

# CT

CHRISTIANITY TODAY

MAY 2015

**MEET THE MIDEAST'S  
MONUMENTS MEN** *p.20*

**JON ACUFF STARTS  
OVER (AND OVER)** *p.52*

**A TRUCE FOR  
CHRISTIAN TRIBES** *p.57*



FOR THE  
LOVE

**Why we  
of all people  
should get  
our vaccines.**



Photo Credit: Nathan Troester,  
Redeemer Presbyterian Church

**“IN MY YEARS AT GORDON-CONWELL, PROFESSORS, FRIENDS  
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**Rev. Tim Keller, M.Div. '75**

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KEVIN DEYOUNG

*What Does the Bible Really Teach About*  
**Homosexuality?**



Kevin DeYoung challenges us to take a humble look at God's Word. Examining key passages as well as the Bible's overarching teaching on sexuality, DeYoung responds to popular objections raised by Christians *and* non-Christians—offering a timely resource for thinking through one of the most pressing issues of our day.

# WHY 68% OF CHRISTIAN MEN WATCH PORN

By Terry Cu-Unjieng

A new generation of porn addicts is about to flood the Church – are we ready?

much, because in attacking human sexuality it actually interferes with human bonding.

According to neuropsychologist, Dr. Tim Jennings, "Any type of repetitive behavior will create trails in our brain that are going to fire on an automatic sequence." The result is years of bondage. This is how 68% of Christian men can love the Lord with all their heart, but be trapped in sexual bondage. The repeated viewing of porn literally changes the physical structure of their brain.

## A PROCESS FOR PASTORS TO USE TO FIGHT PORNOGRAPHY

Wiles is confident the Conquer Series will embolden church leaders to tackle the problem by giving them a high-quality video curriculum and study guide that can be used by leaders in small men's group meetings. "Pornography is a really tough subject for a lot of pastors to openly confront," said Wiles. "This cinematic series will give them confidence that they can restore men using proven Bible-based principles."

## THE CONQUER SERIES HAS BEEN GETTING A LOT OF POSITIVE FEEDBACK:

*"Extremely well done. Not Christian cheese."* -Mark Punchard Jr.

*"We had 110 men go through the series recently. We have seen TREMENDOUS change in the men!"* -Paul Leininger

*"This series has helped change my life. The healing it has caused has revolutionized my relationship with my wife, kids, and people at church."* -Matthew Cook

The Conquer Series is a 6-disc DVD set, which also includes a leader's DVD. They are currently offering a 14-day money back guarantee, so if you want to see if this is something for you or the men in your church, then here's a chance to try it risk-free.

**Order at [ConquerSeries.com](http://ConquerSeries.com)**

**A**re we really supposed to buy into the idea that 68% of men in Church watch porn regularly? Could this just be sensational rhetoric? Not according to a national survey among churches. The survey conducted over the past five years revealed that 68 percent of Christian men and 50 percent of pastors view pornography regularly.<sup>1</sup> But even more shocking is that 11-17 year-old boys reported being its greatest users. The Church is in the sexual



Dr. Ted Roberts, Host of the Conquer Series

battle of its life. As these boys become adults, the Church will be flooded with porn addicts. Pastor James Reeves of City On A Hill Church DFW has successfully tackled porn addiction in his church. He warns, "This problem is going to sweep through the Church like a tsunami wave of destruction and we're not prepared for it".

## A GRASSROOTS MOVEMENT FOR CHANGE

In response to this growing epidemic in the Church, a group of filmmakers took it upon themselves to create a DVD teaching curriculum on sexual purity called the Conquer Series. The Series is the first of its kind to show men how to retrain a brain that's hooked on porn, using biblical principles and powerful insights. "The shocking statistics were the game-changer for me," says director, Jeremy Wiles. "So, we spent two years developing a five-hour discipleship curriculum, interviewing top Christian experts on this subject and shooting battle reenactments to illustrate the war that every man faces with sexual temptation. I wanted to give men proven principles on how to find freedom," adds Wiles.

The team recruited Dr. Ted Roberts, a former U.S. Marine fighter pilot, to be the

host of the Conquer Series. As a former Pastor and head of Pure Desire Ministries, Dr. Roberts has counseled men for over 30 years—mainly dealing with pornography issues. "Our goal with the Conquer Series is to give men a battle plan for purity. We've got a great tool here that will change lives, but we need pastors to partner with us to fight this battle," Dr. Roberts said.

## THE TYPICAL CHURCH APPROACH DOESN'T WORK

According to Dr. Roberts, churches often treat this issue as a moral one, but fail to recognize it's mainly a brain problem, "We tell men to try harder, pray harder, love Jesus more." Dr. Roberts adds, "But, what starts off as a moral problem, quickly becomes a brain problem. Telling a man to try harder is only tightening the 'noose' of bondage." Today, science sheds new light on biblical truth regarding strongholds of the mind and how a person becomes enslaved to sin.

## A HIJACKED BRAIN

Understanding the brain is pivotal. When a woman is nursing her child and she's skin-to-skin with her baby, her brain releases a neurochemical called oxytocin, which emotionally bonds her to her child. The same thing happens during sex. God designed oxytocin as the glue for human bonding. During a sexual release, oxytocin, along with other neurochemicals, are released and cause us to emotionally bond with our partner.

When you watch porn, powerful neurotransmitters such as dopamine are also released, which bond you to those images. This is why Satan attacks our sexuality so



1. Pure Desire Ministries, "Porn Usage in Evangelical Churches" (2009).



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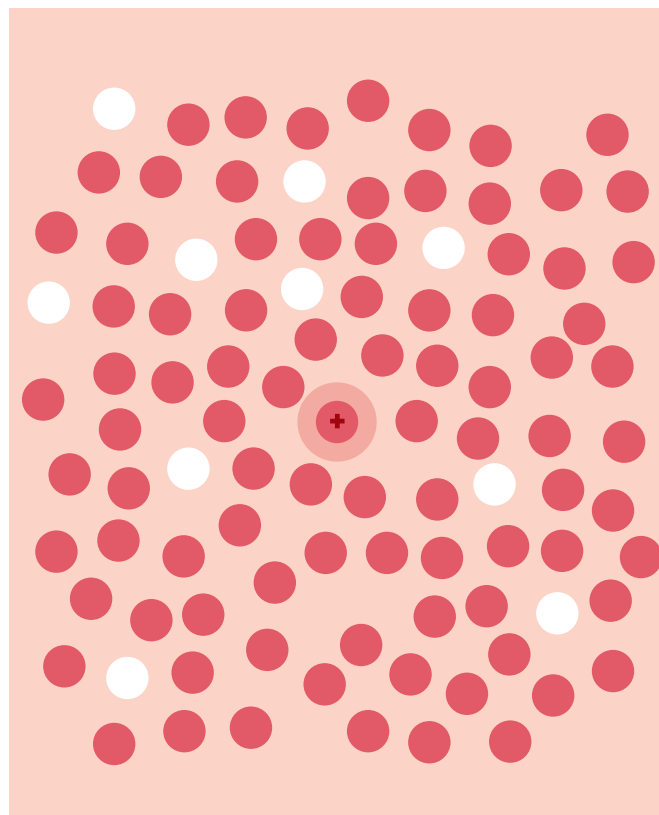
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**"We readers get to hear the voices too: unruly, like an uprising of goats." p.60**

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Carol will soon travel to visit her son in Liverpool, England, where he's a ministry trainee.

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Collin found that writing a book about the church's blind spots (p. 57) is a good way for others to point out his own.



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# EDITOR'S NOTE



**T**HE FIRST PUBLIC “vaccines” campaign in US history was led by a Puritan preacher.

Cotton Mather (p. 59) had seen smallpox kill many fellow Bostonians, including his first wife and several of his children. The disease was a scourge on Native Americans and colonists living in New England in the 17th and 18th centuries. But Mather knew disease wasn't inevitable. He had studied the sciences at Harvard before taking over his father's influential congregation, Boston's North Church. He believed God revealed truth in the book of Scripture and the book of nature, and Mather published several works showing the harmony between the two.

Mather's scientific mind drove him to investigate his slave Onesimus's claims that “he had undergone an Operation, which had given him something of ye Small-Pox, and would forever preserve him from it.” Onesimus showed him a scar on his arm where he had deliberately inserted a small amount of smallpox pus, inducing immunity. It sounded similar to reports Mather had read in a Royal Society paper. Should a smallpox epidemic befall Boston, Mather vowed, he would urge residents to get inoculated.

That epidemic came in spring 1721, after the HMS *Seahorse* pulled into Boston Harbor carrying traces of the disease. By the end of 1721, nearly half of the city's 11,000 residents were infected. Basic precautions such as quarantines failed to prevent 844 Bostonians from dying that year alone.

Acting as a public servant, Mather urged doctors and his own congregants to get inoculated. But his campaign met strong resistance. Some feared that inoculation would spread smallpox further. Others thought humans shouldn't try to fight what was clearly the judgment of God. Still others, reflecting the entrenched racism of the time, questioned adopting a practice used by Africans. Mather's campaign “raised an horrid Clamour” not unlike what we see today whenever vaccines are mentioned on Facebook.

To be sure, history has proven Mather wrong on a lot of things (Salem Witch Trials, anyone?). But when it comes to vaccines, at least, history has proven him right: When 242 Boston residents got inoculated, only 6 died. At the end of the 18th century, Edward Jenner invented the smallpox vaccine. Some 200 years later, the World Health Organization declared that smallpox had been eradicated from the earth.

Cotton's father, Puritan minister and statesman Increase Mather, provided wisdom during his son's public flogging. He called inoculation a “wonderful providence of God... the most successful and allowable method of preventing death,” teaching that it fulfills the sixth commandment by preserving human life.

Will Christians today follow in the Mather men's footsteps, doing all they can to protect their communities from disease? We hope this month's cover story (p. 32) will help you decide. **CT**

## OUR PRO-VACCINES HISTORY


Meet the Puritan who helped to eradicate smallpox.

**KATELYN BEATY** *Managing Editor*



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# REPLY ALL

RESPONSES TO OUR MARCH ISSUE



Your question assumes shame is an intent rather than an embedded value. In Eastern culture it isn't one or the other.

Kathy Khang [@mskathykhang](#)

The most menacing dimension of shaming is often the indirect way it mobilizes crowds against persons.

Alastair Roberts [@zugzwanged](#)

Speaking up for the voiceless and marginalized isn't shaming. It's biblical.

Wende [@webbspinner77](#)

We underestimate the power of our words. What we say about another can color the way our followers view a person.

Ekemini Uwan [@sista\\_theology](#)

## THE RETURN OF SHAME p. 32

Ours may be a culture that no longer believes in sin. But, clearly, it believes in shame. . . . Andy Crouch analyzes how Western civilization is transitioning from a guilt-based [culture] to a "media-amplified shame culture." The role that communities play in conferring either honor or shame (in contrast to their more individualistic counterparts, innocence and guilt) provides an opportunity for the church, Crouch argues.

While public outrage is as old as human history, social media shaming is new. In its ability to take shame as far beyond a local community as the entire globe and to wreak effects vastly disproportionate to the precipitating acts, social media shaming may become a form of systemic injustice. It therefore is a phenomenon that Christians need to acknowledge and address intentionally and with principle. We have the opportunity at this moment in our culture to determine to offer a different way than the world [does].

Karen Swallow Prior  
Think Christian  
[thinkchristian.reframemedias.com](http://thinkchristian.reframemedias.com)

### #CTSHAME

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** On March 12, *CT* hosted its first live Twitter chat to further discuss issues brought up in "The Return of Shame." More than 100 participants talked about shame as tied up in relationships of power, Eastern and Western notions of shame, the role of shame in our lives as Christians, and the need for gracious dialogue rather than criticism. The hashtag #CTShame was mentioned 760 times and received 281,646 impressions by the following day.

Critique remembers the imago dei in the recipient, shame forgets that.

Daniel Darling [@dandarlind](#)

## HEADLINES: DO DIGITAL DECISIONS DISCIPLE? p. 17

Having served as an online missionary with Global Media Outreach (GMO), I'm compelled to add a point to your informative article on sharing the Good News online. During my training with GMO, prayer was a key element of the program. Online missionaries are instructed to stop and first pray for the person who has just sent the email. This is my favorite part of connecting with a respondent. This may be the *only* time in this person's life that someone has lifted them to the Lord. This step is what lends credibility and validity to online evangelism. Prayer releases the hand of God to move in a person's life far beyond any email response.

Candace Sparks  
Colorado Springs

Is clicking a button the same as raising a hand in church? Fascinating article about online #evangelism.

Tearfund Churches [@TFChurches](#)

## CUBA LIBRE p. 23

Cuba's opening means opportunities, but forget not Castro's martyrs.

Jim Jewell [@JamesWJewell](#)

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**OPEN QUESTION: SHOULD I  
ATTEND THE WEDDING OF A GAY  
FRIEND OR FAMILY MEMBER?** p. 26

All three responses to this question share a strong theme of avoiding being understood as harsh and unloving. I share that burden too.

But consider that when Jesus came 1,500 years after the giving of the law, he found that the Israelites had perverted its purpose. Does anyone suppose there's a ghost of a chance that, in the 2,000 years since, he could return and find that many of us had run his revelation into an opposite ditch? After all, it would be consistent with human nature to mess up in more than one way.

If I must be the last man standing who won't attend a gay wedding, and I must bear the shame and accusation of being seen as a Pharisee by the whole world, God help me.

However, if with tears in our eyes and heavy hearts we refuse to support marriages that Jesus clearly taught were adulterous, we won't so easily be classified as gay bashers.

Yes, Jesus ate with unrepentant sinners, but we must know the difference

between eating with sinners and toasting to them.

**Anthony Hess**  
Boise, Idaho

Over the years I've asked similar questions and find my answers changing. It would be equally interesting to ask, "Should I attend the wedding of a friend or family member who cheated on their spouse? Should I attend the wedding if they are marrying the one they cheated with? What if the bride is pregnant?" Sherif Girgis makes the point that nonmarital sex is wrong. Does that go for heterosexual couples as well as gay couples?

**Ken Wells**  
Gilbert, Arizona

**THE LOST WORLD OF ADAM & EVE** p. 42

For some time now I have had a lot of questions about Genesis, and have not been satisfied with the answers I get from many Christians. Furthermore, I often worry about what people would think of me if they knew I didn't believe in a "literal" reading of Genesis 1-2. Reading the interview with John Walton encouraged me considerably.

We Christians often get so hung up on the creation-versus-evolution debate that we alienate some of our own who have serious questions and trouble reconciling Scripture with science. Walton reminded me to look at the big picture of Genesis 1-2 rather than get caught in the details.

**Jackson Dame**  
Greenville, South Carolina

I enjoyed this month's cr as always but was struck by the juxtaposition of two articles. On the one hand, John Walton talks about interpreting the story of Adam within the context of "information today that most historical interpreters didn't have," and new understanding of how the original readers of the text would have interpreted it.

On the other hand, Christian ethicists in Open Question all reject the idea that verses in Leviticus and Romans regarding homosexuality might have nuance. Christians today too easily embrace "context" where it suits our preferences and prejudices, and reject it where it does not.

**Alan Mazer**  
Pasadena, California

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**POWERHOUSE IN A PETTICOAT** p. 52  
When it comes to #WomensHistory, this is the type of woman I look up to and want to emulate.

Amy [@ModernishLife](#)

**REVIEWS: FOR BETTER OR WORSE** p. 63

I feel like I can speak to this interview with Matt Chandler on his book *The Mingling of Souls*. Anger, frustration, disconnection are not reasons to give up, but a chance to exercise the promise made. That's why we made the vows we did. We knew the hard stuff would come. If we can stand through the difficulties, we earn the right and privilege to stand through the good times as well.

[f Joy Higginbotham](#)

**TESTIMONY: AN ORIGINAL JESUS FREAK** p. 88

Some interesting parallels and similarities to my own life, including finding my way to the Anglican Church!

[The Uprising](#) [@UprisingTulsa](#)

Proof that God can use anything: LSD, Revolution, Buddhism, then Jesus.

[Charles Burge](#) [@cburge](#)

**@ NET GAIN** Responses to our blogs and online articles.

We don't like the interpretation perhaps because we have been told it means taking care of the poor, and we have been told this over and over, but in context, it simply is not about that. Interpreting this text properly doesn't mean we have no responsibility for the poor. Other passages tell us that, but we should not read into texts what we want them to say.

[f Don Fawcett](#)

"What You Probably Don't Know about 'The Least of These,'" by Andy Horvath.

In reading "Contraception Saves Lives," I asked God: "What happened to Margaret Sanger? Who hurt her and confused her?" This post on Amy Julia Becker's blog gives a bird's eye view of the young nurse who was overwhelmed with women's plight of pain and threat of death in childbirth. Sanger chose the wrong path in her attempts to serve women. She chose what would become millions of deaths by chemical, oral, and surgical contraceptives and abortions, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of women by strokes, heart attacks, breast and cervical cancer, depression, and countless other ills. She chose what would one day lead to the deaths of over 55 million babies by the 21st century.

If only Sanger had been able to pray to Jesus, and not be angry or frightened about the conditions surrounding her, we could have avoided a lot of death and destruction. The scourge of abortion is a curse, a symptom of a sick and dying world. Abortion brings death, not life.

Accepting harmful birth control and abortions as the primary or only salvation for women who need help in understanding and managing their God-given gifts of fertility and motherhood has resulted in years of heartbreak.

[Alveda King, Email](#)

Director, African American Outreach, Priests for Life

Thin Places: "Contraception Saves Lives," by Rachel Marie Stone, guest author.

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# NEWS

**WITNESS**

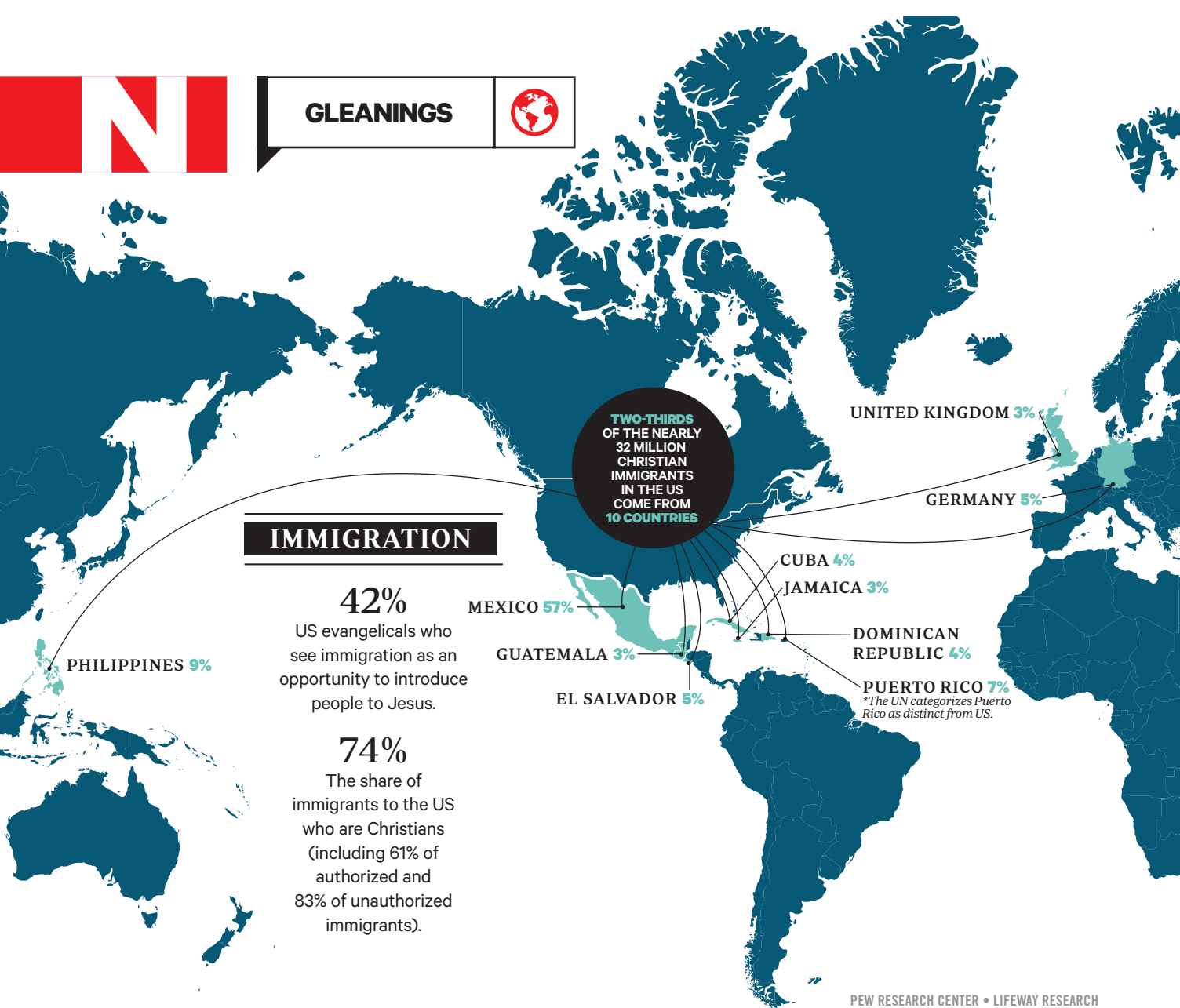
## STOPPING TRAFFIC

**CAMBODIA:** What was once the world's top destination for sex tourism has essentially eliminated child sex trafficking. A decade ago, 15 to 30 percent of Cambodia's sex workers were 15 or younger, International Justice Mission (IJM) reports. The nation went from no laws and little social accountability to having an antitrafficking police unit in every province and a Christian-run reporting hotline. "The beauty of this story is that you have God's people coming alongside a nation," said Christa Hayden Sharpe, IJM's Cambodia director. "[That's] why so much has changed."

