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WONDER?** p. 42

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BRAND EVANGELISTS

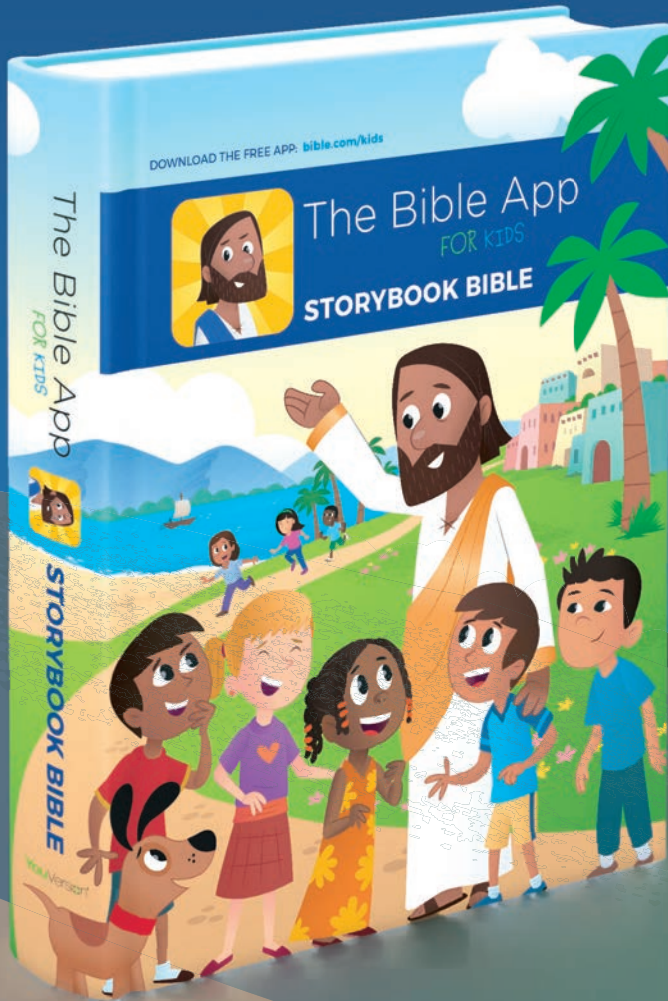
What's behind the multilevel marketing phenomenon making its way to your church.



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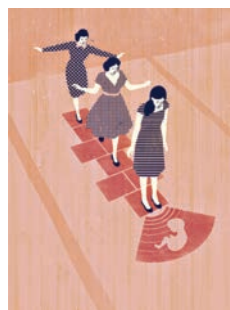
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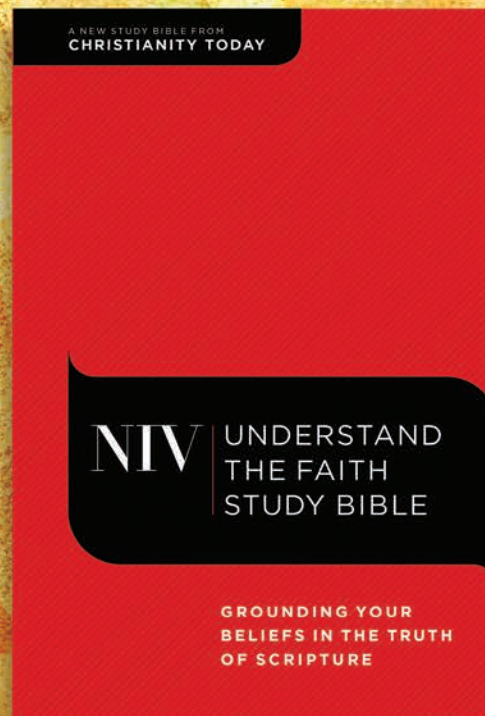
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EDITOR'S NOTE

THERE WAS A TIME, not that long ago, when every worker “worked from home.” Men and women labored to survive on the farm. Sowing, harvesting, preserving, spinning, weaving, and animal husbandry kept the family fed and clothed. Children were foremost valued not as “special snowflakes” but as helping hands. Life was very hard, but it was also seamless.

This side of the Industrial Revolution, many of us live lives full of seams. We are pulled in all directions—from office to church to grocery store to mall to house to disembodied Internet. During the Christmas season especially (p. 25), work and home compete for our time and energy, like forces ever pitted against each other.

But if the people featured in this month's cover story (p. 34) are any indication, some of us are healing the work-home divide.

Multilevel marketing (MLM)—wherein individuals sell products to friends and family, who are then invited to sell said products—has been around at least since 1959. That year, two Christian businessmen founded Amway, which has grown to a \$10.8-billion-a-year business. My first brush with Amway came when a janitor at my parents' church came over to tell us about some remarkable cleaning products. My parents politely explained that their Spic 'n Span would do just fine.

Today, we are more likely to encounter MLM through cheery and frequent Facebook posts—or in a local church. I just bought my first MLM product from a friend from small group. We pray together! We do life together! Why wouldn't I support her in her good desire to generate some income?

The force of MLM raises many questions for church leaders. It can be a thorny discipleship issue; as ministry leader Amanda Edmondson told CT, “Because of the lack of compartmentalization of work and home life, [critique] becomes personal. If you approach a woman about her involvement with MLM, you're cutting to her core.”

“MLMs seem to tap into the identity crisis for women caught between home and marketplace,” says Hannah Anderson, author of *Made for More*. “This goes beyond finding . . . work-life balance. Women speak about how these opportunities gave them purpose.”

Whatever churches discern about the MLM trend, one thing is clear: We are all made to work “with eager hands” (Prov. 31:13). Industry and thrift are long-praised virtues. Anyone who has run their own store, finished a home project, or published a print magazine (hypothetically!) knows the pleasure of a job well done. And, as for our forebears, for us, work is crucial to living. Whatever we conclude about MLM, we honor the impulse to work—even when it centers on a magenta-colored product catalog. **CT**



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In praise of magenta-colored industry.

KATELYN BEATY *Managing Editor, Magazine*



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REPLY ALL

RESPONSES TO OUR OCTOBER ISSUE

The Truth about Heresy p. 38

Understanding the difference between heresy and heterodoxy as described in Justin Holcomb's clear article is critical for Christian unity. I found this to be true in the small Bible study group I held in my home for 17 years. We had people from different churches, Protestant and Catholic. I stressed that agreeing on the foundations of our faith in the Nicene Creed kept us unified.

Those who debate the predestination issue distance themselves from those who disagree as if they were heretics. I have cautioned people to resist this temptation.

JIM HILT Sheboygan, Wisconsin

Such an overdue rebuke of the church's current addiction to the word "heresy."

@JOHNMARKCOMER

I tell students a heresy is usually an effort to resolve one of Christianity's key paradoxes, but here is CT's take.

@MOLLYWORTHEN

The New Battle for the Bible p. 31

Mark Galli's editorial "The New Battle for the Bible" focused the entire October issue. In my 32 years of ministry at a Christian school, I have seen Christian groups increasingly depend on other sources of truth as our first choice for faith and practice. It feels good to use best practices from business, psychology, education, and marketing. But popular practices often do not originate from the Bible.

The Bible often looks foolish to the world and to the consensus confirmed by research and surveys. But God's Word is

sufficient for equipping us for every good work. What radical changes would we make in our organizations if we went to the Bible first?

JOE NEFF Little Rock, Arkansas

I completely agree with "The New Battle for the Bible," and am glad to hear CT express it. Yet as I think back to articles I've read in CT, you have not always carried this out regarding creationism. Mark Galli writes, "Fidelity to the Bible has long been an essential part of evangelical identity. . . . We believe it crucial to adhere to the plain meaning of the text unless overwhelming evidence suggests otherwise." Yet you publish the views of those who adhere to progressive creation—an old earth, the big bang, and so on. These views disregard the "plain meaning of the text."

I hope that the excellent resolution to "return to Scripture as our final authority" will pertain to *every* area that the Bible covers—including how we began.

DENISE HAYS Olympia, Washington



I borrow my kids' crayons all the time in church, but my drawings aren't as cool.

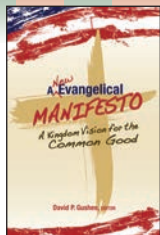
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Drawing from Faith p. 52

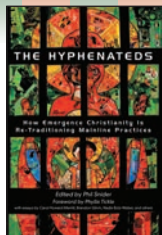
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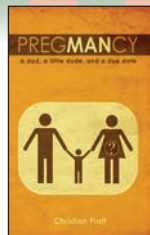
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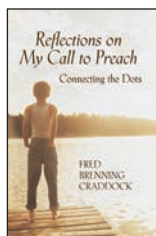


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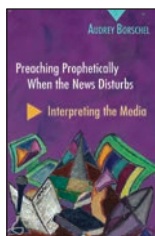
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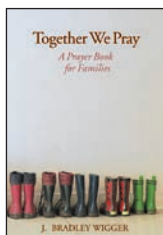


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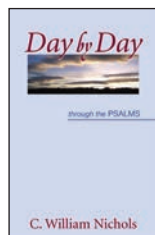


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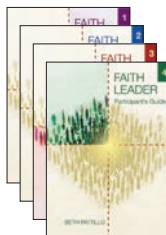
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The primary purpose of the Christian Scriptures is to reveal Christ, who in turn reveals the nature of God. The Scriptures are a means to an end, not an end in themselves. We don't worship a book of words, but a person who is the Word. There is a significant difference.

f CHAD ANTHONY RHODES

The milk of therapeutic Christianity is no substitute for serious Bible study.

t @GALENCAREY

One Flesh, Two Callings p. 36

Thankfully my husband recognised what God had done and was doing in me, as I did with him. He pushed me forward to speak, despite my natural shyness as he could hear the Holy Spirit through me, as I did with him.

I lost my husband in February after 26 years of being one in God. I miss him so much.

f MARION BURDON Birmingham, UK

I thought this article was about a Cubs fan marrying a Cardinals fan.

f STEL PONTIKES St. Louis, Missouri

THE SPLASH THE TOP-READ ONLINE

1

"David Was a Rapist, Abraham Was a Sex Trafficker," by David T. Lamb

2

Pastors, Power, and Prettiness," by Karen Swallow Prior

3

Pope Francis' Latest Convert: Kirsten Powers," by Bob Smietana

4

"Why Gospel For Asia Got Kicked Out of the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability," by Bob Smietana

5

"What I Learned from Being a Vegas Call Girl," by Annie Lobert



A Better Word, A Better Way, A Better World



The Real Woman at the Well p. 66

At last, another take on the Samaritan woman! For years I have been troubled by the characterization of her as an adulterer at worst and a multiple divorcée at best. None of these statements are found in the text. It was refreshing to read this well-researched alternative viewpoint, bringing to light first-century realities, particularly for women. This story tells us much about Jesus, how ready he was to cross cultural, racial, and religious boundaries for genuine seekers of truth.

VERNA ZOOK Iowa City, Iowa

Jesus knows our hearts and our sins, and waits for us to turn to him. Lynn Cohick misses the most important aspect of this story: that Jesus first reveals to this woman that he is the Messiah. She becomes not only the first to hear the news, but also the

first evangelist as she runs to tell the town about him. That is the point: that we tell others about him. Sometimes it's in the context of our testimony, but it is his story that matters, not so much our own.

ELIZABETH SANDEN Ridgefield, Connecticut

It Happened One Night p. 104

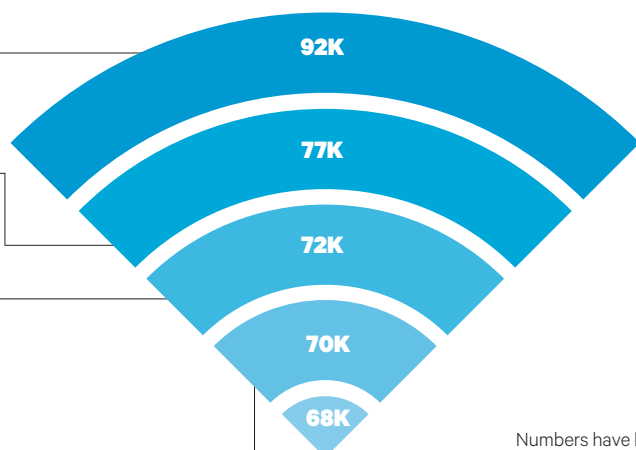
I love hearing people's conversion stories. It's a constant reminder that God is at work in the world and is doing miracles that the world doesn't notice. As the Lord himself taught us, "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8).

DENNY BURK Louisville, Kentucky

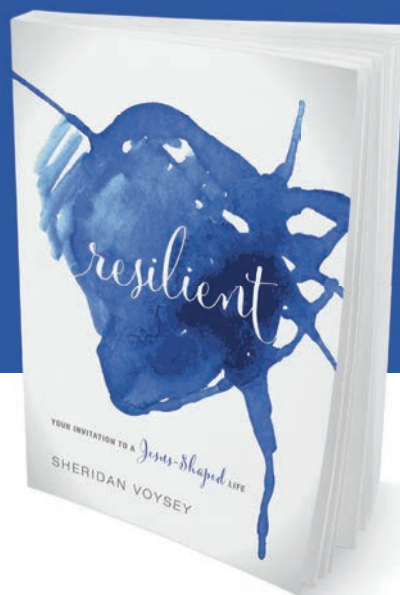
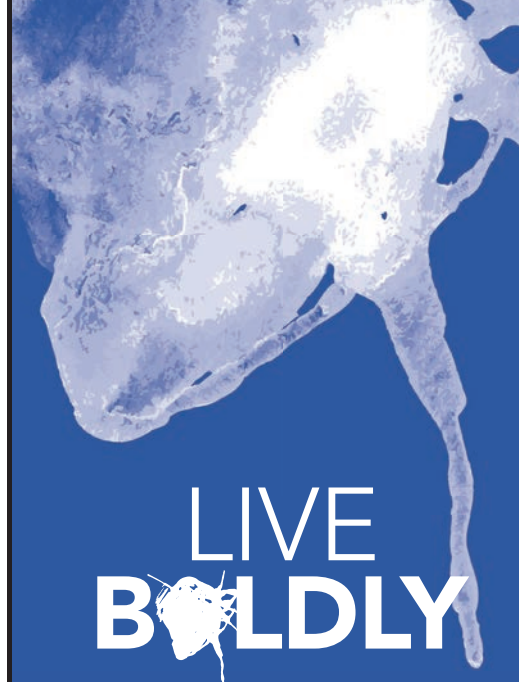
CORRECTION

In June 2015 *News, CT* reported that Wycliffe Associates is a sister organization within Wycliffe Bible Translators ["The Bible in Two Months," p. 18]. In fact, Wycliffe Associates is separate from Wycliffe Bible Translators. We regret the error.

EXCLUSIVE ESSAYS FROM OCTOBER



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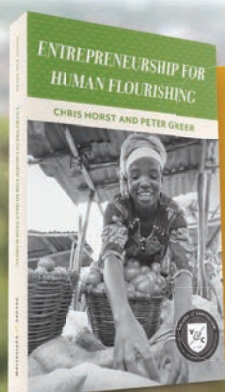
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- The monthly share has never exceeded \$405 for a family of any size*



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* As of October 2015

NEWS



WITNESS



KINGDOM CODERS

INDONESIA: More than 800 tech-savvy Christians gathered this fall to take part in Code for the Kingdom's first global hackathon. Spread across 13 cities—including Addis Ababa, Guatemala City, Nairobi, and Jakarta (above)—in 8 countries, attendees worked on more than 120 apps that would, among other things, match refugees with hosts, teach the faith via children's games, avoid pornography, and place aspiring chefs in church kitchens.

PHOTO COURTESY OF LEADERSHIP NETWORK / VIKI YAPUTRA





GLEANINGS



The **digital** distribution of Scriptures in 2014 was three times higher than in 2010. But it still only makes up half of 1 percent of all distribution by Bible societies.

Cuba distributed four times more Bibles than in 2013.

Thanks to the World Cup, more than two-thirds of all Scriptures and one fifth of all Bibles distributed worldwide went to **Brazil**.

The number of Brazilian Bibles (7.6 million) eclipsed all of **Africa** combined (7.3 million).

Amid its Crimea conflict with Russia, **Ukraine** saw 10 times as many New Testaments (70,000) distributed as in 2010.

War-torn **Syria** saw more than five times as many Old and New Testaments distributed as in 2010, before its civil war began.

Myanmar had 45 percent more Scriptures distributed than in 2010, a bigger increase than the 42 percent of the **Philippines**, Asia's most Christian nation.

