad's point was not that awesome itself was some sacred incantation only for the divine (the lover in Song of Solomon, for example, ascribes awesomeness to his bride). He simply wanted me to acknowledge with my words that, in both character and magnitude, God is different from deep-dish pizza.

We live in a culture of inflated language. Our text messages and e-mails explode with exclamation points and smiley faces-and we suspect less enthusiastic communicators of being sarcastic or curmudgeonly. Our everyday language swells in an era where immediate eclipses thoughtful, where the objective meaning of words is questionable, and where affirmation is prized. Parents, teachers, and coaches praise children effusively for attempting even basic tasks. And our social media statuses daily attract hundreds of thumbs-ups. As they sing in The Lego Movie: "Everything is awesome."

But if everything is awesome, then nothing is.

In her book Talking the Walk, Marva Dawn asks, "In a society...in which we use words like extraordinary and stupendous

to describe laundry soaps, what words do we have left to describe breathtaking grandiosity?" We have blasted through our list of superlatives and are now supplementing with punctuation and emoticons. Often the words themselves are beside the point.

For people redeemed by a God who speaks, words still matter. "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver" (Prov. 25:11, ESV used throughout). Saying the right word at the right time is a thing of beauty. Jesus urges us to use language precisely, warning against calling anyone a fool who isn't, and foretelling a day when "people will give account for every careless word" (Matt. 5:22; 12:36).

"And so," writes Bret Lott in Letters and Life, "as believers, and as those made in God's image, who among us can say, 'That's good enough,' when we know we haven't given our best to find the exact word for the moment at hand?"

It's easy to respond to everything from an ice-cream cone to a job offer with "Great!" It's easy, but is it true? And where does our habit of exaggeration leave us when we must put words to our great God?

After I moved to Mississippi, the way Southerners talked about each other puzzled me. Surely not all women could

When the escalating emoticons and exclamation points begin to cloy, we might do well to follow the example of Job.

really be "sweet," or their children "angels." Eventually, I realized that in the South. "sweet" was the baseline from which an acquaintance could ascend to "very sweet" and then beyond to "so, so, sweet!" My scale was not the same.

Christians, too, use a different scale. Our language sets us apart and reflects a reality that only the Lord's people understand. If you don't know our God, you might think a movie is awesome, but if you meet him, you'll understand what awesome truly is. Careful language testifies to the world as it reflects our truth-telling God.

Thirty years after my father's loving censorship, I still think twice before using awesome. I recently overheard my own 5-year-old child telling a neighbor, "I don't say awesome about toys. I'm saving some good words for God."

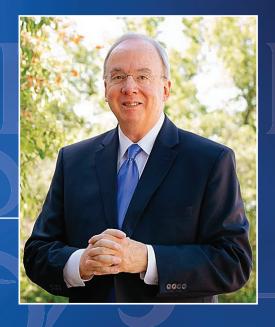
This side of heaven, of course, even the most exalted language fails us. If we multiply praises like Moses—"Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?" (Ex. 15:11)-or if we choose to save some good words for God, our words and symbols are still limited. Like William Shakespeare, frustrated by the insufficient image of a summer's day to capture the unfading beauty of his beloved, we lack language to adequately express the fullness of our Lord.

And when the escalating emoticons and exclamation points begin to cloy, we might do well to follow the example of Job: "I lay my hand on my mouth" (40:4). In the aftermath of God's self-revelation. Job responds in the only way he can: silence. In a world of babble and hyperbole, standing before an awesome God, sometimes we have nothing to say at all.

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SPIRITED LIFE

Andrew Wilson is Church in Eastbourne, England, and author Unbreakable.



God Always Heals

Good news for our bodies—in this life and the next.

ooner or later, every Christian will have to decide what he or she thinks about the possibility of physical healing in this life. The topic is especially pressing for me. I pastor a large, charismatic church that sees dozens of people healed bodily every year, I speak at charismatic conferences regularly, and I've argued publicly that Christ's gift of healing continues today.

I also have two children with regressive autism. Both children have slowly lost the ability to sing, clap, paint, and hold spoons (although my son has regained some of these skills). So far, they haven't been healed. For me, talk of healing is not theoretical.

Polarized views on the topic abound. On one end are preachers who promise health and wealth for everyone who follows Jesus. On the other are skeptics who think most people claiming to have experienced physical healing are either lying or delusional. Even Christians who agree God heals sometimes, but not always, face confusion. Does God heal if we simply have enough faith? Should we assume sickness is a gift from God, designed to teach us about suffering, perseverance, and God's mysterious sovereignty amid evil?

Before we can answer these types of questions, we first need to recognize healing for what it is. As I've studied these issues—and worked through them in my family life and church life—I've learned that there is more than one type of divine healing.

Type one: A virus attacks my body, and my white blood cells move into action, hunting down the perpetrator to kill it. Every second, tiny bits of mineral and organic material are sent to the parts of my body that need them, performing ongoing repairs, hour after hour, year after year. My body heals itself all the time. It's the result of the grace of God, who created me, searches me, knows me, and loves me.

In the second type, a Jewish prophet lays his hands on blind eyes and deaf ears and causes them to see and hear instantly. A young man born deaf attends a training event with me and is healed immediately after someone prays for him in Jesus' name. He promptly calls his fiancée with his (until now deaf) ear to the phone. They have an excitable conversation, to say the least. A woman wheelchair-bound for years is prayed for in Jesus' name, is immediately healed, and gets out of her wheelchair. Months later, she requests her disability benefits be discontinued. The Daily Mail and the BBC pick up her story.

A third type: At age 11, I cycle into the middle of a busy street. My tibia and fibula are smashed between my bike and a vw Beetle, and a windshield wiper cuts four inches into my side, between my liver and my spleen. An ambulance arrives within minutes, and paramedics put a splint on my leg. At the hospital, my leg is reset. A surgeon removes fragments of windshield glass from my torso, and repairs the gash. After 16 weeks, I'm running around again like normal. The ambulance, the paramedics, the skill of the surgeon, the discoveries that make operating rooms and anesthesia possible-all

God never says no to a request for healing. He either says 'Yes' or 'Not yet.'

are gracious gifts of a loving God, whose mercy enables healings to occur all over the world that most other generations would have called miraculous.

Type four, the trumpet sounds and the dead are raised in the twinkling of an eye, never to perish again. Corrupted bodies become incorruptible; sickness and affliction will never again befall them. The sterile smell of the operating room corridor is no more. Octogenarians formally bound to hospital rooms are given a new life and new youth that will never be stolen by the march of time. Every deaf ear is unblocked, every damaged limb is repaired, every blind eye sees. Autism, Down syndrome, schizophrenia, and Alzheimer's disease are swallowed up in victory. And the last enemy to be destroyed is death (1 Cor. 15:26). Nobody cries, except with joy.

Recognizing these types of healing can help us with the questions we so often ask. Why doesn't God always heal? He does, eventually. Does God always heal us if we are certain he will? Not necessarily. Why not? The effects of Christ's victory over death aren't fully realized yet. Should we assume sickness is a gift from God? No, unless we're prepared to stop taking medicine or visiting doctors. How can we see more healing? Pray, fast, believe, and persevere. How should we pray? "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10).

God never says no to a request for healing. He either says "Yes"—as it was for two people in my church while I was writing this article—or "Not yet"—as it has been, so far, for my children. One day, their disorders, and ultimately death, will be swallowed up in victory. I can't wait.





On the Edge of Extinction

FOR MIDEAST CHRISTIANS, 2014 HAS BEEN A YEAR OF BLOODY DISASTER.
COULD THIS BE THE END FOR THESE EARLIEST CHURCHES?
BY PHILIP JENKINS





FOR CHRISTIANS IN THE MIDDLE EAST, 2014 has been a catastrophe. The most wrenching stories have come from Iraq, where the nascent Islamic State (ISIS or ISIL in news reports) has savagely persecuted ancient Christian communities, including Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Syrian Orthodox. Iraqi Christians have declined rapidly in number since the first Gulf War in 1991, but survivors long believed they could maintain a foothold around Mosul.

This past summer, that hope collapsed. In a ghastly reminder of Nazi savagery against Jews, Christian homes were marked with the Arabic letter \circ for Nazarenes—Christ followers—or *R* for *Rwafidh*, a term for Protestants, and inhabitants were targets for abuse or murder. Islamist militants have controlled Mosul since June 10. Even if the total extermination of each and every believer is not the goal, those ancient communities and churches face the prospect of utter ruin. To that extent, the end of Christianity in Iraq is within sight.

The current battles are part of a lengthy story. Islam gained power over the Middle East in the seventh century, but it was several centuries before Muslims became an overwhelming majority. Christians operated under Muslims' political rule, but the Coptic Patriarchate of Alexandria, Egypt, and the Baghdad-based Church of the East remained mighty forces of global Christianity. They retained that position for more than 500 years. Not until the 14th century did persecution become systematic and violent.

Long after that date, though, minorities survived and even thrived in substantial numbers. As recently as 1914, Christians still made up 10 percent of the whole region from Egypt to Persia (Iran), and most large cities were homes to multiple faiths and denominations. That did not mean that the Ottoman rulers were tolerant in principle; rather, they accepted what seemed like the natural order of things.

Disappearing Faith

Matters changed swiftly during World War I. Massacres and expulsions all but removed the once very large Armenian and Greek communities in Anatolia





In Baghdad, a sparse crowd gathers for a baptism. The Christian population in Baghdad has been reduced by 90 percent since 2001.

and starvation killed more than two million Christians between 1915 and 1922.

Emerging Arab nations also targeted Christians. Iraq's slaughter of Assyrians in 1933 gave lawyer Raphael Lemkin a basis upon which he defined the concept of *genocide*. The partition of Palestine and subsequent crises in the region massively

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shrunk other ancient Christian groups. The modern story of the Christian Middle East is one of contraction and collapse.

By the end of the past century, Christianity in the Middle East had two great centers: Coptic Egypt, and the closely interrelated lands of Syria and Lebanon. They are now home to many refugee churches.

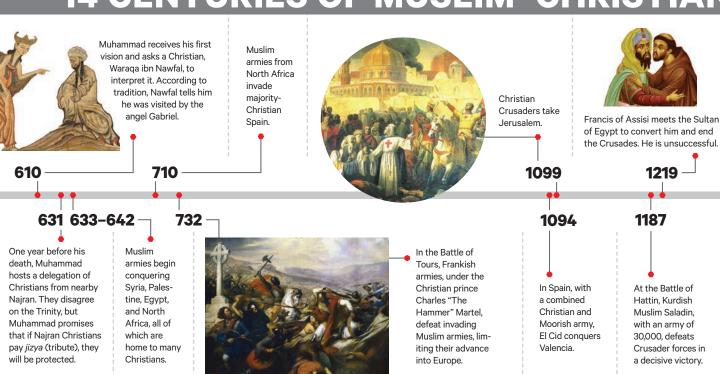
Today, Syria's continuing civil war threatens to extend Islamist power still further. Islamic State flags have appeared in Lebanon. Lebanese politician Walid Jumblatt has warned that both Christians and his own Druze people stand "on the edge of extinction."

How bad could this get?
All local Christians know
the answer. They look back
at the experience of Jews,
who flourished across the
region just a century ago but
have now vanished from virtually every Mideast nation
outside Israel. Since 1950,
Egypt's Jewish population
has shrunk from 100,000
to perhaps 50; Iraq's, from
90,000 to a mere handful.
Christian Aleppo or Damascus could easily go the way of

Jewish Baghdad. In 2013, Iraq's Chaldean (Eastern-rite Catholic) patriarch Raphael Sako warned, "If emigration continues, God forbid, there will be no more Christians in the Middle East."

The only Christian community that seems secure is the Copts, perhaps eight million strong, and a solid majority in

14 CENTURIES OF MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN



If emigration continues, God forbid, there will be no more Christians in the Middle East?

Patriarch Raphael Sako

some of Egypt's southern districts. Even so, after the crisis there of the past two years, the potential remains for imminent civil conflict and Islamist violence.

Killing Churches

If the vision of a Christian-free Middle East is too pessimistic, the scale of the disasters that have overtaken some countries is beyond doubt. That experience offers many lessons for us in the West.

It is obscene to complain about a "war on Christmas" in the United States when there are Syrian cities without Christians to commemorate their holy days at all for the first time in some 1,900 years. That's an authentic war on Christmas.

More broadly, these events teach us about the long-term trajectories of Christian history. They show how churches

vanish and, more important perhaps, how they survive under the direst of circumstances.

One lesson emerges strongly: However often we talk of churches dying, they rarely do so without extraordinary external intervention. Churches don't die because their congregations age, their pastors behave scandalously, the range of programs they offer wears thin, or their theology becomes muddled. Churches vanish when they are deliberately and efficiently killed by a determined foe.

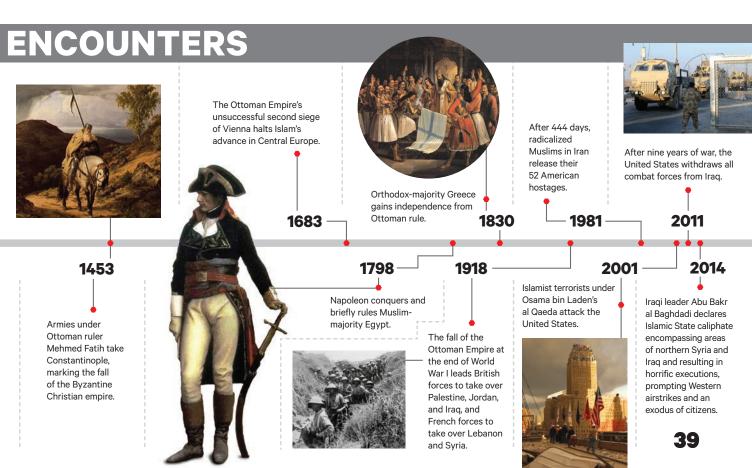
That opponent looks different over time. The destructive enemy might represent a rival religious creed, as we now see with radical Islamism in Iraq. More commonly, the persecutor is inspired by a radical secular ideology that exalts the state and condemns any group that pledges loyalty to some other absolute,

whether on earth or in heaven. That was the defining attitude of Soviet and Chinese communism. Similarly, the murderous Ottoman regime during the Great War acted as it did because of ferocious nationalism rather than any Islamic belief.

The Church of the East, the ancestor of the Assyrians and Chaldeans, perfectly illustrates that long survival—and profound current crisis. The disasters of the 14th century reduced that once transcontinental body to a much smaller remnant. That vestige continued within Iraq, Syria, and Anatolia for seven centuries. Throughout that latter period, hard-line Muslim jurists and demagogues competed to invent new humiliations to inflict on Christians: limits on what those believers could wear, the houses they could own, and the horses they could ride. At the worst of times, Christians wore rags to avoid giving any impression of wealth, which invited others to take their property.

If there was a single penalty that stung more than any, it was losing control of the soundscape. In a Muslim-ruled land, the only public voice of religion was the cry of the *muezzin* from the minaret; ringing church bells were utterly forbidden. The starkest division between Christian and Muslim societies was literally in the air.