MIKKEL ØSTERGAARD / PANOS







**IRAQ**

## Christian forgiveness of ISIS goes viral

More than 1 million people watched on Arabic television as 10-year-old Myriam, an Iraqi Christian forced to flee Mosul, Iraq, as ISIS advanced last year, forgave her persecutors. “I will only ask God to forgive them. Why should they be killed?” she told SAT-7 in its most-watched interview ever. The Christian broadcaster also hosted Bashir Estephanos, the brother of 2 of the 21 Christians beheaded in Libya, who prayed for the killers on air. “[Their] calls are a form of resistance—through forgiveness,” said Farid Samir, SAT-7’s Egypt director. The statements drew praise from the region’s secular Arabic

press, and the dean of Islamic studies at Cairo’s al-Azhar University later read Matthew 5’s “love your enemies” at a seminar.

## Bob Jones U. won’t discipline leaders as asked

Bob Jones University (BJU) announced it is pursuing 25 of the 28 recommendations from an unprecedented review of how the university treated victims of sexual abuse. President Steve Pettit said BJU had “too closely juxtaposed discipline with counseling” and has asked for a “comprehensive review” of student life. But BJU declined to follow a task force’s advice to discipline chancellor Bob Jones III and counseling professor Jim Berg, the two men whom a GRACE report [Gleanings,

March 2015] tagged as ultimately responsible for the university’s shoddy response in past decades. The decision angered the task force’s two survivor representatives, who called BJU’s response “shallow words backed largely by inaction.” Instead of choosing to “put this experience behind us,” Pettit said, “I want to keep it before us” so it won’t happen again.



**PAKISTAN**

## Christians stop turning the other cheek

After the Taliban attacked two Sunday services in Pakistan’s largest Christian neighborhood, protesters turned unusually violent. Christians lynched two Muslim men thought to have assisted 2 suicide





*“[He] has given it a much wider audience than I ever did or could.”*

**Nichole Nordeman**, on Prince choosing to cover “What If?” her 2005 hit song on the “transforming love of Jesus.”

bombers who killed 17 and injured 80 in Lahore, the nation's second-largest city. Christian leaders apologized on television and asked forgiveness. A terrorism court indicted 28 people. Christians complain that the Muslim government has ignored last year's Pakistani Supreme Court order to better protect places of worship. “The government told church authorities to build higher walls, add barbed wire, and install CCTV cameras,” said bishop Joseph Arshad to AsiaNews. “For a poor church like that of Pakistan, these are huge expenses.”

### LifeWay pulls heaven visitation books

Two months after Tyndale House Publishers retracted *The Boy Who Came Back from Heaven*, LifeWay Christian Stores announced it would stop selling all “experiential testimonies about heaven.” The move followed last year's Southern Baptist Convention resolution insisting on “the sufficiency of Scripture regarding the afterlife.” Books on near-death experiences are historically profitable: The 2010 *Heaven Is for Real* remains on the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association's bestseller list. “This is a good category for us, and we're going to continue to publish credible stories,” Baker Publishing Group told *Publishers Weekly*. A movie based on Baker's *90 Minutes in Heaven* will be released this fall by a sister company of Family Christian Stores, a LifeWay competitor.

### ISRAEL Bibi reelection squeezes Arab Christians

Research suggests that Arab Christians in Israel are downplaying their Israeli or Palestinian identity in favor of their Christian one. But the move could hamper

ministry outreach. The latest national election squeezed the roughly 157,000-strong community between the rising Zionism that preserved Benjamin Netanyahu as prime minister and the rising Islamism that partially propelled a new Arab party to a surprising third-place finish. Research from Musalaha and Hebrew University found that Christian youth today are rejecting affiliation with both Jews and Muslims. The result: a “ghetto mentality,” said Musalaha's Salim Munayer. “This is sad because in separating ourselves from these two communities, we have fewer opportunities for witness and ministry.”

### Gordon College reaffirms sexuality stance

Despite pressure from neighboring towns and its accrediting association, Gordon College unanimously reaffirmed its current sexual standards. “We remain as committed as ever to historic Christian teaching on this topic,” said president Michael Lindsay, “while recognizing that members of the Gordon community hold varying perspectives.” The college will develop a task force, conduct biennial surveys, and bolster antibullying policies to “improve its care for students around human sexuality.” Meanwhile, the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities thanked Gordon's accreditor, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, for clarifying that a requested report [Gleanings, November 2014] on Gordon's student conduct policy by September was a “routine follow-up” and not a threat to revoke its accreditation, intact until 2022.

### Antiporn ministry hits up Driscoll fans and fails

About 90,000 church leaders who attended Resurgence conferences

at the recently disbanded Mars Hill Church received an email from an anti-porn ministry linking Mark Driscoll and porn addiction to the same root: lack of accountability. Craig Gross, founder of XXXchurch, bought the mailing list for about \$1,500. His message: Buy our software, or you might end up like Driscoll. Many on the list were furious. Justin Dean, a former spokesperson, said he sold the list without permission and apologized. Not long after the email, the list was erased, and Gross received a refund. He noted: “I should have realized the Mark Driscoll supporters are as loud if not louder than the Mark Driscoll haters.”

### THE REACH OF CHRISTIAN MEDIA



**35%** of those who saw a Christian **movie** last year rarely attend church.



**31%** of those who watch Christian **TV** rarely attend church.



**28%** of those who read Christian **books** rarely attend church.



**26%** of those who listen to Christian **radio** rarely attend church.



**26%** of those who listen to Christian **podcasts** rarely attend church.

LIFEWAY RESEARCH/NRB



Publishing

# Forgive Us Our Debts

Bankrupt bookstore chain turns to the law for grace.

**B**lame it on the economy, the digital revolution, and a huge debt. These are the culprits that Family Christian Stores (FCS)—the nation's largest Christian retail chain, with 266 stores in 36 states—said pushed it into Chapter 11 bankruptcy this year.

Three years ago, FCS bought itself back from private equity owners. In 2013, it promised to donate all profits to serving widows and orphans around the world.

Since then, the company has contributed \$300,000 to charities—a small sliver of the \$450 million in gross sales it generated over the same 2 years. This shows how slim the profits really were, according to Christian literary agent Steve Laube.

When FCS filed for bankruptcy in February, it owed \$57 million to lenders and \$40 million to suppliers and vendors. “I wish that we had alternatives, but we do not,” said president Chuck Bengochea.

Carrying debt is a normal part of business, said Michael Anderson, president of the Association of Christian Economists. But “when plans go awry,” he said, “it has to be resolved in a way that is fair to everyone.”

FCS hopes to resolve its debts without any layoffs or store closures, but the collapse has pained Christian publishers, trade vendors, agents, and authors. Barbour Publishing announced layoffs, naming the FCS bankruptcy as a factor. Hendrickson Publishers stated that receiving no payment would “pose a very difficult financial burden.” Additional publishers delayed royalty payments.

Dozens of Christian publishers sued FCS over its initial proposal to use \$20

million worth of consignment inventory to help pay its debts. They argued the plan was unjust because the inventory was still their legal property, as they hadn’t been paid for it.

After creditors and the federal government also objected to how the sale plan would benefit one FCS owner more than outside creditors, the chain withdrew its inside bid but refiled its plan for a fast-tracked bankruptcy sale. At press time, FCS was still looking for a new bidder.

It’s important for Christian businesses to take their financial obligations seriously, said Dan Busby, president of the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability. “Not to do so is tantamount to cheating the offended party. In Old Testament terms, it’s doing business with unjust weights and measures.”

But some Old Testament passages suggest bankruptcy is a legitimate option, said Regent University law professor C. Scott Pryor. Releasing debtors has its roots in commands for a Year of Jubilee (Lev. 25) and for a debt-canceling year (Deut. 15).

“Bankruptcy reflects financial failure but also gives us the opportunity to do good” by showing grace, he said. “Part of God’s legal system is a built-in opportunity for a fresh start, a do-over.”

Such Old Testament principles can be applied by Christians today on the level of relating to others, said Mark Gignilliat, a professor at Beeson Divinity School.

“But to think about it on the macrolevel is a complicated soup.”

We live in a different economic

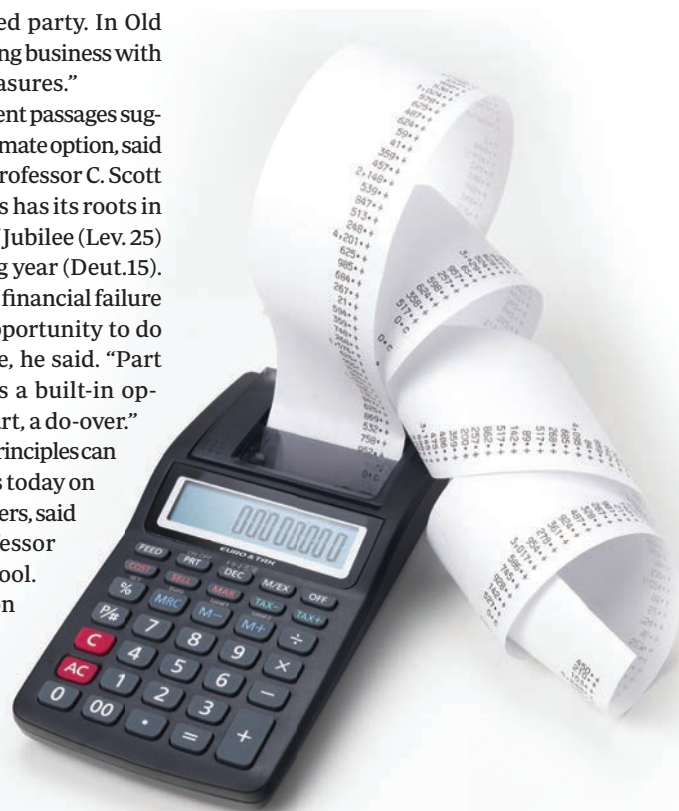
system than the theocracy of Moses’ time, he said. Also, there are different types of debt. The debt of a poverty-stricken family trying to get enough to eat is not the same as a company reaching beyond its means to take on debt. “That’s a breach of other covenants in the Old Testament,” said Gignilliat.

And while giving away money is a good thing, Christian companies—or individuals—overwhelmed by debt shouldn’t be writing checks to charity, said David Skeel, University of Pennsylvania law professor and historian of bankruptcy law.

In fact, charitable donations have been a significant issue in bankruptcy courts over the past 25 years, he said. In 1999, Congress began allowing debtors to give away 15 percent of their gross income without facing charges of fraud.

“You should be just before you are generous,” Pryor said. “If there isn’t enough money to pay your bills, you shouldn’t be giving anything away.”

The Christian companies owed millions by FCS are “obviously disappointed that we will take a huge loss in this process,” said Mark Taylor, president of Tynedale House Publishers. “But we hope Family Christian can survive as a chain of stores. Our industry needs them. . . . No one except the banks and the attorneys will get any money from [FCS] if we force them to liquidate.” **Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra**



# Matthew 18, 25 Years Later

Chinese Christians wrestle with rape allegation.

**A** dispute over an alleged rape in 1990 involving two influential Chinese Christians has rippled through the global Chinese church.

In October 2011, Chai Ling, the famed dissident who survived the Tiananmen Square massacre, emailed another dissident, saying she forgave him for raping her 21 years prior. Since the alleged assault near Princeton University, she had become a Christian and “out of love for Jesus” decided to forgive Yuan Zhiming.

The next morning, Yuan reportedly called her, saying, “The Lord was tormenting [me] all night.” He also had become a Christian since Tiananmen. In 2000, he created China Soul for Christ Foundation to spread the gospel through preaching and documentary films. But Yuan denied raping Chai. He later asked forgiveness for “sexual iniquity.”

After several attempts by Chai at reconciliation, her organization—All Girls Allowed (AGA), which opposes China’s one-child policy—released a public letter calling for Yuan to repent.

The disputed rape charge is spurring larger discussion in part because Chai’s spiritual mentors gave her conflicting advice. Some urged her to forgive, forget, and move on. Others said she should seek public justice and accountability.

Chai said AGA’s public letter was an attempt at practicing Matthew 18, where Jesus instructs that sins be made public to the church if the sinner doesn’t listen after repeatedly being approached in private.

Zhiqiu Xu, a Columbia International Seminary theology professor, served as Yuan’s witness at one of Chai’s private reconciliation attempts. He believes it’s best for Chai to turn the matter over to the courts.

“Everyone deserves justice,” he said. “However, justice can be administered only on the basis of truth, and truth needs the support of facts and evidence.”

Chai contacted police after China Soul’s board refused to respond to her allegation. Since then, three other women have alleged misconduct by Yuan. China Soul has asked accusers to contact the board directly. The board also condemned a report from an independent panel of



18 Chinese pastors about the newer allegations, saying it spread rumors online. Other leaders praised the report.

Xu, executive director of the International Fellowship of Chinese Churches, says “the Chinese church as a whole owes gratitude” to Chai because her case “purifies the church” and “provides an opportunity for us to improve the behavior code of pastoral staff.”

Traditional Chinese ideas about honor, shame, and saving face further complicate reconciliation, said Jackson Wu, who trains and mentors Chinese pastors. “Conflict is most frequently dealt with by silence,” he said. “The court of public opinion is not blind. So often justice eludes us. Victories are superficial.”

Chai believes the Matthew 18 process was helpful to her. “My motive in making this issue public,” she said, “is simply to stop any sexual violence that still may be going on.”

**Timothy C. Morgan**

## Under Discussion

Compiled by Ruth Moon



### Q: Should churches dim the lights during worship?

Bob Kauflin recently explained why his WorshipGod conferences intentionally leave the lights up. Many churches debate whether low lighting sets a better mood or mimics entertainment too much.

YES

NO

“The ability to ‘turn down’ the lights probably best encapsulates the lighting levels for Christian worship for centuries, when the ‘brightness’ of modern lights was not a possibility. Lights that are too bright can make it difficult to experience a gathered sense of corporate worship.”

**Bruce Benedict**, chaplain of worship, Hope College

“A song’s energy and tempo will rise and fall, so why shouldn’t your lighting? I’m not suggesting strobing your houselights. But your lighting needs to reflect what’s happening from the stage. During slower, introspective songs, the lighting can be lowered to create an intimate atmosphere.”

**Camron Ware**, founder, Visual Worshiper

“Worship lighting is a preference and should be appropriate to the style of your worship space. Traditional sanctuaries with traditional worship and stained glass should be well-lit, while contemporary worship in contemporary venues should make use of modern lighting techniques.”

**Don Chapman**, arranger and composer

“If most people in your church like a darker room, then don’t fight a needless battle to bring in more light. No matter how dim you go, however, please consider guests and those like me who have terrible eyesight and stumble around in a dark worship space.”

**Sam Rainer**, senior pastor, Stevens Street Baptist Church

“No. Aesthetic elements should support and complement our response to God’s Word and the gospel, not overpower it, distract from it, or be the foundation for it. Every time in history the church has overly emphasized aesthetic and artistic elements, the gospel has suffered.”

**Bob Kauflin**, director, Sovereign Grace Music





Archaeology Iraq, Syria

# The 'Monuments Men' of the Mideast

The race to save Christian antiquities from ISIS.

**ISIS has become** one of the world's best-funded terrorist groups, earning most of its profits by selling seized oil. But details keep emerging of the estimated No. 2 source of its billion-dollar revenue stream: looting biblical-era artifacts.

The group often destroys statues and other objects it deems idolatrous. But thousands of potentially lucrative archaeological sites are now under ISIS control. The resulting looting has given

rise to the term "blood antiquities." A parallel to Africa's "blood diamonds," where mines in a war zone are looted to finance military operations, ancient artifacts are helping to fund ISIS's reign of terror.

"ISIS is very savvy, very alert to economics," said Columba Stewart, executive director at St. John's University's Hill Museum and Manuscript Library. His team has been taking digital photographs of Christian artifacts in the

Middle East for 12 years.

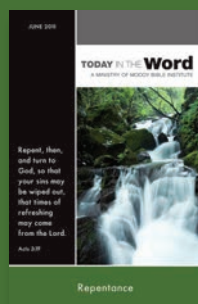
Most of the contents in Syria's 34 national museums were transported to safe havens, United Nations officials reported last January. Still, the remaining museum pieces—or worse, uncatalogued items in archaeological sites—are at risk.

Enter the US Committee of the Blue Shield, the subject of George Clooney's WWII movie *The Monuments Men*. Along with training the US military on how to protect cultural heritage during armed conflict, the committee also trains and teaches foreign museum staff who are trying to protect endangered artifacts, said member Corine Wegener.

"We teach various emergency methods for protection and evacuation," she said. Last summer, the committee trained 14 Syrian archaeologists and museum professionals who risked their lives both to attend the training and to hide museum artifacts.

Blue Shield isn't the only organization working on the problem. Stewart's library has digitized 2,500 manuscripts from Syria since 2005, and about 5,000 more from Iraq since 2009. Manuscripts are small enough to move and hide, so

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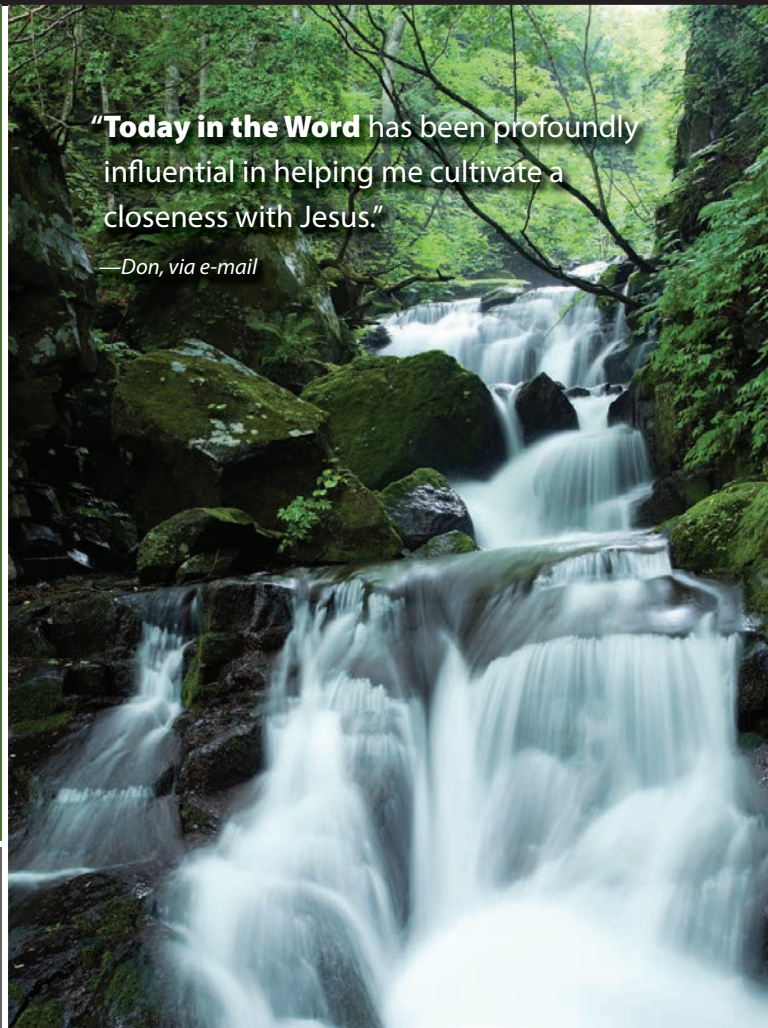
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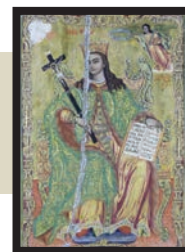
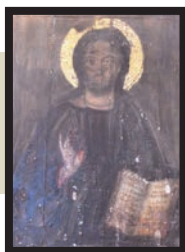
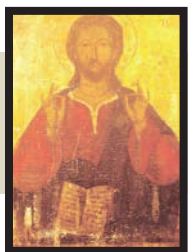
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**STOLEN: SYRIAN ANTIQUITIES TAKEN IN 2014**



they are relatively easy to protect from looters. But they are also relatively easy to sell on the black market, he said.

For archaeological sites like churches, taking photographs is the only way to preserve them, said Stewart. "A statue or a carving you might be able to hide, but if somebody is intent on destroying [a building] for ideological reasons, there's not a lot you can do."

The swift ISIS takeover in Iraq meant there was little time to hide thousands of documents, he said. Many have been destroyed.

"I tell people, look to yourself and your family first," Wegener said. "If you are still a caretaker of your collection and you see the opportunity where it looks like things are bad, you have to make that judgment call."

Most stories of saved artifacts won't come out until the conflict is over, she said. When Islamic extremists were threatening Timbuktu, Mali, in 2012, a local library curator created a system for smuggling more than 275,000 pages of priceless manuscripts by donkey, bicycle, or boat to the south of the country.

In 2001 in Kabul, Afghanistan, the Taliban destroyed thousands of artifacts that resembled humans or animals. But museum employees hid statues in obscure

storerooms and kept the fragments of pieces smashed by the Taliban. In recent years, 300 have been restored.

"The unsung heroes in these situations are people like librarians or museum directors who do their best to hide things in advance of trouble or as trouble arrives," Stewart said. One of his colleagues smuggled thousands of manuscripts out of Qaraqosh, Iraq's "Christian capital," in advance of ISIS last summer.

Still, the loss is enormous. "Our understanding of the past is made up of little specks we find and put together," said Hershel Shanks, editor of *Biblical Archaeology Review*. "Much of what we don't know is gone. It's heartbreaking."

**Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra and Gordon Govier**

INTERPOL

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# VIEWS



WHERE WE STAND

## IF YOU SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING

The church is starving for honest witnesses about moral failure.