Almost 3 out of 5 Scriptures distributed in Africa went to just two countries: **Nigeria** (4.5 million) and **South Africa** (1.5 million).

■ SCRIPTURES
■ BIBLES

↑ BIBLE BONANZA

A record number of full Bibles (34 million) and Scriptures* (428 million) were distributed worldwide in 2014 by members of the United Bible Societies. Highlights from their report on how Scripture circulated last year are above.

**Scriptures include Old or New Testaments, the Gospels, and smaller Bible portions.*



UNITED KINGDOM Missionaries must go

One of the world's largest missions agencies has lost 66 staff members from its British office. This fall, United Kingdom Visas and Immigration (UKVI) officials stripped away Operation Mobilization's (OM) license to sponsor visas. Christian ministries have been running into trouble amid UK efforts to bolster homeland security and regulate the labor force. Last year, Youth With A Mission said it learned "hard lessons" about recordkeeping after UKVI nearly forced out more than 300 missionaries and families. "We have seen the expectations and requirements on visa sponsors increase dramatically and ... we have been unable to keep up,"

OM's UK director, Gary Sloan, told CT. OM will reapply for the license next year.

Gospel for Asia loses ECFA approval

The Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA) has removed a charter member of 36 years, concluding that Gospel for Asia (GFA) misled donors, mismanaged resources, and has an ineffective board. The move surprised GFA, one of the world's largest missions agencies, which denied any wrongdoing and said no money "was found to be missing" during its ECFA review. But GFA admitted it may have been "unintentionally negligent" in its financial and management practices.



SINGAPORE Pastor convicted over pop music pipeline

One of Singapore's most prominent pastors, Kong Hee, has been convicted of illegally using church funds on his wife's secular singing career. The nation's charity commissioner found Kong and five other leaders at the 17,000-member City Harvest Church (CHC) guilty of siphoning \$35.9 million to support Sun Ho. The church maintains that Ho's music was intended to evangelize non-Christians. But the funding wasn't straightforward: donations to a sister church in Kuala Lumpur were used to support Ho, and CHC purchased \$500,000 worth of unsold albums to

boost Ho's ratings before her US debut. "[I am] sorry for the pain you all have had to endure under my leadership and watch," Kong told his congregation. "But hopefully, that season in the life of our church is in the past."

GUATEMALA **Voters pick evangelical entertainer for president**

Several months after their president's surprise resignation, Guatemalans have chosen a new leader: an evangelical television personality. Jimmy Morales has little political experience beyond running for mayor four years ago. But he holds an MBA and other degrees—including one in theology from Guatemala Baptist Seminary. Morales vowed in campaigns to be "neither corrupt nor a thief" in a year that saw outgoing president Otto Pérez Molina and other leaders arrested on fraud and corruption charges. Guatemalan evangelicals, who make up one-third of the population, have worked for peaceful reform by holding prayer meetings, handing out Bible verses on leadership, and meeting politicians, according to the United Bible Societies.

Evangelicals officially divide on death penalty

Opposing the death penalty is a legitimate application of Christian ethics, the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) acknowledged for the first time this fall. Since the early 1970s, the NAE has supported capital punishment only, reasoning that it works as a deterrent and underscores the weight of heinous crimes. But "a growing number of evangelicals call for government resources to be shifted away from the death penalty," said NAE president Leith Anderson. "Our statement allows for their advocacy." In 2014, 59 percent of white evangelicals, 25 percent of black Protestants, and 24 percent of Hispanic Protestants preferred the death penalty for people convicted of murder.

Megachurch drops .tv for .church

An Oklahoma-based megachurch lost its \$185,000 bid to distribute .church, one of the newest web domain names on the market. But LifeChurch.tv, which draws 70,000 weekly attendees using video simulcast to 24 campuses in 7 states, adopted the new domain anyway—and

a new name to match. Now Life.Church, the church is one of more than 13,000 websites with the .church domain. Several other groups were more successful with their bids. The Vatican controls .catholic, and the American Bible Society owns .bible. But Donuts Inc., a for-profit company that owns .email, among other domains, owns .church.

ZAMBIA **Officially Christian nation no heaven on earth**

Zambia, home of the world's worst-performing currency and a sputtering economy, had its first national day of prayer this fall. At its new president's directive, bars and restaurants were shut down and soccer games canceled. "Since we humbled ourselves as a people . . . [God] has heard our cry, has forgiven our sins, and will surely heal our land," President Edgar Lungu said in his public address. Many Christian groups backed the declaration. But opposition party leader Hakainde Hichilema criticized Lungu's proclamation as "not genuine," and listed issues the government needed to address before calling for prayer and reconciliation.

Under Discussion

Compiled by Morgan Lee



Q: Should Christians give money to ministries deep in debt?

Teen Mania, best known for its Acquire the Fire (ATF) rallies, is one of America's five most insolvent charities, according to Charity Navigator. It has asked donors to be patient; Compassion International sued for a refund after paying to promote its child sponsorship at ATF events that got canceled.

YES

NO

"If a ministry has been called by God, he may be letting it go through difficult times in order to work in the hearts of those involved. Paul had times when he was hungry and times when he had abundance, but it was one of the greatest all-time investments ever to support Paul."

Howard Dayton, founder & CEO, Compass (Finance God's Way)

"Mature ministries should be held accountable. Younger ministries, however, may struggle between trusting God versus relying on their own capacities. Support that encourages their spiritual maturation but does not reinforce questionable ethics may be totally appropriate."

Bob Lupton, founder, FCS Urban Ministries

"Ministries with worthy goals, sound fiscal policy, and good track records should be supported even if—perhaps particularly when—struggling. But repeated mismanagement must be addressed. Even the best attempts at noble endeavors, if repeatedly not making it, need to be rethought."

Craig Blomberg, author, *Neither Poverty Nor Riches*

"On its own, a market-based approach to support of Christian ministries is inconsistent with the call to sacrificial obedience. Yet Christians are called to be stewards of the gifts—including assets—that God has given them. So ministry effectiveness is a legitimate concern."

Scott Pryor, bankruptcy professor, Campbell Law School

"We must count the cost of doing God's work so the ministry can be solvent and God-honoring. God is glorified when a ministry pays its obligations on time, has adequate reserves, and sets aside funds related to restricted gifts—none of which will be true if the ministry is insolvent."

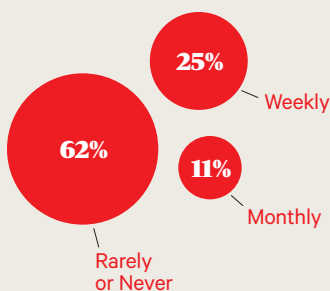
Dan Busby, president, Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability



How Women Who Aborted Feel about the Local Church

On behalf of Care Net, a national network of crisis pregnancy centers, LifeWay Research surveyed more than 1,000 American women who have terminated one or more of their pregnancies. Here's what they said:

Church Attendance at Time of First Abortion



2 in 3 evangelicals* were attending monthly or more.

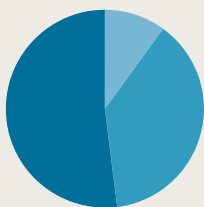
Judgment vs. Care

Both churchgoers and non-churchgoers equally reported receiving or expecting reactions from local churches that were **"judgmental"** (1 in 3) or **"condemning"** (1 in 4).



But churchgoers were much more likely than non-attenders to report or expect reactions that were **"caring"** (31% vs. 7%), **"helpful"** (28% vs. 7%), **"loving"** (25% vs. 6%), and **"informative"** (17% vs. 5%). Still, less than one-third of churchgoers said they received or expected such positive reactions from their local church.

In the Secret, Quiet Place

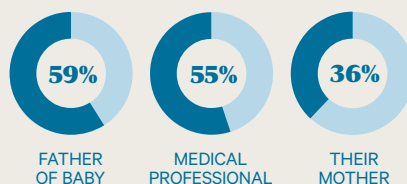


52% of churchgoers say **no one** at church knows they terminated a pregnancy.

38% say **someone** at church does know (including 55% of evangelicals).

10% **don't know** if someone at church knows or not.

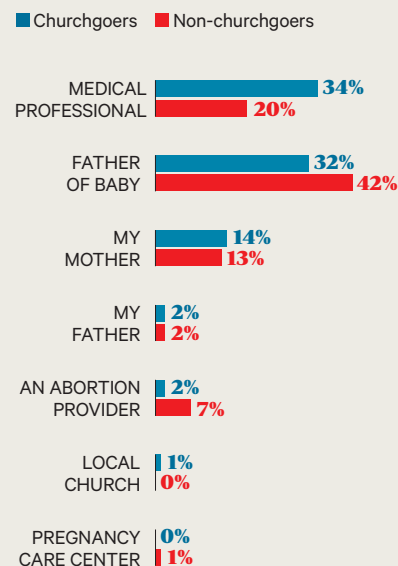
Who Churchgoers Were Most Likely to Consult



Of note: **Evangelicals** were significantly more likely than non-evangelicals to consult their mother before aborting (40% vs. 31%).

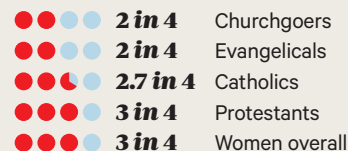
Churchgoers were unlikely to consult their local church (16%) or a crisis pregnancy care center (9%).

Who Was Most Influential on Decision to Abort:



Influence of the Local Church

Those who said local churches had "no influence" on their decision to terminate their pregnancy:



Note: Protestant includes those who identified as "nondenominational."

* "CHURCHGOERS" DEFINED AS ATTENDING CHURCH ONCE A MONTH OR MORE. "EVANGELICALS" BASED ON SELF-IDENTIFICATION.

Women Who Have Aborted Believe That:

It is safe to talk with a local pastor about abortion.



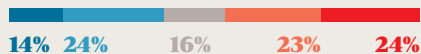
Pastors' teachings on forgiveness don't seem to apply to terminated pregnancies.



Pastors are sensitive to the pressures women face with unplanned pregnancies.



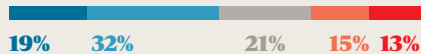
Churches are a safe place to talk about pregnancy options.



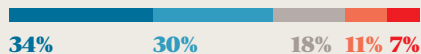
Churches do not have a ministry prepared to discuss options during an unplanned pregnancy.



Churches are prepared to provide support to women who chose to keep a child from an unplanned pregnancy.



Church members are more likely to gossip about women considering abortion than to help them understand options.



A Church-Based Solution

When Roland Warren and his wife, Yvette, were students at Princeton University, the dating couple faced a dilemma: Yvette became pregnant. A health counselor suggested she have an abortion, saying she would never graduate with a child in tow. The counselor was wrong: Roland and Yvette (who later became a doctor) married, and she graduated as the mom of two children. Warren brings his experience to his work as CEO of Care Net, a 40-year-old national network of crisis pregnancy centers.

CT senior editor for global journalism Timothy C. Morgan spoke to Warren about the recent LifeWay Research survey, sponsored by Care Net.

What's the most surprising or thought-provoking finding here?

The father of the child is so significant in this decision. When women were asked who they were likely to talk to about their decision, 61 percent said the father—more than medical professionals, abortion providers, mothers, girlfriends, friends—was the one they were most likely to talk to.

When a woman tells a guy that she's pregnant, I believe that somewhere deep inside of her, she hopes he'll respond the same way Joseph responded to Mary: I'll be a husband to you, and a father to the child growing inside of you.

Also, the finding that many women were attending church at the time they had their abortion. We talk about defunding Planned Parenthood. We can defund Planned Parenthood if Christians stop having abortions themselves. There are about 1 million abortions a year [in the United States]. Roughly 650,000 are women who profess to be Christians in some way, shape, or form.

Say some of those folks are cultural Christians—then cut that figure in half.

That still leaves a significant number of Christians having abortions, and the average abortion costs \$500. Do the math: Christians are providing more than \$100 million to the abortion industry.

What keeps Christian women from seeking help during an unplanned pregnancy?

One big issue is shame. There is a woman in Care Net's office who had an abortion. She had gone to church all her life. When she was growing up, a young lady in church got pregnant, and they [church leaders] had her come up before the entire congregation. This woman remembered that moment and said, "I'm not going to be that girl. I'm not going to let that happen."


Mary [mother of Jesus] didn't make value judgments about the baby growing inside of her. She knew that how she got pregnant—as an unmarried woman—had no bearing on the worth of the child growing inside her. But that's not what we do.

What can churches do to change that perception problem?

If you have a drug problem, a porn problem, a marriage problem, a problem with finances, there's typically a ministry on-ramp that connects you to support. But if you find out Sunday morning that you're pregnant and you walk into a church, exactly whom do you tell? In most cases, there's no on-ramp to ministry. If you look at all the reasons women have abortions—economic issues, housing, the father doesn't have a job—there are people in the body of Christ who can help.

This is all doable. I don't need Congress to act. I don't need pastors to march somewhere. If the church doesn't have the capacity to help those who have fallen, we are in the wrong business.

Timothy C. Morgan

A photograph of a man and a woman in a church setting, both with their eyes closed and hands clasped in prayer. The man is in the foreground, slightly to the right, wearing a dark button-down shirt. The woman is behind him to the left, wearing an orange top. The background is softly blurred, showing other people in the congregation.

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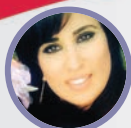
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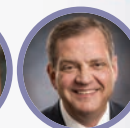
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Museum of the Bible:

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VIEWS



WHERE WE STAND

THE POVERTY OF CHRISTMAS

It's not a story we can package or market.
It is also the greatest story ever told.





WE DON'T BELIEVE in Christmas anymore.

We believe in Christmas gatherings, Christmas shopping, and Christmas recitals, of course, and even Christmas outreach events and Christmas acts of charity. If you are reading this issue of CT while fighting tryptophan-induced sleep, you know that Christmas has dominated our mass-mediated imagination since before Halloween. Christmas is the *piece de resistance* of a year spent hustling from one “big event” to another, anticipating the next holiday as we try to enjoy the present one.

Christmas is the biggest celebration on the calendar. But we know not what we celebrate.

Church leaders are in a major bind

The Incarnation can't be sold, scheduled, or enjoyed, in the way a glass of eggnog or a new gadget can. It can only be beheld.

“Create a new Christmas tradition, that of birthing new, remarkable ideas.”

The Advent Conspiracy, founded in 2006 to encourage worship, simplicity, and giving, rightly draws the holiday away from ourselves, onto God and others. But even it tries to add big ideas—generosity and justice—to God's Big Idea. Our critiques of Christmas consumerism come wrapped in the packaging of a consumerist society.

whom the angel has foretold. When the shepherds find the baby, “they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child” (v. 17) and go home praising God for all they have seen.

The passage in Luke returns us to the humility and poverty of the Christmas story. God does not enter our world donning bells and whistles, hoping to compete with Luke Skywalker or *Love Actually* reruns. He doesn't hope to “attract” more people with his “message.” Instead, he waits for our eyes to adjust to the dim light emanating from the manger, to come, to see, to behold—and to truly celebrate.

This is very good news for church leaders, who experience great pressure at Christmas to increase attendance and giving. It means they need not think up a “big idea” to add to the Incarnation, but rather communicate—as clearly and plainly as possible—the big idea that is the Incarnation. Essayist Dorothy Sayers helps us on this point:

It is the dogma that is the drama—not beautiful phrases, nor comforting sentiments, nor vague aspirations to loving-kindness and uplift, nor the promise of something nice after death—but the terrifying assertion that the same God who made the world, lived in the world and passed through the grave and gate of death.

The Christmas story is “terrifying” because it is beyond human thought. It is nothing we humans could have invented. Yet it is everything that we need to hear in order to flourish in our dark and violent world. It is the great rescue plan of God, initiated before time itself to save sinners from death. It is salvation.

Come and behold.

CT

KATELYN BEATY is CT's print managing editor.



with this one. They have to compete with the usual rivals—Santa Claus, TV specials, and generic holiday cheer that can be felt without taking the family to a church. This year, Christian leaders face the allure of the new *Star Wars*. In a tossup between the baby Jesus and Luke Skywalker, I'm not sure most Christians would bet on the Christ Child over the Jedi Fighter.

In an effort to capture their neighbors' flitting attention, churches have perfected their Christmastime marketing game. It's no longer the Christmas sermon; it's four weeks of “Unwrapping Christmas” or “An Upside-Down Christmas,” with children's programs and four weekend services—all requiring members' time and energy—to match. In a 2011 *Charisma* article on “the 12 mistakes of Christmas outreach,” the No. 1 mistake is “not planning for something great.” Even God knows you gotta have a WOW moment: “The Incarnation was one of God's Biggest Ideas,” write the authors.