But Christians endured century through century. They maintained their faithful







Seeking shelter, refugee Christians move into an unfinished building across the street from a church in northern Iraq.

witness while recognizing their severe limits. Through bitter experience, they learned to identify the irreducible core of their faith while setting aside additional practices. They abandoned the bells and whistles, literally. Christians could not evangelize, but they kept up the worship that stood at the heart of their spiritual life.

Critically too, they could support monasteries where spiritual warriors maintained prayer and study. As long as monks prayed and priests said the liturgy, the church was intact, and that situation could last, in theory, until Judgment Day. Surviving monasteries tended to be in remote and highly defensible places, and their fortifications were formidable. Egypt still has such legendary fortresses of prayer, such as St. Antony's monastery and St. Catherine's in Sinai. Until our own times, Iraqi Christians clustered around Mar Mattai (St. Matthew) and Rabban Hormizd, both dating from late Roman times.

Some believers hoped that powerful Western churches would send aid, although foreign Protestants in particular could rarely grasp the distinct patterns of local religious practice. Worse, Westerners aroused the suspicion of local nationalists.

No less dangerous was the temptation to support secular nationalist parties that promised to govern regardless of faith

or denomination. Such alliances were always something of a trap, as they intertwined local churches with dubious regimes, most notoriously the Ba'athists of Iraq or Syria. At least for some years, though, these policies removed the danger of active persecution.

The church persisted stubbornly until modern times, when new militants emerged to tear it up, root and branch. Believers were killed en masse, leaving survivors to flee the country for a time or altogether. Only at that point did churches cease to function. That is what happened to the Armenians during the Great War, and has started to happen to Iraq's Syriac Christians over the past two decades.

The Greater Plan?

In the darkest years of the Middle Ages, when European Christians fled from barbarian invaders, their obvious refuge was the neighboring monastery. This past summer, that was exactly the course taken by the Christians of northern Iraq to escape the Islamic State.

Some of the remnants of Mosul's Christian community took shelter in the ancient cloisters of Mar Mattai, As the Islamic State has recently demonstrated, the practical logistics of destroying a church are not terribly difficult: You occupy a region militarily, and kill or expel all its inhabitants who practice the offending faith. Quite separate, though, is the question of how $\,{}^{\circ}_{\circ}$ those persecuted believers understand that destruction.

Over the past thousand years, Christians have repeatedly had to ask: Why would God allow his followers to suffer defeat, subjection, exile, and enslavement? They find some answers in biblical precedent, looking to the Hebrew prophets who saw their own kingdom defeated for lacking faith and betraying the national covenant. Seen in this light, even the worst disasters

What may seem like a definitive act of annihilation seems quite different when located upon a divine timescale. can be seen as God's scourge on his sinful people, although no clear evidence suggests that the churches in question are any worse than others that have enjoyed far greater success and safety.

But deeply embedded in Jewish and Christian thought is the idea of the righteous remnant, the community that survives tribulations only to follow God's commands still more exactly. Perhaps the exile that initially seems a nightmare might form part of this greater plan, as dispossessed believers carry their witness to other lands. You cannot read the Bible without realizing how the Exile and Diaspora experience could powerfully spread faith into distant corners of the world. Around the Western world, growing communities of Christians from the Middle East are quite prepared to sing their song in a strange land.

Far more challenging is the question of why God would permit Christianity in a particular land to vanish altogether. Yes, churches move to new pastures where they might prosper. But what about their homelands? What about churches that are altogether destroyed, no remnant remaining? This theological dilemma might well be much discussed in 2015, when the long-awaited film version of Shusaku Endo's 1966 novel, *Silence*, is set to release.

Endo was exploring the fate of the Catholic Church in 17th-century Japan as vicious persecution was snuffing it out. While the Catholic Church commemorates 200 named martyrs, tens of thousands more ordinary believers were beheaded, burned, and crucified. The Japanese used a singularly cruel tactic of water crucifixion at the seashore. Nailed to a cross at low tide, a priest would almost be wholly submerged as the tides came in over several days, finally drowning him.

As the last living priest in Silence muses over all the persecution and terror, he notes one fact: "In the face of this terrible and merciless sacrifice offered up to him, God has remained silent." No, says the priest, God never intervened miraculously to protect his flock. No angels descended to conceal and protect fleeing victims; no persecutors were struck blind as they proclaimed their sentences or erected their crosses; the persecutors suffered neither plague nor military defeat as punishment for their actions. As in modern Iraq, the persecutors carried on their path unchecked until they achieved their monstrous goal.

Did God care so little for his faithful? Was there simply no God to care?

Eternal Timeframe

God may seem silent on occasion. At other times, people simply don't trouble to hear his voice. Those previous cases of church extinctions are dreadful enough, but rarely are they as total as they initially appear. So much depends on our perception of time.

What to us may seem like a definitive act of annihilation seems quite different when located upon a divine timescale. As we are often told, extinction is forever; but humans should be very cautious about using the language of eternity. Forever changes.

As an example, we might look at the experience of China, which over the past two millennia has remained the world's most populous nation. The story of Chinese Christianity is a recurrent cycle of mighty boom years followed by what seemed like total annihilation at the time, an obliteration so absolute that on each occasion, it was quite clear that the church could never rise again. That cycle has occurred five times to date since the ninth century. On each occasion, the Chinese church has reemerged far more powerful than at its previous peak. Each successive "nevermore" proved to be strictly temporary.

Of course, individuals and communities suffered horrifically during those intervening centuries of disaster. We can't minimize the atrocities. But if communities perished, the church endured. Viewed in the timeframe of eternity, those years of seeming annihilation should more properly be understood as fallow times of gestation.

Even when institutional churches vanish, believers persist in many different forms. One of the most understudied facts in Christian history is that of *cryptobelievers*, those hidden remnants who hold onto truth while superficially accepting the prevailing regime. As Anatoly Lunacharsky, the frustrated Soviet minister of education, complained in 1928, "Religion is like a nail: The harder you hit it, the deeper it goes into the wood." Sometimes it goes in so deep, you can't even see it.

In Japan, for instance, the brutal destruction of the Catholic Church described in *Silence* did not prevent large groups of *Kakure Kirishitan* ("Hidden Christians") from maintaining the faith underground. In fact, some survived four centuries and

a few elderly hang on today. We see the same phenomenon in China and, most relevant to this article, all across the Middle East. In Syria, estimates of the size of the Christian population before the present crisis commonly varied between 5 and 15 percent, with crypto-Christians accounting for much of the difference. Underground belief and practice will be much more difficult under an extreme Islamist regime than under the secular Ba'athists, but "cryptos" have often endured for astonishingly long periods, until gentler times return.

Shall we talk about the extinction of Middle Eastern Christianity? Come back in 500 years. We'll see then.

Uncounted Christians

Even at this worst of times, Christians survive. But dare we say that, even in an increasingly intolerant Middle East, Christians as a whole are not just remaining but in places actually swelling in number?

This gets us into sensitive territory. Over the past decade, we have heard amazing claims about new Christian evangelization in Muslim countries, usually accompanied by incredible conversion statistics.

Having said that, some specific accounts are much more believable. David Garrison's recent book, *A Wind in the House of Islam*, describes the Christian appeal in diverse Muslim societies. Remarkably, Syria offers some of the most convincing examples of this trend. Garrison is a responsible and critical reporter. The problem, though, is that all such activity is clandestine, for fear of arousing persecution.

For the sake of argument, let us adopt a sweeping skepticism and dismiss all such stories. Even so, we are still witnessing a striking upsurge of Christian numbers in some of the most unlikely settings, almost entirely as a result of immigration. Look at Saudi Arabia, a land of 28 million people where Islam is the only permitted religion. Consequently, official sources list the country as 100 percent Muslim.

In reality, Saudi Arabia is only one of many Middle Eastern countries that have imported millions of poor foreigners to perform menial jobs over the years. Many of those immigrants are African and Asian Christians, including many Filipinos. As they do not officially exist as Christians, they have zero right to practice their faith, even in private. But exist they do. By some





Outside the Church of Gethsemane in Jerusalem, Christians celebrate Easter, Due to the threats of terrorism and persecution, Christians in many parts of the Middle East are able to conduct very few open air worship services such as this one.

estimates, Saudi Arabia's Christian population is about 5 percent of the whole, perhaps 1.5 million people.

Other Gulf nations are more honest about just how religiously diverse they have become. Christians—mainly guest workers-probably make up 7 percent of the population of the United Arab Emirates, and 10 percent of Bahrain or Kuwait. Those are nations where Christianity scarcely existed 100 years ago.

No less surprising is Israel. Together with Palestine and the Occupied Territories, the State of Israel now includes thousands of adherents of ancient Christian denominations. Those older churches have fallen sharply in their numbers in the past half-century, but newer Christians have more than replaced them. There are thousands of Global South guest workers. Also, many Russian Christians invoked Jewish ancestry to enter Israel in the 1990s. Some were Orthodox Christians, others Baptists and Pentecostals. Israel's Russian Christian community today is perhaps 80,000 strong.

Israel and Palestine combined have a population of some 10 million, of whom perhaps 5 percent are Christians-Arab, Armenian, Russian, African, and Filipino. Together with the Arab Gulf, these are the region's new and growing centers of Christian belief and practice.

Suffering, Yes. Extinction, No.

Not for a second should such signs of growth distract our attention from the dreadful situation facing Christians elsewhere in the Middle East. Individuals are being murdered, raped, enslaved, and turned into refugees, and Western governments have no option but to intervene on their

behalf—only how is a matter for debate.

Armed intervention might actually succeed in crushing the most aggressive jihadi campaigns. In the longer term, Western churches undoubtedly have their role to play in assisting fellow believers, whether in their homelands or in their new diasporas. Even with vigorous activism, though, whether military or humanitarian, it is difficult to imagine the $^{\circ}$ churches of Syria and Iraq returning to the flourishing condition they enjoyed even half a century ago.

But that is quite different from saying a that Christianity as such faces extinction in the region, or that the church might cease to exist.

Looking at this story, we might adapt the famous remark about Russia, typically attributed to Otto von Bismarck: "Christianity is never as strong as it appears; but nor is it ever as weak as it appears." In God's terms, words like strength and weakness can have surprising meanings. We must be very cautious indeed about making statements that claim to understand the goals or directions of history.

PHILIP JENKINS, author of The Lost History of Christianity (HarperOne), is distinguished professor of history at Baylor University.

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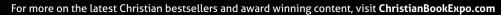


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WHY ME LOST THE MARRIAGE PLOT

And how Christians in the arts can bring it back.

BY W. DAVID O. TAYLOR



CHRISTIANITYTODAY.COM NOVEMBER 20



N HER BOOK I Do and I Don't: A History of Marriage in the Movies, film historian Jeanine Basinger describes a trend that has marked movies for the past 40 years: the lack of interest in married life. Incapable of imagining a dramatically interesting marriage, she explains:

Hollywood kept only the ritual, making movie after movie about weddings. Since no one felt the need for marriage—you could have sex, children, and cohabitation without it—films elevated the event and made it the main point: the Big Wedding in which you could have the decorations, the food, the booze, and the outfits without having to be bored by marriage problems.

According to a former editor of Marvel Comics, one reason why the graphic novel has nearly universally eschewed marriage is that it "kills a good story." Whatever could be exciting about Clark Kent if he were to remain married to Lois Lane? Not much, apparently, because DC Comics erased the 1996 marriage from history, returning Superman to bachelorhood, the preferred state of our superheroes.

Exceptions exist, of course. Amour, The Incredibles, and In America, along with many Tyler Perry films, focus on and celebrate marriage. Recent movies, such as Drinking Buddies, also trace the relation between friendship and romance, and even between friendship and marriage, explored, for example, throughout the Harry Potter franchise.

One marvelous exception is the critically acclaimed television series *Friday Night Lights (FNL)*, which aired from 2006 to 2011. It tells the story of ordinary people in a small Texas town and their impassioned love of football. But, as Basinger notes, *FNL* is not so much a show about football as it is "a show about

how marriage works when it actually does work." For critics and fans alike, there has arguably never been a more honest marriage portrayed on the screen than that of coach Eric and Tami Taylor.

Theirs, unfortunately, remains the exception. More common on the small and large screen is the sense that marriage, particularly traditional marriage, is boring as storytelling material. More usual is the view that, "as in the days of the judges," each one does with marriage what seems right in his or her eyes, whether in "open," "free," or "transgressive" style.

It is my contention that, while movies and television cannot be blamed exclusively for our society's rejection of theologically conservative ideas about marriage, they have certainly made it easier for our neighbors to imagine that such a marriage, especially its exclusive status, is impossible or undesirable. I also contend that we have not fully reckoned with the power of the artistic imagination.

And therein lies a task for us.

CATEGORY WORK

In a 2012 interview with NPR, communications professor Edward Schiappa discussed the results of his research on the effect of TV to decrease prejudice against gay persons. "These attitude changes are not huge," he said. "They don't change bigots into saints. But they can snowball."

Whether watching Will & Grace or Glee, more Americans, "from the safety of their armchair," can "learn a bit about gay people who they might not otherwise

While movies and television cannot be blamed exclusively for our society's rejection of theologically about marriage, made it easier for our neighbors to imagine that such a marriage is impossible or undesirable.

have learned from in real life," he said. It has been a vicarious, and rather effective, lesson for a fifth of Americans who, according to an Ipsos MediaCT survey, said that television has inspired them to embrace same-sex marriage.

Shows like Modern Family (which prominently features a gay couple) achieve what Schiappa calls "category work." The show takes a categorical stereotype (like the flamboyantly fickle gay man) and complicates it by showing other possibilities (in this case, the trustworthy gay man).

Modern Family performs an additional function: By presenting empathetic gay characters, it helps the viewer exchange an anxious feeling about gay people with a likeable feeling and, as the case may be, it enables the viewer to imagine him-or herself in friendship with a gay person. What was once fundamentally questionable, especially for many younger viewers, becomes in due time a new normal.

Star Trek performed a similar function for a previous generation. In 1966, it became the first primetime show to favorably depict an African American woman, Nichelle Nichols. Nichols almost didn't return after the first season of playing Lt. Nyota Uhura. As she explained years later, the turning point came at a fundraiser for Martin Luther King Jr., the self-proclaimed "biggest Trekkie on the planet."

King told her, "You are changing the

minds of people across the world, because for the first time, through you, we see ourselves and what can be." NASA astronaut Mae C. Jemison, the first black woman to travel into space, was one of those people inspired by Nichols. Jemison said simply: "Images show us possibilities."

What fictional narratives like Modern Family or the menagerie of Star Trek tales foster, then, is a sympathetic sense that "this is the way things could be and in fact should be." And like all good works of art, movies and television can summon the imagination not simply to conceive the improbable, for black people or gay people or others, but also to desire it as good.

IMAGINATION IN ACTION

In June 2013, the Supreme Court ruled against the constitutionality of the Defense of Marriage Act. One Christian commentator remarked that if Americans couldn't handle complex verbal arguments, then they ought to be given something easier, by which he meant an appeal to the artistic imagination.