# Ask religion journalists which they've encountered more: false witnesses and discord-sowers, or people with firsthand knowledge of wrongdoing who stay silent.

**I DON'T USUALLY GET MAD** at news stories. Not anymore. After 20 years of working at CT, I'm used to reading about human sin. Part of my job used to include sifting through every religion news tidbit and highlighting the top stories for our online readers. The daily drumbeat of ministry leaders resigning or being fired for moral failure was so common that I rarely noted it. But it was demoralizing. During one period, I kept hoping for a break in the streak. After one unbroken month of moral failure stories, I sought out spiritual help. My crisis passed.

So I was surprised to find myself grieving this month amid another series of reports. Grieving, and mad.

There was Patrick Sookhdeo, one of the most prominent advocates for persecuted Christians, especially in Muslim-majority countries. A British court found

the ministry. The article's author later compared the victim to Potiphar's wife and said Sookhdeo wouldn't have risked his career for breasts that were "nothing worth looking at." The ministry told CT it accepted Sookhdeo's resignation as a trustee but that he could have stayed on if he'd wanted to. He remains the international director of Barnabas Aid.

Similarly, Yuan's China Soul for Christ Foundation insisted that only it had the right and ability to determine the truth of accusations brought against its founder

Even still (and I hate to use a line from airport-security theater): If you see something, say something. I have no doubt that you are already attuned to the dangers of false accusations. You're almost certainly less attuned to your efforts not to acknowledge wrongdoing by your friends, colleagues, and ministry leaders.

Ask religion journalists which they've encountered more: false witnesses and discord-sowers, or people with firsthand knowledge of wrongdoing who stay silent.

Ask William Lobdell. He was the religion reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*. He's not there anymore. He's not a Christian anymore either. Years of reporting on sexual abuse by Catholic priests and spiritual chicanery by TBN hit him hard. But what did him in were bishops' cover-ups and evangelical pastors refusing to comment on TBN.

There are many others like Lobdell—people whose faith has been rocked less by leaders' sin than by churches and ministries enabling that sin. "That pastor did something wrong" is sad. "Those people knew and did nothing" can be devastating.

This is not a call for paranoia or to assume that everyone is up to no good. It's not a call for witch-hunting. It's a call for self-examination—and a plea. If you know something, tell someone. If you're hoping that something will resolve itself, you need more fear that it will blow up terribly. If you are praying that God will bring something to light, listen to his call to "take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them" (Eph. 5:11, ESV). When we say something, we help to ensure that dark deeds done in secret can no longer wreak havoc in the lives of the innocent. **CT**

**TED OLSEN** is managing editor for news and online journalism for *Christianity Today*.



him guilty of sexually touching a female employee and intimidating witnesses.

Around the same time, human rights activist Chai Ling was accusing apologist Yuan Zhiming of raping her in 1990, before they both became prominent Christians. (See "Matthew 18, 25 Years Later," p. 19.)

And these weren't the only two such cases we investigated this month. But the Sookhdeo and Yuan cases illustrated the defensive response we tend to get from organizations when their leaders' sins are made public.

Barnabas Aid International insisted that its own internal inquiry into the allegations against Sookhdeo found no wrongdoing. After the court conviction, ministry officials repeatedly directed CT to an online article that implied the victim sought to bring down

and president. "Pastor Yuan resigned from his pastoral duties and ministries, but not his title and position, in order to rest in our Lord and renew himself during this trial," the ministry told CT. "The resignation is not a punishment in any way."

In our news stories, we have attempted to represent all sides accurately and fairly. But, in general, when such cases emerge, I find claims of innocence increasingly difficult to believe. My experience tells me that organizational leaders dramatically underestimate their capacity to self-deceive and turn a blind eye.

Yes, I've known hurt people who make false accusations. Some people really are trying to profit from other Christians' sins. I'm wary of our surveillance culture and of our social-media culture of outrage and self-righteous watchdoggery.





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# Should Christians confront Mormon missionaries when they knock on the front door?

The Latter-day Saints field 80,000 missionaries worldwide.



**L. L. (Don) Veinot Jr.**  
**Yes, Jesus Would**

**H**oly confrontation has become a lost art, in part because we misinterpret 2 John 1:10–11: “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them. Anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work.”

Some Christians use this verse as a reason to not invite Mormons into

their homes. But this stance ignores the passage’s context. In the early church, churches met in homes. When Christian teachers arrived in a community, they looked for the home in which the faithful met. The Lord instructed the disciples to do this. In today’s language, we would write, “Do not take them into your pulpit.” It is a warning to not let false teachers into authority where they could mislead the unwary.

As a missionary to members of cults and new religions, I reach out to those

who are not Christians and know they are not Christians (atheists, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews); those who think they are Christians because they go to church; and those who are not Christians but are in pseudo-Christian groups (Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses).

People in this last category use the Bible and Christian terms but with different definitions. An aspect of proclaiming the gospel is exposing these differences. That is our task in confronting—not to shame, embarrass, or manipulate.

Paul gives excellent guidance on how to sanctify confrontation in 2 Timothy 2:24–25. First, never be quarrelsome. Apologists and defenders of the faith must take this advice to heart. We should not be ready to argue at the drop of a hat.

Second, offer kindness to everyone. Demonstrate a generous demeanor. The individual on the other side of the conversation is lost. How I treat this person may be just as important as the words I use.

Third, be skilled in teaching. Do we know what we are talking about? Do we know what we believe, why we believe it, what the key theological ideas are, and what the full meaning of a key text is? With Mormon missionaries at the front door, we can literally teach people into Christian faith.

Fourth, show self-restraint when wronged. We may be wronged quite a bit in these exchanges. Someone in a false religious system is emotionally tied to the group and will view us as the enemy trying to harm them.

Finally, offer correction with gentleness. We live in a shout-out culture. But the God-honoring, still, small voice of truth

can make a deep impression. The process of correcting false ideas with the truth from God's Word should never induce fear.

The entire purpose is to lead persons to know the truth and repent, the same way Jesus would. Each day, Mormons leave their group and call on the name of the Lord for salvation—even at our front door.

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**L. L. (DON) VEINOT JR.**, cofounder of Midwest Christian Outreach in Wonder Lake, Illinois, is president of Evangelical Ministries to New Religions.

## Lynn K. Wilder No, But Try Pointed Questions

**T**wo gangly 19-year-olds in crisp white shirts and dark suits carrying the Book of Mormon bounded up onto our front porch. Smiling broadly, they said, “We bring a message about Jesus Christ. May we mow your lawn?”

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) is missionary focused. My husband, Michael, and I were looking for a Bible-believing church. Assuming the Mormon church was one, we joined. After 30 years of leadership—I was a tenured professor at Brigham Young University—God called us out of the Mormon church when our son Micah challenged us to read the Bible in the same way a child would.

All our sons served LDS missions. Please—engage these missionaries when they knock. Love them, feed them, and teach them the gospel of grace from the Jesus of the Bible. Micah was converted by just such an encounter while on his Mormon mission. Confront them? Not if you can avoid it. The Book of Mormon teaches that contention is of the Devil.

These missionaries will use the same religious words that biblical Christians use, but the words do not have the same meaning. The *Godhead* is not the same. *Jesus, grace, Atonement, heaven, salvation*, none of it. So avoid religious speak.

Mormons do not completely trust the Bible. Christians should have on hand the historical and archeological evidence that proves its people, places, and events. The Book of Mormon has no such corroborating evidence. With missionaries, ask questions and when confronted with a teaching contrary to the Bible, kindly point it out.

Present Scripture up against LDS doctrine in a way that causes these missionaries to pause. *Unveiling Grace* has a doctrinal comparison chart to utilize with missionaries. Know your own testimony and Bible verses that impact you, and recognize what is not biblical. Read online the missionary guidebook *Preach My Gospel*. Courteously ask pointed questions. Watch for departure from the orthodox Christian faith: Both God the Father and Jesus appeared to Joseph Smith and have bodies of flesh and bones? Doesn't that make them separate gods? The Bible teaches that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the same divine being.

There was a great apostasy and the church fell away until Smith restored it? Refer to Matthew 16:18: “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” If Jesus said that, how could there be a falling away for 1,800 years?

Has Jesus always been God? Read John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Wait a minute. If he was God from the beginning, he can't have worked his way to godhood as Mormon scripture teaches.

The Bible is often not translated correctly? Jesus himself says in Matthew 24:35, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”

What worked for me? The Word.

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**LYNN K. WILDER** is author of *Unveiling Grace: The Story of How We Found Our Way Out of the Mormon Church* and coauthor of *7 Reasons We Left Mormonism*.

## Cory B. Willson No, Try Bold Humility

**I** hate it when anyone, but especially a salesperson, knocks on my front door. I often work from home, so when missionaries come to the door—whether Mormon or Southern Baptist—I have to resist succumbing to my irritation and temper. If there is anyone who has a predilection for confrontation, it is I. And yet the gospel of Jesus calls me to something more.

First Peter 3:15 says, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness

and respect.” This passage reminds me of what Chuck Smith, the late Calvary Chapel pastor, wrote regarding debates about predestination: “If you have come to a strong personal conviction on one side of a doctrinal issue, please grant us the privilege of first seeing how it has helped you to become more Christlike in your nature, and then we will judge whether we need to come to that same persuasion.” His words have rebuked my abrasive disposition many times.

US evangelicals need to engage Mormons with persuasive reasoning and respect. This is what Martin Marty, Richard Mouw, and others have called “convicted civility.” Such principled engagement is much different from direct confrontation, and it's based primarily on two teachings.

First, each human being is created in the image of God, and his or her uniqueness is precious to God. This uniqueness demands my respect (Gen. 1:27; 9:6; James 3:9). As we consider the Mormon missionaries at our door, we would do well to remember that these young adults are image bearers of God and someone's son or daughter.

Second, the gospel is intended to woo us and stir our desires for God. Engaging our neighbors should entail more than confronting them with the truth. Scripture teaches us that God is active not only in Scripture but also in the moral consciences and restless longings of every human person (Rom. 2:14–16; Acts 17:26–28).

Just as we share in the human experience of restlessness for God, we also know what it is to distort God's revelation through our unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18–23). Paul argues that the gospel meets us in our restlessness for God, but also rebukes us for sinfully distorting God's revelation.

We evangelicals must first preach the gospel to our own hearts and address the deep roots of sinful rebellion operative in our lives. While we must remain bold in teaching that the Bible tells the true gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16), we are also called to humility because we know our own sinfulness (1 Tim. 1:15). When the gospel confronts our own lives with its power, the Spirit can do mighty things through our witness to others. **CT**

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**CORY B. WILLSON**, a PhD candidate at Fuller Seminary, is cofounding editor of *Evangelical Interfaith Dialogue* and an elder at Grace Brethren Church of Long Beach.

**Wesley Hill** teaches  
New Testament at Trinity  
School for Ministry in  
Ambridge, Pennsylvania.  
His latest book  
is *Spiritual Friendship*.



# The Best Christian Paradox

And what it means for our own suffering.

I still vividly remember the first time I went to speak with an older, wiser Christian about some significant personal pain. I remember sitting down in his office, tongue-tied. I remember my halting effort to find the words to express my questions. I remember, afterward, feeling the joy of a burden lifted.

But as much as I remember anything about that day, I remember *why* I went to see that particular mentor rather than someone else.

First, I knew that this friend had suffered. He had already described for me his own dark times in which he had cried and prayed to God for relief.

Second, I knew my friend had somehow journeyed on *beyond* where I was. Not only was he several decades my senior, those years of faith had also deepened and seasoned him, like a rich-hued oak table grown darker and smoother with repeated polishing. It was the combination—suffering and godly maturity—that made me want to confide in my friend.

This experience illustrates why many Christians throughout the ages have wanted to affirm two things about God's saving relationship to us. Placing their faith in a crucified Savior, the early Christians declared that *God has suffered*. It was, in the words of the church fathers, precisely *one of the Trinity* who bled and died for us. As Scripture puts it, "We don't have a priest who is out of touch with our reality. He's been through weakness and testing, experienced it all—all but the sin" (Heb. 4:15, MSG).

But, in the same breath, our Christian forebears also declared that God—the same God who hung on a tree for our

salvation—didn't give up his transcendent majesty when he did so. God remained who he always had been: the One who is beyond human change, suffering, and death.

To be sure, holding on to *both* of these affirmations often resulted in paradoxical statements. Like a third-culture kid trying to straddle her native home and a new environment, the church fathers and those who came after them tried creative ways of speaking about God's work in Christ. Charles Wesley, the Methodist hymnist, exclaimed, "'Tis mystery all: / Th' Immortal dies!" *The One who cannot die—has died*. Cyril of Alexandria, a fifth-century bishop in Egypt, spoke teasingly of "the suffering of the impassible [or 'unable-to-suffer'] God." *The One who is impervious to human suffering has suffered*.

What these writers were trying to articulate was the paradox of a God who surrenders none of his saving health and power, even in the moment when God humbles himself to the most abject weakness and vulnerability. Only if God remains God—immutable, omnipotent, and impassible—could the Cross be a rescue operation rather than merely a

comforting but ultimately ineffective solidarity with us humans in our misery. As Eastern Orthodox theologian Paul Gavriluk writes, "The compassionate person ... is able to help precisely because he is not susceptible to suffering to the degree to which the victim is."

Thinking back to my time with my older friend, I catch a glimpse of why this paradox was so important to the early Christians. I knew I needed to talk with someone who would be a sensitive fellow sufferer, who could identify with what I was feeling, one who was familiar with sorrows and acquainted with grief. But I also knew that no amount of "I've been there too" camaraderie would be enough if my mentor couldn't also somehow pull me out of the mire I'd fallen into. Empathy could only go so far. If my friend didn't stand ahead of me, at a farther point down the road of discipleship, he wouldn't have been much help.

The same is true with God—albeit in a qualitatively different way. The reason the death of Jesus is able to *defeat* death, rather than capitulate to it, is that Jesus is God. He is the same God who told Moses from the burning bush, "I am who I am" (Ex. 3:14).

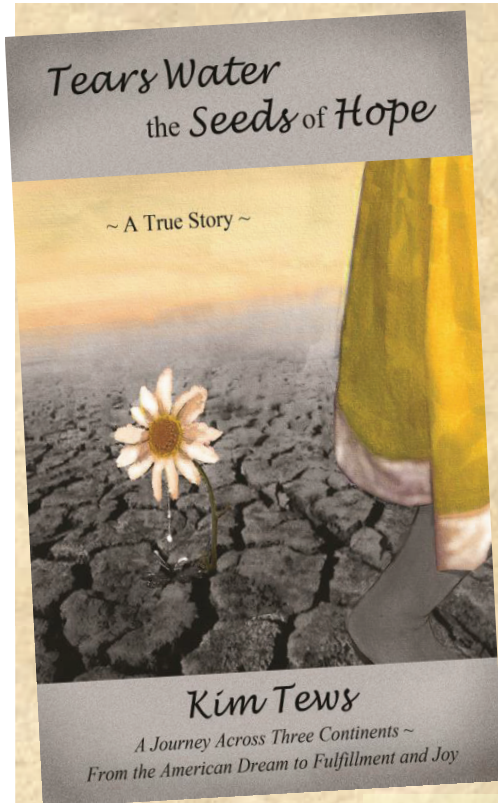
He is the One who stands beyond time and the waves of human vacillation and defenselessness. *That* is the One who carried his own cross to Calvary. If that One died, his death could never be mere sympathetic cosuffering with us. *That* death was the end of death. *That* death broke death's power forever because it was the death of the Deathless One. Praise him.

**Only if God remains God—immutable, omnipotent, and impassible—could the Cross be a rescue operation.**

CT

ILLUSTRATION BY ADAM CRUFT





## The story of ordinary people, making a difference, one life at a time.

***Tears Water the Seeds of Hope*** is the inspiring true story of a Wisconsin husband and wife that become disenchanted with the relentless pursuit of the “American Dream” and embark on a journey that spans six countries and redefines their hearts and lives. The story begins in a small town in Wisconsin and weaves its way through South and Central America as the couple gathers an army of supporters, and eventually establishes a 501(c) 3 organization to save the lives of children in the end stages of starvation in eastern Guatemala. The narrative is filled with action-packed adventure and heart-warming victories as the couple faces incredible odds and seemingly hopeless situations, while hundreds of volunteers join mission teams to offer help and hope through the programs of the ministry. Readers of all ages will enjoy the roller coaster ride of emotions—from laughter, to tears, to sheer joy—as they realize that it is possible for ordinary people to make a difference, one life at a time.

*“I was hooked from the first pages. Readers will be wrapped up in the emotional side of this journey and brought to laughter and tears as they learn that ordinary people can do extraordinary things. This is a must read.”*

**Terri Forehand –RN-Author**

*“Tews has a very descriptive writing voice that will draw you in and hold you from the first page to the last. It is a book that will remain with you forever. The photos will touch your heart and the stories will touch your soul. If you purchase just one memoir this year, it should be this one.”*

**Lori Caswell-Top 1000 Reviews**

*“Kim Tews shares her faith effortlessly as she deals with the issue of why God allows suffering. Her impact is unbelievable. She never comes across “preachy”, but my faith has been encouraged. I found myself in tears more than once. This a book I want to tell everyone about!”*

**Ruth Hill**



*“Impossible to put down...an awe-inspiring journey through hardship and doubts, to peace with God, as Tews shares an honest look at faith challenges and offers sincere and valuable resolution. You will be left exhausted, but inspired to make a difference with your life. This well-penned page turner is one of the best inspirational reads to come along in quite a while.”*

**Malcolm Dougherty**



*...“I couldn’t get enough of this book. I simply did not want to stop reading it. I was completely drawn in from start to finish...Kim Tews did not sugar coat anything nor did she hold anything back. I found her story to be riveting and convicting. Tears Water the Seeds of Hope provoked, inspired and challenged me all at the same time. I highly recommend this book.”*

**Pilar Arsenec - National Book Critics Circle**

**Available at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) & [barnesandnoble.com](http://barnesandnoble.com)**



# Preacher with a Paintbrush

The first acclaimed black artist shared the gospel without saying a word.

In 1973, after more than a dozen years of turning down invitations to preach in racially segregated South Africa, Billy Graham finally held the first large-scale, mixed-race public event in the nation's history. "Jesus was not a white man," he declared to the 45,000 gathered in Durban. "He came from that part of the world that touches Africa, and Asia, and Europe, and he probably had brown skin."

A lot of people still have trouble imagining a brown Jesus. In December 2013, Fox News anchor Megyn Kelly riled media pundits by insisting that Jesus was white. The 2014 movie *Son of God* featured a decidedly white actor in the role of Jesus. In *Exodus: Gods and Kings*, director Ridley Scott used white actors to play key Egyptians and Hebrews; he claimed he couldn't have financed the film had the principal characters looked too Middle Eastern.

The kerfuffle over *Exodus* got me thinking about the biblical paintings by Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859–1937). Tanner was the first African American painter to receive international acclaim and a pioneer in using Middle Eastern models for biblical figures. Tanner came from an illustrious family. His father was a leading bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and editor of the church's paper, the most widely circulated African American publication at the time. Henry's sister was the first woman (black or white) to practice medicine in Alabama, and Henry studied at both the prestigious Philadelphia Academy of Art and the Académie Julian in Paris. Many of his paintings were exhibited at the Paris Salon.

Though Tanner sometimes painted a dark (though not African) Jesus—and

though he settled in France to escape American racism—he was not on a race mission. His mission was to universalize the biblical message: "My efforts have been to not only put the biblical incident in the original setting . . . but at the same time give the human touch 'which makes the whole world kin' and which ever remains the same." Believing that Bible stories illuminate the universal human experience and offer an encounter with the living God, Tanner wanted to put us, the viewers, in the frame, for those stories are addressed to us and are about us.

*The Annunciation*, perhaps his most reproduced painting, does this remarkably well. His is not the standard double profile of an enormous angel with parrot wings confronting a pious Mary sitting in the garden of an Italian villa (think Fra Angelico). Instead, Tanner's angel is a featureless, brilliant burst of light. Mary, on the other hand, sits in an unadorned bedroom in the middle of the night. The viewer's eye is thus directed to the wonderstruck young woman. Because Mary is turned toward us, we share her reaction, listening with her for the divine Word as she receives the angel's message and the Spirit's overshadowing.

Tanner's first painting of Jesus and

Nicodemus is a similar contrast to standard practice. When James Tissot, the most popular illustrator of biblical scenes in the 1890s, painted *The Interview between Jesus and Nicodemus*, he gave us a profile of the two seated men, heads bent together intimately. But Tanner's dark-faced Jesus faces us squarely. Tanner makes us, alongside Nicodemus, spiritual seekers.

In *The Resurrection of Lazarus*, Tanner again departs from the standard portrayal. When Jesus commands "Lazarus, come forth!" both Rembrandt and Tissot isolate him visually from the mourners. Tanner's Christ, by contrast, stands with the mourners (among them a turbaned man of distinctly African appearance), not pointing upward but reaching out toward the awakening Lazarus, spreading his palms in a gesture of welcome. By standing with the mourners—we are all mourners—Tanner's Jesus includes us in the story.

Similarly, *The Two Disciples at the Tomb* has none of the usual props—no angel, no folded grave clothes. Tanner shows us instead the faces of Peter and John, illuminated by a light from the tomb. Reflecting both their grief and their budding resurrection faith, their faces could be ours.

The son of a preacher man, Tanner used images, not words, to extend an invitation. "I will preach with my brush," he said. He did so by putting us in the picture, allowing us to share Mary's wonder, Nicodemus's searching questions, the sorrow of Lazarus's friends, and the disciples' newborn faith.

May we have the eyes to see Tanner's message.