It's like we don't trust the Incarnation to sell itself.

And maybe that's our problem. The trick about the Incarnation—God becoming *man*; God becoming man—is that it can't be sold, scheduled, or enjoyed in the way a glass of eggnog or a new gadget can. It refuses to bend to the rules of the market. It can only be beheld.

THE DOGMA IS THE DRAMA

The story is found in Luke 2. A decree goes out. Joseph travels with Mary to the city of David, called Bethlehem, to be registered in Caesar's census. Then the text simply says: “And she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them” (v. 7). Such little fanfare, we might miss the pre-existent divine Son of God lying as a babe in a feeding trough.

The plot doesn't pick up until the shepherds arrive, to gaze upon the child



Why I Chose Westmont

Jeff Han, who double majors in religious studies and English, says Westmont fundamentally changed his approach to academics and to life.

As Jeff searched for a college, he found himself drawn to a question Westmont considers fundamental: **“What does it mean to live successfully while being faithful to my God-given callings?”**

He has asked hard questions at Westmont. **“The college facilitates a sincere grappling with difficult questions** rather than being dismissive or disconnected from the church,” he says.

The significance of relationships has defined his experiences. **“The overwhelming friendship of students, professors and staff** has shaped, enriched and redeemed my life academically and personally,” he says.

Through his studies, Jeff pursues his calling and prepares for the future. **“I’m working toward a doctoral program in theology, seeking to live in a manner that benefits the church and echoes the wisdom, patience, kindness and love I’ve experienced in the Westmont community,”** he says.

Invest in an affordable Westmont education

This year, Westmont committed **\$22 MILLION** to student scholarships and grants.

In 2014, students with demonstrated need received an average of **\$30,373** in assistance that included scholarships, grants and loans.

Nearly all (**95 PERCENT**) of incoming first-year and transfer students received financial aid last year.

Westmont has also increased academic scholarships for students enrolling in fall 2016 by **38 PERCENT**, making the college more affordable for many applicants.

Beginning in fall 2016, Westmont will award **SCHOLARSHIPS COVERING 85 PERCENT OF TUITION** to 30 applicants each year. An extraordinary gift from a generous donor will fund the new Augustinian Scholarship and Honors Program.

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My Neighbor's Health Is My Business

The Christian call to public policy.

One of the hardest jobs I have as a physician is filling out death certificates—especially for children.

Last year, I spent two weeks at a maternity and pediatrics hospital in South Sudan, where I now work full-time. During just those weeks, I signed death certificates for five children after unsuccessfully attempting resuscitation. As I was giving chest compressions to the first child, I fought back tears. She was about the size of my daughter.

In the United States, only 1 child in 100 dies before his fifth birthday. In South Sudan, it's more like 1 in 10. What makes the difference?

Not parental love, that's certain. The children who died under my care had parents who had tried to provide for their children as best as they could. The parents' grief was as deep as mine would have been. And while medical care obviously makes a difference in individual cases, all these parents had managed to get to a doctor: me. I had access, in turn, to a reasonable supply of medicine and equipment—certainly equivalent to what many US physicians had a generation or two ago.

Every death certificate includes the cause of death. But the deeper causes of these children's deaths wouldn't fit in a box on a form. What was wrong had less to do with their individual health than with *public* health: the structures and environmental factors that many of us in the modern world can take for granted.

In a country like South Sudan, public health asks: Can your family access clean water? If you get sick from the water you

drink, are the roads to the hospital safe enough for you to drive there in time? Is there a health professional who is trained well enough to give you the treatment you need? Can you afford the treatment? These are questions about government, policy, and institutions, not primarily about individual choice or circumstances.

The difference in public health between countries can be stark. But it's nearly as dramatic *within* countries, including in the United States. The average life expectancy in some neighborhoods in Baltimore is 20 years lower than in neighborhoods one mile away. Here, the relevant questions take different forms: If you want to eat fresh produce, can you buy it within walking distance? If you are renting a house, how do you know lead paint in the walls isn't poisoning your kids? If you're coming home from prison, can you find a job—other than dealing drugs—that allows you to pay the rent?

In the Bible, especially in the Law that governed God's chosen people, we find a relentless concern for public health. The Levitical code addressed not just individual and family matters but also communal ones: how animals

were fenced, how food was harvested, and how people were allowed to rest.

All too often, I find that my fellow Christians in the West reflexively think about individual choices more than about the systems that shape those choices. Sometimes we get it right; concern for structures has motivated Christians' engagement on policies about marriage, abortion, and euthanasia. But when it comes to the moral ecology that causes many of our neighbors to suffer from illness, addiction, and violence, we seem to think people will make the right choice if we just teach them to make it.

In fact, all of us make personal choices only within broader systems that either frustrate our best intentions or enable us to choose well.

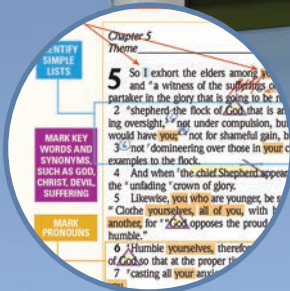
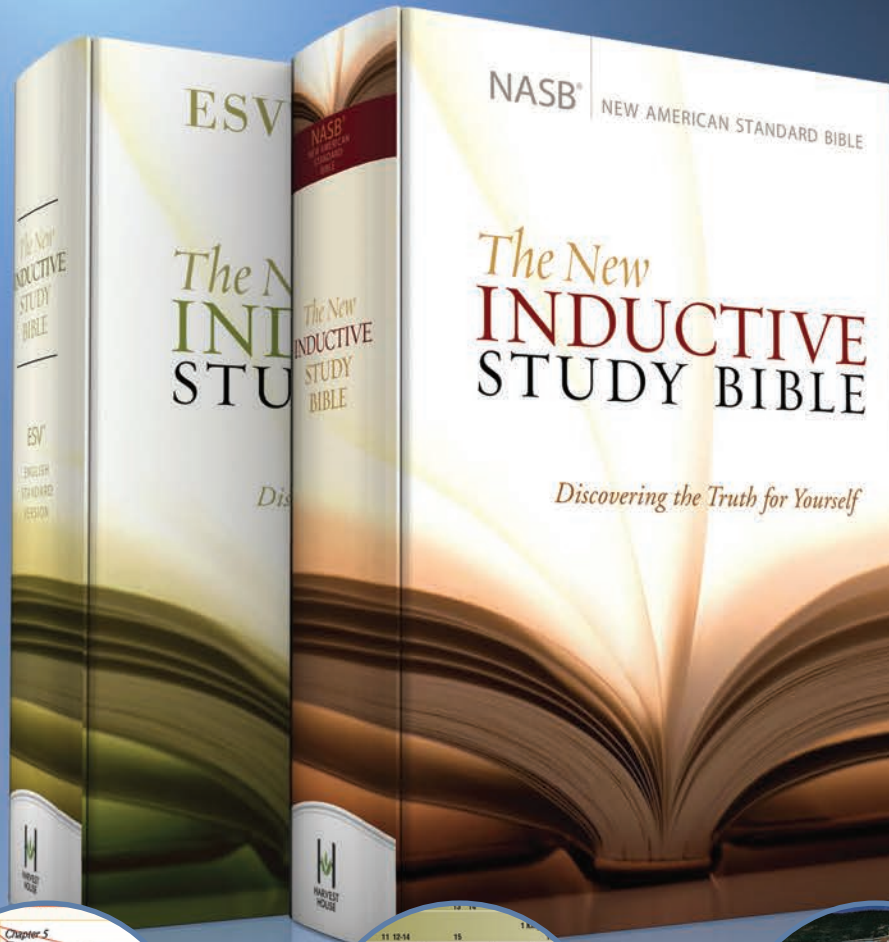
Building and maintaining those systems requires careful choices about power. In order to help most people live longer, healthier lives, often a new rule has to be applied to everyone, or money from everyone (in the form of taxes) has to be spent. Enforcing good intentions via government power can be dangerous. But *avoiding* public policy doesn't help anyone. Instead, we have to work at every level—individual, family, community, and nation—to apply the right power in the right places.

Public health is the discipline of thinking beyond our individual needs—especially if the systems around us work pretty well—and applying wisdom and resources on behalf of persons for whom the system is clearly not working. It's not easy work. But when the alternative is a death certificate signed far too soon, it's worth learning to do it well. **CT**

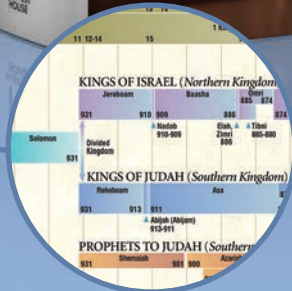
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Jen Pollock Michel is the author of *Teach Us to Want* (InterVarsity). She is writing a book about home.



Not Yet Home for Christmas

Refugees long for refuge. But we all know of exile—in our hearts.

Carolina first left the Gaza Strip to study journalism in Toronto. At age 20, she arrived newly pregnant and, as a result, lost her scholarship—though not her valuable student visa. Without educational opportunity, she eventually went back home.

Carolina returned to Canada this March. This time, with a toddler in tow and another on the way, her travels included hungry hours on a hot bus and repeated attempts to cross the border into Egypt, where she and her child finally boarded a 12-hour flight to North America.

Carolina was fleeing hopelessness for the sliver of light that is this New World.

"In Gaza, there is no work. There is no dignity. Any day, you can die." She pauses. "But it is difficult here. *Very* difficult." Her immigration status hangs in the balance. She cannot know when—or if—her husband will join her.

Like the stories of the millions of refugees from Syria, Iraq, Libya, South Sudan, Eritrea, and Nigeria, Carolina's story is the Christmas story, although not in the ways we usually think. The immutable "I AM that I AM" entered a womb and took up a body. But these were not his only vulnerable acts. Jesus of Nazareth also claimed an earthly home, which, as Carolina and many others know, is less a promise of permanence and more a risk of grief. When mobility, death, divorce, ecological crisis, and war reign, there is nothing certain in life, not least a home.

"To have a home is to become vulnerable," writes James Wood in an essay for *The London Review of Books*. "Not just

to the attacks of others, but to our own adventures in alienation." Wood recalls that the battle prowess of the Scythians was often attributed to the fact that they were nomads, without a home. Because "they carry their houses with them and shoot with bows from horseback," Wood writes, they were invincible, leaving behind no settlements for enemies to attack. Without a home, one has less to lose. With a home, happiness is the rug that can be jerked, without warning, from under our feet.

But we are hardwired for home and for the refuge it promises. The Creation narrative introduces a home-making, home-keeping God, who lays a feast and welcomes guests. Twice in Genesis 2, we hear that God "puts" Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The second time, Scripture doesn't use the common term for "put" (like putting our shoes in the closet), but instead uses a word that connotes rest and safety. They are *put* in the Garden in the same way God *put* Lot outside the city before he rained sulfur and fire on Sodom (Gen. 19:16), that he *put* the Israelites in the Promised Land as a gift of rest (Deut. 3:20; 12:10; 25:19).

This Hebrew word for *put* can also refer to something dedicated to God, like the manna that was "put" in the ark of

the covenant. Old Testament scholar John Sailhamer suggests that the author of Genesis intends both meanings in verse 15: "The man was 'put' into the Garden where he could 'rest' and be 'safe,' and the man was 'put' into the Garden 'in God's presence' where he could have fellowship with God."

Our first human parents were given a home and invited to sit and stay awhile. But they, and we, have chosen rebellion. So the drama of life unfolds not at home, but in exile. "Home is the mouth of a shark," writes Warsan Shire, a Somali poet. "Home is the barrel of the gun / and no one would leave home / unless home chased you to the shore." Because of sin, we are all on foot now. To be human is to be homesick, longing for paradise lost.

Christmas is a time when many families return home, buoyed by starry expectation for the transcendent meaning we are supposed to be finding around our tables. But our celebrations, good in their own right, do not ultimately sate our longing for home. Even in Middle America, the specter of exile haunts the human experience.

Christmas reminds us that the riskiest business of the Incarnation wasn't ultimately the manger but the cross. God exiled his own Son in order to restore home to the sinner, the sinner to home. And because the longing for home is the ache of every human heart, the good news is as deliciously true as Jesus told it in Luke 15: *Once upon a time, there was a patient father with two rebellious sons. One came home, and a feast was laid.*

Salvation, as homecoming. Forgiveness, as eternal feast. Welcome home. **CT**

Because of sin, we are all on foot now. To be human is to be homesick, longing for paradise lost.

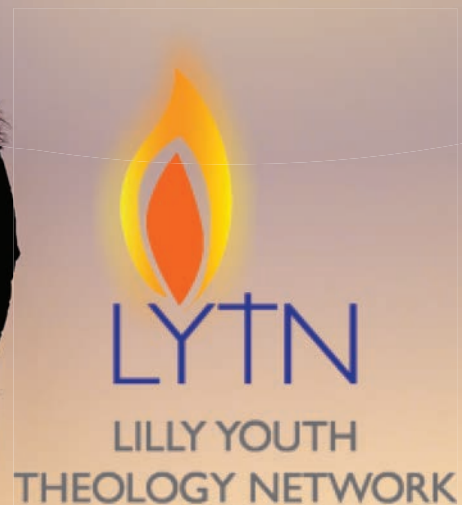
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THE PROVERBS 31 WOMAN HAS A FACEBOOK PAGE

BY KATE SHELLNUTT
WITH REPORTING BY HANNAH ANDERSON

SHE WORKS FROM HOME.

SHE SWEARS BY
ESSENTIAL OILS.

SHE SELLS TO
HER NEIGHBORS.

AND SHE MAKES
VERY LITTLE
MONEY DOING IT.

WHAT'S BEHIND THE
MULTILEVEL MARKETING
PHENOMENON COMING
TO YOUR CHURCH.

PHOTO BY DARREN BRAUN



Heather St.Clair's phone peeks out of the plum, pleather laptop bag she totes around a women's retreat in Lynchburg, Virginia. Before dinner with friends, she grabs the phone, swipes the oversized screen, then flashes a smile. "I just made \$50!" she announces.

Last year, St.Clair became a seller with Thirty-One Gifts, a Christian-owned company that makes customizable bags and accessories. She wanted to get a deal on her laptop bag, and has since hosted 22 parties—in person, through catalog orders, and online. In July, the 38-year-old mother of four drove six hours to attend Thirty-One's national conference in Columbus, Ohio.

There, the arena glowed pink from the crowd of 9,000 women dressed to match the signature magenta logo. Each wore a string of ribbons designating their achievements and goals: "Paid off debt!" "Empower women!" "Live for me!" Thirty-One Gifts has drawn in 300,000 sellers since Cindy Monroe founded it in 2003.

"We are a business that's helping women make more income so they can reach their dreams and look for what God's calling them to do," said Monroe, 41, who named the company for Proverbs 31's Wife of Noble Character.

Last year, Thirty-One Gifts brought in \$643 million in revenue—more than popular purse line Vera Bradley, whose annual revenues average a half-billion dollars. Monroe recently appeared on a *Forbes* "Businesswomen to Watch" list. Her estimated net worth matches that of pop star Taylor Swift. "I want women to have the courage to think outside their box," Monroe said.

As American women think outside the traditional boxes of "work" and "home," they are leading a resurgence in multilevel marketing (MLM). Following the business structure of well-known brands such as Tupperware, Mary Kay, and Amway, today's MLM phenomenon is led disproportionately by Christian women, many of them moms who want to set their own rules for work. Amid a post-recession economy and the cultural push for women to "lean in," MLM companies

are tapping women like St.Clair to share the good news of products they love—purses, makeup, and fitness shakes, among others.

Here's how it works: MLM companies train sellers to become experts in a distinct product line to market to friends and acquaintances. Sellers earn a commission on their sales as well as the sales of their recruits. Depending on the company, they could be "consultants," "stylists," "wellness advocates," or "agents." But the goal remains: Educate your friends and family about a wonderful product, sell it to them, then recruit them to do the same. Many companies emphasize that sellers can work from home and set their own hours, and many evoke Christian language about mission and ministry.

Today, an estimated one in seven US households includes someone involved in MLM, also known as network marketing. Women make up 75 percent of MLM participants overall; in some jewelry and health-and-beauty companies, that number is more like 95 percent. The MLM industry recruited its biggest-ever sales force in 2014—as many Christians can attest, given the pitches and party invites popping up in their social media feeds, playgroups, and church events.

Thirty-One's conference features Bible verses on the big screen and praise music performed by founder Cindy Monroe's husband, Scott, a former worship pastor. At certain points, "it felt like I was sitting at church," Heather St.Clair said.