This is a view common among Christians who regard the imagination as a distraction at worst, and a form of persuasion suited to the "unsophisticated" mind at best. Against this somewhat naive view, I suggest that the artistic imagination performs important work, in the following three ways.

1. By inviting us to imagine an alternative world, the artistic imagination brings us into vicarious experiences. This is a dynamic that Jesus himself uses while speaking with a certain lawyer (Luke 10). Instead of telling the young man "just the facts," Jesus tells him a story. The story, in turn, pulls the lawyer vicariously as well as affectively into a role he might never have imagined for himself: the "bad guy" instead of the "good guy." With Jesus, as with a movie like Brokeback Mountain or Milk, the unimaginable becomes imaginable because we have experienced it vicariously, "from the inside."

2. The artistic imagination enables us to live beyond the givens of the world. In the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus encourages his listeners to reimagine an ethnic given: the "no good neighbor" Samaritan. In a movie like The Kids Are All Right, director Lisa Cholodenko invites the viewer to reimagine a marital given: the supposed impossibility of a happy lesbian marriage. In this case, one given

conservative ideas they have certainly



Kyle Chandler and Connie Britton portrayed the Taylors on Friday Night Lights. Chandler won an Emmy for his role as the beloved husband, father, and football coach.



(the wrongness of such a marriage) is replaced by another given (the rightness of it), and a once incredible reality eventually becomes an assumed reality.

3. The artistic imagination shapes our desires. As Paul the apostle well knew, we come to desire what we repeatedly imagine. In this vein, the common slogan "Love = Love," emblazoned on T-shirts worn on college campuses across the country, encourages us to imagine love as the right to be "true to oneself" and to love whomever one wishes, regardless of sexual or marital preference. For many, to see this idea played out on the small or large screen is to begin feeling the desire to see it realized.

"Leading the conversation. Shaping the media narrative. Changing the culture." The phrase might sound like the slogan of a zealously conservative group, but it is actually the stated mission of GLAAD (the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation). And it reminds us that we are all in the same business: word-smithing, story-telling, culture-shaping, ultimately heart-forming. GLBT Americans have long understood that in order to effect permanent change in this country, they must capture our imaginations. They understand the power of a story well told, and they understand that it costs something.

If it's true that the average American spends close to 200 hours every month in front of a screen, then gay Americans, like secular Jews or agnostics or liberal Christians—but often unlike conservative Christians—are right that society's perception of romance and marriage will be uncommonly shaped by the stories we tell on television and film. This is another way of stating—as have Peter Wehner, senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, and "crunchy con" journalist Rod Dreher—that politics routinely exists downstream of popular culture.

To nuance my original contention, it is not that all conservative Christians have failed to take the artistic imagination seriously. Many have, and in very thoughtful ways. It is that too many conservatives have not taken the artistic imagination seriously enough—enough to invest in the sort of institutions, cultures of patronage, communities of artists, and rigorous habits of art-making that over decades would yield a winsome Christian presence within the industries of art and entertainment.

Christians have made so little artistic culture in the "public square," in fact, that

our witness to the graces of traditional marriage is feeble, capturing the attention of few.

Thankfully, this is not the full story.

IN WORD AND DEED

While writing this article, I corresponded with several Christians who have written for a range of TV shows, from That '70s Show to Buffy the Vampire Slayer. They told me that, while there are more Christians in the studio system today than even ten years ago, their numbers are miniscule and their power to make a difference is relatively little. As one writer said, "The real issue is not the writers but the gatekeepers (the networks and studios), and what they want or will allow on the airwaves." Though we needn't subscribe to a conspiracy theory, as a lecturer at the University of Southern California's Peter Stark Producing Program mentioned, Hollywood nonetheless feels little motivation to explore traditional marriage, especially when story lines about single people seem far more dramatically exciting.

Another writer stressed that "it is difficult to write about that which you do not know: a good marriage." When 60 percent of industry marriages result in divorce, there is little incentive to write about a reality that seems too good to be true, or even necessary. Even if a writer wanted to change the plot, he or she likely could only provide a minor "salting" presence in a process that involves hundreds of people to produce a single television episode, and many more for a feature film.

A writer for *The Americans*, which *The New Yorker* dubbed "a show about marriage dressed up as a spy drama" (and which my wife and I place on par with *FNL*, alongside NBC's *Parenthood*), pointed out that of the 500 story pitches that a network hears each season, only 5 are turned into a new series. That is a 1 percent chance of success for stories that may have included a nuanced picture of traditional marriage.

In light of this, is there anything for Christians to do? Yes, in fact.

For starters, as valuable as parallel efforts such as Big Idea Productions or Sherwood Pictures may be, I would encourage us not to abandon the center of Hollywood (or Bollywood, for that matter). We should offer wholehearted support to the writers, producers, and

executives who labor within the industry, whether in Los Angeles or in our own cities, performing their small but brave labors on behalf of God's kingdom, even if they add only a pinch of light for the common good.

Beyond this, pray for artists. Befriend an artist yourself. Patronize them with financial and practical helps. Encourage them to put in the 10,000 hours and the discipline required to make good work, to tell the kind of nuanced, textured, winsome, even humorous stories that evoke a desire in an audience to be truly, fully human. Help them to discern the shape of their calling. Help them connect to a good community.

If Christians are to reshape the public square of art and entertainment, it will not be due to a single person. It will be due to the body of Christ everywhere, releasing artists in all stations of life to remain faithful to their vocation. It will take more than a handful of TV shows or movies; it will require hundreds of them. It will require a decades-long endeavor, not a



Beyond artistic activities, I encourage the church to keep offering a brave, clearheaded articulation of sexuality and marriage. Good teaching and preaching are essential.

fewenthusiastic years here and there. And it will call for a humble relinquishment of all our efforts and desires to the good, often inscrutable, will of God.

Beyond these artistic activities, I would encourage the church to keep offering a brave, clearheaded articulation of sexuality and marriage. Good teaching and preaching are essential. It is also important that we not pit relational efforts against political ones. Both have their place, even if the integrity of our lives may speak most convincingly.

For those of us who are married, we need to give ourselves permission to live transparently before our neighbors, letting them witness our marriage's imperfections and tensions, as well as the moments of grace when God rescues us from our worst selves. We ought also to support those whose marriages are breaking or broken.

As always, we should seek every opportunity to lay down our lives to serve our neighbors, gay or straight or otherwise, offering them the hospitality of Christ in witness to the fatherly love of God. Nothing good will come of holding onto stereotypes. Our neighbors are not our

enemies. They are men and women made in the image of God and beloved by him. To them we owe the same kind of humble love that Christ has shown us.

In the end, faithful artistry together with faithful living may well enable our neighbors to imagine life not "just as it is" but as the triune God would have it.

THE GOOD MARRIAGE

Critics often ask what made FNL's marriage work, dramatically speaking. For New York Times critic A. O. Scott, the answer is that Eric and Tami's marriage was neither complacent nor predictable, and it included the "messy delights and petty frustrations" that make lifelong fidelity interesting. Basinger adds: "There was no 'strategy' for their marital story: no clever plot twists, no dream episodes, no other woman or man, no cheap theatrics or misunderstandings."

Marked by great writing, an honest friendship, and a permission to take its time, *FNL* exhibited what Basinger calls an emotional truth, which viewers week after week could recognize, absorb, and be nourished by. In my case, it frequently

made me want to be a better husband.

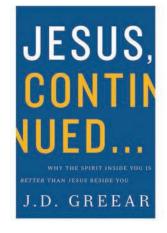
I contend that Friday Night Lights is exactly the kind of story that we need played out on the small and big screen—a story that helps us not only to imagine a flourishing marriage but also to desire one. We need such stories to help us feel again that it is actually possible to have this kind of marriage, despite the relational fragmentation and ideological mayhem that daily surrounds us.

If a Christian community were willing to invest in those who are called to produce such television and movies, then I believe we might be looking not at the failure of the Christian imagination in the public square, but at the gift of a vision of marital love, in all its complexities and pleasures. God willing, viewers may yearn for much more of where that came from.

W. DAVID O. TAYLOR is assistant professor of theology and culture at Fuller Theological Seminary and the director of Brehm Texas, an initiative in worship, theology, and the arts.

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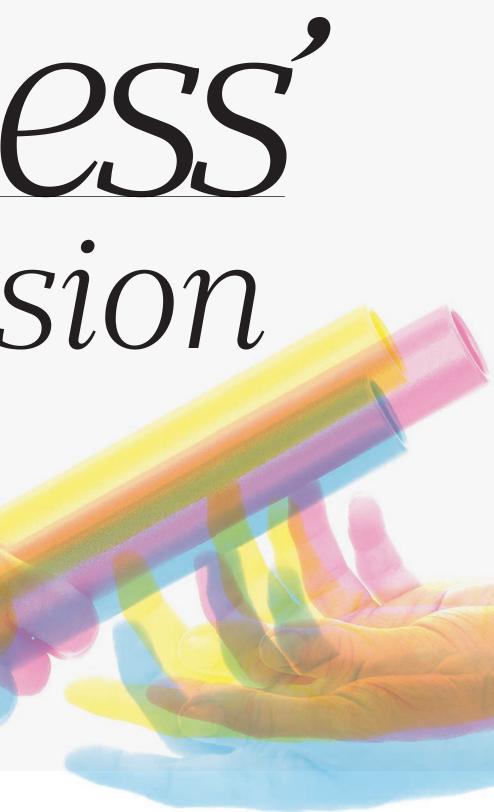


CHURCH LIFE

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PROMINENT
PASTORS
GO PUBLIC WITH
HOW TO WISELY
PASS THE
LEADERSHIP
BATON.



VERY PASTOR is an interim pastor.

That statement may

sound harsh or abrupt, but it's becoming a catchphrase. Saddleback's Rick Warren commented about the quote on Instagram, noting that it's something his dad—also a pastor—said repeatedly. As William Vanderbloemen and I explain in Next: Pastoral Succession That Works (Baker Books), a day will come for every church leader when a successor takes his place.

And based on our research, the smartest churches address succession head-on. A church that doesn't handle it well faces significant losses, sometimes to the point of no return. Crystal Cathedral is now bankrupt due in part to succession issues. The same is true of many once-prominent churches, like Earl Paul's Chapel Hill Harvester Church, that are now gone. An outstanding long-term pastorate offers no guarantee that a church will survive, let alone thrive.

In 1968, 12 years after Jerry Falwell founded Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia, the church was drawing more than 2,000 weekly worshipers, putting it on early "top 10" lists from Elmer Towns and John Vaughan.

Then in 2007, at 73, Falwell died suddenly from cardiac arrest. When I interviewed his son Jonathan, I noted that if anyone was high risk, it was his dad—who flew private planes, received death threats for his politics, and had serious health issues. Jonathan technically had been named co-pastor two years earlier, when Falwell underwent two hospitalizations in one month with potential open-heart surgery to follow. But the two never discussed in detail Thomas Road's future after its founder was gone. "Twish we had talked about it," said Jonathan. "He wanted to die with his boots on—and he did."

The "no plan" plan of succession has been the most common pattern over the years, says Linda Stanley, vice president and team leader for Leadership Network. "The large-church pastors in our leadership communities, ages 45 to 65, may talk about succession. But few if any have actually detailed a plan," she says.

A number of high-profile pastors are bucking the trend by creating plans and making them public. At the 2012 Global Leadership Summit, Willow Creek Community Church founding pastor Bill Hybels, then 60, devoted a session to his journey

'There is no one pattern or approach for making a successful transition. We need to be guided by supracultural principles that emerge from biblical models and directives.' GENE GETZ

of beginning one. Warren, 60, has likewise gone on record with the outline of his own plan. This fall, at a gathering of senior pastors whose churches draw 5,000-plus in attendance, "a big topic of conversation was *Next*," said Tim Harlow from Parkview Christian Church in Orland Park, Illinois. "It blows my mind to be thinking in these ways. I'm only 53."

Since the 1970s, the number of large churches in North America has steadily grown, as has the average size of a "large" church. Thirty years ago, when Leadership Network convened its first peer group of pastors with 1,000-plus attendees, fewer than 100 existed. Today there are some 1,650 megachurches (attendances of at least 2,000), plus roughly 3,000 churches in the 1,000–1,999 range, according to a joint study by Leadership Network and the Hartford Institute for Religion Research.

Four Models

Our research found that among the 100 largest Protestant U.S. churches, the average senior pastor is age 55 and has led the church for 21 years. And 44 percent of the pastors founded the church. According to Scott Thumma and Dave Travis (in *Beyond Megachurch Myths*), 82 percent of today's megachurches grew to their large size under the current pastor. These numbers raise the question: Will these churches be able to keep growing once the lead pastor is gone?

Here are four of the most common emerging models of leadership succession:

Family Plan. The pastoral reins are passed to a relative or long-standing spiritual son or daughter. Danny de Leon plans to do both. He became senior pastor of Templo Calvario in Santa Ana, California, in 1976, growing the church by thousands.

Three years ago, de Leon, then 70, and the church board outlined a plan. "Our church has always developed its own leaders," he says, "so why not develop [them]

all the way to senior pastor?" The plan is to have two lead pastors. One—de Leon's son Danny Jr.—will head English-language services. Marcos Roman, who met Christ 17 years ago at the church, will lead Spanish services. A younger brother, Lee, will continue as executive pastor and run Templo Calvario's community development group.

The timing is set for 2016, when de Leon will mark 40 years of pastoring and 50 years of marriage. "I will take the first month off, telling them, 'Don't call me for anything.' In my retirement, I will continue in an emeritus capacity, meeting with the staff and board but otherwise not going to the office."

His successors are already preaching more (de Leon preaches half the time) and building teams of people in their 20s and 30s. The test is whether de Leon can truly let go at appropriate levels. We met several long-term pastors, some who stay around and thrive, others who languish.

Sometimes the family plan involves a husband-wife handoff. At NYC's Greater Allen African Methodist Episcopal Cathedral, Floyd and Elaine Flake have co-pastored thousands since 1976.

Their denomination has a retirement mandate at age 75. Floyd is 69, Elaine is 65. The current plan is for Elaine to succeed him. "This is not common in AME churches, but the people have already made it plain who they want as pastor, and the bishop supports that change," says Floyd. "Elaine is in the pulpit every Sunday, and she's been preaching here for 14 years."

Floyd plans to have the mortgage paid off and leave the church debt-free. "We are working to ensure that in future handoffs ... our successors can set goals based on cheering the heritage they inherit," he says.

In some cases, family successions work well, such as for Bethany Church in Baker, Louisiana, now in its third generation of Stockstill leadership. For others, family successions prove not to have been the best path.

Denominational Plan. The larger the church, the more likely it is to chart its own course. If it has a bishop or district superintendent, he or she often consults with the church to appoint the next pastor.

Lutheran Church of Hope in West Des Moines, Iowa, draws 10,000 weekly, the largest attendance of any Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) church. Mike Housholder, who founded it in 1994, is 50. "I feel God's called me to stick around for a while," he says. But still they've begun addressing succession. "We've discussed this issue on our board of directors and at senior staff meetings on several occasions."

As an ELCA church, Housholder says, "When the time comes we'll partner with our regional synod office. Ideally we'd have an intentional overlap, appointing the future senior pastor to work with me for a season before the transition is made."