CT

ILLUSTRATION BY ADAM CRUFT



# NY CITYFEST

with **LUIS PALAU**

# CENTRAL PARK

## JULY 11

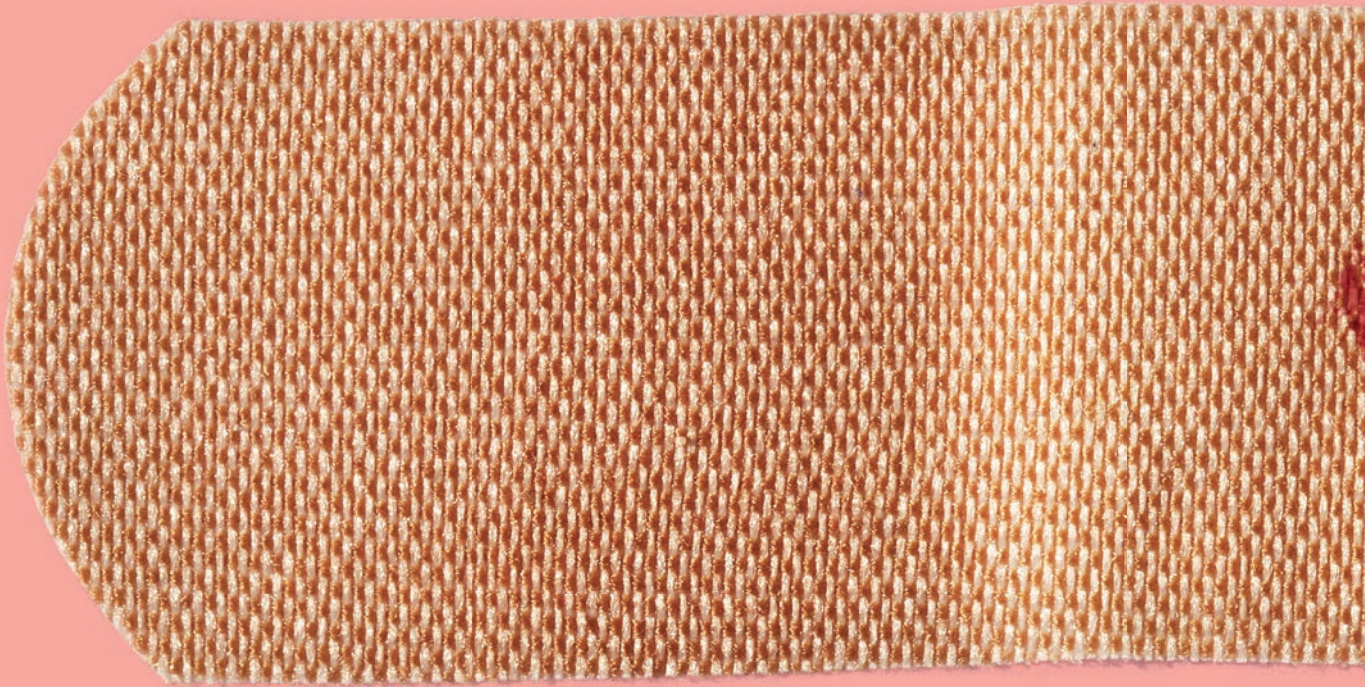


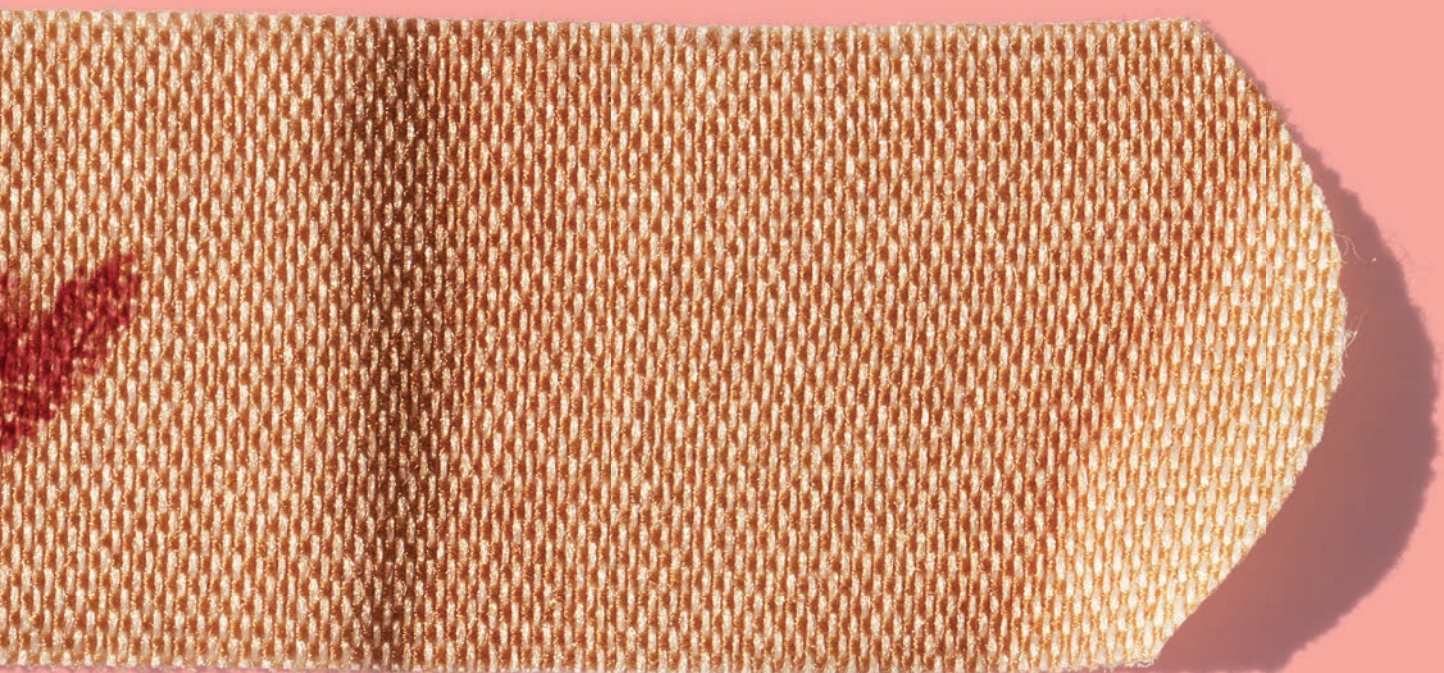
Imagine hundreds of churches and nonprofits from across the New York City metro area coming together to love and serve their city in the name of Jesus Christ. Imagine multiple evangelistic gatherings throughout the region, all leading to a major evangelistic festival with Luis Palau in Central Park. Imagine the long-term impact. Imagine the lives changed. This is the vision of NY CityServe & CityFest, a region-wide effort led by Luis Palau and hundreds of local churches.

You can play a part by praying for the campaign, partnering in outreach, tuning in to the festival, or hosting your own satellite gathering. Learn more at [www.NYCityFest.org/partner](http://www.NYCityFest.org/partner).



# Why I Still Vaccinate



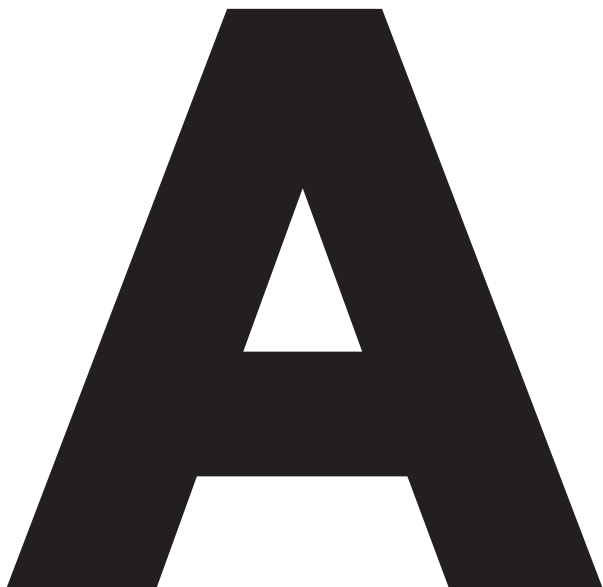


Even though I almost died  
from a vaccine reaction.

BY MATTHEW LOFTUS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RYAN HAYSLIP





As I lay in a hospital bed, the doctor and I tried to figure out why red, purple, and blue patches were erupting all over my body. My blood platelet levels were so low, I could have developed spontaneous internal bleeding. ER residents crowded into the room, curious to see my skin. We went down the list of potential causes: a family history of bleeding disorders, recent medication exposures, cancer symptoms, recent infections.

Then I remembered. Three weeks prior, I had received several vaccines to prepare for a medical missions trip. As I endured much testing over the following weeks and years, only one explanation persisted for my immune thrombocytopenic purpura (ITP): A vaccine had tricked my immune system into attacking my own platelets, the parts of blood cells that bind them together.

I know the risks of vaccines quite intimately. Even so, I continue to take vaccinations, I ensure that my children get them, and I recommend them to all my patients. Before becoming a family doctor in Baltimore, I studied immunology in medical school, learning how and why vaccines work in order to offer them to my patients. Like all parents—including, of course, those who refuse vaccines—I want what’s best for my children. As I have thought about my own story and studied vaccines, I’ve grown confident in this: The benefits of vaccines are far too great for us to refuse, and the risk of refusing them extends far beyond our own families. This is not just a medical issue, but an issue that touches on our faith and our public witness.

## THE WORRY OVER VACCINES

In recent years in the West, including among Christians, concerns about vaccines have grown, leading to measles outbreaks in pockets of the United States and in Germany, where an infant died of the highly infectious disease this winter. Vaccination rates are so low in some states, some wonder if we’ll lose herd immunity—the protection given to a population when so many people are vaccinated that a disease can’t spread, even if the vaccine isn’t effective for everyone.

Yet many parents still believe vaccines’ risks outweigh their purported benefits.

Members of the antivaccine movement note that many

vaccine-preventable diseases were on the decline before vaccines were widely used. This is true (in some cases, anyway) largely due to improved medical care across the board. These prevaccination declines underscore that health is not simply about following the medical industry’s recommendations. More broadly, health means a whole community practicing a range of behaviors and making structural developments (mostly related to sanitation) to see general health improvements.

Here we can learn from communities that deliberately choose not to vaccinate. Their focus on individual health, an unpolluted environment, and the tight community bonds that allow them to propagate their ideas make them less likely to suffer from heart disease, cancer, and other illnesses that kill far more people in developed countries than vaccine-preventable diseases do. Families that breastfeed, exercise, avoid junk food, opt out of daycare, and follow a more “natural” way of life are indeed less susceptible to disease. So why, they reason, put a mixture of foreign DNA and artificial chemicals into a child’s body to prevent those diseases?

Further, families who reject vaccines note that materials used to make them—such as mercury and aluminum—could harm our bodies, particularly our brains. Christians and non-Christians alike argue we were created with immune systems designed to ward off disease, making “artificial” prevention obsolete.

Some Christians in particular are concerned that vaccines are made using cell lines taken from unborn babies aborted decades ago. The cell lines are manipulated in a lab to divide indefinitely, providing a medium in which to grow a weakened virus. These Christians worry that getting vaccines amounts to cooperating with evil, especially given that research on aborted fetuses continues today. (For example, neuroscientists have transplanted cells from aborted fetuses into the brains of people with Parkinson’s disease.)

In sum, vaccine critics note that vaccines have no obvious benefit while posing health risks, all while participating in a potentially murky ethical system. Add

### ANTIVACCINES ARGUMENT



#### ‘What about the link between vaccines and autism?’

In 1998, *The Lancet* published a study by Dr. Andrew Wakefield that appeared to find a link between autism and vaccines. Follow-up cohort studies covering more than 12 million children have found no link. *The Lancet* formally refuted Wakefield’s findings in 2004.



# **We can't ever let a story or set of stories, no matter how compelling, negate a larger body of evidence.**

to this the powerful stories from individuals whose children developed debilitating diseases after getting vaccines, and the no-vaccines case seems strong.

## **THE POWER OF STORIES**

But as compelling as that case may be, it ultimately doesn't grapple with how we as a society measure health benefits and risks.

Let's first clarify the language we use to talk about medical intervention in general and vaccines in particular. All medical interventions—whether a simple cholesterol test or a complex surgery—carry both an increased *chance* of benefit and an increased *risk* of harm.

If you have pneumonia or a blood infection, a doctor will prescribe an antibiotic as a treatment that carries side effects. But the risk of the infection is higher than the risk of the side effects. Therefore, the antibiotic is a wise medical intervention. By contrast, antibiotics do nothing to kill viruses that cause colds, and also introduce unnecessary risks. Many Westerners request antibiotics for these viruses because they want to relieve their symptoms. But in this case, an antibiotic is a poor medical intervention and should be avoided.

We've all seen the TV commercials for new drugs that purport to treat one ailment while potentially creating dozens more. These commercials demonstrate that no medical intervention is completely free of risk—and some, like the antibiotics used for colds caused by viruses, create a greater chance of risk than benefit. Further, the medical community has notoriously overprescribed an enormous variety of drugs. We're wise not to assume that a medical consensus always implies scientific rigor. It doesn't.

But we're also wise not to assume that individual stories—which are as powerful as scientific research in shaping public opinion today—have the final word. Even I can't say for sure that a vaccine caused my autoimmune disease. We can't ever

let a story or set of stories, no matter how compelling, negate a larger body of evidence about how well a treatment works or how frequently it harms. This is especially true when discussing what's best for a whole society.

When I had ITP, I was bruising for two weeks before I sought treatment. Knowing that I'd recently received vaccines, I figured that I'd had an innocent drug reaction and continued on with my 14-hour workdays. By the time I saw my doctor, she took my otherwise normal appearance as a sign that I'd be fine. Then she ordered a battery of tests to figure out what was going on. Two days later, I got the call that my platelets were critically low and I needed to get to the ER immediately.

I had misidentified my rash, and my doctor had overlooked its seriousness. That I actually felt fine didn't help: it prevented me from seeking care sooner and prevented my doctor from acting faster. I had just enough knowledge to take serious risks, such as riding my bike and playing Ultimate Frisbee.

Similarly, if our decisions about vaccines are based on how healthy we feel right now and how infrequently we get vaccine-preventable diseases, we'll miss the big picture of how dangerous these diseases can be and how powerful vaccines are. We can avoid this error by sifting through as much information about vaccines as we can and basing decisions on the studies with the largest numbers of participants, putting less weight on individual anecdotes. So let's look at the largest studies.



### **'Don't vaccines use cells from aborted fetuses?'**

Some vaccines are made using cell lines from animals and fetal tissue.

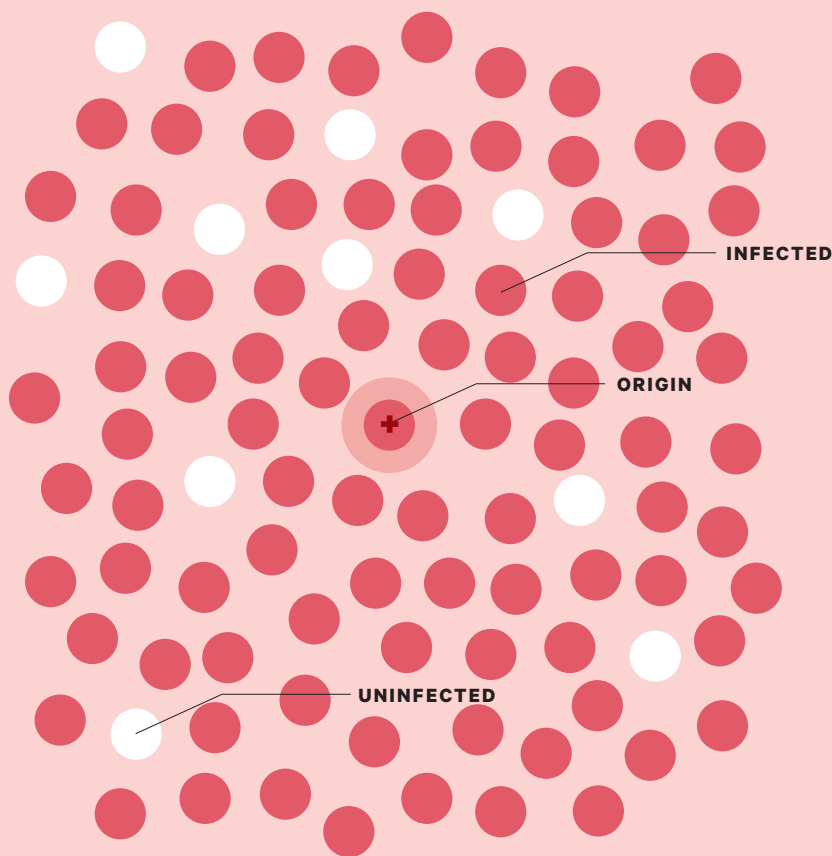
The Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission compares such use to using organs from a person who was murdered. The circumstances are a sign of a fallen world, but there is no causal link between the two.

## **THE BIG PICTURE**

When it comes to the measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine, a combination of studies involving millions of subjects find that the chance of benefit is incredibly high. This has translated to ever-decreasing rates of measles, mumps, and rubella, along with decreased death and disability from these diseases, worldwide. Meanwhile, the risk of harm is demonstrably low. About one in six children have a low-grade fever or rash the day of the shot. Seizures resulting from a fever—which are scary but harmless—occur generally at rates of 1 or 2 per 1,000 vaccine doses.

More serious reactions (such as thrombocytopenia, which is similar to ITP) occur less frequently. Even then, they are

# By the Numbers: Measles Vaccine



**Measles is incredibly contagious.** If 100 people are standing in a room and 1 has the measles, within the next 3 weeks, 90 of those exposed—if not already vaccinated—will be infected.

How many people worldwide still die from measles

EACH YEAR

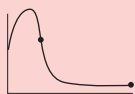
146,000

EACH DAY

400

EACH HOUR

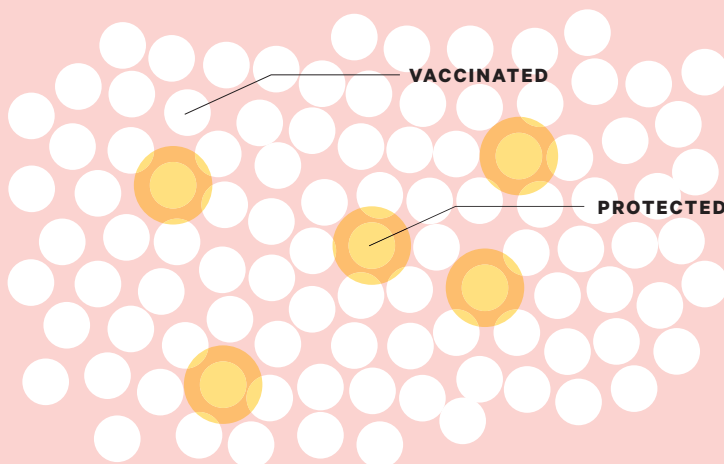
17



Measles infections have sharply declined since

1963

when the vaccine was first licensed.



**If 95 of 100 people** are vaccinated against measles, the 5 who can't get the vaccine (or for whom the vaccine didn't work) will still be protected due to herd immunity.

still *less* frequent than complications brought on by measles, mumps, or rubella. And when the risks of a vaccine outweigh the benefits—such as in the case of RotaShield, meant to treat diarrhea in young children—public health officials usually step in to pull the product.

What about those artificial components? Aluminum and formaldehyde occur naturally in our bodies or in the environment at concentrations higher than those in vaccines. Research continues to demonstrate that an infant's body can safely handle the amount of aluminum found in vaccines. In the case of autism, studies with larger and larger sample sizes demonstrate no link between autism and vaccines, despite otherwise compelling stories from individuals who see a connection between the two.

The scientific evidence overwhelmingly suggests that vaccines carry a high chance of benefiting us and an incredibly low chance of harming us. The more effective a health intervention is in saving lives, the more morally responsible it is for a community to promote it.

Still, many Christians are rightly concerned that some vaccines are made using cell lines from aborted babies. To be clear: We should oppose any ongoing research that treats a vulnerable human life so callously. And, as the Catholic Church suggests, all Christians should implore pharmaceutical manufacturers to find vaccines without such tainted histories wherever possible.

Even so, getting a vaccine that includes components produced by these cell lines doesn't *causally* cooperate with evil. Indeed, it's nearly impossible to do anything without cooperating, however distantly, with evil. As the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission noted, getting a vaccine that uses these cell lines doesn't fuel the number of abortions; likewise, avoiding such vaccines doesn't prevent abortions from happening. There are far more effective ways to advocate for the lives of the unborn—ones that don't pose a health risk to us or our neighbors.

How, then, to think about vaccines from a biblical perspective?

## HEALTH IS STEWARDSHIP

First, we have to understand health not just as the absence of disease but as *wholeness* in our bodies and communities. It's what the writer Wendell Berry has called "singular integrity and communal belonging." From this perspective, health means stewarding all the resources God has given us to bring about human flourishing and full image-bearing among our families and neighbors. Preventing the most deaths for the lowest cost with the simplest interventions is a core part of stewardship.

We find an example of this stewardship in the Old Testament. Reflecting an early Judeo-Christian vision of "public health," the Levitical law prescribed quarantining people and property with infections that could spread to others (Lev. 13). Landowners were held responsible for injuries incurred on their property (Deut. 22:8) or by their animals (Ex. 21:28–29). Our relationship to the natural world is one of stewards; to each other, as image bearers and, among Christians, coheirs with Christ. This means we make use of every morally sound means to promote health for all.