Yet, outside exceptional success stories, the vast majority of women selling MLM wares bring in a couple thousand dollars a year. Factoring in business costs, this means their profits are slim to none.



THE CLEAR APPEAL OF MLM is that it provides women a taste of entrepreneurial success.

Sellers are trained in sales, social media marketing, and business strategy—developing expertise as they grow.

Fellow representatives celebrate each other's achievements with Facebook posts for earning a special certification, making a recruit, or reaching a personal goal. The setup offers the tangible rewards often missing from both the home and the office.

Women “don’t necessarily get that celebration, that encouragement, or that reward for moving one step forward,” said Monroe. “I don’t think we realize how important that is for women, but women do want to be acknowledged.” Thirty-One Gifts gives cash bonuses and free bags for milestones such as a consultant’s first party or \$600 in sales.

But MLM’s main draw isn’t money, at least after the numbers are crunched. By some estimates, as few as 1 percent of sellers earn a profit. More than 90 percent of Thirty-One consultants remain at the lowest level in the company, meaning they bring in less than \$600 a year—and that’s before tallying business expenses and taxes. Income disclosure statements for other MLM companies tell a similar tale.

St.Clair works part-time at a local insurance agency and her church, so she considers her work for Thirty-One a “hobby.” In fact, she doesn’t keep track of exactly how much she makes.

She donates part of her income to church, a cancer charity, and a retreat for stepmothers. The rest, she uses to shop.

A friend had prodded St.Clair to join for five years before she signed on. Now that friend is St.Clair’s “director,” coaching her and 70 other consultants and receiving a percentage of their sales (hence, the “levels” in multilevel marketing). To join, St.Clair paid \$99 for a sample kit, and today earns 25 percent commission on all orders.

Some MLM companies require sellers to buy inventory, pay a monthly fee, or meet sales quotas. The greater these costs, the harder it can be for participants to make a profit—and the greater the risk of being exploited. If an MLM company depends primarily on recruiting more sellers and getting them, rather than the general public, to purchase items, then you have yourself a pyramid scheme, according to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC).

Over the years, several MLM companies have faced such complaints. In 1979, the FTC declared that Amway was not a pyramid scheme, but did flag them for deceptive income claims. In 2010, the Christian-owned business settled a class-action lawsuit with former sellers who said they had been misled. (With \$10.8 billion in annual revenue, Amway remains the highest-earning MLM company in the world.) And this summer, the FTC filed suit against energy drink company Vemma for operating as a pyramid scheme.

The FTC guide for prospective sellers describes how to evaluate MLM businesses’ ethics. Beyond analyzing the payment structure to ensure it’s not a pyramid scheme, they advise scrutinizing the product itself. Does the company make “miraculous” claims without providing reliable research? Is the product fairly priced? An online search about the company can also hint at its overall reputation and whether it’s been sued for deceptive practices.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THIRTY-ONE GIFTS



WHERE FASHION STATEMENT MEETS MISSION

NOONDAY COLLECTION SUPPORTS JEWELRY-MAKERS WORLDWIDE—AND FUNDS ADOPTIONS.



ESSICA HONEGGER

began selling handcrafted, fair-trade jewelry to help cover the costs of adopting her son from Uganda. Five years later, her fundraiser has turned into one of the fastest-growing companies in the United States—enough to rank 3rd on *Inc.*'s list of fastest-growing companies led by women, and 45th overall.

With 950 “ambassadors” holding in-home trunk shows to sell eclectic jewelry and accessories, Noonday Collection, based in Austin, brought in \$11.8 million in 2014. All of its products are made by hand by artisan businesses in 13 countries.

The ambassadors are mostly Christian women, and take home a 20 to 25 percent commission. Like Honegger, a quarter of them are funding their own adoptions; last year, the company gave \$120,000 to families in the adoption process. Others use the income to fund church projects, mission trips, or other charitable efforts.

“I launched Noonday Collection . . . not knowing that it was to become a viable company but kind of knowing on the inside, in that deep place where God whispers to you,” said Honegger, 39.

Following a trip to Uganda in 2010, Honegger and her husband, who met while working for Food for the Hungry, felt called to adopt. With two kids already, she began selling jewelry made by Ugandan artisans for extra income. Honegger earned around \$4,000 at her first trunk show, and before long, other women began holding their own parties and placing orders. Once her sales outgrew her capacity, she enlisted Travis Wilson, a friend with an MBA from Wharton and experience in microfinance, as co-CEO.

Even with a partner, a booming business, and help from friends, Honegger admits it wasn't easy. She looked around for fellow Christian women running startups with small children for inspiration. “I didn't have anyone,” she said. “I was reading *Lean In* and Tina Fey and Brené Brown. I'm like, ‘Somebody help me!’ Now I'm happy to hopefully pave the way.”

We're seeing more “social entrepreneurship” companies that include a philanthropic component. Given your mission, why is it important for you to be a for-profit business rather than a charity?

I believe in business. God used his power to create the world and to create us, and he asks us to use our creative power to go and create more out of the world. So he left this world untapped and undeveloped so that we could go and tap and develop it.

Our artisan partners are entrepreneurs themselves. They're learning how to scale a business, how to create middle management, and how to create jobs in their community that are dignified and good. To me, it's an equal exchange.

As the leader of a company that makes and sells fair-trade products, what would you want consumers to know in an economy that in many ways is not built on fair trade?

‘I'M A CAPITALIST. THERE ARE REALLY TALENTED PEOPLE LIVING IN RESOURCE-POOR AREAS OF THE WORLD, AND ALL THEY NEED IS ACCESS TO A MARKETPLACE.’

JESSICA HONEGGER, FOUNDER

I'm a capitalist. I call it compassionate capitalism. So it's not that fair trade isn't capitalism. There are really talented people living in resource-poor areas of the world, and all they need is access to a marketplace. And I'm going to start something for them. It was creating market access to underrepresented people and ensuring that as these artisans build their businesses, it's being done in a beautiful way.

What are the biggest challenges for you as a Christian woman involved in business and entrepreneurship?

We are created in God's image to work. Sometimes that means staying home with your kids, and that is your work for a season. It might also mean becoming the CEO of a company. . . . I knew in the Christian subculture that the whole women leading, working, business can have some baggage with it, but then in general there aren't as many female-owned businesses as there are male-owned businesses (either). . . . It's been a hard road. I definitely struggled with balance and guilt and shame and all of that. But so much of it was not having a real confidence level in what God created me to do.

Tell me about the women who become Noonday ambassadors.



JESSICA HONEGGER

SSION STATEMENT

INTERVIEW BY KATE SHELLNUTT

They are extremely motivated by issues of justice. They enjoy women. They are relational. They are looking for a way to not just give money to an organization or a charity, but to be an active part of building a flourishing world. They're women who are already practicing leadership in their communities, whether it be in their churches or in their schools, but want to influence and want to channel their passion. And obviously a lot of women love fashion and appreciate aesthetics.

Where do you see Noonday in relationship to the multilevel marketing trend?

What we're doing is pretty distinct, which I think is why we've grown so quickly. A lot of these women have been approached by other direct sales companies because they are outgoing and are influencers or have that potential to be really great at sales. We don't have the robust compensation structure that other direct sales companies have, and we don't have this ability to build out multilevel teams. The main way we are distinct is that people are doing this to be part of building a flourishing world. With us, they're extremely driven by that and less by money.

Who has inspired you along the way?

My first partners in Uganda, Jalia and Daniel, were extremely poor when I partnered with them five years ago, and they were the ones making everything. Now they oversee a workshop of 100 employees. Jalia and I walked a very similar journey of having to scale a business when we were young moms. Comparing that experience with my own experience running a business in America has definitely provided an immense amount of encouragement and inspiration to me.

CT

MLM companies market home parties as "much-deserved girl time," a retreat from the demands of motherhood and a chance for women to connect in person rather than just online.



Potential fraud or the appearance of fraud is one barrier to MLM. But so is the simple awkwardness of mixing business and friendship. That's especially prevalent in the Northeast, according to economist Stacie Bosley. MLM tends to flourish in the South and the Midwest, regions that retain a strong Christian presence and a "collective mentality," said Bosley, a professor at Hamline University in St. Paul, Minnesota.

The local church breeds "a strong expectation of reciprocity and a willingness to support one another, whatever those endeavors might be," said Bosley. Any woman who has said "yes" to a party invite—only to search the catalog for the cheapest kitchen tool, necklace, or lipstick, despite her friend's insistence that there's "no pressure to buy!"—knows what she is talking about.

IN SOME WAYS, the church is a perfect setting for MLM sales. Many companies were founded by Christians or have explicit Christian values, including Mary Kay (cosmetics), Shaklee (nutritional supplements), Pampered Chef (kitchen equipment), Premier Designs (jewelry), and Advocare (sports performance). "Because direct-selling is relationship-based, and of course the church community is so relationship-based, that definitely is a draw," said Monroe.

Further, MLM allows Christian women to engage business, community, and family at once, in a way that the current work-home divide doesn't allow for, at least not as seamlessly. Many women want to work and raise a family without the demands of a 9-to-5 job. In a 2012 Pew Research Survey, US mothers said their most desired work scenario would be part-time; working moms wish they were home more, and stay-at-home moms wish they could work outside the home. This makes a "work-from-home" arrangement such as MLM attractive—especially to evangelicals, who are more likely than any other religious group to say it's better for the family when one parent stays home.

"As long as MLMs are regarded by conservative Christians as a more honorable option for women than a normal part-time or full-time job, these organizations will continue to attract women within the church at significant rates," says Jen Wilkin, a minister at the Village Church in Flower Mound, Texas, where she leads a citywide women's Bible study.

MLM is "one of the most sanctifying things that I have ever done aside from parenting," says Molly Abrigg. The stay-at-home mother of two based in Dallas sells essential oils—tiny bottles of plant extracts purported to have cleansing and healing properties. For her, it's a way to meet and minister to other sellers. "There are many benefits to being a stay-at-home mom and having an extra income coming from a product you are passionate about," Abrigg said. "It helps women find their 'why' outside of being a mama."

The two major essential oil makers, Young Living and doTerra, use the MLM model. Essential oils are popular among women looking for natural solutions to common ailments. Burn your hand? Rub on some lavender. Feeling down? Take a whiff of peppermint.

Many MLM companies don't try to draw in women with get-rich-quick language. Some actually downplay the earning potential; doTerra, for example, boasts that 85 percent of their 150,000-plus distributors join for the discount. Instead, the real sales pitch is in the satisfaction of achieving goals and connecting with others. It's the kind of satisfaction St. Clair gets when she checks her sales phone app, or when Abrigg makes a friend over a shared love of lavender oil. For these women, the reward is not financial. A consultant may join for product discounts, but "it's the friendships that make her stay," said Thirty-One Gifts' Monroe.

Bosley's research bears this out. She found that women who are enthusiastic about the products report being satisfied—regardless of whether they make money. Some women rationalize their involvement by focusing on purpose, which for Christians gets wrapped up in concepts like *calling* and *mission*. Even women who earn just a few hundred dollars a year see it as money they wouldn't otherwise have—enough to cover this year's Christmas presents, say, or to put toward a trip to Disney World.



HOMESCHOOLING MOM Heather Patenaude is a remarkable exception: After business expenses and taxes on annual income of \$130,000, she currently earns about \$45,000 in profit a year with doTerra. That puts her in the very top—and very small—tier of MLM success. "I am overwhelmed at God's grace in our lives because of doTerra," she said. "I see this [as being] clearly from his hand."

Two years ago, Patenaude was worried that the new Affordable Care Act requirements would hamper her husband's chiropractic practice. She began selling doTerra oils as a way to boost the family finances. Within a year, she ranked among the top 10 percent of sellers, reaching the "diamond" rank. ("Diamond" sellers get a certificate, a charm, and a pin, along with sponsors, travel reimbursements, and a chance to win vacations.)

Patenaude now oversees a line of oil enthusiasts, many

of them fellow Christians, and teaches classes about essential oils to natural-health adherents as well as nurses and doctors who use them at home and chiropractors who use them in their practices. Every few days, she uses Periscope, a live-video app, to answer questions from sellers. One piece of advice she gives: Invite specific people to "exclusive" events, rather than notifying all your Facebook friends, as many MLM sellers do.

"I wish I would have known from day one that not everyone will understand what we're doing, and that's okay," she said. "We know God was leading, directing, opening doors."

Crystal Paine runs the popular personal finance site Money Saving Mom. She recently wrote the book *Money-Making Mom* to help the kinds of women who are drawn to MLM for income. Based on pitches by eager sales reps, many women expect that MLM will be easy, that the product will "sell itself," and that they can earn money working a few hours a week.

"I have friends who have been very successful in multilevel marketing. I also have friends who have lost thousands of dollars," said Paine, 34. "It's one of those things that's very hard to be successful at."

Despite the all-caps badgering from commenters who insist that, given her online reach, she could make tens of thousands in commission, Paine does not participate in MLM. She advises readers to do their own research on a company rather than relying on a friend's or distributor's testimony.

Similarly, personal-finance expert Dave Ramsey tells his listeners that, while many MLM companies are legitimate businesses, they take a lot of work. At root, Ramsey said in a video recording for his radio show, MLM success is about recruiting and retaining a sales team, not selling products. "You need to understand the business you're in," he said. "And the business you're in is recruiting."

It took one party for Donna Bixby, an educator in Greenville, South Carolina, to realize that selling moisturizers and mascara was not going to work for her. When she became a Mary Kay consultant to supplement her teacher's salary, she knew the pitfalls, yet believed she could buck the trend. But she immediately felt uncomfortable pressuring friends to buy a product she wasn't personally passionate about. She ended up with thousands in debt, a closet full of makeup, and shame.

"I know God does not hold this against me, but it's something I know I shouldn't have done, and the guilt haunts me," she said.

"MLM sales come at a cost to someone. There is a price to pay. Think carefully and pray earnestly before embarking down this route."



THE AVERAGE PRICE POINT for MLM products is \$30, a price most middle-class and lower-middle-class families can afford. Not so for the working poor, who often opt out of social activities centered on "lifestyle products." Nor can they become consultants,

since starter kits typically run between \$100 and \$300.

Some church leaders try to avoid the social tensions created by MLM. To prevent pressure within Bible study groups,

THE MLM INDUSTRY RECRUITED ITS BIGGEST-EVER SALES FORCE IN 2014—AS MANY CHRISTIANS CAN ATTEST, GIVEN THE PITCHES AND PARTY INVITES POPPING UP IN THEIR SOCIAL MEDIA FEEDS, PLAYGROUPS, AND CHURCH EVENTS.

Wilkin tells women not to use each other for business contacts, MLM or otherwise. Greg Baker, who leads Fellowship Bible Church in Liberty, Utah, asked the congregation's leaders not to participate in MLM, and told congregants not to distribute materials or products at church events. By doing so, he hopes to keep suspicion out of church relationships. "I don't want anybody wondering why I'm calling him," he said. He also worries that MLM testimonials foster a "love of money," and meets with congregants involved with MLM to learn about their motivations.

Amanda Edmondson of Sojourn Community Church in Louisville, Kentucky, has raised concerns that MLM had become "inescapable" at the multisite church. "We appear tolerant, but behind closed doors, women are really frustrated," the women's ministry leader told CT. "We don't know how to talk about it, but we know it's infiltrating our churches." Edmondson challenged women to consider how MLM involvement affects their ministry, particularly if they hold prominent positions, such as pastor's wives or ministry leaders.

One male churchgoer approached Edmondson to tell her about "an inappropriate photo of that woman leading worship on stage." The worship leader had posted "before and after" pictures of her stomach on Facebook; she was touting her weight loss using Shakeology, part of the Beachbody fitness program centered on meal-replacement shakes.

Other Sojourn attendees have raised concerns about the effectiveness of supplements, essential oils, and weight-loss wraps sold through MLM, or what such products communicate about physical beauty. A Christian-owned company called It Works! reported \$538 million in revenue in 2014 for its body-toning products. Its signature cloth wrap—marketed literally as "that crazy wrap thing"—claims to minimize the appearance of fat and cellulite in as little as 45 minutes. As founder Mark Pentecost told *Tech Insider*, "When I first started in the industry, you could go to a mall, hang out, meet people, start a conversation. Today's gathering place isn't the mall. It's Facebook."

Of course, concern about churchgoers pitching to other churchgoers, or the merits of certain products, reaches far beyond MLM. But people tend to be more skeptical of business ventures that fall outside the traditional marketplace, said Anne Bradley, vice president of economic initiatives at the Institute for Faith, Work, & Economics. With any "unusual" venture, whether it's a food truck or an at-home business, she said Christians may be more suspicious of potential ethical

and spiritual pitfalls.