Adam Hamilton is founding pastor of Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas, one of the largest United Methodist congregations, drawing over 8,000 each weekend. It has two succession plans, one for emergency (death, disability, moral failure), the other "around my retirement," says Hamilton, 50. "The succession plan is 15 years [away], but we are implementing elements now, including having a regular preaching pastor in my absence." Hamilton will also preach one fewer weekend a year each year over the next 15. "Generally UMC bishops are grateful to have larger churches help identify leaders and increasingly have these persons on staff before retirement.

"Iinitiated conversation when I was 45, at what was likely the halfway point in my ministry here," says Hamilton. "We've had informal conversations about this before, particularly when we built our current sanctuary and lenders insisted on keyman insurance as a condition of the loan."

At many large churches, the leadership doesn't publicize details but lets congregants know a plan is in place. This becomes important during capital campaigns, when people want to know what will happen should their pastor get hit by the proverbial bus or retire early.

In reality, the church often leads the denomination by example. Mike Slaughter, 63, arrived at Ginghamsburg Church in Tipp City, Ohio, when it had fewer than 100 attendees. Now there are over 4,000, and the church includes 501(c)(3) organizations, a counseling center, low-income housing, and multiple campuses. "This complexity almost requires leaders to be raised from within," says Slaughter.

"I consider us R&D for the UMC as they work with other large churches," he says. "We want to serve as a test case." By working with Leadership Network CEO Dave Travis, Slaughter has transitioned senior staff to a younger team, most in their 30s, including a 31-year-old teaching pastor. "My focus is to mentor and train our senior team and to pastor our staff," he says.

Slaughter plans to retire July 1, 2019. "Our board and all staff know the timeline, and this fall we told our lay leaders—and now we're telling anyone who reads this!"

Process-Only Plan. A common approach is for the outgoing pastor to help create and set in motion a succession plan—and then get out. This was the case for Leith Anderson, who retired in 2011 after 35 years of pastoring Wooddale Church in Eden Prairie, Minnesota. "Wooddale and I developed a written protocol about 10 years before the transition," says Anderson. "It specified how to manage the situation if the senior pastor dies, is disabled, becomes heterodox, fails morally, resigns, retires, etc. Doing this takes the pressure and emotion out of the process."

When Anderson formally announced his retirement, the protocol kicked in and was carefully followed. A new pastor was called 16 months after Anderson left.

Intentional Overlap Plan. Our research for *Next* found that more large-church pastors than not intentionally overlapped with their predecessor. It seems to be the strongest model for succession—when the church culture matches it.

The overlap typically runs for months but occasionally for years. A prominent example is Oak Hills Church in San Antonio, where best-selling author Max Lucado, after 20 years as senior pastor, needed to move from full-time to half-time due to a heart condition. The church board called Randy Frazee as new senior minister. In place since 2008, the overlap continues, with good results. They've even

weathered awkward moments such as when Frazee noticed tour buses pulling up to the church, and found out people were coming to hear Lucado. Frazee said he was preaching that day. "I guess it stinks to be you," the tour guide responded.

Some churches have a co-pastor situation, but that rarely leads to permanent co-pastor arrangements. Since 1980, Larry Osborne has been senior pastor of North Coast Church in Vista, California. Chris Brown, 18 years younger, became co-pastor in 2004, and preaches just as much as Osborne. In business terms, North Coast has always had a shared leadership model that functions more like a partnership in a CPA firm than a sole proprietorship with valued employees. Should Osborne die or step away, Brown would likely take on the managing partner role that Osborne held until Brown was elevated.

"I don't believe in a transition plan longer than 18 months," says Osborne. It goes by . . . too slowly for the one waiting in the wings. It's hard to find a 'big L' leader willing to wait 3 to 5 years. With a partnership model, 18 months is plenty."

No One Model

Research in Elephant in the Boardroom affirms that no model is the best or even most likely to result in a seamless pastoral succession. One of the most-watched handoffs was that of Gene Getz, founding pastor of the formerly named Fellowship Bible Church in Dallas. At 72, he passed his leadership baton to a former intern. "There is no one pattern or approach for making a successful transition," Getz wrote recently in DTS [Dallas Theological Seminary] Connection. "We need to be guided by supracultural principles that emerge from biblical models and directives. We also need to learn from history in order to avoid making mistakes that have led to outright succession failure."

Our research affirms the same conclusion: From the Moses-Joshua handoff to Jesus' training of the Twelve, succession planning is both biblical and essential, but there is no cookie-cutter template.

The only thing that's certain? It's an inevitable need in every church. And we hope to move it from taboo to normal.

WARREN BIRD, PhD, an ordained C&MA minister, is research director for Leadership Network and author or coauthor of 27 books, including *Next* (Baker Books).

5 REASONS WHY SUCCESSIONS FAIL

Pastors Don't Let Go.

Many pastors resign but then stay—or let their spouse, children, or other relatives stay. They micromanage, typically allowing their shadow to remain longer than they realize.

2 Pastors Wait Too Long.

Many long-standing pastors stay well beyond the church's glory days, watching the church's vital signs ebb year after year, yet hold on, thinking next year will see a turnaround. The successor inherits many challenges and disadvantages.

3 Multiple Candidates Fight It Out.

Power struggles, often highlighted by media coverage, cause members to quickly become disheartened and leave. The "winner" has little remaining to work with.

Change Comes Too Quickly.

The incoming pastor is given a mandate for change (perhaps "help us become outward focused"), but moves far faster than the culture of the church is able to shift. Broken trust along the way thwarts future success.

5 Pastors Hit Hidden Landmines.

Many successors have uncovered a moral issue, huge debt, badly conflicted boards, or other toxic issues that explode upon their arrival.

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WHY TRADITION

IS VITAL FOR

UNDERSTANDING

SCRIPTURE.

BY GERALD R. McDERMOTT

ou are a new Christian. You want to learn all you can about the Bible, for you know it is the Word of God, and somewhere you heard that you can know God only to the extent that you know his Word. You know a woman down the street who has walked with God for more than 60 years and has studied Scripture all that time. She has read commentaries, enjoyed attending churches within different denominations, and discussed the deep things of God with other mature believers and pastors.

You consider reading Scripture with her, to glean her wisdom. But you choose to read the Bible for yourself by yourself. You don't visit the woman because you don't want her beliefs to influence your own reading. And you want to listen to the Holy Spirit yourself, so you can get to the purity of God's message untainted by outside influence.

Some Christians, and not just new believers among them, take this "me and God" approach to reading Scripture. They have learned from Matthew 15 not to be like the Pharisees, whom Jesus said exalted human tradition over God's Word. They also try to heed Paul's warning not to succumb to "philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition" (Col. 2:8, ESV used throughout). They have concluded, therefore, that Scripture teaches that church tradition—and all the perspectives and human-derived interpretations that it carries with it—should not color our reading of God's Word.

Is that what the Bible itself teaches?





Tradition offers a check on our interpretations: If we come to conclusions that are at odds with the received consensus, we had better think twice.

Paul commended the Corinthians for "maintain[ing] the traditions even as I delivered them to you" (1 Cor. 11:2). He urged the Thessalonians to "stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter" (2 Thess. 2:15). He told Timothy to pass on the tradition the young leader learned from him, and to teach others to do the same (2 Tim. 2:2). And when Paul quoted Jesus' saying, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35), he was affirming an oral tradition never recorded in the Gospels.

When Jesus criticized the Pharisees, he wasn't condemning all traditions, not even all the Pharisees' traditions. Rather, he was denouncing the traditions that made God's Word void (Mark 7:13). For instance, Jesus' condemnation in Matthew 15 was directed against Pharisees who were pretending to dedicate their goods to the temple so they wouldn't have to support their aging parents, thus dodging the commandment to "Honor your father and your mother" (Ex. 20:12).

Yet Jesus also said, in a statement missed by many Christians, that people should learn from the Pharisees' oral traditions: "practice and observe whatever they tell you" (Matt. 23:3). The early church recognized it needed tradition when it faced the heresy of Gnosticism. Gnostic teachers claimed that both the God of the Old Testament and physical matter are evil, and that salvation comes through knowledge, not through the life and death of Jesus Christ. Their picture of God and salvation radically opposed the apostles' preaching. The early theologian Irenaeus countered that the apostles passed down not only certain writings but also a way of reading those texts. And only by following that way of interpreting biblical texts could one hold to orthodoxy.

In its later battles to understand the Godhead, the early church finally established a Trinitarian tradition: God is one divine being in three persons. The word Trinity and the now-classic phrase "three persons in one God" are not in the Bible. But nearly all Christians, evangelicals included, believe the Holy Spirit guided the early church through those debates to reach this consensus. Leaders in the debate reminded their hearers that Jesus promised there were some things that the apostles were not able to bear at the time, but that would be revealed later, as the Spirit guided them and their successors "into all the truth" (John 16:12-13). This understanding of the Godhead used nonbiblical words to express biblical concepts, and has guided all Christians ever since.

But what about the Protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura*? Didn't Martin Luther, who taught this doctrine most famously, say that Scripture alone is our authority, that human traditions should never supplant the Bible?

Actually, Luther taught that Christians needed the right tradition in order to interpret the Bible. He criticized late medieval theological traditions (this we have heard) by appealing to earlier traditions: Augustine, the creeds, and the great church councils (this we have not heard). Augustine helped Luther see the priority of grace in justification—contra the priority of works. And the creeds and great councils, he wrote, were reliable guides to grasping Scripture. In his treatise "On the Councils and the Church," Luther criticized the church councils that had distorted the teachings of the "universal or principal councils"-Nicaea I, Constantinople I, Ephesus I, and Chalcedon. Luther added that several other councils were "equally good." He accepted the three ecumenical creeds (the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed) and used them to counter anti-Trinitarians. He praised the Apostles' Creed as "the finest of all, a brief and true summary of the articles of faith," and the Athanasian Creed as "a creed that protects" the Apostles' Creed.

For Luther, then, sola scriptura means Scripture is our principal authority, yet we need the help of the creeds, councils, and theologians to interpret it properly. Otherwise, we will use the Bible to distort the gospel, as the late medieval church had done.

John Calvin, who also taught sola scriptura, drew liberally from early Fathers—such as Irenaeus, Cyprian, Chrysostom, and Augustine—to reinforce his teaching of biblical themes. Many of Calvin's opponents, like anti-Trinitarian Michael Servetus, also used the Bible to make their case. But Calvin used these Fathers to show his readers that Servetus was misinter-preting Scripture.

For both Luther and Calvin, the Great Tradition played what Alister McGrath calls a "ministerial, not magisterial" role, "serving, not directing, the church." We might say it offers a check on our biblical interpretations: If we come to conclusions that are at odds with the received consensus, we had better think twice.

till, many evangelicals insist they read the Bible uninfluenced by tradition. They have not noticed what McGrath calls "the evangelical tendency to cite the interpretations of earlier evangelical writers in weighing up how a given biblical passage is to be interpreted." Nor have they noticed how their views on various issues-women in ministry, gender roles, Communion and baptism, the end times—are shaped by the Christian communities to which they belong. In each case, evangelicals of assorted backgrounds use similar biblical texts but are led to different interpretations.

Not that that is a bad thing. The body of Christ is a community, and each part of the body is a community of interpretation where beliefs are passed down through texts but also through persons with authority. Lutheran and Reformed evangelicals have confessions that help them interpret

the Bible. Similarly, Pentecostal, Baptist, and Bible churches have statements of faith that govern their beliefs and practices.

In the past two centuries, mainline Protestants tried to free themselves from past traditions in order to get back to Jesus' gospel, before it was supposedly corrupted by umpteen layers of church tradition. They waved the flag of sola scriptura, imagining they stood above and outside tradition. They didn't realize they were interpreting the Gospels through the lens of their own Enlightenment traditions. It was no surprise, then, that their quests for the historical Jesus painted pictures of Jesus that looked like themselves.

The real question is not whether tradition influences our interpretation of the Bible, but which tradition does so. And the best way to judge that tradition is to regularly compare it to the Great Tradition—another name for the great "cloud of witnesses" (Heb. 12:1) down through the centuries. It's what C. S. Lewis called "mere Christianity," the consensus on belief and behavior that the historic church has agreed on for the past 2,000 years.

Of course, there is much that the writers in the Tradition disagree on, such as the number and meaning of the sacraments and the location of church authority. Nevertheless, there is unity of vision on much else among the Fathers (such as Irenaeus, Athanasius, Chrysostom, Augustine, Maximus the Confessor), medieval theologians like Anselm and Aquinas, the Reformers, and Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, John Henry Newman, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI, to name a few.

No doubt, evangelicals look more frequently to the Reformers, Edwards, and Wesley. But when these thinkers provide little help on certain topics—liturgy or social action, say—we needn't be so allergic to Rome that we neglect its reflection on these matters, or to Eastern Orthodoxy's understanding of what it means to be "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4).

The creeds are also part of the Great Tradition. As we have seen, Luther, Calvin, and their successors prized the creeds as valuable summaries of orthodox faith. Theologian Donald MacKinnon observed that the great orthodox creeds protect us against the ingenuity of those who consider themselves intellectually superior and free to change historic orthodoxy. And evangelical scholar Scot McKnight explains that the creeds are found in the New Testament (see 1 Cor. 15:1–8, 22–31) and that

the later creeds, such as the Nicene Creed, were instances of "gospeling"—telling the story of Jesus by emphasizing what was most significant.

Yet the Great Tradition is not just a source for understanding biblical doctrine and morality-though we need its reflection now more than ever in understanding topics like sex and marriage. It's also a great source for learning how to worship God (the historic liturgies are deeply biblical and aesthetic), what it means to be a disciple (classics such as Thomas à Kempis's The Imitation of Christ, John of the Cross's Dark Night of the Soul, Teresa of Avila's Interior Castle, Bonhoeffer's The Cost of Discipleship, and Mother Teresa's Total Surrender), and how to see God's beauty in the world and the life of the church (Edwards and Orthodox icons are premier sources here). We evangelicals have our own saints-think of Billy Graham, Lottie Moon, and Jim Elliot-but the Great Tradition has countless saints whose feast days and biographies show us in living color what it means to live the faith.

hurch historian Jaroslav Pelikan famously distinguished *Tradition*, "the living faith of the dead," from *traditionalism*, "the dead faith of the living." How are we to prevent Tradition from degenerating into traditionalism? And more important, how can we discern the difference between traditions and Tradition?

There are times, such as the late Medieval Ages, when traditions seem to distort the gospel and therefore require purification. The best way to "test the spirits" (1 John 4:1) is to do so in the way Luther and Calvin did, with the help of the Great Tradition. They appealed to the "rule of faith" expressed by the creeds and the first ecumenical councils. They didn't hold up every statement at each council but the enduring ones that have been accepted by the church throughout history. At Constantinople (A.D. 381), for example, what endured was not its proclamation of the Eastern patriarch's authority over the church but its declaration of the Holy Spirit's divinity. And what has passed down from Chalcedon (451) is not its rule that women cannot be ordained as deaconesses until age 40, but that Jesus is both fully God and fully man.