Considered in the wider context of stewardship, there is no coherent biblical reasoning that discourages us from putting

#3

**'I don't want the government telling our family what to do.'**

You're in luck:

While all 50 states require vaccinations for children entering public school, 48 states grant exemptions for religious reasons. And a recent poll found that most doctors are willing to at least delay vaccines based on parents' wishes.

anything "artificial" in our bodies. The distinction between the "natural" world and the "artificial" one has been blurred ever since humans started planting crops in rows instead of scattering seed. Even those who practice the healthiest lifestyles to prevent hypertension, diabetes, asthma, and cancer are not fully protected from these maladies. Many require lifelong medical treatment—in tandem with a healthy lifestyle—to reduce disability or prevent early death. By giving our bodies just enough ingredients to develop immunity instead of waiting for disease to strike, we're proactively conforming to a pattern of wholeness.

As vaccine skeptics point out, healthier children are less likely to suffer complications from vaccine-preventable diseases. Even so, a Christian vision of stewardship extends beyond the health of individuals or families. As essayist Eula Biss notes in her book *On Immunity*, humans are prone to clutch at control to the point that the artificial ingredients in vaccines terrify us more than the diseases they prevent.

## PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE

Many are not so privileged as to opt out. Those who suffer from poverty or immunosuppressive disease do not have the same power to protect themselves and their children. Parents who consider the effects of vaccines only on their families without considering the wider consequences are, from a public-health perspective, whittling away at the herd immunity that protects the most vulnerable. It's like a town that lives at the source of a river and disposes of their waste in the water—forgetting the other town downstream. Not vaccinating elevates the risks of infectious disease among the poor and immunosuppressed.

From a global perspective, the problem is more acute. Previous generations bore the risks of smallpox vaccination. Now the disease is eradicated worldwide, and the vaccine has saved millions of lives. Polio may be the next breakthrough, as researchers estimate that millions have dodged lifelong paralysis or early death. While efforts to ensure appropriate sanitation and nutrition are a priority, vaccines still represent a crucial weapon against diseases that would otherwise kill many.

This reasoning applies even to diseases

#4

**'Weren't measles on the decline even before the vaccine debuted in 1963?'**

Yes, but vaccines have nearly eradicated infections, while the decline before the vaccines was related to medical advancements across the board.



typically spread through unprotected sex or drug use. The hepatitis B vaccine, for example, was initially focused on “high-risk” populations. Then researchers realized a small number of children were getting infected without engaging in such behaviors. Since universal vaccination at birth was started, the incidence of hepatitis B has declined dramatically.

We can celebrate that God has mercifully given us insight into how the human body and the diseases that ravage it work; because of his mercy, we can exercise dominion over the natural evils of disease.

Genesis 3 teaches us that since the Fall, creation naturally bites back at us through thorns and viruses as part of God’s curse for our sin. Yet we who have been redeemed partner with God in his work of redemption, in part by fostering our communities’ health.

It’s no surprise that medical missionaries have played a crucial role in advancing health care across the globe over the past several decades. They carry Jesus’ mission to preach and heal in places that desperately need all kinds of healing.

## IMMUNITY AND ETERNITY

As a medical student, I started by learning about anatomy and physiology. Then I learned about infectious disease and pathophysiology, then pharmacology and therapeutics. The curriculum’s structure is a reflection of how medicine is meant to work. The practice of medicine explores the body and its functions in their original goodness; identifies patterns of decay brought by sin; and works to undo or prevent those patterns from harming our bodies and minds.

And we practice medicine expecting that our present bodies will be raised to new life. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15, “The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable,” like seeds bursting into full-grown plants. As Matthew Lee Anderson writes in his book *Earthen Vessels*, “The same God who forgives sin shapes and reshapes human bodies.” Thus, all of our medical care and healthy behaviors still rest on God’s mercy, and they anticipate that *complete* healing will come not in this life but in the life to come.

Even still, we can take all the precautions prescribed by the best science and fall prey to an infectious disease (or suffer a horrific side effect). We can refuse all vaccines for our children and still watch them suffer neurodevelopmental disorders. While science and medicine help us to decrease risk, there’s nothing any of us can do to stop death. When we perform medical interventions, then, we must humbly acknowledge that we can never guarantee a particular outcome. Nor should we ever forget that God can and does use supernatural means to heal. Medicine, rightly practiced, recognizes that our bodies and our souls are marred by sin but that God will one day restore both. We carry on the work of Jesus, knowing that one day the work of both evangelism and medicine will come to an end.

Three days before I was admitted to the hospital with ITP, I got whacked in the head by a Frisbee that left an enormous bruise behind my ear. I thought about that a lot sitting in the hospital, watching my brother get married over Skype and

# Preventing the most deaths for the lowest cost with the simplest interventions is a core part of stewardship.

forgoing the best man speech I’d prepared, and emailing the mission hospital where I had planned to work. I was alive now. But would my body recover from this side effect? Would I ever get to go to the mission field to preach and heal, as I felt God had called me to do?

I’m happy to say God has seen fit to restore me to health. At the end of this year, our family will travel to South Sudan, one of the world’s deadliest places, to work in a maternity and pediatrics hospital. The risks we’ll face—poisonous snakes, tropical diseases, political violence—are quite real. I can’t guarantee that my disease won’t relapse at a time when I’m far from a platelet transfusion. Nor can I guarantee that one of my children won’t develop a problem with catastrophic consequences.

Yet the same God who protected me from serious injury is beckoning us there. We trust that he will take care of us. We recognize that our lives—and our children’s—are in his hands. These are risks he has called us to bear for the sake of his glory and love. We can maximize our effectiveness there by counting the cost, but we cannot cultivate health by magnifying our anxieties to the point that they obscure the value of the gifts he’s given. God has called us to steward wholeness in one particular community. The benefits that we’ll see and that the people we’re working with will experience as his kingdom advances far outweigh the risks of going.

Of course, for our sake—and for the sake of those we meet both abroad and back home—we’ll be getting our shots before we go.

**CT**

**#5**

**‘Can’t I just focus on keeping my kid healthy without vaccines?’**

Maybe. “Herd immunity” means that as long as 95 percent of your neighbors are vaccinated, you’re probably safe. But as more parents rely on the herd immunity buffer and don’t get their kids vaccinated, herd immunity will vanish.

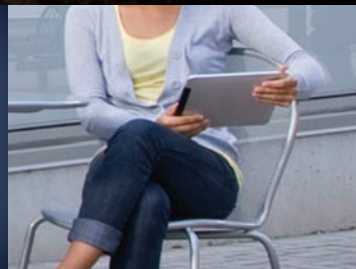
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# RECONCILER

Jeanne Bishop has helped thousands of clients make amends for their crimes.  
**Now she's helping the man who killed her sister make amends for his.**

By Morgan Lee  
Photography by Chris Strong

**O**n April 7, 1990, David Biro broke into the affluent suburban Chicago home of Nancy and Richard Langert armed with a glass cutter and a revolver. When the Langerts returned home that night, Biro, then 16, was waiting. He rejected the couple's attempts to negotiate, which likely included money; police discovered \$500 in cash abandoned at the scene. Biro shot Richard in the head and Nancy, who was pregnant, three times. He left her bleeding in the couple's basement.

"It was Palm Sunday," remembers Jeanne Bishop, Nancy's sister. Bishop was at choir rehearsal at Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago. "The secretary came and said, 'You have a phone call.'"

"I said, 'Can you take a message?'"

"She said, 'No, you need to come with me.'"

Bishop immediately thought of her elderly father. But it was his voice she heard over the phone: "Nancy and Richard have been killed."

An image of a truck crushing the couple's compact car on the expressway flashed through Bishop's mind.

"What do you mean, *killed*?" she said.

"Somebody killed them."

A week later, Bishop learned the details of her younger sister's last moments. Nancy had remained alive for roughly 10 minutes after Biro shot her in the elbow, back, and abdomen. Before she died, she crawled over to her husband's body and used her own blood to draw a heart and the letter *U*.

## No Division

Six months after the murders, the police arrested Biro. An honors student at New Trier High School in Winnetka, Illinois, Biro had once been admitted to a psychiatric hospital for trying to poison his family. He had bragged to his friends about the Langert murders.

In 1991, shortly after Biro was sentenced to life in prison without parole, Bishop had already decided that she needed to forgive him.

"If you look at the Gospels, you see Jesus over and over again saying, 'You have to forgive because you have been forgiven,'" said Bishop, a lifelong Christian, citing the parable of the unforgiving debtor (Matt. 18:21-35).





## Public Servant

**N**ancy Langer's murder spurred Jeanne Bishop to grapple not only with Christian forgiveness but also with her vocation. In 1990, the then-29-year-old was a corporate attorney in Chicago.

"I was doing the job out of fear and pride, really—fear of not having enough money, pride in working for the big fancy law firm," Bishop told CT. "I realized that God gave me this gift of life, and I was squandering it."

"I needed to do the things God gave me this life for: to serve others and not myself."

Within a year of her sister's death, Bishop quit her job to become a Cook County public defender. Today, the Yale Law School graduate advocates for Chicagoans who can't afford a trial lawyer, representing thousands accused of everything from petty theft to murder.

Before Bishop and her clients meet—typically in the lockup of a courthouse—the defendants have been handcuffed, arrested, and put in a cell. They will "be wearing a uniform they did not choose, shoes that may not fit," said Bishop. They have a number written in marker on their arms, so "they're not called out by name. They're called out, 'Number 24!'"

The majority of Bishop's clients opt for a plea deal instead of a trial. But before Bishop offers counsel, she asks them for the truth.

"I want to be the smartest person in the room when I stand in front of the judge," she

But because Biro was permanently behind bars, Bishop thought she could move on without ever informing him that she had forgiven him in her heart. She thought she would never have to say his name aloud.

"I had built this wall that was convenient for me," Bishop told CT. "I thought, 'Because you haven't apologized to me, that absolves me of the responsibility of reaching out to you.'"

Then, in 2012, Bishop read *Forgiveness: Christian Reflection*. It contained an essay by J. Randall O'Brien, the president of Carson-Newman University, a Baptist school in Tennessee. "No Christian is ever in the position of privilege, wronged one or wrongdoer, where he or she is excused from the responsibility of working for reconciliation," he wrote.

Bishop disagreed—so much so that she arranged a meeting with O'Brien to challenge him. O'Brien reminded her that Jesus prayed for his own murderers from the cross.

"I felt my heart, hard and rigid, cracking open," said Bishop. "I had always made a divide between Nancy's killer and me. Him: bad murderer. Me: innocent victims' family member. The truth was, there was no division between us before God—we were both flawed and fallen."

"Wouldn't it be amazing," O'Brien told her, "if God used you to bring this man into relationship, if he joined you in heaven one day?"

After their meeting, Bishop began to pray for Biro, saying his name aloud for the first time. In January 2013, she made contact with Biro through a letter, asking if she could visit him.

One week later, Biro—who had never admitted to the murders, far less shown remorse—wrote back. In the course of 15 pages, he confessed to the crime for the first time and accepted her offer to meet.

said. "If I don't know what really happened, then I'm not the smartest person in the room. I want to know everything so I can investigate every possible avenue of defense."

Bishop also uses all the details of the crime to teach her clients. One previous client stole the bike of a delivery man who was on the ground, already the victim of having his wallet and cell phone filched.

Bishop asked her client why he failed to call 911 and help the man.

"Oh, I didn't know him," he said.

"That's not okay to do to a stranger," Bishop told him. "That's what got you in trouble."

Another defendant wore a ski mask into a convenience store, pistol-whipping the owner before ransacking the shop. Bishop warned him that going to trial would not only result in a guilty verdict but likely invoke the ire of the judge for traumatizing the shop owner again.

"[The victim] wasn't that terrified. The gun doesn't even work," he said.

"He didn't know that," said Bishop. "It's likely that with the gun in his face, all the owner is thinking is, *I have two daughters whom I might never see again. I'll never get to see their graduation from high school or walk down the aisle for their wedding.*"

In talking in depth with clients, she helps to humanize not only victims but also the clients themselves. Several years ago, Bishop interviewed a man accused of breaking into the apartment of an immigrant mother and her daughter. They had watched, helpless, as he stole their belongings. The client grew up in Cabrini-Green, formerly one of Chicago's roughest housing projects.

"I was eaten by rats when I was a baby," he told her. Then he pulled up his shirt to show her the crevice in his stomach. There were chunks of flesh missing from his forearm.

"If you're an infant in your crib and you're eaten by rats, one of two things has happened," she told cr. "You're screaming and there's nobody there to hear you. You were left alone. Or, they're there, but they don't even care enough to notice that you're being eaten by rats.

"I have been able to learn about why people commit crimes—what it's like to be a prisoner, how prisoners often think of their own crimes, and how their narratives of themselves and what happened shifts over time.

"My job is to be as good a lawyer as I can possibly be, because it isn't about whether I like them or they like me. It's about this ethical duty I have to be their advocate, no matter what they've done."

'What I wanted for him was to rot in prison and suffer, and that would make him sorry. But what made him sorry is to experience the unconditional love of God and the forgiveness of his victims' family member.'



## Pardoned

**T**he day before Bishop first made the 100-mile drive to Pontiac Correctional Center, she had coffee with an 83-year-old man who had been making the same journey every other week since 1991. Nicholas Biro, David's father, gave her handwritten directions to the prison, including a tip for a nearby McDonald's if she wanted a beverage before entering the jail. He also gave her two quarters, explaining that she'd need them for the locker at prison to hold her car keys.

When Bishop first sat across from David Biro in prison, Bishop did not find the person she'd expected. "I'd turned him into a monster. I'd mythologized him as a thing called a *murderer*. He's a 40-year-old man."

In their first meeting, Biro didn't explain how someone raised in a loving, well-to-do home could take "a magnum revolver and put it to the back of a grown man's head. But he did admit to the crimes."



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He recounted the details of April 7, 1990, as Bishop asked questions.

Since then, Bishop has returned to meet with Biro 15 times. Before each visit, she prays on the drive that she will be able to communicate that “he’s loved and valuable and that God has a purpose for him.”

“The more I get to know you, the worse I feel about what I did,” Biro told her recently.

“What I wanted for him before was to rot in prison and suffer, and that would make him sorry,” said Bishop. “But what made him sorry is to experience the unconditional love of God and the forgiveness of his victims’ family member.”

Bishop believes that all who are sentenced as teenagers should have a chance at some point while in prison for a comprehensive review. But it’s likely that Biro will spend his life in prison. While the Supreme Court ruled in 2012 that juvenile mandatory life sentences without the possibility of parole were unconstitutional, the judge at Biro’s trial gave him a discretionary life sentence, which remains constitutional. A governor could pardon him, but that’s unlikely given the severity of the crime.

“To say to a person who commits this crime at age 16 or 17, ‘We know that you need to be locked up forever for us to be safe,’ is contrary to what we read when we open up the Bible,” said Bishop. There, “we see stories of people who killed and were restored, starting with Moses and David and later Saul, who became the apostle Paul.”

Bishop doesn’t sugarcoat Biro’s murder of her sister, brother-in-law, and their unborn child. She calls it “horrific, heinous, and merciless.” In a new book, *Change of Heart* (Westminster John Knox Press), she goes into detail about what happened. “I want people to understand that I’m not forgiving him because it wasn’t so bad.”

Facing the gravity of the situation, in fact, is what allows Bishop to keep making the treks to Pontiac.

“It’s not okay what you did, but I am not going to hate you. I am not going to wish evil on you,” said Bishop. “I am going to wish the opposite. I am going to wish that you will be redeemed.” **CT**

**MORGAN LEE** is CT’s editorial resident and lives in Chicago. Follow her on Twitter @Mepaynl.



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BY CRAIG KEENER

LETTERING BY JILL DE HAAN

CRAIG KEENER is F. M. and Ada Thompson Professor of Biblical Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary and author of *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (InterVarsity Press).



# When Jesus Wanted All My Money

And everything else. How I learned he's an all-or-nothing Lord.

**I** BECAME A CHRISTIAN in 1975 after debating some Baptist street evangelists. I wasn't raised in church and had become an ardent atheist, but I knew some things about Christianity. I knew that Christians believed in the Trinity and gargoyles, and that they were against science. At least I was right about the Trinity.

After coming to Christ, in order to catch up with the kids in Sunday school, I read the Bible a lot. I learned that if you read 40 chapters per day, you could read through the entire Bible every month—or, what I did more often, through the New Testament every week. Consumed, I began seeing not just how each book of the Bible is distinctive, but also how each passage reinforces the major themes of the book in which it appears.



Sell  
your possessions  
(and give to the poor.)  
Provide purses for yourselves  
that will not wear out,  
a treasure in heaven  
that will never fail,  
where no thief comes near  
(and no moth destroys.)  
Luke 12:33.



One New Testament theme that resonated with me early on was self-sacrifice. I saw this theme most clearly in the Gospel of Luke. As I grew familiar with the book, the meaning of Jesus' words in chapter 12 became obvious to me. When Jesus called people to follow him, he demanded that they forsake everything, instructing his disciples to sell what they had and give the proceeds to those who need it more. By so doing, he said, they would provide themselves wallets that don't get old, an unfailling "treasure in heaven" (v. 33).

As a new convert, I didn't think giving up my possessions for Jesus seemed difficult—especially as I realized that the eternal reward far outweighed any present sacrifice. Or perhaps it seemed easy because I was young, idealistic, and didn't own much. But I hadn't been taught differently. While lacking a church background may have led me to take this passage more literally than Jesus intended, it helped me to see that living forever with God easily trumps everything else.

## ABANDONING EVERYTHING

**I**n Jesus' day, most people owned few possessions. In rural areas, many people worked and lived as serfs on the land of the wealthy. In urban areas, many of them lived in rickety tenements located downwind from sewers. Only a small proportion of people were wealthy, and their property was serviced by slaves and paid workers. Estimates suggest that at any given time, more than half the Roman Empire was at risk of starvation. Luke's world was not too much different from ours: Today half the global population lives on less than \$2.50 a day and 400 million people lack access to safe drinking water.

While giving up possessions was not a foreign practice in Luke's day, it certainly wasn't the norm. Only some marginal philosophic sects and Jewish monks who lived in the wilderness near the Dead Sea actually demanded the sacrifice of possessions. Most people, like most people today, would have found Jesus' words frighteningly difficult. They had either too much—or too little—to give away.

Yet Luke stresses that financial sacrifice is fundamental to Christian

discipleship. Jesus urges not just the rich ruler but all of his disciples to sell their possessions and care for the poor—in return for treasure in heaven. Many of us today wonder whether Jesus' words apply to all Christians or only to the disciples, those leaders of the early church. Peter wondered the same (v. 41). While Jesus may have meant it especially for leaders, the principle applies to any of us entrusted with resources that we can use to care for others (vv. 42–48).

A key reason Jesus calls us to care for those in need is that God does (1:53; 4:18; 6:20; 7:22; 14:13, 21; 16:22; 19:8; 21:3). Luke shows that God's concern for the destitute carries profound implications for those who aren't destitute. For instance, when people asked John the Baptist how they

them to trust in his provision. He even tells us not to worry about basic needs such as food and clothing (Luke 12:22–29). It's not that we stop needing such basic things. It's that we shouldn't worry about them. As a recent convert from atheism, I felt more prepared to give up my possessions than my self-dependence. I accepted the truth that God worked in spiritual ways, but I struggled to trust that he would act in my physical world.

Luke emphasizes that we can trust our powerful and caring Father to provide for us, especially when we aim to do his work. When Jesus sent out his disciples, he told them not to take any provisions with them and to instead depend on God through local hospitality (9:3–4; 10:4–8). I understood intellectually that

Most people would have found Jesus' words frighteningly difficult. They had either too much—or too little—to give away.

should repent, he invited anyone with two garments to give one to someone who had none (3:11). When an official asked Jesus how he could inherit eternal life, Jesus invited him to sell everything, give the money to the poor, and follow him (18:18–22). And in Luke's second volume, the Book of Acts, after people ask how to be saved, we are told that an integral part of their life together, subsequent to conversion, was sharing resources (2:44–45).

All of this struck a chord in my newly believing heart. Early on as a Christian, I decided not to accumulate many possessions so that I could care for others. Living simply seemed to come naturally to me.

Another aspect of Christ's call, however, proved to be difficult.

Jesus not only summons his disciples to surrender their possessions, he also invites

God's promise of provision is related to the mission on which he sends us. But learning to trust him in this area has been slow going for me.

For example, soon after I committed to support a child in India for \$15 a month, circumstances changed and I had no income. I prayed that God would supply the money since the child was dependent on me. When I was literally down to my last dollar, God provided the money I needed—and the money the child needed—even though my faith was weak.

And when I was accepted into a PhD program, I didn't have the resources to pay tuition. I figured I wouldn't be able to enter the program, so I planned to decline enrolling. The day before I would have done so, however, God unexpectedly provided the money I needed—through someone

I didn't know even had that much. Time and again, I've experienced God's provision for my calling. He's been faithful to provide, even when I feared he wouldn't.

God cares about us more than he cares about birds and flowers, yet he provides for them, Jesus says. How much more, then, will he provide for us (12:24-31). "Don't focus your attention on, or worry about, what to eat or drink," he notes. "No, these are the things that all the pagans are focusing on, but your Father already understands that you need them! Instead, focus on the matters of your Father's kingdom, and he'll provide you with these things you need."

At minimum, this includes our basic needs such as food and clothing. And someday our Father will share with us everything—the fullness of his kingdom (v. 32). Meanwhile, Jesus wants us not simply to give up possessions but also to give up our dependence on them.

The self-sacrifice that Jesus calls us to, therefore, involves far more than money. Following Jesus and participating in his mission takes priority over everything else in our lives, including residential security

and social and family obligations (9:57-62).