"MLM or not, we all want to justify what we're doing. My advice would be: prayer, prayer, prayer," Bradley said. "If we're selling jewelry, we don't have to ask whether it's okay to sell each bracelet. But we should be asking, 'What are my idols?'"



AT ITS BEST, MLM reveals the good impulse among Christian women to create wealth, connect with each other, and make a difference. "That underlying desire for a sense of purpose is core to who we are," said Jenni Catron, executive pastor at

Menlo Park Presbyterian Church and author of the book *The Four Dimensions of Extraordinary Leadership*. "Women who are in these other arenas where they're finding fulfillment and purpose in the work they're doing, are finding that there instead of the church."

But the concerning aspects of MLM—the overall lack of verifiable profit, the strain on relationships—raise the questions: Are women in the church pursuing MLM because it's truly the best outlet for their gifts? Or are they pursuing MLM because it's one of the only options available to them?

With entrepreneurs and marketers among the groups leaving US congregations, churches have "a huge opportunity . . . to help connect faith and calling, particularly for young women, who now have more opportunities in the world," said David Kinnaman. The Barna Group president encouraged "vocational discipleship" in a video for Propel, a Christian nonprofit targeting women in the marketplace.

By infusing work with identity, purpose, and fellowship, MLM has enlisted Christian women to help build a \$34 billion industry in the United States. But women's distinct gifts as leaders and entrepreneurs aren't limited to one industry or sphere, MLM or otherwise. In God's good design, no program or marketing technique will lead to success for every woman.

The Bible praises the woman who manages her household, sells her wares, gives to the poor, and receives praise for "all that her hands have done" (Prov. 31:31). The task now is to discern all that the modern MLM seller's hands have done—and ask whether those hands are indeed fulfilling God's call, or if they could be put to other use.

CT

KATE SHELLNUTT is editor of *Her.meneutics*, CT's women's site.

HANNAH ANDERSON is a freelance writer and author of *Made for More*.





C O M E T of W O N D E R

A BIBLICAL SCHOLAR VENTURES AN
EXPLANATION OF THE MYSTERIOUS
STAR THAT GUIDED THE MAGI TO JESUS.

INTERVIEW BY GREG COOTSONA

GENERATIONS

OF CHRISTIANS have helped ring in the Christmas season by singing John Henry Hopkins Jr.'s 1857 carol, "We Three Kings," with its evocative chorus:

Star of wonder, star of night
Star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding
Guide us to thy perfect light.

We know, from the Gospel of Matthew, that these kings—or "Magi," as Matthew calls them—saw something brilliant in the night sky, a celestial body that beckoned them to Jesus' birthplace in Bethlehem. But what exactly was this mysterious "star of wonder"?

Biblical scholar Colin R. Nicholl is the latest to venture an explanation for this astronomical marvel. Blending Bible research with findings from expert astronomers, Nicholl makes the case that the Star of Bethlehem was actually an extraordinary comet. Greg Cootsona, a writer, teacher, and leader with the

Scientists in Congregations program (funded by the Templeton Foundation to integrate science and theology in churches), spoke with Nicholl about his claims in *The Great Christ Comet: Revealing the True Star of Bethlehem* (Crossway).

As a biblical scholar, what drew you to astronomy?

If figuring out the biblical text requires me to understand history, geography, religion, sociology, or something else, then it's my responsibility to do the necessary study. It's obvious from Matthew 2 that the Star of Bethlehem is a real astronomical entity that was faithfully observed by astronomers in the Ancient Near East. The biblical scholar, then, is challenged to search for astronomical information, and that's what I've done.

The challenge is to be as rigorous about studying the relevant science as you are about studying the Bible. It's difficult, but it's also rewarding.

Why have biblical scholars shied away from studying the science behind the star?

Because it requires knowledge outside their specialized areas. Some back away simply out of skepticism that the biblical text relays accurate history.

In my experience among scholars, few things draw out more cynicism than the Star of Bethlehem. But we need to remember that nowadays, Matthew's gospel is widely acknowledged to be an ancient biography. When an ancient biography is written in the same century as its subject, it is generally characterized by a concern with historical accuracy. Books like Richard Bauckham's *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* bear this out.

As for Matthew's account of Jesus' birth, Luke and other historical accounts corroborate key elements. For example, what Matthew records about Herod matches up with what first-century historian Josephus tells us. It is perfectly legitimate, then, to look at Matthew as a source of historical information, and to ask whether astronomy supports his claims. As a biblical scholar, I'm not so quick to disregard Matthew's historical claims. I want to take him seriously. I'm willing to hang in with him even when I don't initially understand what he's saying.

Who were the Magi?

We often call them "wise men," but

that's not a helpful designation. Nor is it helpful to think of them as philosophers. The Magi, straightforwardly, were scholars engaged in astronomy and astrology. They made regular observations of stars, planets, comets, and other phenomena.

The Magi were probably from Babylon. We know that was the main center of astronomy in the Ancient Near East, and that the Babylonian astronomers had studied the stars dating back at least to the eighth century B.C. They kept an eye on celestial developments and kept detailed records.

What evidence is there that the star was a comet?

The star appeared suddenly and was visible for over a year, something that makes sense only if it were a supernova or a great comet. That the star surprised the Magi with its impressive "rising" points strongly to it being a comet: Of all the celestial bodies, only comets behave in this manner. (*Rising* refers to the period when a celestial body re-emerges on the horizon after being hidden by the Sun.)

Then you take into account the star's movement, in the space of a couple of months, from the eastern morning sky to the southern evening sky, where they see it when they're traveling from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. That kind of movement is only possible for an object in the inner solar system, meaning that the star had to be a comet.

At the end of the Magi's journey, the star stands over the place of Jesus' birth, pinpointing a particular location. As New Testament scholar Craig Keener has pointed out, that's something only a comet can do. Josephus mentions a comet that "stood over" Jerusalem in the run-up to the Judean War. Another Roman historian, Cassius Dio, mentions that another comet did something similar over Rome in 12 B.C. This is all very powerful evidence, and there is much more in the book.

I should emphasize that I didn't set out with an agenda. I didn't have a clue what the Star of Bethlehem would be. I was just following the evidence wherever it went. When I did my analysis and looked at the star's profile and orbit, and then compared the data with the great comets of history, I was astonished to discover that this Christ-comet really did turn out to be the greatest.

If the Star of Bethlehem is actually a comet, should we start calling it the “Comet of Bethlehem”?

No. In the ancient world, many astronomical entities—meteors, for instance—could be regarded as “stars.” In fact, we still describe meteors as “shooting stars.” Comets were commonly called “stars.” This was true in the Greco-Roman world, in the writings of philosophers like Pliny and Seneca. It was also true in Babylon.

In Numbers 24:17, there’s a prophecy by Balaam about a “scepter” and a “star” (“... a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel”). Ancient rabbis could refer to comets as “scepter stars.” The “star” in Numbers is almost certainly a comet.

How did the Magi determine that the one whose birth was announced in the heavens was the Messiah?

There are various indications in Matthew that the Magi were impacted most by what they saw in the star’s rising. Whatever it did at that time revealed that the Messiah had been born, motivating them to make their journey to find and worship him.

The Magi seem to have concluded that Balaam’s oracle in Numbers, about the rising scepter-star, was the key to interpreting the comet’s behavior. I also believe that the opening verses of Revelation 12 paint a picture of the heavenly sign the Magi witnessed. (Rev. 12:1–2 reads, “A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of 12 stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth.”) The Magi saw a nativity drama unfolding in the heavens, in which the constellation figure “The Virgin” played the role of a pregnant mother giving birth to a baby, whose part was played by a great comet. This celestial drama was strongly suggestive of Isaiah’s oracles about a virgin becoming pregnant and giving birth to a son (7:14), and about a great light shining in the darkness to signal the Messiah’s coming (9:2–7).

What’s really exciting is that, based on detailed information from Revelation 12, we can produce an approximate orbit for the comet. This means we can re-create what the comet did and where it was at various points. What’s more, when you plug the orbit into planetarium software, you discover a pattern that

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lines up perfectly with what Matthew 2 records. Now that really is amazing!

What the Magi did wasn’t irrational. This is not some kind of weird, mystical story. This was a rugged, down-to-earth event. If we had been alongside the Magi and witnessed what they witnessed, we too would have gone to Judea. What the comet did would have drawn you in. It revealed Jesus for who he is. It compelled the Magi to become part of the story. It is interesting that later sources suggest the Magi abandoned astrology in favor of following Christ. After entering into their experience, you can understand why they would have done so.

How can your book help us appreciate the significance of Christ’s birth?

First, the book authenticates Matthew’s account of the Nativity as historically reliable. Second, it authenticates Jesus as the prophesied Jewish Messiah. It is important to realize that no ancient source could have invented a comet so unique; they simply didn’t know enough to pull that off.

So the book has implications for us as Christians and for the whole world, because every human being has to confront the claim of Christ and his divine confirmation as Messiah. The claim of Christ during his ministry is a lofty one—to be the Messiah, to be the light prophesied by Isaiah. Remarkably, this comet made precisely the same pronouncement.

There’s a glorious coming together of the claim of Jesus himself and heaven’s pronouncement about him.

In addition, the comet’s intense brightness anticipated the glorious light of Jesus’ person and ministry. It speaks to our generation, assuring us that the one whose birth it announced will fully establish his kingdom on earth.

The Star of Bethlehem underscores God’s mastery over the cosmos. For this great heavenly display to happen at the birth of Jesus, it had to have been tailor-made for the occasion. That included its size, shape, orbit, and chemical composition. And to think that this plan had been in motion from the birth of the solar system—it really is amazing. From our 21st-century perspective, we can appreciate that God is claiming lordship over astronomy and over the entire universe.

How can the real story behind the Star of Bethlehem change the way we worship during Christmas?

When you walk in the sandals of the Magi, you feel the power of the story. At the end of the journey, it’s you on your face before the Messiah. The story draws you into recognizing who Christ is and how great he is. And yet all this magnificence is displayed in the beautiful simplicity of a baby—this is the awesomeness of the Incarnation.

The glorious celestial wonder simultaneously reveals and hides. Not everyone looking into the sky understands. For example, Herod, the rabbis, and the people of Judea—there it is, right before their eyes, but they don’t get it. It’s the mystery and beauty of the plan of salvation and the marvel of what God has done in Christ.

To think of the Star of Bethlehem as a great comet is transforming. It takes away the sentimentality of Christmas and brings back the meaning, the power, the authenticity, and the ruggedness of the story. Suddenly, we realize that this is history. This is something that actually occurred. And the Magi on this journey were real people, overwhelmed by what they witnessed.

We too should be overwhelmed, even more than the Magi, because we are now able to recognize what God had to do to perform the great heavenly sign marking Jesus’ birth. We can’t be the same again.

CT



THE RESISTER

DIET EMAN ENDURED HITLER'S OCCUPATION
SEPARATED FROM HER FIANCÉ, HEIN SIETSMA.
BUT APART, THEY SERVED IN THE DUTCH
UNDERGROUND—SAVING AT LEAST 60 JEWS
FROM CERTAIN DEATH.

BY SUZANNE BURDEN

POP-POP-POP!

Diet Eman lay awake in her bed. Who could be beating their rugs at this hour? It was early morning on May 10, 1940. Hours before, Hitler had announced that he would respect the neutrality the Netherlands had maintained during World War I.

As the popping continued, Eman and her parents scrambled to the front lawn. Planes buzzed through the night sky and fire shot upward, shattering Hitler's assurances. Stumbling back inside, the Emans turned the radio on: "We are at war. German paratroopers have landed." Diet's blood boiled; Hitler had lied.

Then a new question rattled around in her mind as she sat in her nightclothes: *What of my Hein?*

A few days later, she found out. A card from Hein Sietsma, smudged by fire, arrived at the house, saying he had survived fiery blasts in Rotterdam, South Holland. She also discovered something else. As Eman later said, "I did not know until the danger of war that I was in love with him."

She also did not know how war would shape their relationship, and how many sacrifices it would require of each of them. Together and then separated, sometimes imprisoned, scheming hideaways and stealing ration cards, and transporting Jews. Always hoping that the Allies, and victory and justice, might be near.



When daylight came, whole regions of the Netherlands lay in ruin. In the two years prior, the Dutch had watched Hitler seize Austria and Poland. Now it was their turn. But with an anemic military and a compliant population, the Dutch were hardly prepared to resist Nazi rule. Queen Wilhelmina and her government fled the country, and the Netherlands officially surrendered to Germany in five days.

But the invasion didn't change things immediately. Hitler considered the Dutch almost 100 percent Aryan. Many Dutch believed the Nazis would not commit atrocities in their homeland and decided to obey their occupiers until the war ended.

Many Dutch Reformed believers saw things differently. They debated intensely whether German authorities should be obeyed in light of Romans 13:1-7. The debate divided family members and friends. Some, including one of Hein's brothers, would later declare fidelity to Hitler.

Others resisted, in part because of Hitler's attitudes toward Jews. Many German Jews had fled to the Netherlands in the late 1930s to avoid persecution. Now they found themselves trapped in a country about the size of Rhode Island, with no neutral surrounding countries to which they could escape. Dutch Reformed Christians (who made up an estimated 8 percent of the population) had long seen the Jews as God's chosen people and thus worthy of protection in such an environment.

Escalating Nazi anti-Semitism

LEFT PHOTO FROM DIET EMAN'S PERSONAL COLLECTION / COURTESY OF LIGHTHOUSE PUBLISHING



LEFT: Diet and Hein enjoyed many bicycle rides—one of the safest forms of transit during the occupation.
MIDDLE: Some of the 107,000 estimated Jews deported from the Netherlands during the war board at the Westerbork transit camp.
RIGHT: Underground bunkers hid Dutch Jews, who depended on others for food, washing, and waste removal.

convinced many Dutch that Hitler planned to annihilate the Jews. At the beginning of the war, 140,000 Jews resided in the Netherlands. By its end, 107,000 (76 percent) had been deported to concentration camps or otherwise killed. Only about 5,000 survived in the general population, while another 30,000 survived by hiding or other means.

As Hitler's henchmen turned up the heat against Jewish men, women, and children, the Dutch Resistance movement was born and grew. Historians estimate that between 50,000 and 60,000 (many, like Eman and Sietsma, motivated by their Christian faith) were active in the Underground, and more than 10,000 sacrificed their lives in the cause.

"I can't take a boarder right now—my life is too busy," she told the family friend. "But I can take another son."

Diet was furious. "When my parents told me that he was coming to live with us, I threw a fit," Diet recalled in her autobiography (*Things We Couldn't Say*). Diet resented the loss of her privacy and time with her friends. She certainly didn't warm up to him, writing that her first bike ride with Hein was "low on adventure." But when Hein moved out a year later, Diet found she missed him, though she wouldn't admit it.

It wasn't long before he was drafted into Dutch military service, during which

his feelings for Diet grew more and more clear. In a November 1939 journal entry, he wrote,

Diet has . . . her childlike, simple faith and the inborn quality to see the good in everything. Conscious or unconscious for her it is: "God is with me and therefore I am happy and try to look for the good in everybody, without pushing myself into the foreground." . . . Does she not know that I am aching for a letter, for a word from her?

Diet remained reluctant, until Hein visited the Eman home with the express purpose of seeing her. "When he came to see just me, I kissed him," she wrote. "At that moment, I somehow knew that what I felt for him was something that was not going to simply pass away."

SEPARATED LOVERS

Berendina "Diet" Eman was born on April 30, 1920, the third of four children, growing up in The Hague, a southwest province of the Netherlands and the seat of the Dutch government. She was sent to a Christian school, where she learned "so many things by heart," she said later.

Hein Sietsma grew up 197 kilometers northeast, in Friesland, the first of many children. The Sietsmas raised their family on the father's modest school principal salary. When Hein moved to The Hague to take a job at age 19, the family was looking for a safe place to board their son when they made contact with the Emans through a family friend. Diet's mother felt great sympathy for the boy.

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DIVINELY LED ROBBERY

In the months following the Netherlands' surrender to the Nazis, Diet and Hein started meeting regularly with other believers at the home of one of Diet's bank coworkers. While some continued to wonder whether they should be loyal to the Dutch or the Germans, Hein knew where he stood. He had read *Mein Kampf* years before, and he told Diet, "He's so full of hate, he's going to do something terrible!"

Meanwhile, Diet was contacted by a Jewish man named Herman seeking

help. It was the end of 1941, and Jews were already forced to wear yellow stars and were banned from travel. More and more were receiving deportation orders. Herman had learned that his family was to be sent to Germany within the week.