Consulting the Great Tradition doesn't

mean the exact language and formulations of every creed and dogma must stay the same. Protestants have invoked semper reformanda ("always being reformed"), recognizing the church's need to be open to the Spirit. But there is a difference between teasing out, for further development, the inner logic of the creeds and dogmas of historic orthodoxy, on the one hand, and throwing out what is opposed to today's culture, on the other. For example, we might object to culture-bound ways of explaining penal substitution on the Cross, recognizing there are multiple atonement motifs in Scripture. But we should never omit what is both central to biblical teaching and offensive to today's zeitgeist-that through the bloody sacrifice of Christ, God satisfied his holy wrath toward sin.

We need the Great Tradition today more than ever. The biggest questions facing evangelical churches are the same ones mainline Protestants faced in the last few decades: Are all saved? What is marriage? Is Christ really the only way to God? For each of these questions, liberal Protestants generally disregarded the Great Tradition.

The temptation for many evangelicals, on the other hand, is to interpret the Bible as they see fit, without listening to anyone in the Great Tradition. Some think Luther's concept of the priesthood of all believers means we can interpret the Bible for ourselves by ourselves, that the most important thing is a personal relationship with Jesus, not doctrine or moral codes. Truth be told, most lone ranger evangelicals actually care about doctrine and morality, but they want to decide for themselves what they mean. They reject the notion that the church is a living communion of saints, with authority over each believer. In this "New Age" Protestantism-where it doesn't matter what you believe or do as long as you have contact with a certain spiritual atmosphere-culture will trump the gospel, and we evangelicals will trace the footsteps of liberal Protestantism, Unless we take seriously the Great Tradition.

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Line Survivor

NANCY WRITEBOL, WHO CONTRACTED DEADLY EBOLA, ON WHAT IT WILL TAKE TO BATTLE THE EPIDEMIC.

> Since the Ebola outbreak began this spring, nearly 10,000 instances of the virus have been recorded—and that number could grow to 1.4 million, says the Centers for Disease Control. (The World Health Organization offers a much more conservative estimate of 151,000.) The threat barely registered on Americans' radar until SIM nurse Nancy Writebol and Samaritan's Purse doctor Kent Brantly were both diagnosed in July.

> Writebol, who has previous experience working in Ecuador and Zambia, moved to Liberia with her husband, David, in 2013. Nearly a month into treating infected patients, Writebol learned she herself had contracted Ebola. After she and Brantly failed to improve in West Africa, they were flown back to the United States, where they both were treated with the experimental and controversial ZMapp antibodies. Both recovered fully.

> Writebol and David, currently based in North Carolina, spoke with ct editorial resident Morgan Lee about treating Ebola, where God went during her illness, and her thoughts about those who protested her return to the States.

What is a Liberian hospital like during an epidemic?

In many of the hospitals, there was no protective gear, and nurses were working

WENDY YANG PHOTOGRAPH

I DON'T KNOW THAT I EVER ASKED, "WHY, GOD?" THE QUESTION I ASKED WAS "HOW? HOW DID I CONTRACT EBOLA?" WE WERE TAKING ALL THE PRECAUTIONS.

without gloves and masks. We [SIM] had the advantage of being partnered with Samaritan's Purse, which had flown in everything we needed to protect our healthcare workers. But still there was fear of being in an isolation unit and working with people. It took time before nurses could see that, yes, they could be protected and go in and come back out and be disinfected.

How did culture affect how you provided health care?

It was hard on families, if they had a patient or family members who were dying of Ebola, to not be able to touch the bodies if they did pass away. In African culture, customarily, after death they do a body washing, so there's a lot of touching. Once a person dies, that's when the viral load is at its peak.

David: There's also a good deal of stigma from the community. People would not take their family members to an isolation unit because they knew it would be regarded as a death sentence. Instead, they would try to keep them hidden at home.

Media have chronicled West Africans who believe so strongly in the healing power of faith that when treating or interacting with diseased friends and family, they have not followed Western medical practices. Did you find that to be true?

David: We saw that. There were people advertising that if you drank this water or got a treatment from a local traditional healer, it would stop Ebola. It was difficult to convince members of the community, to help them understand that these other

things are a detriment rather than a help. It's really a question of confidence and trust.

How has the Liberian church reacted to Ebola?

Many churches are trying to help with Ebola education. For instance, in churches like the one we attended, Sunday morning is like any U.S. church, whereyou shake hands and greet people. But in the beginning stages of Ebola, right away pastors were saying, "We're not going to shake hands." They were greeting in different ways.

Why did local pastors follow the advice of the medical community?

They had trust and years of history with SIM'S Eternal Love Winning Africa (ELWA) Hospital being there. That's not to say we didn't have some who were not totally on board. But there was a relationship built between pastors working with our hospital and the church and our leadership.

When you're trying to educate people, a lot of times it comes down to the relationship you have with leadership.

You mentioned a general distrust of Westerners. What does that stem from?

David: It probably has to do with the recent history of Liberia, in terms of the 15 years of civil war that ended in 2003. There was a general distrust of anybody and everybody. Money was coming in—and money is always a temptation—and Western support and finances would come into the country that never really reached the lower levels.

How did you wrestle spiritually with the fact that you contracted Ebola and lived while many of your colleagues did not?

It is a wrestle. First of all, we don't know the mind of God and why the Lord allowed me to survive and some of my African brothers and sisters not to survive. I just have to say that God is so great, and that we don't know his mind and we don't want to put him in a box: "This is how God should work or shouldn't work."

God has allowed us to survive, and there are many African brothers and sisters who are surviving Ebola. We give God glory for those who are surviving. But it's like cancer or any disease: some survive and some don't. I trust the Lord in what he's doing and how he's working. He's brought awareness to the Ebola crisis, which has helped in getting a vaccine and a serum that can maybe help, and in raising awareness for the rest of the African countries that are suffering.

Did you ever ask God why you got sick?

Idon't know that I ever asked "Why, God?" or "Why?" I know that I received peace from the Lord. It doesn't mean that there weren't dark times. All of us in Liberia felt that the week that Dr. Brantly and I were really struggling, there was a spiritual battle going on—there were some very, very dark days. But also in the darkness, the Lord brought back into my mind his Word and his peace.

The question I asked was, "How? How did I contract Ebola?" There's no answer for that. We were taking all the precautions. That opens up a whole other set



While Nancy fought for her life, David faced three weeks of quarantine to ensure he was not infected.

of medical questions: How long is Ebola living? Where did we pick it up?

To what extent had you already been thinking through these theological issues simply because you had been treating Ebola for several weeks?

I always felt safe going. I trusted the Lord that we were the hands and feet of Christ. I had experienced Christ's peace way before I ever contracted Ebola. [After I got sick,] my relationship with the Lord deepened, knowing he was in control. He was in control of what was happening, and it was not a surprise to God. He has our days numbered.

There's been a robust discussion in the States about the ethics of administering ZMapp to Western medical professionals, even though the virus had already begun to spread several months ago. What did you make of the debate?

We were told about the ZMapp. We knew it had been an experimental drug and that

it had never been tested on humans. We knew there was a question about whether it would be effective in us and our African brothers and sisters. There was also a question of what the ramifications would be if it was given to our African brothers and sisters. What if neither Kent nor myself survived? Those types of questions are not easily answered.

We did know there was a possibility that it could have an adverse effect on us when we took it—we knew that—yet we also knew we weren't getting any better. Yes, afterward we knew there were many ethical questions: "Why did we receive it and not our African brothers and sisters?" That's a hard question for anyone to answer.

Do Samaritan's Purse and SIM provide the majority of healthcare infrastructure in Liberia?

Samaritan's Purse and SIM were the only ones providing services to Ebola patients in Foya and Monrovia from early June until early August. They have handed

over the Ebola treatment centers to the Liberian Ministry of Health and Doctors Without Borders. Other entities and hospitals depend upon the availability of staff willing to work.

Is it harder to fight Ebola when many of the medical professionals are not Liberian?

Our hospital had five Western doctors, but seven or eight Liberian doctors were serving alongside them. There is a real trust of ELWA, but just look at what happened in Guinea recently with the attack on healthcare workers. In different areas in Monrovia and different parts of the country, there's a lack of trust in some expatriate healthcare workers.

How did you react when you heard about Americans protesting bringing you and Brantly back to the States?

Even here there is lack of knowledge about the virus. If you have somebody in isolation, and they're in a plane that has an isolation pod and brought in by people who are in

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I HAVE A VERY RESPECTFUL FEAR OF THE EBOLA VIRUS, WE NEED **TO TAKE SERIOUS**

PPES [Personal Protective Equipment]. there's very little chance of someone contracting Ebola. Every precaution was taken. Iliked what [Emory Hospital] doctor Bruce Ridner said: "They're one of our own."

PRECAUTIONS.

Did you feel angry or frustrated toward those who protested?

No, I just thought, It's people who don't understand the situation. It's an education issue even on our side of things. I've had Americans put their hands up and say, "Don't come any closer," even after the Centers for Disease Control announced we were Ebola-free.

Do you see yourself going back?

It won't be in 2014. Possibly 2015. I would like to see the people we worked alongside and be able to encourage them. [But] we don't know how this epidemic is going to go. I have a very respectful fear of the Ebola virus. We need to take serious precautions.

What did you learn in Liberia that might change how people react to the crisis?

Liberia is where God called us. We truly care about our West African brothers and sisters and what they are experiencing. We went to a Liberian church and had fellowship with them. Being part of the body of Christ was a blessing for us. We were at the ELWA compound, where the hospital was as well as the radio station and school. There was a church there-not the church that we attended, we attended one of the Liberian churches in the community and so were able to get to know people within the community better too.

It's a spiritual issue. We're living in a spiritual battle for people's lives and for people to come to know Christ as their Savior.

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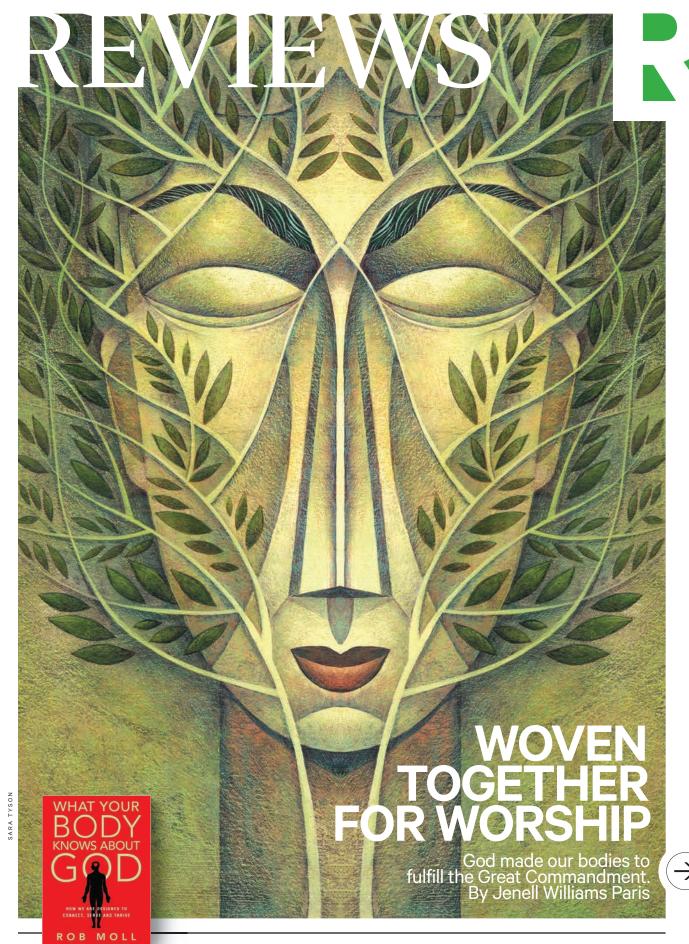
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fPsalm 139 were published as a contemporary book, it might look a lot like Rob Moll's What Your Body Knows About God: How We Are Designed to Connect, Serve, and Thrive (InterVarsity Press) ***. Channeling the psalmist's wonder at having been "woven together in the depths of the earth," Moll, a CT editor at large, wonders at the marvel of humanity: its dynamic blend of body, mind, soul, and spirit. Christians don't worship God, serve their neighbors, and connect with other people merely because of external rules; such impulses are inscribed in our DNA.

"Spirit and flesh, it turns out, are intimately intertwined," writes Moll. "And understanding how things work—how our bodies are designed to commune with God—can enhance our faith and give us a fuller picture of God's work in the world and in our lives."

It's not easy to live as embodied creatures today (to say nothing of previous eras). All too often, human bodies are treated (by others, and even ourselves) as commodities or instruments of sexual satisfaction. They are bought and sold, mutilated by others, and hit with self-inflicted harms. Yet Moll reminds us how high a privilege it is to dwell in flesh. "Our bodies, the Bible says, are the temples of God—the place where God lives."

EMBRACING THE BODY

Over hundreds of years and across various cultures, Christians have carried on a rich conversation about the body: its nature, its value, and its purpose. Moll strikes an excellent balance between invoking the best of that tradition and making it fresh for today's readers. What Your Body Knows About God draws from Christian history, cutting-edge research in neuroscience and biology, and anecdotes from Moll's own life.

The book is divided into three parts. Part one, "Spiritual Bodies," explains how certain activities move our spirits, from everyday routines like eating and exercise to more profoundly formative habits of friendship and intimacy. The spiritual

life can seem like an endless, futile attempt to overcome the very fact that we have bodies. But Moll is deeply reassuring. He encourages us to recognize, celebrate, and strengthen the body–soul connections that are part of God's good design.

Of course, our bodies aren't immune to malfunction. Nor are they effortlessly connected, at all times, to God and others. Readers will be grateful to Clarissa, Moll's wife, for allowing him to share stories of the panic attacks she experienced after giving birth to their fourth child. Her illness affected the entire family, and the road to recovery was long. Moll asks the difficult questions familiar to anyone who's endured brokenness: "How could I stand in awe of God's glorious design for our bodies when things could go so badly wrong?" Researching and writing during Clarissa's crisis, he worried that pressing on with the book would prove a fool's errand.

Moll doesn't offer answers or solutions to the problem of bodily suffering. Instead, he shares a realization: When "suffering turns to compassion," the "questions provoked by suffering can find resolution." Pain breaks us open, allowing us to become kinder and more generous toward others who suffer and preparing us to recognize God's suffering in the person of Christ. These spiritual moves can renew and strengthen one's relationship with God. Moll also dwells on biblical accounts of Paul's physical afflictions to arrive at fresh insights on the spiritual avenues opened by pain.

If the book's first part focuses on how God has made our bodies, part two, "Spiritual Growth," explores what we do with what we're given. We can choose to discipline our lives, both body and spirit, with worship, prayer, and service. These practices put our bodies and souls on the same page, supplying "the routines necessary to train our bodies, and thus our minds as well, to follow after Jesus."