A few chapters later, Jesus warns those who want to follow him that they must "hate" their family, "even their own life" (14:26). Many of us trip up on the word *hate*. Like other ancient Jewish teachers, Jesus often used hyperbole, a rhetorical overstatement meant to drive home a point. Such statements were not intended to be taken literally, as if we could, for example, actually relocate mountains or squeeze a camel through the eye of a needle (Matt. 17:20; Luke 18:25). Rather, Jesus wants to grip our attention to force us to reconsider our priorities and actions.

Matthew's version puts Jesus' statement in more literal terms: "Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (10:37). The point is that Jesus doesn't want anything to get in the way of our following him—not even family or survival. He says we cannot be his disciples if we do not give up everything (Luke 14:33). He is an all-or-nothing Lord.

This doesn't mean that everyone must give up all possessions; it does mean

everyone needs right priorities. When Charles Finney preached on Luke 14:33 in a wealthy New England church, he emphasized Jesus' call to surrender possessions. The pastor thought he needed to correct Finney's interpretation. So he assured his congregants that Jesus merely wanted them to be *willing* to give up their possessions. Finney countered that while we don't lose all our possessions when we come to Christ, we do lose our *ownership* of them. If Jesus is truly Lord of our lives, then everything we have and everything we are belongs to him.

## PRIORITIZING PEOPLE

I

sometimes carried the principle of forsaking everything further than Jesus intended. Shortly after my conversion, I was supposed to be translating Caesar for

my second-year Latin class. I wanted to read Scripture rather than do my homework, so I opened my Bible and put my



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finger down on the page, expecting it to fall on another “forsake all” passage. But not all passages, even in Luke, address this theme. Instead my finger landed on Luke 20:25: “Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s.” I now know as a Bible scholar that that’s normally not a smart way to apply Scripture to life. But the finger trick did get me to do my homework.

When people turned to Jesus, they learned to value people more than possessions. Rather than immediately selling everything and becoming monks—like Saint Anthony—the earliest Christians sold what they had to help those in need, as their needs arose (Acts 2:44–45; 4:32–35).

That sort of sacrificial love inspired me profoundly. I learned that everything I had was a gift from God, and I tried to use my resources for God’s purposes. After learning that in some countries 20 cents could provide a day’s worth of food for a child, and that a Bible commentary could cost a pastor a month’s salary, I used my money as carefully as possible. I found ways to live simply so I could contribute to people’s desperate needs.

Having a family obviously changed my practices. I want to provide for my family’s needs and bless them as much as possible. At the same time, my wife and I try to help our children understand why they don’t need everything valued by their peers. William and Catherine Booth, the founders of the Salvation Army, similarly had to explain their sacrifices to their

hungry near our doorstep. Yet we know that thousands of people die every day from starvation, malnutrition, and inexpensively preventable diseases. It seems backward, therefore, to acquire what we don’t need when we could help others meet genuine needs. There is inexplicable joy in living wholly for Jesus. Why settle for temporary pleasures when we can do

We cannot be his disciples if we do not give up everything. He is an all-or-nothing Lord.

children, who grew up understanding why their parents lived the way they did. I pray that mine do too.

So what does it mean today to value people more than possessions? We’re not like the rich man who let Lazarus starve at his doorstep (Luke 16:19–31). Our society is too sophisticated to let anyone that

what counts for eternity?

I’m still discovering areas of my heart that can be more devoted to Jesus. Nevertheless, I’ve experienced firsthand the joy of sacrificing for others, not to mention God’s never-ending faithfulness through it all. That is worth infinitely more than anything I could give up.

CT

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# **“I’M A PASTOR, NOT A FINANCIAL PLANNER. THANKFULLY, MY *benefits consultant understands me.*”**

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**J O N**  
**A C U F F ' S**



**N E W**  
**D O - O V E R**

THE FUNNY MAN, FORMER DAVE RAMSEY TEAM MEMBER,  
AND SELF-DEVELOPMENT EXPERT IS ON TO HIS NEXT GIG.

BY KATE SHELLNUTT  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEREMY COWART



**IF YOU WANT A SENSE** of Jon Acuff's career path, look no further than the titles of his three best-selling books. *Quitter*, *Start*, and *Do Over* hint at the Nashville writer's surprise resignation from financial guru Dave Ramsey's team. Now the man behind the website

Stuff Christians Like is using his platform to dispense business advice infused with Christian wisdom.

From a cubicle he dreamed of escaping, Acuff watched Stuff Christians Like develop a devoted following with its spot-on satire about modest side hugs and worship leaders who wear deep V-neck tees. Seven years later, he's a nationally known author and speaker, giving readers practical steps to pursue right now the dreams they'd put off for "someday."

A smiley guy with a slight faux-hawk, the 39-year-old former ad copywriter hasn't left his comic roots. With a quarter million followers, his Twitter feed alternates between inspiration ("Beware the temptation to ask money for things it simply can't give you: an identity, a purpose, a sense of internal worth") and random one-liners ("The number of Cheetos I can eat in one sitting is exactly equal to the number of Cheetos that are within arm's reach").

*Do Over: Rescue Monday, Reinvent Your Work, and Never Get Stuck*, released last month by Portfolio, is Acuff's first book with a mainstream publisher. The same Penguin imprint is responsible for titles by marketing innovator Seth Godin and former Apple "chief evangelist" Guy Kawasaki. Godin himself called Acuff's *Do Over* "the best career book ever written."

Acuff is among a number of Christian leaders mixing professional development principles with discipleship and vocation. Former Thomas Nelson publisher Michael Hyatt, leadership coach Jenni Catron, *Blue Like Jazz* author Donald Miller, writer Jeff Goins, and others instruct devotees on how to set goals, market oneself, build healthy teams, network, and steward time efficiently.

"There was some hesitance to use business thinking," said Matt Perman, former director of strategy at Desiring God and author of *What's Best Next*. "However, we started learning from it because we saw a lot of it was speaking truthfully." Conferences such as Bill Hybels's Global

Leadership Summit and Brad Lomenick's Catalyst were among the first large-scale settings to introduce such principles to evangelical leaders, said Perman.

A Southern Baptist pastor's kid, Acuff infuses his advice with his go-getter attitude. He tells readers they don't have to settle for a job they dread and offers practical steps to find passion in their daily work. His taglines include "Punch Fear in the Face" and "Build a Better Monday." He wants people to actually enjoy their jobs, for the sake of themselves, their employers, and their witness in the world of business.

In *Do Over*, Acuff addresses people who feel stuck in their jobs—up to 70 percent of US workers, according to recent Gallup polls. It's a message inspired by his own experience leaving Ramsey's team, a position he once called his "dream job."

## LEARNING TO HUSTLE

**A****FTER GETTING A** journalism degree from Samford University, Acuff spent more than a decade in advertising while blogging on the side. After Stuff Christians Like landed him a book deal and speaking gigs, he became a touring speaker with Ramsey, best known among US churchgoers for his Financial Peace University curriculum.

In 2010, Acuff moved his family—wife

reaching *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* bestseller lists.

Acuff held sold-out workshops to drive home the books' messages; he and Ramsey kicked off the tour for *Start* in Times Square with a giant bus branded with the book's logo.

It was Ramsey, Acuff said, who taught him how to *hustle* (a favorite Acuff word) and get more done in a day than he thought possible. "Hustle is doing the things you don't enjoy sometimes to earn the right to do the things you love," he wrote in *Quitter*.

Then, in September 2013, Acuff announced he was leaving Lampo. He said there was no instance of "moral failure" on his part, no rift with Ramsey. Nor was there a bigger, better opportunity waiting.

"I had just attended the *Start* conference a week or two earlier, so to hear this was a shock," said Randy Langley, one of the 11,000 members of Acuff's closed Facebook group about starting books, projects, and business ventures. "But as I observed him, I have seen the decision was made by someone who is doing exactly what he teaches."

Ramsey's team said they didn't see it coming. "This takes us as much by surprise as it does you," read a message posted on the Ramsey site immediately following the news. Acuff's speaker bio, personal site, and Stuff Christians Like—all hosted



**'EVERY CAREER GOES THROUGH  
A DO-OVER, AND A DO-OVER  
ISN'T A BAD THING. I BELIEVE  
WE ARE WIRED FOR RESETS.'**

—JON ACUFF

Jenny and daughters L. E. and McRae—from their home outside Atlanta to join Ramsey's Nashville company, the Lampo Group. Its 400 employees produce Ramsey's radio show, publish training materials, and host live events. Lampo released *Quitter* in 2011 and *Start* in 2013,

by Lampo—generated the same message. Acuff launched a new site (Acuff.me) and later resumed control of Stuff ChristiansLike.net. Ramsey still owns JonAcuff.com, which lists Acuff's three books for sale.

Lampo has repeatedly declined to



speak with *CT* about Acuff's departure, citing a policy against commenting on former employees. Acuff said he has not spoken to Ramsey since he left.

"Everyone on the outside was saying, 'Hey, this must be the worst thing ever,'" Acuff said. "Jenny and I were feeling the opposite. Every career goes through a do-over, and a do-over isn't a bad thing. I believe we are wired for resets."

At one point in his career, Acuff says, he had gone through eight jobs in eight years. Some people would consider that a problem. Not Acuff. "Jenny pointed out, 'You've never stayed at a job longer than 3 years. Why did you think this would be 40?'" Acuff told *CT*. "'God didn't wire you that way. He wired you with this heart of adventure and change.'"

## WHAT'S NEXT

**A**CUFF CONTINUES TO update *Stuff Christians Like*, though far less regularly than in its first three years. In those days, he added 1,000 entries to the list, including "Giving your kid a biblical name" and "Arguing

about whether Chick-fil-A or In-N-Out will be served in heaven."

"It started out as this humorous take on how we do life in the Christian world, but then it became serious and really compelling," said Matthew Paul Turner, who runs the site *Jesus Needs New PR*. "I don't think people realize how difficult it is to be funny consistently and never use the f-word and never tell a sex joke. . . . It's not like Jon just sits down and it flows. He's tactical. He's a planner."

Acuff considers comedy a craft, looking to Jon Stewart and Louis CK, as well as Christians such as John Crist, Sammy Rhodes, and Tripp and Tyler, for ideas. But his family remains his biggest source of inspiration for his humor—and his love for the church.

"My brother Bennett is the funniest in the family. I might be third," said Acuff. As a kid, "Jon was always saying something humorous or insightful. He was quick-witted," said Mark Acuff, Jon's father, who now pastors a nondenominational church in North Carolina.

Jon's father began a church in Massachusetts in the 1980s—something he

said was unheard of at the time. "That really influenced my sense to do brave, counterintuitive stuff," said Acuff.

Acuff has coined terms like *Jesus juke*—when well-meaning Christians take a lighthearted topic and suddenly make it about the Lord—as well as *booty*, *God*, *booty*, the way believers struggle to integrate faith in their daily lives. But the last thing he's trying to do is bash the church, friends said.

"Jon has such a great way of celebrating the mess that is the church that we're a part of, in a way that's constructive," said Tim Schraeder, a social media strategist.

A self-diagnosed "What's next?" addict, the frenetic Acuff continues to blog, write, and dispense advice on everything from designing book covers to networking to facing rejection. Self-publishing, Kickstarter campaigns, and other web resources make Acuff's message seem doable for any self-starter.

"Reaching awesome used to be primarily a postmidlife accomplishment. . . . The path to awesome was decades long and there was little you could do to shorten it," wrote Acuff in *Start*. "The Internet, and especially social media, has changed that."

Between book deadlines (he's writing his second for Penguin), webinars, and YouTube videos, Acuff also consults with organizations and tours with the family ministry Orange.

"An hour with Jon around the creative table usually generates more ideas than our team would typically put on a storyboard in a day," said Reggie Joiner, Orange's CEO and one of the founding pastors of Acuff's former church, North Point Community in Alpharetta, Georgia.

Working at the intersection of business and faith lets Acuff—who now attends the Franklin campus of the nondenominational Cross Point Church—reach secular readers. "The books I write are on business shelves," he said. "I love the idea of [a reader noticing], 'When you talk about character or empathy, there's something different.'"

And when it comes to a gospel witness, it might just be Acuff's can-do message that stands out in a culture of negative headlines and loud opinions. "Anyone can be cynical," he wrote recently. "Hope takes courage."

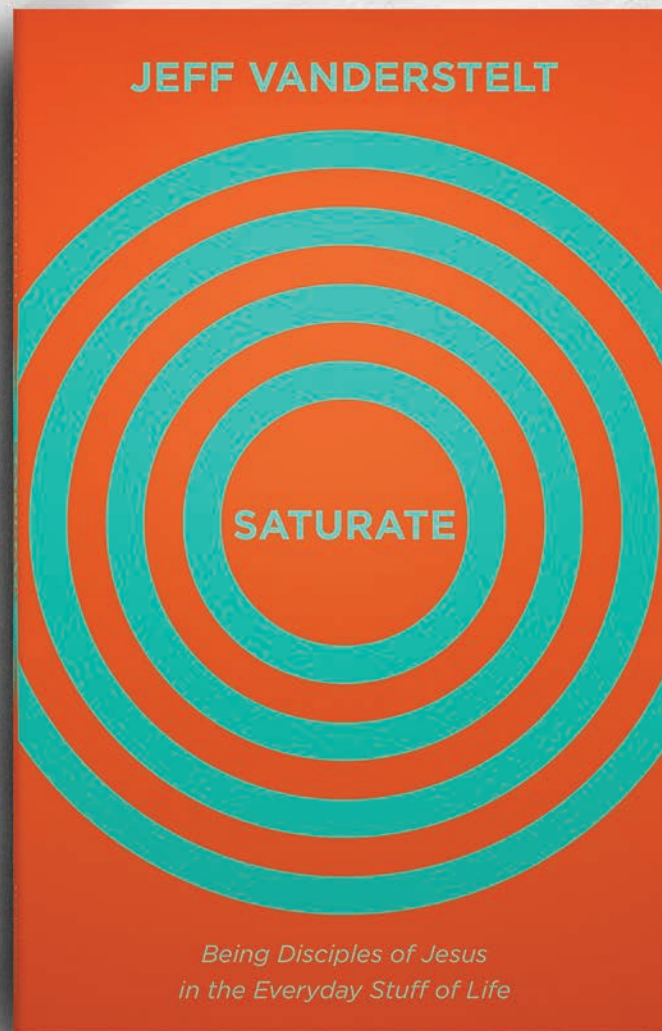
**CT**

**KATE SHELLNUTT** is *CT* associate editor of *Her.meneutics*.



# WHAT DOES LIVING RADICALLY FOR JESUS LOOK LIKE IN EVERYDAY LIFE?

Being a Christian isn't just about going to church. It's about something bigger. Much bigger. God has called us to a life of radical discipleship that encompasses the ordinary, the extraordinary, and everything in between.



"Jeff Vanderstelt does what all good leaders should do: spends his days equipping others to do the work of the ministry."

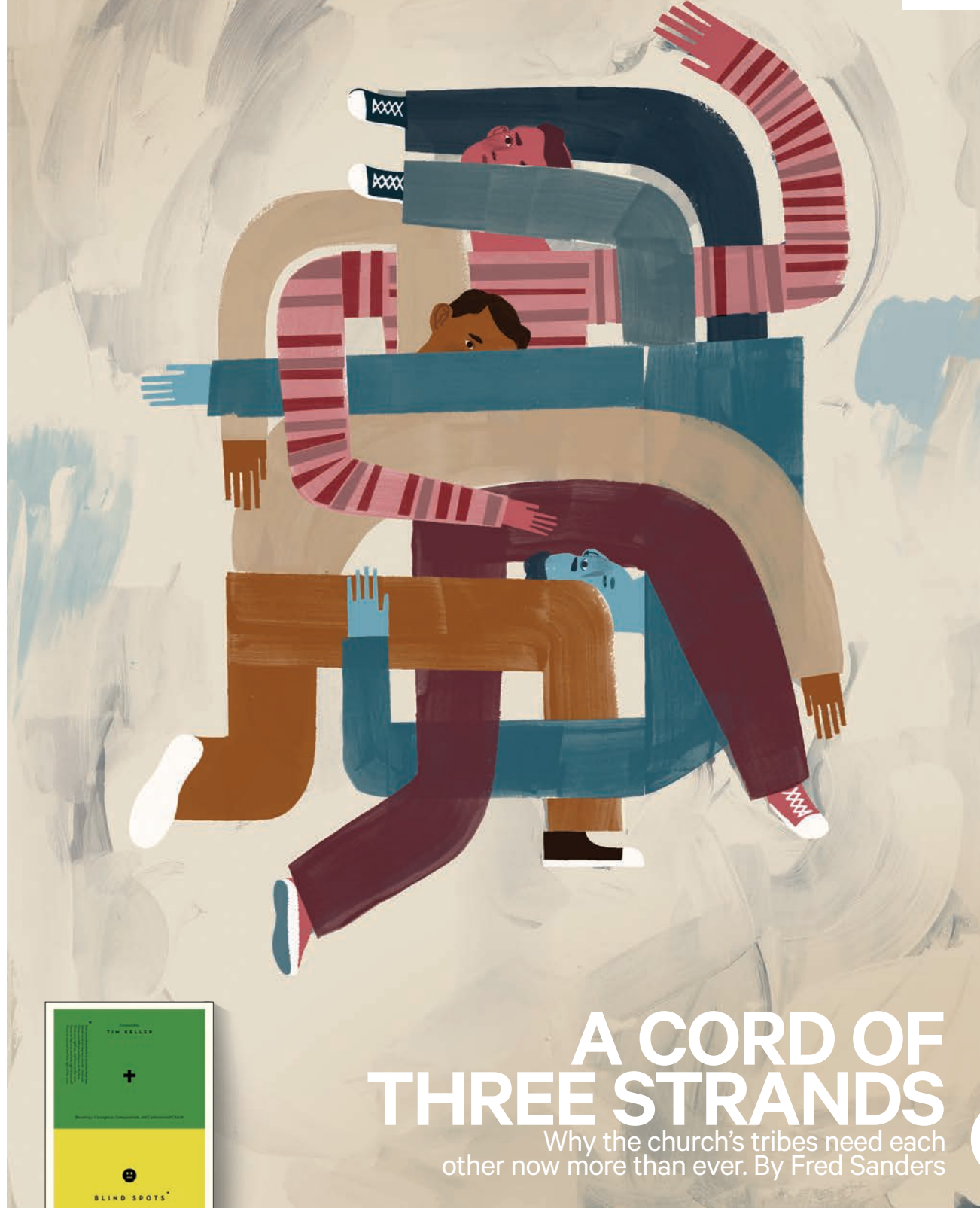
—**FRANCIS CHAN**, *New York Times* best-selling author, *Crazy Love* and *Forgotten God*

"*Saturate* is a compelling and biblically serious picture of Jesus and the mission he has given his people."

—**MATT CHANDLER**, Lead Pastor, The Village Church, Dallas, Texas; President, Acts 29 Church Planting Network

# REVIEWS

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## A CORD OF THREE STRANDS

Why the church's tribes need each other now more than ever. By Fred Sanders







**C**onfronted with the stubborn fact of church disunity, every new generation of Christians asks the same question: “Why can’t we all just get along?” And every old generation has the same set of answers at the ready. “We already tried to get along before you got here,” say some. “All the things that divide us are nonnegotiable,” say others.

In any generation, the friction among Christian “tribes” is palpable. Collin Hansen, the editorial director for the Gospel Coalition, approaches this subject not as an impartial observer but as a committed member of a particular tribe: the “young, restless, Reformed” believers whose emergence he profiled in a classic 2006 *CT* cover story and a 2008 book by the same name. Yet his latest work, *Blind Spots: Becoming a Courageous, Compassionate, and Commissioned Church* (Crossway) ★★★★★, suggests a strategy for “church unity and an effective gospel witness in the world.”

This is a matter of no small urgency, Hansen argues, because a divided witness won’t suffice to gain a hearing for the gospel in the current cultural climate. In the foreword, NYC pastor Tim Keller describes the book as “an extended essay on how Christians in Western societies today . . . need to respond to a culture quickly growing post-Christian.”

To this end, Hansen proposes that Christians learn from believers who make them uncomfortable, because the ones who annoy us are likely the ones we need most. Instead of trying to be well-rounded, we should settle for being well-surrounded. If we can’t embody all the strengths of every Christian tribe, we can at least associate with brothers and sisters who have what we lack (and lack what we have).

## TWO-THIRDS BLIND

There are three types of Christians in Hansen’s telling. There are the *courageous*, who love to take a stand against clear opposition and relish a clarifying doctrinal dispute; the *compassionate*, who

sympathize, listen with all their hearts, and seek to heal whatever pain they find; and the *commissioned*, who keep their focus on evangelism and outreach to unbelievers, devising new forms of communicating the gospel as the need arises. Each type habitually partners with like-minded believers. As Hansen writes, “We tend to cluster around Christians with similar personalities, who reinforce our strengths but turn a blind eye to our weaknesses.”

And we *all* have weaknesses. Within each of the three groups, Hansen says, we are “conditioned by our various cultures and experiences to hear certain aspects of the gospel more clearly than others.” Or, to use the metaphor of the book’s title, we can end up “at least two-thirds blind” if we look only with our own eyes.

Even as Hansen celebrates each of the three types, he remains keenly aware of their blind spots. The courageous, for example, are often so certain of their convictions that they have trouble heeding legitimate criticism, and suspect other Christians of being theologically naive. The compassionate are so motivated to comfort their wounded neighbors that they neglect to speak uncomfortable truths at all, and blame other Christians for doing most of the wounding. And the commissioned are so eager to reach their culture that they uncritically adopt everything the culture has to offer, having no patience for theology or mercy ministry that lacks an immediate evangelistic payout.

Hansen’s key point is that “each group goes bad to the degree it distances itself from the others.” His solution is to have each group confess its need for the others.