After pondering Herman's options, Hein had an idea, and insisted that Herman not go to Germany. Instead, he said, he would arrange for him to travel to Friesland to live with a farmer until the war was over. The dangers involved in such an operation were many, and if caught during any part of the process, it could mean death for anyone involved. But it seemed well worth the risk for both the Jews and at least these Dutch.

The idea spread among other Jews, and in a few weeks, Hein and Diet had a list of more than 60 Jews who sought refuge. The couple's mission became clear: Find safe places for Jews wherever they could.

Diet and Hein conscripted other friends to join the budding resistance. They called themselves Group HEIN—*Help Elkander in Nood*, "Help each other in need." As Hein had journaled months before the invasion, "True love for God reveals itself in love for your neighbor."

Many farmers were conscripted into service, while others went into hiding, so food became scarce. Group HEIN worried that the Jews in hiding, who depended on them for food, would soon starve. They had no idea what to do, so, "We went on our knees," remembered Diet. "And we said, 'Lord, we don't know what to do anymore, but you know they need food.'"

After the prayer, a solution presented itself: They would steal ration cards to procure food to take to the Jews in hiding.

The risks were now ratcheted higher, but they went forward, praying for God's protection before each robbery. Aided by drawings of the buildings, insider tips, and British arms smuggled into the country, three men from Group HEIN joined other resisters to steal hundreds of ration cards each month.

It felt to Group HEIN that miracles were happening regularly. People were safe while switching trains in front of the Gestapo or walking through occupied areas. While the men received new ID cards, which listed them as "pastors" and thus protected them from German

1940

MAY 10

Nazi troops invade the Netherlands

1942

Diet and Hein smuggle more than 60 Jews to farmers in Friesland

1943

Group HEIN begins stealing ration cards

1944

APRIL 26

Hein is arrested and imprisoned

MAY 8

Diet is arrested and jailed in Scheveningen

JUNE 6

Normandy invasion; Diet travels with ten Booms to Vught Concentration Camp

1945

MAY 5

Allies liberate the Dutch



conscription, Diet was especially helpful in the operation, since she was relatively inconspicuous as a woman. She traveled to deliver ration cards, find hiding places, and gather falsified IDs and documents.

CAUGHT IN A CHESS GAME

The resistance operation required Diet and Hein to spend increasing time apart, just as their love for one another was growing deeper. In January 1944, Hein wrote to Diet:

Dearest, yesterday I screamed for you in a place where nobody could hear it—except me. I needed you so much, Diet... tell me you will always keep on pointing to our spiritual strength.

"It was like a chess game," said Eman. The stakes grew higher as the work became more dangerous—something Diet became forcefully aware of one day when the now-engaged couple stole away for a bike ride in the town of Barneveld. Hein talked over contingencies with Diet: what to do if he was ever arrested, and how to run the resistance efforts should he die or disappear. At that moment, an internal voice unsettled Diet: *You'd better have a good look at him*. She heard the voice so clearly that it seemed like someone had said the words aloud.

On April 26, 1944, three days after the bike ride, Hein was caught with incriminating documents, arrested, and carted off to prison.

Diet immediately changed her appearance and falsified her name in honor of Queen Wilhelmina: New papers identified her as Willie Laarman. On one mission for the Underground, she boarded a train with money and resistance documents hidden in her bra when an officer asked for her ID. The resistance forger had accidentally listed her nationality in black ink rather than the standard purple. Suspicions roused, the guards escorted her off the train for questioning.

"I was pleading with God," remembered Diet. "You are almighty. Can you give me a moment that all people don't look at me and then I can get rid of this envelope?"



LEFT: The couple on their last day together.

RIGHT: A letter from Diet to Hein, and the envelope in which Hein's last letter to Diet arrived.

PAGE 50: Diet's newspaper from the day the war began; one of her fake ID cards.

Then, one of the guards began showing off a shiny new raincoat, one of the first made of plastic. "You think that is handy," he said as he opened it—"this coat has pockets on the inside!"

As everyone marveled at the raincoat, Diet grabbed the packet from her blouse and threw it out of sight. Diet then decided that by acting as stupid as possible, the Gestapo would see her as a mere nuisance rather than a threat.

Despite her plan, Diet was thrown into prison for possessing a false ID. At Scheveningen Prison, sanitation was horrible and food in short supply, driving Diet to her knees and her mind to the Scriptures that she had memorized as a girl. One day Diet took a bobby pin and scratched the words of Jesus into the prison's brick wall: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end."

THE LONG ROAD OF RESISTANCE

On D-Day, June 6, 1944, Diet and 1,600 other Scheveningen prisoners were transferred to a tiny railway station, where they were forced to stand together on a platform. Diet noticed two middle-aged women "worming their way" toward each other in the crowd. Their names, she was told by those standing near her, were Betsy and Corrie ten Boom, who had sheltered Jews in their home in Haarlem, and whose father had recently died in prison.

As the train barreled toward Vught Concentration Camp, eight women

managed to jump off. But any hope Diet had grew slim as she was crowded into Barrack 4, with 175 other women, with few rations and no soap, towels, or toilet paper. After being forced to wash bloody clothes that belonged to Nazi "traitors," Diet sank into despair, unable to leave her bed for three days. At times, she wondered if she was losing her mind.

When Diet was finally called for her hearing before Nazi officers, she once more rehearsed the story she had practiced for months. On her way to the hearing, she clung to two promises in Scripture: Not a hair on her head would be touched (Luke 21:18), and she needn't fear when she appeared before authorities and kings (Matt. 10:19).

After being grilled about the details of her story, one officer said, "I can't put a needle in your story. It fits—all the way through. But my sixth sense tells me that it's all baloney." For the moment, though, he let her return to the barracks.

As she walked back to the barracks, she heard Allied planes in the distance. Two weeks later, Diet Eman walked out Vught's front gates a free woman.

The war raged on in the rest of the country, but Diet was able to return home, where she continued to spy for the Resistance, caring for Jews still in hiding. With the Allied invasion in March 1945, the German army was expelled from the Netherlands, and her work for the resistance was over. Diet rejoiced that not one Jew whom Group HEIN had sheltered was lost.

Now she had but one thought: *Hein, where are you?*

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THE KING AND DIET



Diet with King Willem

On June 2, 2015, Diet Eman, 95, stood beaming while clasping the hand of the King of Holland, Willem-Alexander, who stood next to his wife, Queen Maxima.

Although Eman and her caretaker, Chris Crandle, knew she would be honored for her work in the Dutch Resistance, Eman didn't realize she would be escorted by the king to a ballet performed in her honor. Later, she quipped, "We walked hand in hand—the king and I! I can't believe it."

On June 2, before a Grand Rapids, Michigan, crowd, the King of Holland called Eman "one of our national heroes with the highest decoration of anybody in the Dutch Resistance against the Nazis," and credited her with helping to save hun-

dreds of Jews during World War II.

After leaving the Netherlands, Diet worked as a nurse, then as a translator fluent in four languages. Eventually she moved to Grand Rapids, surrounded by other Dutch Reformed Christians.

For decades, Eman tried to leave the tragedy she experienced in the past. But in 1978, Corrie ten Boom visited Grand Rapids to speak about her experiences and God's faithfulness. Diet's conscience was stirred. "It seemed that every time I opened the Bible, something like 'Tell the great things I have done' stared me in the face," wrote Diet in her autobiography, *Things We Couldn't Say*. She was soon asked to speak in a church, and eventually her son pushed her to write a book. When neo-Nazi movements surfaced in the 1990s, Diet realized a number of people did not believe the Holocaust had happened. She committed herself to writing the book, in part so that history might not repeat itself.

Though Eman planned a foreign missions trip as recently as this summer, it was canceled after she broke her leg. She admits she also suffers from post-traumatic stress, but told me in an in-person interview, "What do you think Paul went through? I'm sure he had post-traumatic stress, and did he stop talking? No!"

Crandle smiles. "She wants to be used by God as long as she has breath," says Crandle. "You're always showing God's love." Diet's eyes twinkle in assent. —SB

FURTHER READING

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TELL THE STORY

Five months earlier, Hein Sietsma sat in a prisoner transport train holding a note to his fiancée on a piece of toilet paper. He had carefully wrapped it in brown paper, addressed it, and flung it from a window. Quite improbably, someone picked it up and mailed it to the Emans:

Darling, don't count on our seeing each other again soon. . . . Here we see again that we do not decide our own lives. *Dieneke*, even if we won't see each other again on earth, we will never be sorry for what we did, that we took this stand. And know, Diet, that of every last human being in this world, I loved you most.

With both dread and hope, Diet waited and watched for more news from him as the war came to an end.

One day she answered a knock on the door. A family friend held in his hand a letter from Hein's father. Diet opened it, read it, and began to grieve: Hein's father said he had learned of Hein's death in March as the war was coming to a close.

"I wanted to die, too," Diet later said. "I thought, *It is much easier to die than to have to go on living without him.*"

Over the next few years, Diet learned about Hein's last days. He was so weak at the end in the Dachau camp, he could no longer work. He was removed from the barracks in January 1945 and not seen again. One fellow prisoner would later tell her that Hein was the most beautiful camp prisoner he had met, one who loved life and loved Christ. "I could



then accept his death," wrote Diet. "Because I knew that Hein, even in his greatest misery, had been a light in their darkness."

The toll on the group had been heavy. Including Hein, of the 15 who joined Group HEIN, 8 had been killed in the course of their resistance. Diet's anger and sorrow were magnified when she pondered the senseless losses sustained across Europe, with estimates of six million Jews and another five million other marginalized peoples killed by the Nazis.

While visiting Hein's grave in the Netherlands decades later, Diet cried as she remembered the sacrifices many made. "So many didn't come back. I was spared three times when I thought it was the end. And I thought God had something for me to do, and

now I see it."

Today, Diet, 95, is a US citizen living in Grand Rapids, Michigan (see "The King and Diet," adjacent page). After hearing her friend Corrie ten Boom share her story in 1978, she sensed that she, too, should begin to tell of the great things God had done amid the evil that had overshadowed her homeland during those years.

"I have a purpose," Diet has said. "They say, 'tell, tell, tell [the story],' and I do."

CT

SUZANNE BURDEN coauthored the book *Reclaiming Eve: The Identity and Calling of Women in the Kingdom of God* and serves as discipleship pastor at Three Rivers Wesleyan Church in Fort Wayne, Indiana. More at SuzanneBurden.com.

DIET TOOK A BOBBY
PIN AND SCRATCHED
THE WORDS OF JESUS
INTO THE PRISON
WALL: 'LO, I AM WITH
YOU ALWAYS, EVEN
UNTO THE END.'

LEFT PHOTO BY AP RIGHT PHOTO BY BRIAN KELLY

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BY MARK S. GIGNILLIAT

LETTERING BY JILL DE HAAN

MARK S. GIGNILLIAT is associate professor of Old Testament at Beeson Divinity School and canon theologian at the Cathedral Church of the Advent in Birmingham, Alabama.



When God Hits Below the Belt

Sometimes he pulls us into the ring—but he always gives us grace to endure.

I'M NOT SURE HOW TO TELL MY CHILDREN that God is dangerous. No doubt, I want them to nestle up to Aslan's furry mane, safe and warm. But with enough life lived, disappointment felt, and loss endured, they will soon find out that he has teeth—big, sharp ones. He is good, but he is not safe, as C. S. Lewis said. And sometimes snuggling turns into a brawl.

My understanding of the Christian life has been rewired since the spirituality

THEN THE MAN SAID,

"YOUR NAME WILL

NO LONGER BE JACOB,
BUT ISRAEL,

BECAUSE YOU HAVE

STRUGGLED WITH
GOD

AND WITH HUMANS

AND HAVE **OVERCOME."**

- GENESIS 32:28 -

of my youth, which promised that every day with Jesus would grow sweeter than the day before. Yesterday's sweetness has become today's bitterness. A dear friend of mine is battling pancreatic cancer in its final stages. He understands that life with God is not always easy, that sometimes we wrestle with him.

The force of these thoughts hit me while reading Marilynne Robinson's new novel. *Lila* narrates a heroine who has no misgivings about life's sweetness. Lila is angular and awkward. She's new to the faith. Her life was hard and will remain hard because she cannot forget her past. And she's pursuing something.

Or maybe Lila is becoming aware that she is the one being pursued. Her stolen Bible (yes, stolen) maps her pursuit with unconventional texts like Ezekiel 16—which describes Jerusalem as an adulterous wife—lighting her path. Lila likes to camp in the hard corners of Scripture, which make one thing clear: The Bible knows nothing of saccharine piety. Like my friend, Lila knows that God can be dangerous. That at times we come to blows with him.

A STRANGE WORLD

Karl Barth delivered a 1917 lecture titled "The Strange New World within the Bible." The Swiss theologian actually used only the words *new world*, but the modifier, *strange*, in the English translation clarifies his thought.

Indeed, the Bible can be strange. When one enters its vast sweep, from story and poetry to proverb and discourse, the reader is disoriented. The terrain is unfamiliar. For Barth, the Bible doesn't reflect ourselves back to us. Rather, the Bible rewires—in an unsettling way—our basic instincts about the world and the God who made it. The Bible presents a universe in which God not only transcends and fills, but also is the center, with everything flowing to and from him. To enter the new world of the Bible is to enter the world as it really is—strange though it is.

Few biblical passages are as strange as Genesis 32. I imagine Lila would like

this story, because it is honest about what it's like to encounter God. What do we find in Genesis 32? When the dust clears, we see Jacob and God entangled, arms and limbs clamoring for the upper hand. God is wrestling Jacob.

Irony invades this story at almost every turn. The Jacob narratives are moving toward a climactic moment. Jacob and Esau have unfinished business. All of Jacob's energies focus on this singular encounter. The last time Jacob saw Esau, the parting wasn't so happy. Jacob has no reason to believe Esau's anger toward him is gone. The birthright is still Jacob's. Esau is still mistreated. So Jacob figures his doomed fate is near.

And so Jacob schemes. His name means "heel-grabber," and once again, he lives up to it. He uses manipulative tactics to thwart Esau's rage. Jacob sends money, livestock, and gifts ahead of his retinue. Perhaps Esau can be bought. It worked before.

Jacob sent his family to the other side of the Jabbok River. He was "left alone," in the haunting words of verse 24. Readers cannot be sure why Jacob

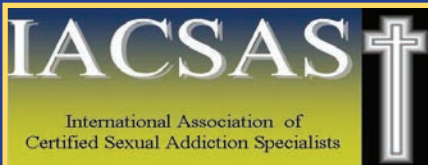
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remains behind all alone. Martin Luther believed that Jacob stayed behind in order to pray. And the prayers he needs to make are the arduous kind, the kind you don't want overheard. That's certainly possible, but the text doesn't say. Whatever the mitigating circumstances, Jacob is alone.

At this point, the story turns spooky. Out of nowhere, the narrative describes a man wrestling with Jacob until the break of day. The Bible is often frustrating in this way. It sometimes shows no interest in providing the kind of details we need to string together a coherent historical account. For instance, in 2 Kings 23, Josiah is killed by Pharaoh Necho II at Megiddo. Why? The text doesn't say. All we know is that Josiah is gone. All we know here is that Jacob wrestles with a man until dawn.

While the sudden transition gives us literary whiplash, we eventually gain a perspective that the characters in the story don't have. Jacob understands that he is wrestling with a man. But we find out that his competitor is both a man and much more.

The prophet Hosea tells us that Jacob

wrestled with the angel of the Lord, and in the next breath with Yahweh himself (Hos. 12:4–5). Don't let anyone tell you that the Trinity really doesn't show up until the New Testament. Jacob is wrestling with a man; Jacob is wrestling with God. The Bible leaves it at that.

AN UNLIKELY CONQUEROR

A

s the episode moves on, we are in for a shock: God is losing. The man in effect says to Jacob, "The sun is coming up, so you need to let me go now." Why would God—the one who, at the beginning of Genesis, spoke the world into existence—ask Jacob to lay off? Because the man "could not overpower him" (Gen. 32:25). God could not break free from Jacob's full nelson.

One stream of Jewish interpretation resists this reading. Indeed, it's a lot to swallow. For Rashi, a medieval interpreter, the figure wrestling Jacob must

be a demon or the protective angel of Esau. Suggesting this is Yahweh runs the risk of theological offense. Mortals may gain the upper hand over deities in Greek epics, but not in Israel's Scriptures. However, the text leaves little doubt who the man really is. Hosea is more forthright. There is no getting around it: The man is God, and Jacob is winning.

The narrative does suggest, however, that the match is rigged. When the horizon begins to glow and the man cannot prevail, he touches Jacob's hip and throws it out of socket. That's not ordinary for a mere human. And Jacob seems to understand, because he's back to scheming: "I will not let you go unless you bless me" (v. 26).