Experiencing God through worship,

Moll encourages us to recognize, celebrate, and strengthen the body-soul connections that God has inscribed in our created nature.

prayer, service, and close relationships strengthens a "spiritual circuit" in the brain that primes us for experiencing the sacred. Moll sees this in Saul meeting the Lord on the road to Damascus; this divine encounter produced transformation and prepared him for future ministry. Certainly, not all spiritual experiences are dramatic. But even quiet or serene encounters with the sacred can, with enough repetition, jump-start the brain's spiritual circuitry. Intense experiences, in particular, "loosen up" neural pathways that open us to transformation. Religious disciplines, then, enhance social awareness and empathy while tamping down destructive feelings and emotions.

Drawing on the work of cognitive psychologist Jonathan Haidt, Moll questions whether the way we behave and believe arises from conscious thought and rational decision-making. Instincts and emotions, he argues, drive many of our judgments and actions, even explicitly moral judgments and actions. Moll counsels us to embrace the paradox that we both do and do not direct our own spiritual course.

Part three, "The Difference It Makes," looks at how recharged spiritual circuits change us for the better. "Through prayer, worship, and study," Moll writes, "as God rewires our brains and renews our minds, he makes us into new creatures." We already know that discipleship is transformative, but Moll explains some of the hows and whys, based on current scientific consensus. Readers may willingly agree with this general idea, even as they pause to chew on some of Moll's more challenging topics, such as the doubtful relationship between intercessory prayer and health. He argues that praying, in and of itself, has a positive effect on health, but specific prayers are not scientifically linked to specific outcomes.

WHOLE DISCIPLESHIP

In societies influenced by the artificial mind-body divide, spiritual pursuits might enliven the heart while seeming to leave the body untouched. The best the body can do, from this perspective, is to avoid sin. Its only job is to not interfere with the soul's progression toward heaven. What Your Body Knows About God is just the right antidote to this platonic way of thinking.

"As we connect with God and invite

others to join this life of prayer, worship, community, and service," writes Moll, "we align our biological and spiritual selves with the Creator of the universe and the most fundamental guide for life—loving God and loving others."

Moll offers realistic and inspiring examples of what it looks like to walk this path, crookedness and all. Anyone who

has struggled to pay attention in prayer can resonate with his account of sitting against the wall in his children's bedroom after they are tucked in bed, praying in the quiet darkness, sometimes finding focus, other times wandering.

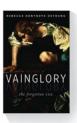
The psalmist rejoices "because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful" (139:14). With smart,

tender, and authentic prose, What Your Body Knows About God beautifully sings this in a 21st-century key.

JENELL WILLIAMS PARIS is professor of anthropology at Messiah College and the author of *The End of Sexual Identity: Why Sex Is Too Important to Define Who We Are* (InterVarsity Press).

We're So Vain

'Vainglorious,' that is. A philosopher examines an obscure sin that arises from a good thing. By Karen Swallow Prior Vainglory: The Forgotten Vice Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung (Eerdmans)



lorious men," wrote the philosopher Francis Bacon, "are the scorn of wise men, the admiration of fools, the idols of parasites, and the slaves of their own vaunts." The subject of his essay was *vainglory*, an old-fashioned word that describes the desire to be noticed and praised.

As vices go, vainglory sounds as quaint as a Victorian buttonhook. Yet it's as vexing a problem today as when the church fathers included it among the deadly sins (as a subset of Pride). In *Vainglory: The Forgotten Vice* (Eerdmans) ****, Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, who teaches philosophy at Calvin College, provides an exceedingly relevant and fascinating examination of a concept we ought to rescue from obsolescence.

The book begins with helpful definitions. Vain, the more familiar half of the word, simply means empty. DeYoung calls upon medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas, from whom the book draws heavily, to define glory as goodness made "apparent and manifest in its splendor" or, more concisely, "goodness that is displayed."

The manifesting of goodness, DeYoung writes, is "necessary and beneficial to human flourishing." Indeed, the very nature of goodness, according to Aquinas, is to "communicate itself"—or, as DeYoung puts it, to radiate outward. Goodness rightly asks for recognition.

Christians are particularly susceptible to vainglory. After all, we are a people who strive both to make goodness manifest and to recognize it where it appears. The danger comes when we're tempted to replace a desire for *good* with a desire for the *applause* that naturally follows.

Thus, DeYoung writes, as with all foundational human desires, vainglory's "deep appeal drives us to seek attention in many disordered ways." Whether cultivated inwardly by pride or fear, or fed externally by others' high expectations, the pursuit of praise (rather than the good at its root) readily becomes a powerful habit. The vainglorious person might begin innocently, rightfully earning honor for some praiseworthy quality or accomplishment. But before long, the thirst for applause and recognition becomes overpowering. It's not hard to think of politicians, athletes, and musicians who started out with pure motives but eventually fell prey to vainglory.

Perhaps no one has better understood vainglory's lure than the monastics of the early church. The church fathers (DeYoung cites them generously) made searching connections between vainglory and its offshoots, such as boasting, hypocrisy, obstinacy, contention, and discord. Today vainglory is often conflated with pride, but the early church recognized important distinctions we have since lost. According to DeYoung, the "prideful desire superiority, and the vainglorious desire the *show* of superiority." Such careful

parsing offers helpful insights into the subtleties of human nature and sinfulness.

Vainglory is more than an intellectual exercise, however. As DeYoung points out, naming a vice helps to distinguish between symptom and cause and points to means of correction. Accordingly, the latter part of the book first examines vainglory's opposite, magnanimity (greatness of soul), and then outlines some practices to point us there. Though the book's diagnosis is more compelling than its remedies, DeYoung does recommend some worthwhile spiritual disciplines, like silence and solitude, foundational to the desert fathers.

Our culture, driven by publicity, spin, and social media, is rife with vainglory. DeYoung points out that the envy that tends to accompany vainglory makes it difficult for Christians to celebrate goodness together or to share struggles and failures. Freedom from vainglory, she writes, "comes from giving up the mirrors, the artificial lighting, and the careful poses and instead resting in the knowledge that we are, from the first to the last, beloved in God's sight."

This book is goodness made manifest and should be widely read.

KAREN SWALLOW PRIOR teaches English at Liberty University. She is the author of Fierce Convictions—The Extraordinary Life of Hannah More: Poet, Reformer, Abolitionist (Thomas Nelson).



MY TOP FIVE Leslie Leyland Fields



eslie Leyland Fields is at home in the wilderness. The author, speaker, and cT editorial board member dwells with her husband and children on remote Kodiak Island, Alaska.

In the summer, she and her family retreat to nearby Harvester Island, where (as the island's sole residents) they run a commercial salmon fishing operation. cT asked Fields to choose 5 books





Two Old Women By Velma Wallis

If you're nervous about going "Into the Wild," don't take that book; take this one. Wallis, herself Athabascan, serves us an Alaskan Athabascan legend about two elderly women abandoned by their hungry tribe during a winter famine. Their canny survival through a brutal winter and their eventual return to the tribe as wise elders offers an extended parable on perseverance and community. If you're having trouble running with the wolves, or running to the outhouse in the dark, this is for you.



The Wisdom of Wilderness By Gerald G. May

We've been retreating to the wilderness looking for God ever since our expulsion from Eden. May, a well-known psychologist and theologian, penned his final book about forays into the woods while dying of cancer. With thoughtful abandon, he drums with cicadas, watches a swan drown a duck, and lies breathless in his tent as a bear passes. But wilderness is not just a place; it's a state of being. May illuminates the ways we can find joy and healing through what he calls the "Power of the Slowing."



Pilgrim at Tinker Creek By Annie Dillard

Yes, a predictable choice. But few writers model attentiveness to muskrats, water beetles, the bacterial mud between our toes, and their transcendent rewards and mysteries better than Dillard. This book, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1975, launched a new wave of nature writing. It remains a primer in observation, biology, and wonder. She may overreach at times, but I predict you'll soon be lacing up your boots and plunging into the forest, notebook in hand.



The Major Works By Gerard Manley Hopkins

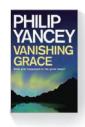
If Dillard's acute observations don't launch you out of your shelter, you're a hard case in need of poetry. Hopkins, a 19th-century Jesuit, delivers not just sight but also sound. He'll unplug you from your devices and plunge you straight into the sound and presence of finches' wings, "rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim," and "all things counter, original, spare, strange." You'll toss your watch and mark time by image and rhythm, offering back your own "Glory Be to God."



Godric By Frederick Buechner

Curl up by the fire and let Godric, the earthiest of English saints, sing you back to the 12th century. His story begins, "Five friends I had, and two of them snakes. Tune and Fairweather they were, thick round as a man's arm . . . keepers of my skimped hearth and hermit's heart till in a grim pet I bade them go that day and nevermore to come again." Godric's journey through the wilderness of self and pride toward God will pierce you with its knowing and beauty.





Pioneers of Grace

Philip Yancey wants a church that exists for outsiders. Interview by Amy Julia Becker

n his landmark 1997 book What's So Amazing About Grace? Philip Yancey challenged fellow evangelicals to act in a way that matches their language and beliefs about grace. He returns to this theme in his latest book, Vanishing Grace: What Ever Happened to the Good News? (Zondervan), updating the call to grace-filled living within a culture whose Christian consensus has frayed. Author and Christianity Today blogger Amy Julia Becker spoke with Yancey about putting grace into action in contexts where Christianity no longer holds sway.

Why did you choose to revisit the subject of grace?

Sociologist and researcher Amy Sherman has said that Christians tend to have three models for interacting with society: fortification, accommodation, and domination. To put that in layman's terms: We hunker down amongst ourselves, water down our witness, or beat down our opponents. For many reasons, those aren't New Testament models.

So what should we do? We need to create pioneer settlements that show the world a different, grace-based way of living.

We have been spoiled in the United States because of our religious heritage. There was once a common Christian consensus. A few generations ago, Billy Graham would fill the largest stadium in any city, stand up, and say "the Bible says," and have the audience nod along. Today, belief in the Bible can't be taken for granted, so appeals to the Bible don't have the same power. The new paradigm, in this culture, is that you reach out with acts of mercy that touch people's hearts, and hopefully they want to know why.

We hear nowadays about Christian groups losing university recognition, or public prayers and Christmas displays being banned. We feel on the defensive and that we're the outliers. But much of Christian history has been lived this way, like it was during the Roman Empire, when a small number of Christians modeled another way to live. In a culture like ours, we need to demonstrate first how faith in Christ makes a difference in how we live.

How can Christians emphasize grace while still holding to gospel truths?

John is clear: Jesus came "full of grace and truth." We've done pretty well with the truth part. But...let's restore some balance.

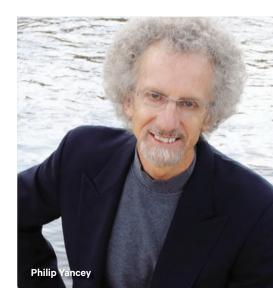
In the Gospels, the more you were an outcast, a sinner, or a failure, the more you were attracted to Jesus. You can't get that kind of upside-down response just by proclaiming truth all the time, no matter how true it is.

I sometimes think of how difficult it must have been for Jesus. He was around people who were making all these wrong, selfish choices. Imagine what it's like to be perfect yet to reach out with grace. What a lesson. It's astonishing how he avoided saying, "I'd love to get off this planet." He never seemed offended by people who would offend us.

You envision a grace-filled church as one that exists for outsiders. What does this look like?

I write about going to every church in my phone book. Different churches have different emphases. Some focus on their own neighborhoods. Inner-city churches, for instance, strongly emphasize the needs right around them. Others are very missions-minded.

It's a question of stewardship. Some of us are called to be stewards of prosperity and success, and others are called to be stewards of failure, of pain and suffering. It is much harder to be a good steward of success than failure. That was true in



the Old Testament with Israel. People forgot God when things were going well yet turned to him during hard times.

This is the situation today. The United States has been blessed with prosperity and success. After the Cold War ended and communism fell, we were the only game in town. How have we stewarded those gifts? I would say not very well.

So the church has an opportunity to be a better steward. We can't expect the nation to operate by Christian principles; no nation has. But we can expect this of the church. Imagine what would happen if we organized ourselves in the neighborhood, in the city, and in the world as people existing for the sake of outsiders.

We're tempted to rely on passing laws and winning arguments, but in the end, they're not the greatest powers. The greatest power is what Jesus did. He died and rose again. That's where it all started. The more we act like Jesus, not beating people down but showing a better way to live, the more outsiders will look back and say, "Those Christians are different."



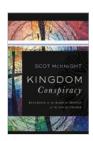
New & Noteworthy

Compiled by Matt Reynolds

"There is no kingdom that is not about a just society as there is no kingdom without redemption under Christ. Yet I'm convinced that both of these approaches to kingdom fall substantially short of what kingdom meant to Jesus."

~from Kingdom Conspiracy

by Scot McKnight



KINGDOM CONSPIRACY

Returning to the Radical Mission of the Local Church

SCOT McKNIGHT (BRAZOS PRESS)

Today the word kingdom is on the lips of Christians. But we're hardly agreed on what it means to engage in "kingdom" work. Is it about using activism to build a just society? Witnessing for Jesus? Raising a family, starting a business, tending a garden, or performing simple acts of kindness? McKnight addresses our confusion here, critiquing both the "skinny jeans" perspective (which emphasizes social justice and the common good) and the "pleated pants" alternative (which emphasizes God's redemptive work through both personal salvation and cultural transformation).



THE DEVIL

A New Biography

PHILIP C. ALMOND (CORNELL UNIVERSITY PRESS)

"Whether we believe in the Devil or not is now a matter of choice," writes Almond, an Australian scholar who has also written books on Adam and Eve and heaven and hell. "It was not always so. For the better part of the last two thousand years in the West, it was as impossible not to believe in the Devil as it was impossible not to believe in God. . . . The history of God in the West is also the history of the Devil, and the history of theology also the history of demonology." Almond's "biography" tracks the shifting understandings of the Devil that have prevailed in various societies and stages of history—even up to our postmodern age.