This is a brief book (120 pages) geared for immediate impact, written in a tone that alternates between chatty and prophetic. Hansen doesn’t pretend to hover above the fray. He freely admits belonging to the type labeled “courageous,” and that he struggles to see his own blind

**Hansen’s strategy is for Christians to learn from believers who make them uncomfortable, because the ones who annoy us are likely the ones we need most.**

spots. “With my highly attuned gift for discerning other’s motives,” he observes, “it didn’t take long for me to see what’s wrong with everyone else.” By candidly admitting his bias, Hansen both models what he preaches and tells a more gripping story.

When Hansen realized he could not see past his own presuppositions on crucial questions, he began experimenting with taking the perspective of fellow Christians motivated by mercy or mission. Hansen knows by experience how deep the ruts of routine run: “You bemoan the church’s ineffective public witness in a changing culture, yet you offer the same self-congratulatory solution to every new challenge.” Here is a way out.

Reading *Blind Spots*, I was reminded of John Wesley’s response to concerns that a growing narrowness and isolation were jeopardizing his revival movement. He watched his Methodist conferences turn in on themselves, splitting apart as they grew self-confident. “I thought it might be a help against this,” he said, “frequently to read, to all who were willing to hear, the accounts I received from time to time of the work which God is carrying on in the earth, both in our own and other countries not among us alone, but among those of various opinions and denominations.” And so he did, giving monthly reports of God’s movements out beyond Methodist land. Today’s evangelicals, no matter where they reside on Hansen’s map of motivations, ought to strongly consider doing something similar.

## THE BEST DEFENSE

Strengths are almost always the bright side of weaknesses, and that holds true for *Blind Spots*. The book’s great strength is in finding a new way to slice the pie. Hansen avoids rehearsing intractable denominational or confessional divisions. He makes no mention of the liberal-versus-conservative narrative that drives our evangelical heritage. By ignoring these categories in favor of his own, Hansen opens up new possibilities. But these fault lines haven’t gone away. It’s left to the reader to figure out how Hansen’s advice would play out across them. And it’s hard to believe his categories (which represent “the heart, the head, or the hands of Jesus”) have as much purchase on actual church life as the older categories, tired as they may be.

But this book of cultural analysis moves almost subliminally towards a concluding Bible study that is its best moment. Hansen paraphrases 1 Corinthians and applies it to the modern church. “God has a plan to unify us in our diversity,” and our blind spots mean we need to make friends unlike us. Then comes an extended meditation on John 15, and a call to abide in Jesus himself rather than adjusting our mutual perceptions

and fiddling with our fellowship ratios. “Abiding in Christ,” Hansen recognizes, “is the best defense against the blind spots that destroy our joy in following Jesus and set us against other believers with different gifts and callings.”

*Blind Spots* dares evangelicals to forge powerful new experiences of unity in diversity. Jesus prayed that his church “may be one,” as the Son and the Father are one, so that a watching world

might know God’s loving purposes (John 17:20–23). When we allow Hansen’s trio of “disharmony, discouragement, and disillusion” the final say, the world sees us—and we see each other—through a profoundly distorted lens. **CT**

**FRED SANDERS** teaches theology at Biola University’s Torrey Honors Institute. He is the author of *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything* (Crossway).

# What’s the Matter with Mather?

Rick Kennedy rewrites the reputation of a reviled Puritan leader.

By Douglas Sweeney

**The First American Evangelical: A Short Life of Cotton Mather**  
Rick Kennedy  
(Eerdmans)



**I**f we remember the Puritan pastor Cotton Mather at all these days, we’re likely to think of him as a meddling, moralistic hypocrite. To the contemporary mind, Mather (1663–1728) was more concerned about his own reputation for intelligence and piety than about the Salem people killed for “witchcraft” on his watch, or the slaves held in bondage in his hometown of Boston.

But Rick Kennedy challenges this portrayal in his lively new biography, *The First American Evangelical: A Short Life of Cotton Mather* (Eerdmans) ★★★★★. Kennedy, a historian from Point Loma Nazarene University, argues that Mather was more socially progressive than his reputation suggests.

Mather knew his share of suffering. Picked on as a child, he stuttered for years—a painful thorn in the flesh for an aspiring preacher. He buried 2 wives and 13 of his 15 children. But he rested on the promises of Scripture, compensating for hardships by edifying others. He undertook pioneering efforts in public education and ministry to prisoners, widows, orphans, slaves, and sailors. His congregation loved him dearly, as Kennedy writes, “for exuberantly modeling a lively relationship with Christ that was grounded in the Bible.” Mather’s

North Church would remain a beacon of Christian faith and practice long after his death.

Historians often picture Mather as the last of the Puritans, a backward-looking Calvinist who chafed at modern life. In Kennedy’s telling, however, Mather emerges as a forward-looking man of formidable learning, a warm-hearted herald of pure and undefiled religion, and a major catalyst of Britain’s “biblical enlightenment.” By the late 17th century, New England was outgrowing its narrow Puritan identity. Its leaders were warming to the wider Protestant world and collaborating with British coreligionists to check the progress of Catholic France. Mather joined in this campaign, forging partnerships with a wide range of European preachers and theologians. But he worried about the shallow, spiritually tepid faith that all too often shadowed the campaign’s cosmopolitan ambitions.

Kennedy clearly admires Mather. This is a breath of fresh air at a time when Christian scholars occasionally treat their kin with an air of superiority or a hint of irony. Kennedy overreaches in tracing modern American evangelicalism to the work of one man. But he’s right to remind readers how

Puritanism and European pietism would shape the movement to come.

The book can be guilty of obscuring Mather’s personal failings. It seems ill-advised, for instance, to gloss over Mather’s complicity in the persecution of “witches” and the enslavement of Africans. But Kennedy introduces valuable evidence casting his subject in a friendlier light. He demonstrates that Mather urged caution to Salem’s civic leaders, called for loving, personal ministry to those accused of witchcraft, spoke out against the slave trade, and eventually permitted his own slave to buy his freedom. Mather has languished so long in the pillory of modern indignation that we’ve lost sight of what he can teach us about ourselves and our own struggles.

*The First American Evangelical* offers a great feel for Mather’s vibrant, quirky, and learned spirituality. It is full of wisdom. Indeed, the book shows what we can learn from historic Christian leaders when we humble ourselves and heed them not as spotless saints, but as flawed mortals—just like us—who sought to do the best they could with the gifts they received. **CT**

**DOUGLAS SWEENEY** teaches church history at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.





# The Moral Stakes of Everyday Life

An excerpt from *The Road to Character*.

**T**oday the word *sin* has lost its power and awesome intensity. It's used most frequently in the context of fattening desserts. Most people in mainstream conversation don't talk much about individual sin. If they talk about human evil at all, then that evil is most often located in the structures of society—in inequality, oppression, racism, and so on—not in the human breast.

We've abandoned the concept of sin because we've left behind the depraved view of human nature. In the 18th and 19th century many people really did embrace the dark self-estimation expressed in the old Puritan prayer, "Yet I Sin": "Eternal Father, Thou art good beyond all thought, but I am vile, wretched, miserable, blind..." That's simply too much darkness for the modern mentality.

But *sin*, like *vocation* and *soul*, is one of those words it's impossible to do without. Sin is a necessary piece of our mental furniture because it reminds us that life is a moral drama. No matter how hard we try to reduce everything to deterministic brain chemistry, no matter how hard we strive to replace sin with nonmoral words, like *mistake* or *error* or *weakness*, the most essential parts of life are matters of individual responsibility and moral choice: whether to be brave or cowardly, honest or deceitful, compassionate or callous, faithful or disloyal. The person struggling against sin understands that each day is filled with moral occasions.

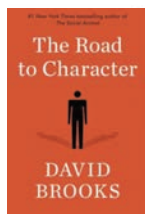
In places like Abilene, Kansas, the big sins, left unchallenged, would have had practical and disastrous effects. Sloth could lead to a failure

of a farm; gluttony and inebriation to the destruction of a family; lust to the ruination of a young woman; vanity to excessive spending, debt, and bankruptcy.

In places like that, people not only had an awareness of different kinds of sin, but of the different remedies for each. Some sins, like anger and lust, are like wild beasts. They have to be fought through habits of restraint. Some sins, like mockery and disrespect, are like stains. They can only be expunged by apology, remorse, restitution, and cleansing. Some sins, like stealing, are like a debt. They can only be rectified by repaying what you owe to society. Some sins, like adultery, bribery, and betrayal, are more like treason than crime; they are affronts to the social order. The social harmony can only be rewoven by slowly recommitting to relationships and rebuilding trust. Some sins, like arrogance and pride, are a perverse desire for status and superiority. They can only be addressed by those willing to humble themselves before others.

When modern culture tries to replace sin with ideas like *error* or *insensitivity*, or tries to banish words like *virtue*, *character*, *evil*, or *vice* altogether, that doesn't make life any less moral. It just means we think and talk about these choices less clearly, and become increasingly blind to the moral stakes of everyday life.

CT



**The Road to Character**  
David Brooks  
(Random House)

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## Wilson's Bookmarks

From John Wilson,  
editor of *Books & Culture*.

### UPRISING OF GOATS

DIANE GLANCY (WIPF & STOCK)

"The ocean came over my bed at night," this book begins. "I would say, first of all, the voices were in it. They floated among the fish." Voices of biblical women—Hagar, Dorcas, Anna, Philippa, and more—come to the narrator, who resembles the author, Glancy (best known for her work on Native American subjects), but is not to be simply identified with her. "Did I actually believe Dorcas was speaking to me? Did I think these voices were making the rounds, so to speak, looking for someone who would listen?" We readers get to hear the voices too: unruly, like an uprising of goats. These obscure women come alive.

### HOPE FOR THE CAREGIVER

PETER ROSENBERGER (WORTHY INSPIRED)

In *Gracie: Standing with Hope*, featured in this space a while back, we heard about Gracie Rosenberger, terribly injured in a car accident while still a young woman, married just three years. Her story of suffering, faith, and caregiving was passed on to us by her husband, Peter. Now Peter distills lessons learned the hard way over more than 25 years—lessons that many of us will need to learn too. Ken Tada, husband of Joni Eareckson Tada, contributes a foreword to this candid, funny, inspiring, and down-to-earth guide.

### THE ASH TREE

OLIVER RACKHAM (LITTLE TOLLER BOOKS)

I'm only able to identify the most familiar species of trees. But I love trees of all kinds. I love reading *about* trees, especially when the writer is Rackham, who died in February at the age of 75. Rackham combined encyclopedic knowledge with a wonderfully lucid style and unfailing good sense. Even as he celebrates the ash tree in this beautifully produced little book, he warns that the "greatest threat to the world's trees and forests"—and to the ash in particular—"is globalization of plant diseases." It's a threat more immediate than climate change.



**Where the Cross  
Meets the Street:  
What Happens to the  
Neighborhood When  
God Is at the Center**  
Noel Castellanos  
(InterVarsity Press)



# Man on the Margins

Noel Castellanos reflects on a career ministering to outsiders. *Interview by David Swanson*

**N**oel Castellanos, CEO of the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA), knows about ministry to underserved communities, having served for more than 30 years in urban Latino neighborhoods. In *Where the Cross Meets the Street: What Happens to the Neighborhood When God Is at the Center* (InterVarsity Press), Castellanos shows how ministries can address inequality and injustice without forsaking evangelism and discipleship. David Swanson, pastor of Chicago's New Community Covenant Church, spoke with Castellanos about forging faith and community at society's margins.

**You write, "We can no longer maintain our old paradigms of ministry that compartmentalize and truncate the work of the kingdom." How does this principle guide your work?**

In most evangelical churches, evangelism and discipleship are the bread and butter. But to bring the full gospel to poor and marginalized communities, we need further tools.

CCDA's biblical framework begins from a foundation of *proclamation and formation*. But from my experience in urban and Latino communities, I learned that we needed to put *compassion* front and center. Compassion is a language Christians can understand in our hurting world: the need for a cup of water, clothing, shelter, or some other practical form of love.

We want to help create economic opportunity—to teach people how to fish, and even to own the pond. We want to restore dignity by restoring the ability to care for oneself and one's family.

As I got involved with the struggle for immigration reform in the United States, I realized that confronting injustice would be essential.

**Where can churches look for examples of putting the full gospel into action?**

Think of the black church and the way leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. read the Bible from a different perspective, giving new meaning to words like *liberation* and *reconciliation*. The black church's mobilization and involvement in justice work has influenced the Latino community as we have begun to mobilize on issues of immigration and poverty. I hope we can learn from the black church's experience without losing our fervor for evangelism.

**What happens when the cross meets the suburban, middle-class street?**

Everywhere you go, you find hurting people. You have to get beyond the gated community and move toward the margins.

When I worked with Young Life, I once ministered at a high school in a wealthy part of Spokane, Washington. The school had an influx of Laotian refugees. You could see from the way they were treated that these kids were outcasts. Because of my own upbringing as an outsider, I saw that I had to reach out.

At Young Life we talked about *incarnational ministry*. It meant entering the world of young people relationally. The more I've reflected on Scripture, the ministry of Jesus, and the radical idea of God coming to earth in human flesh, the more I've realized that effective ministry must be incarnational.

**We often think of racial reconciliation as a black-white issue. As someone who is neither, how do you approach this?**

When I arrived at CCDA, black-and-white was definitely the assumed way of framing reconciliation. At the first meeting I attended on reconciliation, there was



one other Latino person. And my experience with Young Life, as the first full-time Latino staff member, was similar. But it's not enough to be upset; you have to step up and lead in order to create change. We're committed to including Native Americans, Asians, and others who have been on the margins.

**Are you optimistic about immigration reform in the United States?**

I feel hopeful—but discouraged about the pace. I'm encouraged when I think of how long it took the abolitionist movement to succeed. Whether change happens is outside my control, but I can't sit on the sideline saying that reform is too hard or taking too long.

Sometimes fear, though, that it's easier to protest or write a senator than to invest time in redeveloping a neighborhood. While we're working to make changes in Washington, we have to keep doing the work of loving our neighbor.

**CT**



*That Dragon, Cancer* takes players through Joel's difficult yet joyful journey.

# Playing with Empathy

How video games with a Christian twist are making their way into the industry. **By Richard Clark**

**I**n an early demo of the video game *That Dragon, Cancer*, a certain moment struck a nerve for one user. “We had a player who got to the point where she had to press PRAY,” said codeveloper Josh Larson. She said, “I can’t keep playing. I put myself in the player’s shoes, and I wouldn’t do that if it were me.”

Larson and Ryan Green are Christians developing *That Dragon, Cancer*, a game that aims to convey Green’s experience raising his son, Joel, who died of cancer last year at age 5. Where a writer might convey that experience with words, Green and Larson are doing so in a video game.

Given the common image of video games—violent, trivial diversions—the idea of creating one about a personal tragedy may seem strange. But Green and Larson are contributing to a growing genre known as “empathy games.” Players don’t attain goals or overcome obstacles as much as empathize with characters on a significant life journey. This genre has allowed Christians to make inroads in an industry traditionally indifferent—if not hostile—to faith.

In the most recent demo of *That Dragon, Cancer*, the player begins the game by controlling a duck swimming after breadcrumbs thrown into the

water. When the perspective shifts to one of Joel’s brothers, the player hands the bread to Joel to feed the ducks. Joel then throws the entire loaf in the water. It’s a funny and touching moment, and the player feels glad to have been there for it.

From there, the player wanders through a forest, at times feeling lost, and eventually stumbles onto a playground where she can push Joel on a swing or catch him at the bottom of a slide. The demo is tinged with sadness, and yet the game’s most striking characteristic is the joy that comes with faith and thankfulness in the midst of darkness.

IMAGE COURTESY OF JOSH LARSON



# There is no failure involved. The player's only job is to be with the Greens. 'That's part of what grace is,' says Josh Larson.

## NOTHING BUT LOVE

The video game industry largely comprises atheists and agnostics, a byproduct of most developers living in the progressive hub of San Francisco. As a video game journalist, I've found that while many industry insiders will discuss spirituality, they have little patience for Christianity, which they see as narrow-minded and misguided. "I have plenty of friends in this community who I think may feel wary around Christians," says Teddy Diefenbach, an independent game designer, "[because of] the opinions that the church has been known to hold against LGBTQ people, for example."

Some games explicitly reject Christianity, whether through the excessive violence of *Mortal Kombat*, the moral chaos of *Grand Theft Auto*, or the post-feminist sexuality of *Bayonetta*. While Diefenbach is not a Christian, he remains grateful that Green and Larson are in the industry. "I see nothing but love from Ryan and Josh," he says.

Apparently there is a lot of love going the other way as well. The Green family announced Joel's passing on their website with an image of him smiling. The overlaid text read, "Awake, oh, awake my Joel and see the place he has prepared for you." Later that day, several major video-game news sites ran the announcement. Developers, journalists, and players mourned with the Green family. "I look forward to meeting the digitized representation of Joel," wrote Jeffrey Matulef, a Eurogamer reporter. "I'm sorry I never got to meet the real person."

I met Green and Larson at the Game Developers Convention in 2013. I was struck by how they coexisted as industry insiders while maintaining their Christian identity. In one talk, they explained

their philosophy of truth-telling in games to a skeptical audience. Green concluded, "We serve a God of the living and not the dead. Our eternal perspective as a family is set on that which we hope for. In the middle of all this pain, suffering, mud, and morass that cancer has wrought in our family, we have a drink of water that's made of hope, love, and life, and we hope to share it with you."

They are not the only ones telling their story. One of the most successful games of 2013 was an empathy game called *Gone Home*, a first-person exploration of a young woman's struggles with sexuality. Richard Hofmeier's *Cart Life*, the grand prize winner at the 2013 Independent Games Festival, lets players control the difficult lives of three street vendors. The genre's popularity has encouraged developers and gamers to incorporate different perspectives, which Green says has benefited him and Larson. "People allow us to say what we believe," he says.

Johnnemann Nordhagen, one of the developers of *Gone Home*, wants to hear their perspective. "I'm really glad [Green and Larson] are in the community. The need to have diverse viewpoints and explore nontraditional subject matter in games extends in that direction, too."

*That Dragon, Cancer* doesn't require the dexterity or skill that many expect from a video game, and that's by design. "The fact that there aren't a lot of gamey mechanics is partly because we're trying to communicate grace," said Larson.

As the player interacts with Joel and his family, they also hear Green's musings in voiceovers as he delights in his son and wonders anxiously about the future. Later in the demo, the player sits in as the Green family learns about the terminal nature of Joel's cancer. Throughout the game, the player is invited to be a

bystander, friend, and even family member. At times the player feels less like a voyeur and more like someone who has an emotional stake in Joel's life.

## VIDEO GAME GRACE

*That Dragon, Cancer* doesn't insist the players blindly trust God or accept the tragedy as evidence against faith. It simply asks us to exist with the Greens. While the player is asked to explore various scenes and participate in occasional tasks, it's impossible to make a wrong decision; the player's only job is to be with the Greens. "That's part of what grace is," says Larson. "It's not something you earn."

Other Christians are on the scene as well. Jay Tholen's *Dropsy* features a misunderstood clown incapable of showing any emotion but love. Tholen found backing from Devolver Digital, the publisher of the extremely violent shooter game *Hotline Miami* and *The Talos Principle*, a humanist retelling of the Garden of Eden.

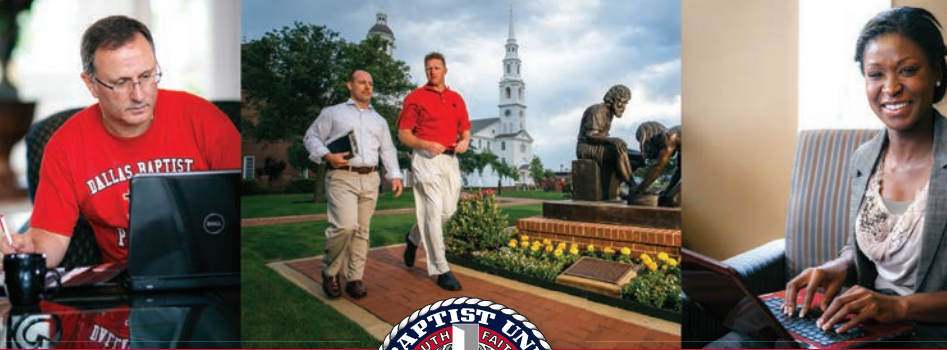
Matt Gilgenbach, a practicing Catholic, recently released *Neverending Nightmares*. The side-scrolling horror game looks at his ongoing struggle with depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder. "I felt like I had a close relationship with Christ when I was dealing with my mental illness, but I did feel kind of abandoned," Gilgenbach told Gamechurch.com. The only splash of color in the grayscale game is found on a stained-glass window depicting Christ on the cross.

As they develop *That Dragon, Cancer*, Green and Larson are learning to treat the player with increasing respect, lessons that Christian developers with similar goals would do well to heed. In a video game, the player plays along with whatever happens on the screen. Green takes that responsibility seriously. "We're not going to force you to your knees," he says. "We're not going to bow your head for you."

Over the last couple of years, Green and Larson have devoted enormous amounts of time to their artistic venture. They've sought input wherever they can find it, even from those who may not share their values. When *That Dragon, Cancer* is finally released, players will be poised to listen to them in return.

CT

RICHARD CLARK is editor in chief of Christ and Pop Culture.



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## REVIEWS



# New & Noteworthy

Compiled by Matt Reynolds

"The Old Testament is our friend in faith. As we get to know its characters and authors, we are drawn into their worlds. They teach us about the difficulty of the moral life, the wonder of worship, and the longings of the God who created the universe."