The narrative builds like a tsunami to this moment. Jacob has no clue what kind of blessing he needs. But the man does.

The whole story centers on and plays with Jacob's name. *Ya'akov* (Jacob) *ye'avek* (wrestles) by the river *Yabbok* (Jabbok). The place and the primary plot sound like Jacob's name. His name is the focus, and God requires Jacob to identify himself before any blessing.

"Who are you?"

LETTERS OF FAITH



DAVID DOUGLAS

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"I'm Jacob, the heel-grabber, the manipulator. I'm wily."

"Indeed you are, Jacob. But now your name is Israel."

The name *Israel*—which probably means "he struggles with God"—bears the weight of the story. "You have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome" (v. 28).

At this point, we have only scratched the surface. The force of the story grips me in ways it seems to have gripped Hosea and Christian readers like Luther, John Calvin, and German Lutheran Gerhard von Rad. All of them—who cover a large expanse of time—believed this story symbolizes the life of faith. Hosea calls on the people of God to repent with tears like Jacob did at the Jabbok River (Hos. 12:4–6). As Israel's namesake, Jacob marks the life of faith as a life of repentance.

Luther and Calvin believed Jacob's wrestling with God symbolizes our struggle to hold fast to God's promises despite the torturous circumstances of life. In pursuing us and wrestling with us, God tests our faith. And von Rad believed that Jacob depicts what will soon become the nation of Israel in the larger narrative of Scripture, desperately seeking to cling to the saving promises of Yahweh.

REFUSING TO LET GO

When you look closely at the characters in the story, Jacob and God enmeshed in hand-to-hand combat, Jacob looks uncannily like us. He was doing physically what we all do spiritually. We wrestle with God, not only to understand who he is, but also to be blessed by him.

My friend may be battling pancreatic cancer, but he's also wrestling with God. Just this summer, we sat on the beach under the shade of a canopy with our feet nestled in the Gulf Coast sand. As my kids and his grandkids played together, we talked about death.

"Mr. Hawkins, how can I help your family when . . . ?"

"I want them to know we have a future," he said.

Those words came out with no

hesitation, but quickly and boldly. Mr. Hawkins taught me Sunday school when I was in junior high. I have spent many summers on the beach with him. I saw him marry off his daughters. I even trekked across Europe with him. But now I am seeing him by the Jabbok River, wrestling with God and refusing to let go of his promises.

Mr. Hawkins's situation reminded me

is with us, and countless faithful believers have gone before us. The psalmist wrestled to understand why the wicked often prosper (Ps. 73). Even John the Baptist wrestled to understand who Jesus really was, asking on the eve of his execution, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" (Matt. 11:3).

The life of faith is one of continual

Our wrestling with God makes sense only in the larger context of another wrestling match: when Jesus came to blows with God and the many difficulties of life.

that faith necessarily entails moments by the Jabbok River, some of which are dangerous. Our wrestling with God makes sense only in the larger context of another wrestling match: when Jesus Christ came to blows with God and the many difficulties of life. Jesus refused to relent, and he persevered in his suffering. He endured because of the blessing set before him: the salvation of the world. His refusal to let go provides us our only hope when we do our own wrangling with God. He fought on our behalf.

Yes, faith is a dangerous business. We face trials and temptations of all sorts, and God uses them to test our faith. No one knew this to be true more than Jesus. And no one invites us into the joyous dangers of faith more graciously than him, either. We don't wrestle alone. He

wrestling, where our faith butts up against the troubles of our experience and the sovereign God who controls all things. But the work of Christ, True Israel, assures us that we never wrestle alone or in vain. We may get injured in the ring, but our wounds—like Jacob's thrown hip—will never become fatal to faith's final security. God won't allow it.

I'm still not sure how to tell my children about God's dangerous side. He allows certain circumstances to happen for reasons only he knows. We don't always accept the blessing he has promised immediately. Nevertheless, we can trust the character of God—the one who loves us so much that he came and wrestled on our behalf—and be confident that his judgments are always right, his nature always good, and his saving promises always sure. **CT**

Gospel for Asia Apologizes

Greetings,

Many of you are aware that the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA) recently terminated our 36-year membership. We understand this has caused great concern and raised questions about the integrity and financial accountability of Gospel for Asia. Although ECFA's review did affirm that funds given to the ministry were accounted for, we acknowledge at times we have failed to utilize procedures necessary to ensure the highest level of accountability that you expect from us, and that we expect from ourselves.

We are sorry for the pain and confusion that we have caused. We want to thank you, our sponsors, donors and friends, for walking with us all these years. We, the staff leadership of Gospel for Asia, in close partnership with our Board, are working diligently to pursue greater accountability as we continue to serve in complex environments among multiple nations and cultures.

To date, we have implemented or are in the process of implementing every one of the changes learned through our recent ECFA review. We have engaged outside counselors who will help us achieve the level of excellence and accountability our donors deserve.

Gospel for Asia's mission is to bring the love of Christ to those who have yet to hear his name. We want to be worthy of this calling, not just in how we engage in ministry, but also how we support those ministry efforts. Our passion is to honor the Lord in all we do.

Thank you for standing with us during this humbling season as we continue to learn and improve.

Your brother in Christ,

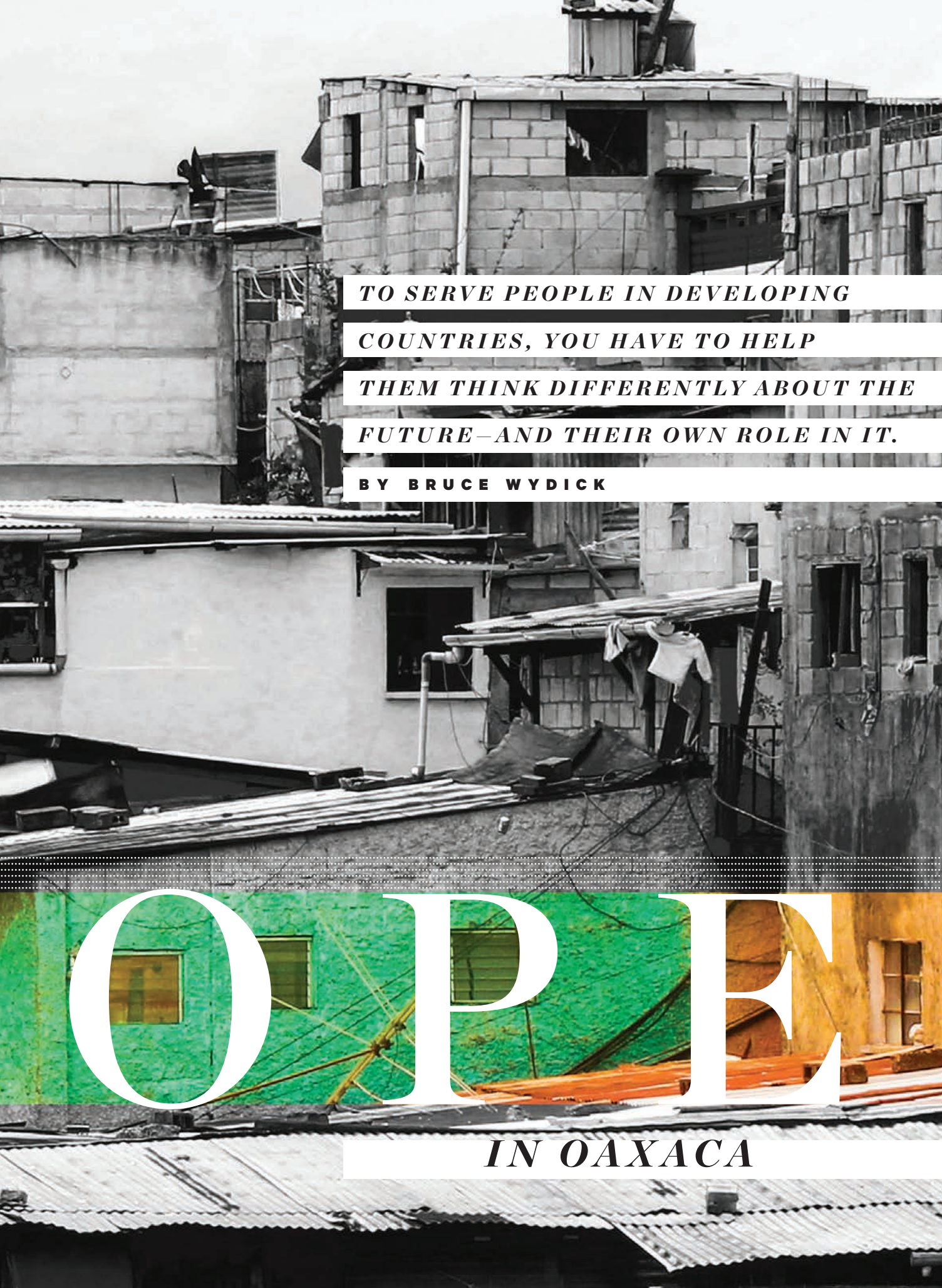


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*TO SERVE PEOPLE IN DEVELOPING
COUNTRIES, YOU HAVE TO HELP
THEM THINK DIFFERENTLY ABOUT THE
FUTURE—AND THEIR OWN ROLE IN IT.*

BY BRUCE WYDICK

OPEN

IN OAXACA

D

RIVING ON A MAIN HIGHWAY in Mexico, I slow down at a stoplight. A man outside my window is igniting a cotton ball on a stick soaked in gasoline and extinguishing the flame in his mouth. He starts approaching the cars to ask for money for his admittedly breath-taking stunt. I don't give him anything; I don't want to reward him for potentially blowing his head off. Nor do I want to facilitate the slow but certain onset of brain damage caused by inhaling gasoline fumes. I have the urge to give him 200 pesos if he promises to take the day off, but I know he won't. The scene makes me wonder how hopeless a man must be to try to earn a living this way.

For six months this year, my family and I lived in a small village in Oaxaca to study hope. Oaxaca is a curious place to try to find hope. It is the poorest state in Mexico, and many of the people in villages like ours are not very hopeful. The same social and political problems that have plagued other regions in Latin America linger here: vast inequality, corruption, unemployment, violence against women. Children in Oaxaca suffer one of the worst educational systems in the Western Hemisphere. Such realities

wither hope into a dry fatalism. "Mexico is the country of the future," say the locals—"and always will be."

I continue in my mud-sparkled Toyota pickup down a dirt road in our village, toward the highway that leads to the office of Fuentes Libres in the City of Oaxaca. The nonprofit is a good example of the challenges we are facing.

Fuentes Libres is a micro-lender affiliated with the Evangelical Covenant Church. Its leaders kindly agreed to participate in our research. The experience of Fuentes Libres mirrors that of many nonprofits who offer microfinance: It doesn't work as well as they hoped. This is consistent with recent controlled studies of microfinance, which show it typically makes only a small impact. Most women receiving microloans in Oaxaca still struggle to make ends meet. Their businesses are mostly stagnant. Barely any have hired a single employee. Hope is low.

In this context, we will carry out an experiment among 600 microfinance borrowers—what we call a "hope treatment." A film crew will first create a documentary about the organization's most successful borrowers. We will show the documentary in half of the organization's community banks. Meanwhile, we will offer a biblically based curriculum about hope, as well as a goal-setting exercise. We will do our best to increase hope among this group of women—and see if it fosters not only changes in hopes and aspirations, but also fosters growth in their businesses.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF HOPE

Most people in our village own small plots of land. My village neighbor, David, planted his field two months ago, just before the rains came. When he plants, a bag of seed hangs around his waist. At every step down the earthy row, he tosses two kernels into the dirt and buries them with his foot. There's rhythm in the work: step, plant, cover; step, plant, cover—a rhythm that has been echoed through the centuries of families who have lived and died in this Zapotec village since 500 years before the birth of Christ.

With the help of the whole family, the field is finally planted. David hopes



WHAT HOPE LOOKS LIKE Shane Lopez (arguably the world's leading authority on hope) says studies show that hopeful people are more productive, happier, healthier, and more resistant to setback. Clockwise starting above: Women with Fuentes Libres paying off microfinance loans; Oaxacan woman making tortillas in the traditional style; Sylvia and Miriam at their *papelería* in Tlaxiactac, de Cabrera, Oaxaca; author with one of his neighbors, Don Joel, a village elder in Tlaxiactac; Isabeth Zárate, chief operations officer of Fuentes Libres.

for a bountiful harvest.

But there are different types of hope. Consider the difference between these sentences: "David hopes *that* it may rain on his field tomorrow," and, "David hopes *to* irrigate his field this Saturday." Both uses of *hope* suggest optimism and uncertainty. But the first is Wishful Hope, or "hope that." "Hope that" is an important form of hope, but it lacks human agency. David hopes that something will happen, but he believes he has little or no influence over it.

The second phrase reflects Aspirational Hope, or "hope to," which means he participates in it.

Both Wishful Hope and Aspirational Hope are important in the Christian story. We see Wishful Hope among the Hebrew slaves in Egypt, who looked for and found a deliverer in Moses (Ex. 3). Wishful Hope is the longing of the prophets for a Redeemer (Isa. 52–53), who came in the person of Jesus. Some things are out of our control; we can hope





for a certain outcome, but we must entrust ourselves to God.

We also find Aspirational Hope in the Bible. David exemplified such hope as he expanded the borders of Israel (2 Sam. 8). Solomon did so when he constructed the temple (1 Kings 5–6). We see Aspirational Hope in Acts and in many of Paul's letters, where God accomplishes his purposes through the apostles' Spirit-filled efforts (e.g., Acts 27).

Aspirational Hope has one crucial element: Those who have it believe they can make a difference. The shorthand for this is *agency*, something given by God to human beings in many spheres so that we might steward his creation (Gen. 1:28).

Psychologists suggest that what I am calling Aspirational Hope has three dimensions: goals, pathways, and agency. For example, a single mother trying to make ends meet in rural Oaxaca might have the goal of sending her daughter to high school (not free in Mexico). To

realize this goal, she must be able to identify a pathway for getting there: perhaps increasing her savings or making a key investment. Most important, she must believe she can accomplish her goal. She must not only have agency, but also believe in her agency.

FATALISM

Agency is precisely what is often lacking in places like Oaxaca. Large parts of the region suffer from the opposite of Aspirational Hope: fatalism. This is somewhat ironic in a country with Christian roots.

Among the many social revolutions ignited by the early Christians, one had to do with hope. Greco-Roman culture largely believed the course of events was left to fate; anything humans did could be trumped by the capricious will of the gods or impersonal natural forces. By contrast, Christians assumed they lived in a world where their choices and actions had consequences, some of them eternal. Christianity assumed that people could actively respond to the gospel and, as led by the Holy Spirit, be transformative agents in their world.

Fatalism is the opposite of Aspirational Hope. Fatalism can creep back into some strains of Christianity, including the strain of Catholicism that exists in Oaxaca. I know this from the sermons of the village priest, Padre Julian, who broadcasts over a loudspeaker of impressive power mounted atop the Catholic church, a block from our house. With such impressive amplification, Padre Julian knows that even people working in their fields many miles away can be edified by his sermons. I know fatalism is a problem in our village if for no other reason than Padre Julian is constantly admonishing the local flock against it; he knows how hopelessness is often a self-fulfilling prophecy.

By contrast, a person with hope believes that his or her actions make a difference. Our neighbor Sylvia runs a tiny *papelería* in the village with her 15-year-old daughter, Miriam, who gets As in school and wants to be a doctor. One day, my daughter Allie saw a stethoscope in a medical store and said, "We should buy it for Miriam." It was a real stethoscope, not a cheap toy imitation. So we bought it and gave it to her. Nobody cried as much when we left the village as Sylvia and Miriam, and we think it might have been the stethoscope.

We've seen the power of hope

demonstrated in many fields of study. In *The Anatomy of Hope*, medical researcher Jerome Groopman summarizes the many studies that demonstrate how hope helps a body heal from injury and disease. In *Making Hope Happen*, Shane Lopez (probably the world's leading authority on hope) reviews studies showing that hopeful people are more productive, happier, healthier, and more resistant

ASPIRATIONAL HOPE HAS ONE CRUCIAL ELEMENT: THOSE WHO HAVE IT BELIEVE THEY CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

to setback. Hopeful people live longer than hopeless people. A subsequent meta-study undertaken by Lopez finds that hope makes a substantial difference in academic achievement. While research is still needed to more precisely determine cause and effect, the consensus is clear: Hope matters.