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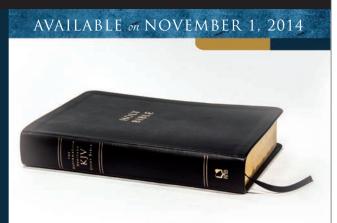
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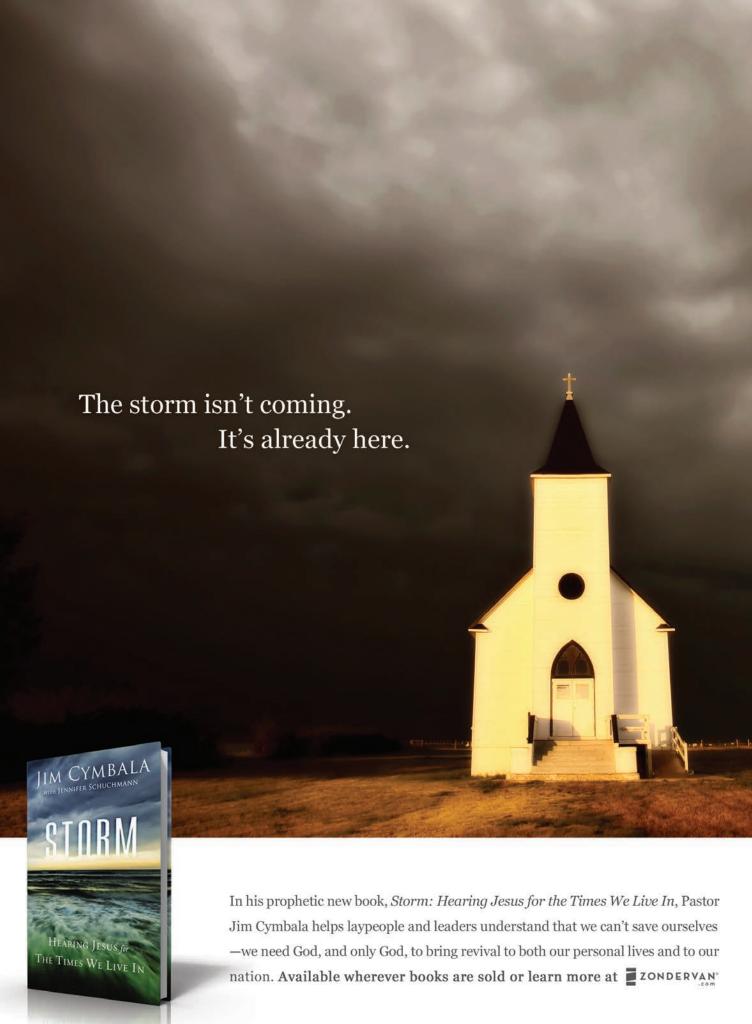
THE STORIES WE TELL

How TV and Movies Long for and Echo the Truth

MIKE COSPER (CROSSWAY)

With dramatic series like Breaking Bad, The Sopranos, and Mad Men leaving outsized cultural footprints and reaching new heights of storytelling sophistication, it's now safe to say we are smack-dab in the middle of a golden age of television. Cosper, a worship and arts pastor in Louisville, Kentucky, says the most compelling shows don't "aim at our rational mind, where cultural Christian convictions like 'we shouldn't watch Sex and the City' exist," but instead "at the imagination, a much more sneaky part of us, ruled by love, desire, and hope." This volume explores how plots that captivate us on screen testify to our deepest longings—and ultimately to the Story that underlies all others.





Prepared for for for akeoff

Equipping teens for life at college—and beyond.

Collegiate success begins at home. **74**

Pre-college conversations. **76**



COLLEGIATE SUCCESS BEGINS AT HONE

PREPARING
TEENS TO
THRIVE ONCE
THEY LEAVE
THE NEST.

By Janna Jones

his spring, 3.2 million American high school seniors will walk across stages and move their tassels, symbolizing the shift into adulthood. Approximately 2.1 million will attend a college next fall, yet as many as one-third of those students won't return for their sophomore year.

As author Alex Chediak can attest, academic challenges are only the beginning of what new college students face. An engineering and physics professor at California Baptist University in Riverside, California, Chediak is passionate about seeing students and young adults overcome these challenges and develop their



Alex Chediak

God-given potential so that Jesus Christ might be magnified. This desire drove him to write *Thriving* at *College* (Tyndale House, 2011), a guidebook for Christian students.

Collegiate success begins at home, he says, and it's often the result of a person's character, not just academic prowess. That means parents have a daunting task in raising well-rounded kids who will thrive once they leave the nest. This reality gave rise to Chediak's newest book, *Preparing Your Teens for College* (Tyndale House, 2014). Here he talks about the challenges and opportunities parents, as well as grandparents and church leaders, have in preparing teens for college.

What prompted you to write Preparing Your Teens for College and Thriving at College?

With Thriving at College, I felt compelled to give students a practical road map to making the most of their college years academically, socially, and spiritually. I see too many students go to college by accident (like I did) because they don't know what else to do after high school. I also became concerned about our culture's low expectations for teens. From movies to music, the message seems to be that teens are inevitably rebellious, immature, and incapable of shouldering responsibility. I'm convinced Christian teens will rise as high or as low as the

expectations we have for them. We need to challenge them to see their college years as a season for launching into all that's associated with



responsible Christian adulthood, and we need to show them what that looks like.

Preparing Your Teens for College is a prequel to Thriving at College and a companion resource for parents. But it's also for pastors, youth leaders, guidance counselors, and anyone involved in the great work of getting children of all ages ready for not just college, but the totality of their adult lives.

How is the college experience different from what it was 20 or 30 years ago? What unique challenges do today's students face?

As recently as 1979, only half of high school graduates chose some form of college after high school. Now we're up to about 70 percent. Why? Jobs for



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high school graduates are disappearing. In addition, the pay gap between those with a college degree and those without is growing. That means the training teens receive (or don't receive) after high school will make a greater impact on their financial well-being than it would have 20 or 30 years ago. In an increasingly knowledge- and skill-based economy, preparing our teenagers to become diligent, internally motivated, lifelong learners has never been more important.

Now consider how the net price of college (what schools expect parents and students to pay, earn, or borrow) has been rising, while family incomes have remained stagnant. That's putting a squeeze on many families. Plus, more students are taking longer to graduate—or not graduating at all. Those who don't graduate must still repay their loans. Those who do graduate are competing with experienced professionals, many of whom have been struggling to land work. Not surprisingly, wages for new graduates have been essentially flat, even as student loan balances keep rising.

I believe today's young adults have greater financial and professional challenges than any generation in 50 years—to say nothing of the spiritual challenges associated with entering an increasingly post-Christian society.

What characteristics do you see in today's incoming students?

On the positive side, and particularly among Christian students, I see a desire to live with impact and purpose—to make a difference in the lives of others. I'm thinking of a recent grad who quit a high-paying job to become a public school teacher, and a top-notch engineering grad who is now doing mission work in Africa.

On the negative side, there can be an unrealistic optimism, a tendency to think they're better than they really are—the "everyone gets a trophy" generation. I survey my students on the first day of class and ask what grade they hope to earn and how many hours per week they plan to study. Without fail, about 70 percent hope for an A or A-, and the rest say B+ or B. Yet they plan to study only two to four hours per week, rather than the eight hours per week suggested for a four-credit class.

If you think you're better at something than you really are, you expect it to come easily. This makes you less likely to work at it, less likely to succeed, and more likely to be surprised and disappointed when you don't.

What realities and responsibilities do students face in college?

Time management is the first thing that comes to mind because of how unstructured college life is compared to high school. This is the biggest issue I see in incoming students: a lack of preparation for both the freedom and the responsibility of being a college student. It's not just the expectation that more academic work be done outside of class, although that alone can sink students. But there are more recreational options as well—some of which cost money, and those expenses can add up quickly.

Intentionality with finances is also

vital. An alarming number of students don't pay off their credit card balance each month. An even larger number of students sign up for student loans with little to no regard for how such debt (and the interest) will add up over four to five years of schooling.

For many, college represents the first time they've lived away from home and outside of a spiritually supportive environment (i.e., parents who take them to church, household rules, a youth group with Christian friends). Students need to be intentional about growing spiritually through practices such as personal disciplines, finding Christian friends, and establishing a new home church.

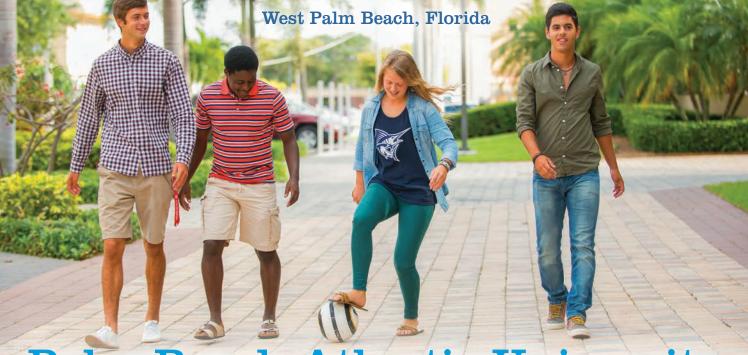
In summary, students need to be intentional with their time, money, spiritual lives, and friendships. These practices train students to take responsibility for their personal and vocational choices—and for the overall trajectory of their lives.

PRE-COLLEGE CONVERSATION STARTERS

USE THESE IDEAS TO GET YOUR TEENS TALKING.

- Discuss the value of persevering with commitments. Use something they enjoy as an example. What has persevering in that activity made possible for them? What have they learned along the way? What might perseverance in this activity lead to in the future?
- Ask your teens what doubts they've heard others express about Christianity. What effect did those doubts have on their faith? Talk to your teens about how you've dealt with any doubts in your life, or how you've responded to doubts in the lives of others.
- Ask your teens to identify their top five friends and why they like them so much. Look for opportunities to talk about important character

- qualities (faithful, truthful, encouraging, challenging, responsible, respectful, and humble).
- Teens are naturally in the process of separating from their parents and establishing their own identities. Talk with your teens about the measure of freedom and responsibility they currently have with regard to their finances. Brainstorm ways they can take increasing ownership of their financial decisions as they move through high school and leave for college.
- Discuss your teens' favorite school subjects and other topics that interest them. How might these interests shape what they pursue after high school? What careers might align with their interests?
- Identify with your teens a short list of no more than five "must have" criteria they're seeking in a college. Discuss what a college with these traits might look like.
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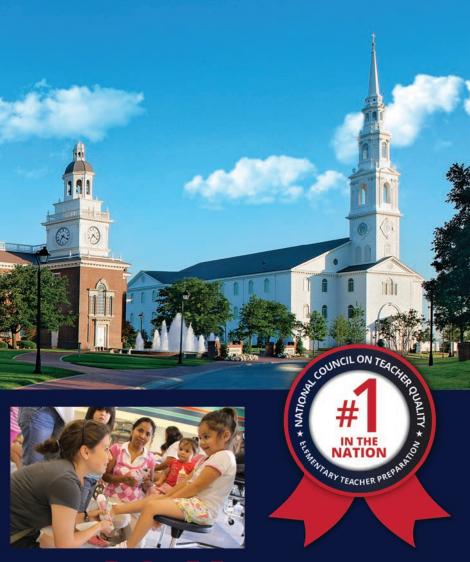


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Parents can easily feel overwhelmed with all they need to do to prepare their kids for college. Tell us about the six areas *Preparing Your Teens for College* focuses on—and which one is most important.

The six areas are character, faith, relationships, finances, academics, and the college decision. It's hard to pick one as universally most important because no two teens are alike. Some are strong in character and faith, but don't have a category for thinking Christianly about their academics or college decision. Others place idolatrous importance on academics and getting into an elite college, while their faith is shriveling.

Academic and professional success tend to flow from character and maturity. I've seen students with great test scores struggle profoundly at college. High school was easy, but their laziness caught up with them. I've also seen students with average academic ability flourish due to their consistent effort, willingness to delay gratification, and farsightedness to understand cause and effect.

Some will point out that faith is foundational for character. I agree: the Bible teaches that faith in Christ leads to a changed life and good works (Eph. 2:8–10). Yet while we know, as Christians, that the character and maturity which engender success flow most readily from a God-mastered life, it's our job to prepare our teens to live responsibly whether or not they become Christians (though we pray they all do).

Can you offer some advice for parents who may be struggling to have any kind of conversation with their teens, let alone conversations about faith, relationships, and finances?

Yeah, that's tough. The good news is, teens often remember what their parents said, even if they don't reply. So share what God's teaching you, apologize when you fall short, and speak grace and truth into their lives. Engage them on subjects they're willing to discuss. Look for ways to stay in their lives; be willing to meet them on "their turf." And when your son or daughter does share something with you or asks you a personal question, make yourself fully available—even if it's past your bedtime.



Try drawing them out to see if you've done or said anything to cause them to become embittered toward you. Move toward them to be reconciled, even if you don't think whatever happened was your fault. If there's another adult that your son or daughter does talk with openly—an uncle, aunt, youth pastor—ask that person for advice about developing the relationship.

Of course, we should also pray that God would do a work in their lives—and in your relationship—as only he can do.

How can parents and grandparents pray for teens as they prepare for college?

Academic, vocational, and personal success flow primarily from character and maturity. But character and maturity flow most readily from a God-mastered life and soul, from the hearts of men and women who have bowed their knees to Jesus as Lord. That's the main thing to pray for.

Second, pray that your teens would embrace a vision for glorifying God with every aspect of their lives. Christian youth have a tendency to view spirituality as mainly abstaining from the "bad things" (alcohol, premarital sex, inappropriate entertainment, etc.). While prohibitions have their place, they're insufficient. They don't give a practical, future-oriented vision for getting up in the morning and going to class. But we're called to love God with our minds and to offer ourselves to him through the medium of our work (to paraphrase Dorothy Sayers). Honoring God in the classroom, library, and laboratory are precursors to honoring God in our employment—not just punching a clock and making money, but loving others by doing our jobs to the very best of our God-given abilities as part of our testimony (Titus 2:10; 3:8.).

How can parents help their college-bound teens choose the right school?

There isn't one "right" school. That's one of the anxieties I try to defuse in *Preparing Your Teens for College*. There are qualities worth looking for in a college: an environment that takes learning seriously, access to quality professors and peers, future employment prospects, Christian community, and affordability. It comes down to knowing your teens, having a sense of how they're wired and what kind of environment would most support their

success: large or small, near or far, Christian or secular. You might also consider whether a vocational school or apprenticeship would better suit your child.

What specific questions can teens and parents ask potential schools in order to assess the amount and type of support the college gives incoming students?

Many colleges offer a mandatory course during the first semester that helps freshmen make the transition. But what are its results and what other support is available? Here are a few practical ways to get answers:

- Look up the college's first-tosecond-year retention rate on the NCES College Navigator (http ://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator).
- Ask the college's Student Services staff what they do to help more freshmen become sophomores.
- Ask what percentage of undergraduate courses, laboratories, and discussion sections are taught by part-time faculty or graduate students, and if they're required to hold office hours.

How can parents guide their teen through the process of finding his or her passion and discerning an area of study?

At the foundational level, modeling is huge. We get what we are. If we model a TGIF mentality that denigrates work, our teens will develop the same cynicism toward their schoolwork. If through our speech and our example we embrace the goodness of work—as a gift of God, which it truly is—then there's hope our teens will do the same.

We also need to give our teens lots of chances to test their interests and see what sticks. Talents are revealed in the crucible of experience (demanding courses, writing contests, math club, robotics team, orchestra, tutoring children, mission trips). By trying things and seeing where they experience success, they learn how God has wired them. They begin to experience a sense of calling.

And lastly, help them research college majors and get some exposure to professions they're tentatively considering.

This could mean shadowing someone at work or doing an academic or professionally oriented internship. The more they know about themselves and the more accurate their perceptions about different majors, the more likely they are to make a wise choice—which means they're more likely to graduate on time (saving a small fortune).

What deadlines would you give parents for helping prepare their kids emotionally and spiritually for college?

The concept of a rite of passage (like the Jewish bar mitzvah) can be helpful. This is also a great area to get grandparents and other family members involved. We sometimes fail to realize that kids as young as 12 and 13 are beginning a transition to adulthood. Around that age we need to start relating to them as men and women in the making, and we need them to know that's how we view them. In one sense, a parent's job never ends. But in another sense, we should be working our way out of a job. We want our teens to take their place alongside us as responsible adults in society.