~ from *This Strange and Sacred Scripture*

by Matthew Richard Schlimm



## THIS STRANGE AND SACRED SCRIPTURE

**Wrestling with the Old Testament and Its Oddities**

MATTHEW RICHARD SCHLIMM (BAKER ACADEMIC)

Most Christians don't consciously oppose the Old Testament, says Schlimm, a professor at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, but they do tend to keep it at arm's length. "We treat [it] less as an enemy and more as a stranger, a mere acquaintance, or a superficial friend." *This Strange and Sacred Scripture* teaches tentative readers to view the Old Testament as a "friend in faith"—albeit a "quirky" one. That friendship will never get off the ground "if we are suspicious of it or somehow biased against it." But if we patiently bear with the Old Testament, studying it slowly and carefully, we'll grow in companionship not only with its characters but also with its Maker.



## OUTPOSTS OF HOPE

### First Peter's Christ for Culture Strategy

DOUGLAS D. WEBSTER (CASCADE BOOKS)

Themes of suffering and persecution figure prominently in the Epistle of 1 Peter. Yet Webster, who teaches pastoral theology and preaching at Beeson Divinity School, says these themes often fail to resonate with readers in the contemporary West, where Christianity—despite pockets of intense disfavor—peacefully coexists with secular culture. *Outposts of Hope* asks whether 1 Peter's perceived lack of relevance can help us examine the depths of our obedience to Christ. "If the messianic community lived the way Peter expected Christ's followers to live," asks Webster, "would they experience social ostracism, mockery, and abuse similar to that experienced by the first recipients of Peter's letter?"



## AGAINST THE FLOW

### The Inspiration of Daniel in an Age of Relativism

JOHN C. LENNOX (KREGEL PUBLICATIONS)

Lennox, professor of mathematics at Oxford University, is one of the world's foremost writers on the compatibility of modern science and Christian faith. In *Against the Flow*, Lennox reads the Book of Daniel against the backdrop of modern secularism and moral confusion, lifting up its example of faithfulness amid pressures to slacken and conform. "Society tolerates the practice of the Christian faith in private devotions and in church services, but it increasingly deprecates public witness," Lennox writes. "The story of Daniel and his friends is a clarion call to our generation to be courageous; not to lose our nerve and allow the expression of our faith to be diluted and squeezed out of the public space and thus rendered spineless and ineffective."

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A Network of Support **73**





# Pressing On Toward the Goal

*Three recent graduates share the highs and lows of distance learning and what kept them going as they pursued their degrees online.*

**By Amanda Cleary Eastep**

**T**he sun hadn't risen yet, but Ashley Holloway had. She had homework. In between her full-time job, church meetings, and volunteer role at the community recreation center, Holloway was earning her MBA, and doing it completely online. The weekends didn't offer much respite. Saturdays and Sundays were filled mostly with studying and pounding out the next paper. It wasn't easy, but like millions of other students enrolled in college distance learning programs, Holloway was keeping her eye on the final reward: a degree.

The US Department of Education recently reported that in fall 2012, 2.6 million students were enrolled in courses that delivered instruction exclusively through distance education, with the majority (2 million) enrolled at the undergraduate level.

The convenience and flexibility of such programs appeal to students who

are working part- or full-time jobs and often caring for families. Liberty University in Lynchburg, VA, Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, IL, and Colorado Christian University in Lakewood, CO, all offer degree programs that can be completed entirely online and structured around a student's schedule.

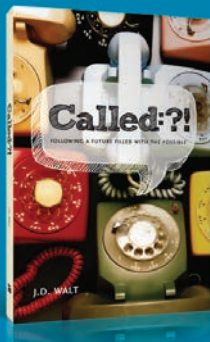
Holloway and fellow graduates Rick Gering and Jeanie Quist, who completed their degrees online through Liberty, Moody, and Colorado Christian, respectively, shared their experiences—what they liked, what they didn't, and what kept them pushing forward. Their motivations for choosing to earn a degree, and to do so without ever setting foot in a traditional classroom, are varied and deeply personal, but their paths to achieving the end goal of a bachelor's or master's degree were directed by their desire to do God's will in their lives and by their determination to "finish the race."



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## EYES ON THE PRIZE

**Ashley Holloway**

As the end of her traditional undergraduate worship and music studies at Liberty University neared, Ashley Holloway sensed God had anointed her for both ministry *and* business. So she enrolled in Liberty's online Master of Business Administration program, one of the college's 250 distance learning degrees. She said that "by the grace of God" she was given the opportunity to serve as a marketing manager in the college's marketing department, a position that also offered the benefit of a full-tuition scholarship. "I knew that God had opened this door as an opportunity to earn a graduate degree at no cost to me."

Balancing school, work, and church duties was a challenge, but she remained "rigidly determined" to prioritize her commitments. Holloway's daily schedule included work, volunteering, rehearsals and meetings at church, and personal Bible study. To stay organized, she used a digital calendar with auto-reminders and a large calendar that hung on the wall in her kitchen.

First on the list each day: prayer and Bible reading.

"I knew that if I didn't keep God first, I was inhibiting my own progress and refusing the edification he wanted to release to me during those times," Holloway said. "I knew all of the success I had experienced was because of God, so I had to remain determined to keep everything else in its proper place."

Certain activities rarely made the calendar, such as going out with friends, Sunday afternoon naps—a favorite

pastime—and visits with family, who remained her biggest cheerleaders. "I had to sacrifice for the sake of my degree," Holloway said. "I reminded myself that the sacrifices were temporary and that in the end, it would all be worth it."

In addition to her personal calendars and an eye on the future, Holloway's degree completion plan kept her focused. "Being able to visually see my progress helped motivate me to continue and also to do better."

Hebrews 12:2 became an encouragement. "Jesus was able to endure hardship by keeping his eyes fixed on the joy that was set before him," Holloway said. "While my challenges were far lighter than his, I got through them the same way that he did—by keeping my eyes fixed on my goal."

The biggest advantage of online

education, according to this working professional? Flexibility.

"Attending classes residually does not fit well with the typical work schedule," she said. "The beauty of distance learning is being able to 'attend' class and

complete assignments at whatever time of day is most convenient for you."

The disadvantages? To Holloway the biggest is the lack of face-to-face interaction with instructors and classmates. During her undergraduate studies, she developed strong friendships and connections, but said her graduate studies didn't afford those types of opportunities. "My instructors and classmates were all very kind, but the nature of distance learning demands more effort to build relationships than a traditional classroom setting does."

A benefit of a traditional Christian college education is the opportunity for students to be nurtured in their faith. Holloway said such opportunities did exist in her distance-learning program, *if* students chose to take advantage of them. A discussion board was created for prayer requests and spiritual fellowship, but Holloway found that most students did not participate. She said that spiritual fellowship occurred more naturally during group project collabora-

tion, when a significant occurrence in a student's life presented challenges to the pursuit of their education: "At that point, group members usually responded empathetically and prayerfully," Holloway said she also felt blessed by the verses, experiences, and exhortations professors included in their weekly emails.

What advice would Holloway give to others contemplating earning an online degree? She says perseverance is imperative. "Set a goal for when you want to finish, and work diligently toward it. I had countless opportunities to quit, but God has taught me to be moved by his Word, not by pressure," she said. "Pressure can burst pipes, but it can also produce diamonds—so I made up my mind to withstand the pressure and be developed as a diamond."

"Every day I had to make the decision to remain firm, keep moving forward, and allow God to perfect and prepare me for greatness."

Holloway completed her MBA program in December 2014, but May 2015 will officially mark the achievement of her goal when she participates in Liberty's graduation ceremony. "Liberty does a great job of making online students feel like they are a part of the family, and I am proud to have received both of my degrees from the largest Christian university in the world."



## LIFE-LONG LEARNING

**Rick Gering**

It has been nearly 25 years since Rick Gering was called into full-time pastoral ministry, and for the last several years, he has served as lead pastor at Sugar Grove Church, a non-denominational church in Goshen, Indiana.

It was during this time that Gering became extremely intentional about finally



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earning his bachelor's degree—which he started almost 21 years ago, but, as the demands of ministry and family grew, never finished. So he began to seek out an online program to fit his lifestyle as a pastor, husband, and father. When a friend recommended Moody Bible Institute, Gering checked out the online bachelor's degree program and decided it would be a good fit.

The longtime pastor didn't have to wait until graduation to realize the benefits of his online classes. As Gering immersed himself in Bible study, hermeneutics, and historical perspectives, he found his coursework immensely helpful with sermon preparation. "I was able to take a lot of what I was doing in class and apply it immediately to my sermon prep," he said. "I hope my congregation of over 1,000 attendees has been able to tell the difference."

Gering's thoughts on the advantages and disadvantages of distance learning echo those of other distance

learners. "The big advantage? No doubt that you can do it in the comfort of your home and, for the most part, on your schedule," he said.

"The disadvantage? You don't get the 'community' as much as if you were on campus," Gering said. Although Moody's professors are accessible and dedicated to openly communicating with students, Gering explained that developing fellowship among students and professors depended on each student's commitment to doing so. "I was very busy developing relationships in my church and didn't have adequate time to develop them online."

One key to Gering's success in the program was structure. He maintained a set schedule each week: ministry and family obligations filled his days, while schoolwork took up late evenings and days "off." The fact that his children were at a stage of independence or living on their own made "getting serious" about completing his degree easier. So did the support of his wife, Cindy.

"My wife has been patient with me, as

she knew this was a big goal to accomplish," Gering said. "She encouraged me to keep going at times I was ready to quit."

Gering thought of quitting a number of times, especially, he said, when taking math classes, which he saved for last. (He credits his tutor for saving him from quitting with only one class left to complete.) "Keeping the accomplishment in front of me was all I needed," he said, and added that the apostle Paul's admonition in Philippians 3:14 to "press on toward the goal to win the prize" is "all over" the endurance aspect of achieving a longtime educational goal.

Carrying out the decision to reach his longtime goal, said Gering, was fueled by "commitment, perseverance, and personal satisfaction." He said his wife and children are also proud of his achievement. "My guess is that they are more

proud of the fact that I didn't give up, and that I accomplished it at age 47."

Gering, who hadn't stepped foot onto Moody's campus throughout the

entirety of his undergraduate program, was determined to walk across the graduation stage to receive his diploma—which he did in May of 2014. "It was an unbelievable feeling," he said. "A swell of emotions fell upon me as I thought back on the last 20 years and the ups and downs of finally completing this degree."

But Gering didn't stop after achieving his goal of earning his bachelor's degree. "As much as I wanted to say, 'I'm done,' I just couldn't," he explained. "I want to continue to learn and grow, and I knew if I put it off, it might be another 20 years before getting my master's degree."

He continues to integrate what he learns in his church leadership courses into his pastoral work at Sugar Grove. He's currently pursuing his Master of Arts in Christian Leadership through Moody's distance learning program and is on course to graduate in 2016. "I will be walking, yes, walking, again in 2016," Gering said. "After that, could there be more ahead? Absolutely. Dr. Gering. I like the sound of that!"



## A NETWORK OF SUPPORT

### Jeanie Quist

When Jeanie Quist was earning her bachelor's degree in public administration in the late 1970s, personal computers were not yet a common household item. So when Quist entered Colorado Christian University's Master of Arts in Curriculum and Instruction (MACI) program for preschool, elementary, middle level, and secondary teachers, and college instructors, it was Quist's first experience with online learning.

But she wasn't a stranger to the university's MACI program. Quist's husband Michael was already enrolled in the program as she was contemplating furthering her education several years ago. She visited the campus with their daughter Christine, a senior in high school at the time, and discovered she loved the atmosphere and the campus as much as her college-bound child.

Initially, Quist enrolled in CCU's online program in the fall of 2008 and planned to teach elementary school after completing her degree. However, unfamiliarity with distance learning, a lack of rapport with her adviser, and the feeling of being lost in a "sea of faceless students" prompted her to withdraw from the program. Four years later, with the encouragement of her husband, Quist decided to finish what she had started.

When she re-enrolled in the MACI program and began classes in January of 2013, Quist had a far different experience, including excellent communication with advisers. In fact, she now considers one a friend. "Heather was amazing as my adviser. She made an extra effort to send me a copy of the graduation program, since I was not going to attend," said Quist. "She made a difference in my time at CCU."



In addition to launching back into her schooling, Quist had also moved with her family to Colby, Kansas, in October, and she started a full-time position at Colby Community College as an administrative assistant the week before spring classes began at CCU.

At work, Quist made the most of her breaks to study, then spent her evenings immersed in her homework. Weekends were dedicated

to completing assignments, which were due by midnight each Sunday. “At times, it was stressful to work late into the evening in order to

complete weekly assignments, especially on Sundays, knowing I had to begin a new work week the next morning.”

However, she found that her work experience shaped and informed her studies, and vice versa. Working under the federally-funded TRIO grant changed the focus of her capstone topic to first-generation students and their success in college. In turn, her capstone research added to her knowledge, which she could then apply to her job. The experience she gained in a coursework design class and as a student user of CCU’s learning management system led to the opportunity to work with Colby’s vice president of student affairs to update the online orientation information for her division. And this past fall, she achieved the goal of becoming an instructor for Colby’s Student Success Seminars, an eight-week orientation class for freshmen. Her love of teaching realized, Quist said she applies what she learned in her MACI classes—specifically those on lesson planning and technology—to her classes.

Quist said that the structure of the assigned MACI cohort—a group of students who journey together through the degree or certificate program—offered valuable opportunities for students to get to know each other and to build a sense of community. Weekly discussion posts provided interaction between classmates and the professor. Biblical views were incorporated into all lessons, and students were encouraged to use

Scripture to support their views.

Professors went above and beyond their job descriptions to support their students, Quist said, even when teaching more than one class. She explained that establishing a rapport with instructors over multiple classes proved invaluable. But their help didn’t end when the computer shut down or the class ended. Quist said her professors continued

to encourage and support her throughout the program. “These exceptional professors serve as mentors to me, and I will always remember them fondly.”

As with others who choose the path of online education, Quist also relied on her family. “You need your family’s support for success, as they are invested in your future with you,” she said. “My family helped out around the house and even took care of me by bringing meals to me when I was deep into my school work. My mom was always sending me great messages that encouraged me. She was my personal cheerleader.”

Her faith, too, played a huge role in her success. When large assignments became

overwhelming, “I prayed for clarity, focus, and understanding,” she said. “I then had to break them down into smaller steps and just keep moving forward until I was finished.”

Quist’s emphasis on the need for prayer—“lots of prayer”—and the continuous support and encouragement of family are testaments to the immense challenges distance learners can face. Yet these kinds of support are the keys to success in realizing dreams and reaching the educational goals set before these Christian scholars.

While the options available for online education continue to grow as technology advances and traditional higher education evolves, Holloway, Gering, Quist, and others like them continue to discover that the greatest blessings of distance learning do not lie in convenience or job advancement or even personal achievement, but in the assurance that their online Christian college degree programs are centered on the One who never changes.

Amanda Cleary Eastep is a freelance writer, focusing on the areas of higher education and business. Her essays have been published by Think Christian and *catapult* magazine. She writes about faith and family on her blog at [amandaclearyeastep.wordpress.com](http://amandaclearyeastep.wordpress.com).

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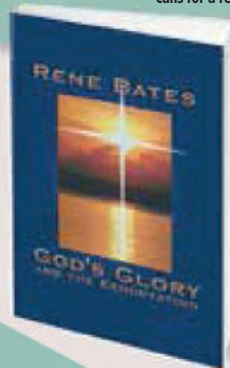
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I had heard that most North Koreans tried to cross the border into China during the night, so I planned my escape for midday in February 2006. I slipped down the banks of the Tumen River, coated my shoes in sandy silt for traction, and raced across the river's icy surface to the far shore. It was a miracle that I made it.

I fled full of hope. I was sure I would have no difficulty finding food. I imagined Chinese families handing me their leftovers, as a bowl of rice was nothing for them. But once in China, reality hit. Almost no one wanted to share with me. They were irritated simply by my request for leftovers. I was so confused. This was not what I believed people were like.

For a few weeks, I was barely able to beg enough to survive. Then an elderly Chinese Korean woman approached me. "I am so sorry—there is nothing I can offer," she said. "But you should go to a church." She told me to look for a building with a cross.

I had seen a red cross on the gates of a hospital in North Korea. I had no idea what a cross had to do with church, but I followed her directions to a corner. I saw a few buildings, but none bore a red cross.

I stopped a man walking by. "Where can I find a cross?" I asked. "Look up." And there it was.

This was my first time inside a church. It was late in the evening, and a few men lingered in the modest building. "I am from North Korea," I said. "I don't know anyone here and need help." One of the men gave me 20 yuan (about \$3) and told me that was all they could spare.

From that town in the northernmost part of China, I made my way to Yanji, then to Tumen City. I wandered around until I found another church. On the wall were written these words: COME TO ME, ALL YOU WHO ARE WEARY AND BURDENED, AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST.

It was as if someone was talking directly to me. I thought I heard a voice saying, *I understand how exhausted you are and what a hopeless situation you are in. Give me your hands and I will take care of you.*

A neatly dressed woman greeted me with a smile—despite the fact that I had not showered for weeks. "How may I help you?" she asked. I felt I needed to add urgency, so instead of giving her my usual

speech, I lied. I told her I was on my way to meet my sister in another town and needed means to get there. The woman asked me to wait in the lobby. She came back with 50 yuan (\$8) and wished me luck. It was the most cash I had ever held in my hands.

A few days later, I returned to the church, imagining I would receive another 50 yuan. This time, church members offered to let me stay temporarily. This was better than what I expected. I had been sleeping in a windowless abandoned house during winter; sleeping in an actual room with a blanket was enticing. I agreed to stay.

A week later, I ran into the woman who had given me 50 yuan. It turned out that she was the pastor's wife. I was scared that she would scold me for lying and kick me out, but she let me stay. One afternoon, I heard members of the congregation discussing how the pastor had bad teeth but couldn't afford dental treatment. I thought that the lady had given me the yuan because she had money to spare. In that moment, I realized how much 50 yuan was for her family.

Her generous act sparked my curiosity about God. She looked so similar to all those who had refused to give me leftover rice, yet she was different. I started to read a Bible to know what she believed. Despite my sincere desire to learn, I couldn't understand it. The vocabulary, the concept of heaven and hell—none of these made sense to me. Still, I kept wondering about her faith.

In China, hosting a North Korean refugee is illegal, and this church had already sheltered me for more than two weeks. I couldn't stay forever. One of the members located an elderly Korean Chinese woman living in another city who was willing to

take me in. She was a devoted Christian who let me call her "Grandma." I didn't know how to pray, but she encouraged me to read the Bible and taught me hymns to sing. She gave me a new name: Joseph.

My first prayer to God was said in China, the night Grandma introduced me to a hymn:

Father, I stretch my hands to thee,  
No other help I know;  
If thou withdraw thyself from me,  
Ah! Whither shall I go?

That night I prayed, *God, I don't know who you are or whether you exist as the Bible and Christians claim. But I need your help.*

A few months after I moved into Grandma's home, I met a South Korean missionary who runs an underground shelter for North Koreans. Later that year, an activist helped me relocate to the United States. I arrived in 2007 as a refugee and began attending high school in Richmond. Different obstacles overshadowed me there. I couldn't understand a single word of my classes or classmates and I could barely keep up with the stream of cultural differences. But because I was still relatively young, I was able to learn English. I graduated in four years, and am now attending college in New York City. I attend a church in Manhattan to learn more about God and his world.

The hymn Grandma taught me put into words what my heart needed to say. I had been alone in the world. At any moment, the authorities could have arrested me and sent me back to North Korea to starve. I felt there was no one to look after me, no one who could help. What would happen if God withdrew himself from me too?

But what was God's help if not the churches that sheltered me or the woman who gave me the 50 yuan she couldn't spare or the elderly Christian who gave me my new name? Fleeing to China, I had lost hope in human goodness. Finding Christians there, I found that hope again. Caring for strangers, acting compassionately without expecting anything in return: That is the beauty of humankind. That is the beauty of the gospel. **CT**

**JOSEPH KIM** is the author of *Under the Same Sky: From Starvation in North Korea to Salvation in America* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt).

**In China, hosting a North Korean refugee is illegal, and the church had already sheltered me for more than two weeks. I couldn't stay forever.**



## TESTIMONY



# Escape from North Korea

My father died of starvation, my sister was sold as a child bride, and my mother was imprisoned. What hope did I have?

By Joseph Kim

**I**n some ways, growing up in North Korea is like growing up anywhere else. I had a father and mother who rarely failed to show me love, and my older sister looked after me constantly. I caught dragonflies with friends and waited with excitement for cartoons to come on TV.

Then, in 1995, the worst of the Great Famine descended on the land, and the privileges of my childhood were stripped away.

When I was 12 years old, my father died of starvation. Our house was taken away to repay a debt we owed a family friend. That year, my mother fled to China with my sister in search of food and money. She returned a few months later, alone. She had sold my sister into bride slavery, a common fate for young North Korean refugees. My mother believed it would be a better life for my sister than the one waiting back home.

I don't know that she even knew what sex trafficking is; most brokers highlight the benefits of being married to a Chinese man. She was hardly the only North Korean who had to

make these kinds of impossible decisions. She continued to secretly travel to and from China until she was caught by the North Korean government and put in prison.

With my whole family gone, I lived on the streets. And the possibility of ever being loved started to fade for me. Before I had a chance to decide who I was on my own terms, my identity was defined by others: *homeless, orphan, beggar*. When I approached people in the food courts in the city markets, they would swat me away like a fly. No one said, "I see how weary and hopeless you must be."

## LOOK UP

At age 15, I faced a choice: I could either starve like my father, or flee the country and hope to secure a better life outside its fortified borders. Between the certainty of death and the chance of survival, I chose survival.

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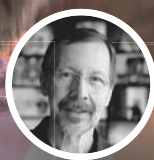
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