We want our children to accept the full mantle of adulthood as they graduate high school—or as soon as possible thereafter. It's not about them having all the answers and never needing help. None of us is ever independent in that sense. It's about them knowing when they need help and taking the initiative to get it, rather than us having to take the lead for them. It's about them assuming responsibility, but with an awareness of their dependence on God and the need for accountability.

What role do church leaders play in preparing teens for college?

Since preparing teens for college is a subset of preparing them for life, church leaders play a vital role. The church comes alongside parents and equips them to better train their teenagers. But the church also ministers directly to those teenagers by teaching them how the Bible applies to every stage and facet of life, including them in worship services, encouraging them to serve, creating a culture of high expectations, and helping them wrestle with and come to own the Christian faith for themselves.

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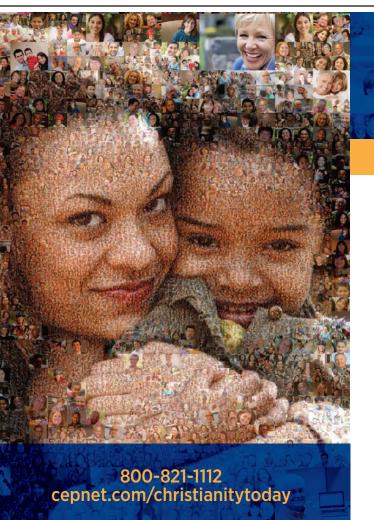












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Some adults in the church are uniquely skilled at engaging teens in matters of the faith, and their efforts can complement what occurs in the home.

Would your advice differ for a student planning to attend a secular school? In what ways?

I don't see a major difference. A Christian college will almost certainly provide a more nurturing environment, but in a few years' time, those attending Christian colleges will be out in the same world as those who attended secular colleges. So our obligation is to prepare our children for the challenges they'll face, spiritually and otherwise, in our increasingly post-Christian culture.

What options are there for students who aren't yet ready to head to college?

Taking a year off between high school and college is increasingly common. A gap year can be helpful if the time is spent fruitfully. Otherwise, a teen is likely to feel discouraged, as if life is passing him or her by. Fill the year with purposeful activity designed to increase your teen's maturity, work ethic, and selfawareness regarding individual talents, interests, and professional aspirations. Shadowing professionals on the job, researching colleges and careers, and perhaps retaking the SAT/ACT can all be worthwhile. It wouldn't hurt if your teen got a part-time job, preferably one that allowed him or her to practice a skill (tutoring, teaching piano, giving swimming lessons) or develop a new one (working in a museum while considering a possible history major). The point is: make a plan for the year.

Can you share some words of encouragement with parents who may feel that despite their best efforts, they've failed to properly prepare their child for college?

That's probably all of us. Yet God's grace marvelously overcomes our shortcomings. Part of how this works in practice, I think, is that God brings other means into the lives of our children to develop them in the areas where we fall short. This is one of the reasons good churches with plentiful adult role models are so

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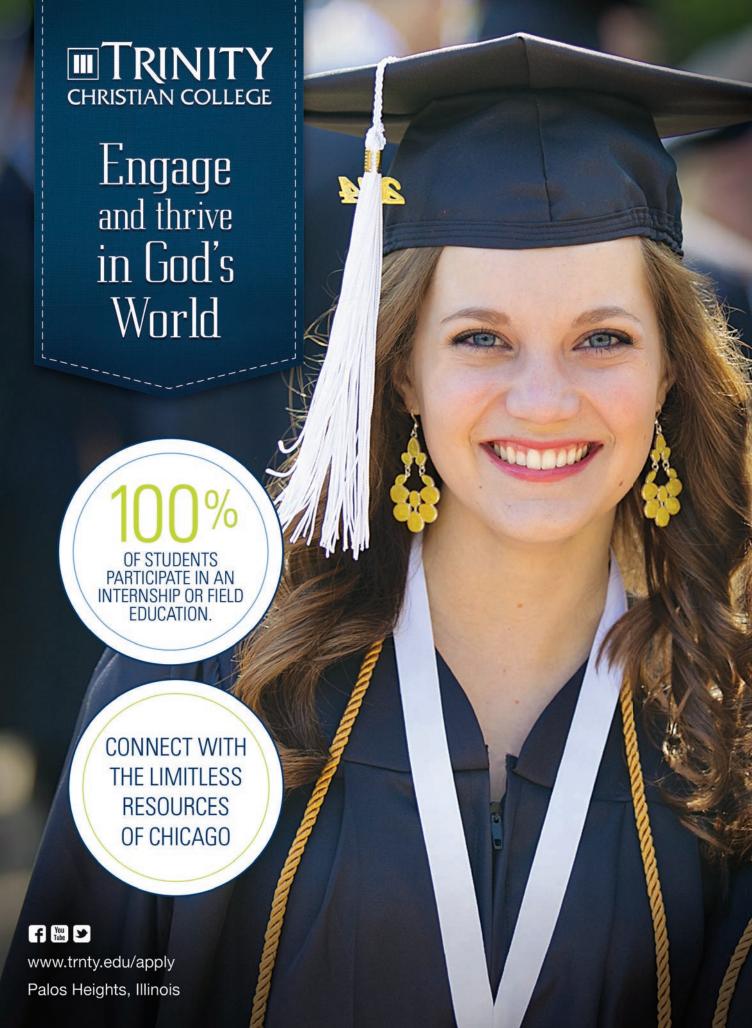




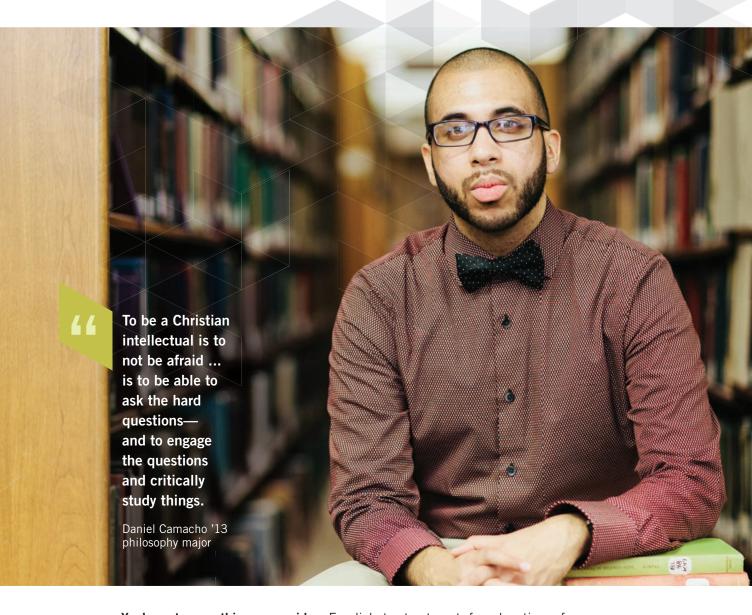
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helpful. None of us is perfect, but when teens have a multiplicity of relationships with godly adults, they see a more balanced picture of what it means to live for Christ into adulthood.

Second, it's never too late to make adjustments. Modeling and instruction can continue, although as our teens age, we must lean more on moral authority than positional authority. We work to earn their trust to the extent it's been lost. We apologize for the ways we failed, we ask for forgiveness, and we trust that God will work all things together for everyone's good (Rom. 8:28).

Last, I'd encourage them to look at their own lives and the lives of their peers. Many of us were not as prepared for college and adulthood as we could have been. Yet, by God's grace we turned out just fine. So keep praying for your children, whatever their age—God delights to help the helpless, and he works for those who wait for him (Ps. 50:15; Isa. 64:4).

Janna Jones is an award-winning writer and editor based in Colorado.

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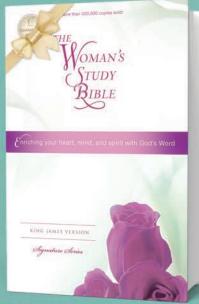
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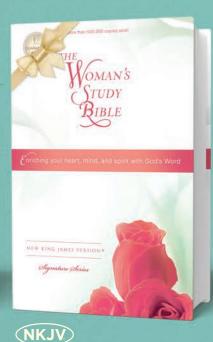
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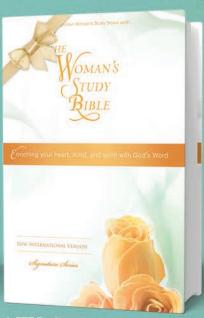
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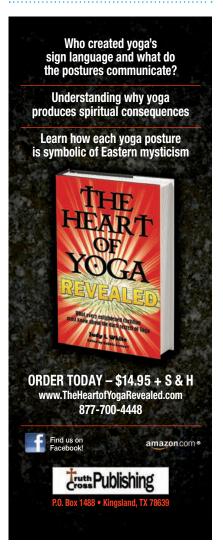
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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 96

directions to their hotel. Incidentally, it was right next to our house, so they gave us a ride.

They were attractive enough that my radar went offimmediately, and we started flirting. The one I was interested in happened to mention she believed in God—by my standards an intellectual suicide. She also said she believed that sex belongs in marriage—an even more problematic belief than theism, if that were possible. Nevertheless, once the vacation ended, I returned to Paris, she to New York, and we started dating.

My new goal in life was to disabuse my girlfriend of her beliefs so that we could be together without antiquated notions of God—or sex—standing in the way. I started thinking: What good reason was there to think Godexists, and what good reason was there to think atheism was true? This step was important, because my own unbelief rested comfortably on the fact that the smart people around me didn't believe in God either. It was more a reasonable life assumption than the conclusion of a solid argument. But of course, if I was going to refute Christianity, I first needed to know what it claimed. So I picked up a Bible.

At the same time, I figured there was at least one experiment I could carry out. I thought, If any of this is true, then the God who exists presumably cares greatly about this project of mine. So I started to pray into the air: "If there is a God, then here I am. I'm looking into this. Why don't you go ahead and reveal yourself to me? I'm open." I wasn't, but I figured that if God existed, that wouldn't stop him.

A week or two after my unbelieving prayer, one of my shoulders started to fail me—without any accident or evident injury. My shoulder would burn out ten minutes into every practice. I just couldn't spike. The doctor couldn't see anything wrong, the physical therapist didn't help, but I was told that I needed to rest my shoulder and to stop playing volleyball for a couple of weeks. Against my will, I was now off the courts.

With my Sundays available, I decided I would go to a church to see what Christians do when they get together. I drove to an evangelical congregation in Paris, visiting it as I would a zoo: to see exotic animals that I had read about in books

but had never seen in real life. I remember thinking that if any of my friends or family could see me in a church, I would die of shame.

I don't remember a word from the sermon. As soon as the service ended, I jumped up and hurried to the exit door, avoiding eye contact so I wouldn't have to introduce myself. I reached the back door, opened it, and literally had one foot out the door when a chilling blast went up from my stomach all the way to my throat. I heard myself saying: "This is ridiculous. I have to figure this out." So I put my foot back in, closed the door, and went straight to the pastor.

"So, you believe in God?"

"Yes," he said, smiling.

"So how does that work out?" I asked.

"We can talk about it," he said. After most of the people left, we went to his office and spoke for hours. I bombarded him with questions, and we met again over several weeks. He patiently and intelligently explained his worldview. And I nervously started to consider that all of it could be true. My unbelieving prayers shifted to, "God, if you are real, you need to make it clear so I can jump in and not make a fool of myself." I started to hope that he would open the sky and send down the light.

WHY JESUS HAD TO DIE

What followed was less theatrical and more brutal: God reactivated my conscience. This was not a pleasant experience. At the same time I had started my investigations, I had also come to commit a particularly sinister misdeed, even by atheistic standards. Though I knew exactly

I drove to an evangelical congregation in Paris, visiting it as I would a zoo: to see exotic animals that I had read about but had never seen in real life.

what I had done, I had shoved it down inside. But God brought it back to mind in full force, and I finally saw it for what it was. I was struck with an intense guilt, crippled with chest pain, and disgusted at the thought of what I had done and the lies I had covered it with.

I was lying in pain in my apartment near Paris, when all of a sudden the quarter dropped. That is why Jesus had to die: me. He who knew no sin became sin on my behalf, so that in him I might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21). He took upon himself the penalty that I deserved, so that in God's justice, my sins would be forgiven—by grace as a gift, rather than by my righteous deeds or religious rituals. He died so that I may live. I placed my trust in Jesus, and asked him to forgive me in the way Scripture promised he would.

Now that everything was in the open, I assumed God wanted me to marry my Christian girlfriend, and I moved to New York. We quickly learned we were absolutely not meant for each other. But now, uprooted and alone, with time on my hands, I was passionate about studying my newfound faith in order to explain it to friends and family. I read book after book, watched lectures and debates, and loved every moment. Eventually it was all I did in my free time. I figured that if I was going to spend all my time and energy studying Christianity, I might as well get a degree out of it. So I applied for seminary, and eventually obtained a master's in New Testament studies. In the process, I met a wonderful woman, got married, had two children, and pursued my studies with a PhD program in philosophical theology.

This, in short, is how God takes a French atheist and makes a Christian theologian out of him. I was not looking for God; I neither sought him nor wanted him. He reached out, loved me while I was still a sinner, broke my defenses, and decided to pour out his undeserved grace—that his Son might be glorified, and that I might be saved from my sin by grace through faith, and not by works. It is the gift of God, so that no one may boast (Eph. 2:8–9).

That's the gospel, and it's good news worth believing.

GUILLAUME BIGNON lives in New York City with his family. Reach him on Twitter @theoloGUI. NOVEMBER 2014

TESTIMONY



My Own French Revolution

How an atheist becomes a Christian theologian.

By Guillaume Bignon

f French atheists rarely become evangelical Christians, how much rarer it is for one to become an evangelical Christian theologian. So what happened? One might argue that with 66 million French people, I'm just a fluke, an anomaly. I am inclined to see it as the work of a God who says, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy" (Rom. 9:15). Hearing the facts may help you decide for yourself.

I grew up in a wonderfully loving family in France, near Paris. We were Catholic, a religious expression that seemed to arise more out of tradition and perhaps superstition than conviction. As soon as I was old enough to tell my parents I didn't believe any of it, I stopped going to Mass. I pursued my own happiness on all fronts, benefiting from my parents' loving dedication. It allowed me to do well at school, learn to play the piano, and get involved in many sports. I studied math, physics, and engineering in college, graduated from a respected engineering school, and landed a job as a computer

scientist in finance. On the sports front, after I grew to be 6 feet 4 inches and discovered I could jump 3 feet high, I ended up playing volleyball in a national league, traveling the country every weekend for the games.

An important part of young male French atheist ideals consisted of female conquests. Here, I was starting to have enough success to satisfy the raunchy standards of the volleyball locker room. All in all, I was pretty happy with my life. And in a thoroughly secular culture, the chances of ever hearing the gospel—let alone believing it—were incredibly slim.

NEW LIFE GOAL

When I was in my mid-20s, my brother and I vacationed in the Caribbean. One day, returning from the beach, we decided to hitchhike home. A car pulled over. Two young women visiting from America were lost and needed CONTINUED ON PRECEDING PAGE

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