SPIRITUAL GRIT

I finally arrive at Fuentes Libres, where Isabeth greets me. She tells me how the organization serves the women in their community groups. They not only give the women microcredit, but also teach them about domestic abuse, youth violence, and spiritual development. Much of what gives the Oaxaca women hope is simply knowing that Fuentes Libres—and God—care about what happens to them. When Christians become the active limbs of Christ, we can bring lasting hope to our neighbors. Material intervention does not always produce hope. But loving, patient encouragement offered so that others can build goals, navigate pathways, and affirm agency almost always does.

Our research on child sponsorship bears this out. We gave 540 children living in the slums of Jakarta, Indonesia, a box of colored pencils and asked them to draw a self-portrait. About half of the children were sponsored through Compassion International, through which they receive care and mentorship for many hours a week; the other children were siblings or children on Compassion's waitlist. We coded the self-portraits

based on 20 drawing characteristics that psychologists believe correlate with mental health. For example, a self-portrait that is frowning or crying suggests depression, a missing mouth, insecurity, and bright colors, optimism.

After analyzing the drawings, we found that child sponsorship was responsible for increasing the index of hope by over half of a standard deviation—which, in lay terms, is a whole lot of hope.

What we found among Compassion children is a third type of hope: Overarching Hope. This is a stronger, more general optimism not tied to a single event or outcome. This hope whispers, "In the end, everything will be all right." It offers resilience in the face of failure and disappointment. It is vital to what is called "grit"—the socio-emotional skill found to be strongly associated with successful life outcomes in research by Nobel-winning economist James Heckman.

We all know Christians who have a strong Overarching Hope. For them, sayings like "All things work together for our good" and "Nothing can separate us from the love of God" are not merely Bible verses; they are words tattooed on their souls. This is true for Ramona Tejas, a hero of mine, who is featured

in our documentary. Poverty quashed Ramona's childhood ambition of becoming a doctor. But her determination to help the sick in her community led her to start a pharmacy, which is now thriving after a few microloans. But make no mistake: the driving force behind Ramona's success is not the microloans but Ramona's gritty version of hope.

We have analyzed the early results of our Oaxaca experiment. Seeing the documentary that featured women like Ramona helped to increase the aspirations index in the treatment group by a quarter of a standard deviation—which is impressive. It's still too early to establish statistical significance, but women who received the "hope treatment" realized sales and profits about 18 percent higher than those in the control group.

Overarching Hope releases our minds from worries about whether we are going to be okay. It literally sets our minds free to pursue higher callings. May it do so for the people of Oaxaca.

CT

BRUCE WYDICK is professor of economics at the University of San Francisco and a research affiliate at the Kellogg Institute of International Studies at the University of Notre Dame. He is author of the novel *The Taste of Many Mountains* (Thomas Nelson).





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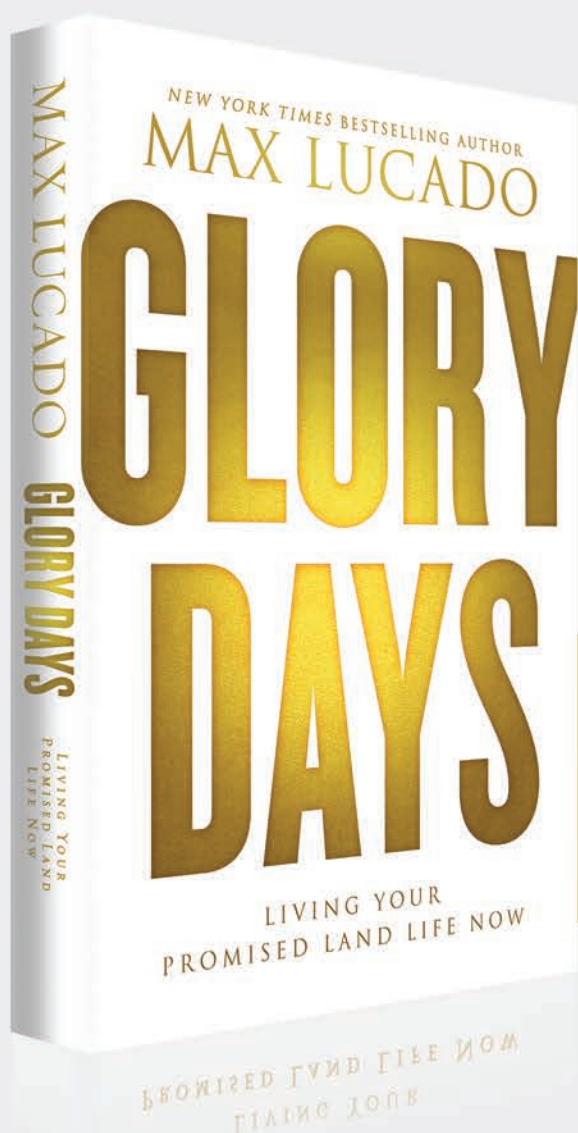
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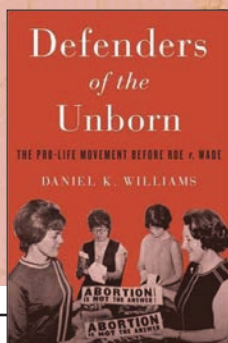
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REVIEWS



OUR FORGOTTEN PRO-LIFE HISTORY

Journeying back to pre-Roe America is like visiting a foreign country. A new book provides the roadmap.
By Robert Tracy McKenzie





Historians have a favorite saying: “The past is like a foreign country.” When we travel there, we meet people who think and act very differently. We return home with a new perspective, recognizing how much we take for granted, how much is far from inevitable.

For a powerful illustration of this truth, look no further than Daniel K. Williams’s masterful new book, *Defenders of the Unborn: The Pro-Life Movement before Roe v. Wade* (Oxford University Press) ★★★★★. When readers turn the final page, they may feel like they have visited not just a different country, but a different universe.

THE TWILIGHT ZONE

When the Supreme Court decided *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, only one in six of today’s Americans were adults. The rest of us have grown up in a later age. In the world we know, abortion has always been a constitutionally protected right. It has always pitted Republicans against Democrats, conservatives against liberals, Christians against secularists.

But the world has not always been this way.

Consider the following features of the period that Williams focuses on, roughly the four decades prior to *Roe v. Wade*. For most of these years:

- Evangelicals mostly watched from the sidelines as Catholics stood in defense of the unborn.
- Women rarely played visible roles on either side of the debate. Abortion was a matter of public health or social justice, not a question of sexual equality.
- Pro-lifers were often political liberals; political conservatives thought abortion laws were too strict.
- Republicans were slightly more likely than Democrats to favor total legalization of abortion in the first trimester of pregnancy. While Ronald Reagan was signing an abortion liberalization law in California, Ted Kennedy was endorsing the “right to life” in

Massachusetts.

Have we entered *The Twilight Zone*?

More important, *Defenders of the Unborn* demonstrates that by 1970, a vibrant, effective pro-life movement had taken off in the United States. Scholars have often portrayed the pro-life movement as if it began in 1973, when *Roe v. Wade* awakened conservatives to feminism, government activism, and sexual permissiveness. The book makes a compelling case that the movement “originated not as a conservative backlash against individual rights, but as a defense of human rights for the unborn.”

Williams begins his narrative with the Great Depression. It was a time when state laws almost uniformly prohibited abortion. But the number of illegal abortions soared in this era of unprecedented poverty. So did the number of women who died from botched back-alley procedures.

In this context, a few doctors began calling for loosening abortion restrictions as a way to protect women’s lives. Dissenting Catholic priests and physicians appealed to traditional church teaching about sexual morality. But they also framed the issue as a matter of social justice, and called for increased government aid to the poor as essential to reducing abortion.

The story of the next three decades is of how “a small, beleaguered Catholic movement” grew into “a massive ecumenical movement of grassroots activists.” They scored dozens of victories in the years before *Roe v. Wade*. As late as the early 1960s, Catholic teaching linked abortion with the use of contraceptives. Catholic leaders condemned both practices as symptoms of a larger cultural trend toward separating sexual pleasure from reproduction. After the Supreme Court’s 1965 *Griswold v. Connecticut* ruling, however, Catholics fashioned

a different strategy. In that case, the Court had declared anti-birth-control laws unconstitutional, persuading an important segment of Catholic opinion to separate the arguments against abortion and contraception.

In 1968, Catholic activists founded the National Right to Life Committee. Dropping references to contraception and sexual morality, they adopted “the language of postwar American liberalism.” Thus, they defined opposition to abortion as a civil rights movement for a defenseless minority. At the same time, they reached out to Protestants who objected to traditional Catholic teaching on sexual morality, but supported Catholic positions on poverty, racial justice, capital punishment, and nuclear proliferation.

The result was a collaboration of Catholics and mainline Protestants. Both groups condemned abortion as reflecting a “broader disrespect for human life in all its forms.” Although popular opinion on abortion remained badly divided, in 1971–72 this alliance was strong enough to resist abortion liberalization in more than two dozen state legislatures. When the Supreme Court obliterated those victories the following year, its ruling would require legal changes in 46 states.

The memory of these achievements faded in later years, as a very different pro-life coalition campaigned, unsuccessfully, to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. The book’s final chapter reviews the pro-life campaign after *Roe*, but everything about this familiar story looks different in light of Williams’s careful re-creation of the previous decades. When evangelicals rallied to the cause in the late 1970s, they did not create a new movement so much as transform an existing one. Following a script crafted by national leaders such as Francis Schaeffer and Jerry Falwell, they brought a new narrative to the pro-life movement. Up to the mid-1970s, pro-life advocates had described legalized abortion as a reflection of the culture’s general disregard for the sanctity of life. The Christian Right framed the issue in terms of the culture’s denigration of family values and traditional sexual morality.

AN UNPREDICTABLE STORY

Over time, advocates of the latter narrative forged an uneasy alliance with the Republican Party. A Gallup poll in

When evangelicals rallied to the pro-life cause in the late 1970s, they did not create a new movement so much as transform an existing one.

late 1973 showed that both major parties were badly split over *Roe*. But the Democratic Party rejected a Human Life Amendment at its 1976 convention, while the Republicans endorsed it. At that point, pro-life activists mostly cast their lot with the GOP, even as the party did little to follow through on its pledge.

This new political landscape left pro-lifers who defined abortion in terms of social justice politically homeless. The Republican Party might become an effective vehicle for pro-life political action, but the party had little sympathy with the broader issue portfolio that motivated the pro-life movement

before 1973. Meanwhile, the Democratic Party championed social justice, but was now adamantly committed to defending abortion rights.

Is there a lesson in this? Williams hesitates to say. His book is not a polemic, but a meticulous reconstruction of a historical moment that we think we know but don't. If there's a moral to the story, Williams only implies it, although I sense that he believes the pro-life movement took an unfortunate turn after 1973.

Readers may disagree, and they might be right. This much is clear, however: Williams has done an invaluable service to anyone who cares about the future

of the pro-life cause. We rarely think deeply about aspects of the world that seem carved into granite. *Defenders of the Unborn* restores a fluidity and unpredictability to the story of abortion politics. The way things are is not the way they have always been—or always will be. God willing, when future historians visit our own abortion-friendly age, they too will be puzzled by its foreign customs. **CT**

ROBERT TRACY MCKENZIE chairs the history department at Wheaton College. He is the author most recently of *The First Thanksgiving: What the Real Story Tells Us about Loving God and Learning from History* (IVP Academic).

Fear Not the Eco-Friendly

We can care for creation without slipping into nature-worship. **By Gracy Olmstead**

Many Christians are suspicious of terms like “environmentally sustainable,” “green,” or “eco-friendly.” As a result, too many of us ignore genuine dangers—deforestation, land erosion, oil spills—while adopting foolishly anti-environmental rhetoric.

That's the problem Norman Wirzba tackles in *From Nature to Creation: A Christian Vision for Understanding and Loving Our World* (Baker Academic) ★★★★★. According to Wirzba, who teaches theology, ecology, and “agrarian studies” at Duke Divinity School, we've ceased thinking of God as actively involved in caring for his creation.

The Bible paints a very different picture. “The eyes of all look to you,” declares Psalm 145:15–16, “and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.” God's rule over creation is tender, particular, and devoted.

“Creation,” writes Wirzba, “is not a vast lump of valueless matter. It is God's love made visible, fragrant, tactile, audible, and delectable.” We have forgotten that the world is “a place so cherished that God enters into covenant relationship

with it (Gen. 9:8–17), so beautiful that God promises to renew it (Isa. 65:17–25), and so valuable that God takes up residence within it (John 1:14 and Rev. 21:1–4).”

Wirzba contrasts this view with two alternatives: one that understands nature as a mass of “resources” to consume, and another that ascribes to capital-*N* “Nature” near-magical powers of life-giving sustenance. The first results in destruction of the created world; the second turns it into an idol.

Much Christian antipathy toward environmentalism arises from a rightful aversion to nature-worship. Many environmentalists seem to view mankind as a scourge on the planet, as though nature were best left untouched by humans.

Wirzba would not have us leave the earth alone, but instead take an active part in cultivating it. “Human creaturely identity and vocation come together in the work of gardening,” he writes, “because God is the Essential Gardener, the one who related to the world in modes of intimacy, protection, and delight.” As God's gardeners, we're given responsibility to nurture and love, as well preserve and conserve, his creation. If we think of creation as a

gift, not a possession, we'll strive to make it healthy and vibrant, rather than succumb to the use-and-discard mentality.

Wirzba seems opposed to industrial production and market economics, perhaps to an extreme. It's true that reducing the earth to its “resources” can fuel exploitation, and that our paeans to capitalism are often covers for greed and sin. But that doesn't mean market forces are *always* detrimental.

Indeed, “market demand” has gradually urged us toward more humane forms of agriculture. Rejecting the free market altogether hardly seems like wise stewardship, as it forces us to do without major sources of innovation and productivity.

But Wirzba is right that we need to reconsider some of our preferred methods of agriculture and environmental care. Doing so will require questioning the stereotypes that drive our conversation about creation. It will require a deeper reverence for the world God has given us—and maybe a bit of thoughtful gardening, too. **CT**

GRACY OLMSTEAD is an associate editor at *The American Conservative*.

From Nature to
Creation: A Christian
Vision for Understanding
and Loving
Our World
Norman Wirzba
(Baker Academic)





Lather, Rinse, Rejoice!

An excerpt from *40/40 Vision*.

For every ten people who love the cycles of nature, at least one hates them. To most people, a sunrise offers quiet moments of solitude and an inherent promise: it's a brand-new day that's never been lived before. Similarly, a sunset throws a splash of color on our workday, happily ending our activities and signaling a time to rest. And tomorrow we'll get to do it all again.

But Qohelet, the author of Ecclesiastes, seems to have no such optimism. To him, a sunrise signals another day in the salt mines. A sunset grimly signals encroaching death. The very repetitiveness of it is oppressive. His is a life of lather, rinse, repeat.

Somewhere in the vicinity of midlife, we come to the place where we can relate. The rhythms that once coordinated our lives now tyrannize them. Life can feel like the same stinking things, one after the other.

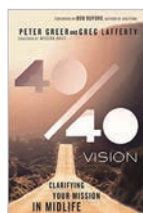
Some years ago, the staff of my (Greg's) church shared our Myers-Briggs profiles. Each profile comes with a wealth of descriptors and explanations, including a short catchphrase. I (Greg) am an ENTP ("Extroverted iNtuitive Thinking Perceiving"). The catchphrase for my type is, "One adventure after another." *Bingo*. The materials went on to explain that my type is the least likely to want to do the same thing the same way. That resonates too. Something in my very DNA craves novelty. My philosophy: If it ain't broke, break it; at least you'll have a new problem to solve.

But here's where we get it wrong. We consider monotony akin to death and variety the essence of life. The brilliant

G. K. Chesterton saw things differently:

Because children have abounding vitality, because they are in spirit fierce and free, therefore they want things repeated and unchanged. They always say, "Do it again"; and the grown-up person does it again until he is nearly dead. For grown-up people are not strong enough to exult in monotony. But perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, "Do it again" to the sun; and every evening, "Do it again" to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. . . . The repetition in nature may not be a recurrence; it may be a theatrical *encore*.

This may actually be Qohelet's point. The cycles of life are so much bigger than we are. Sun, wind, and water continue to follow their courses unabated as entire generations of people pass off the scene. Our lives and works are so feeble and fleeting by comparison. The proper response is not despair but wonder. Qohelet says mouths can't say enough, eyes can't see enough, ears can't hear enough. It's all too great to comprehend, and we'll wear ourselves out if we try. The wise person will simply adjust to the reality.



40/40 Vision: Clarifying Your Mission in Midlife
Peter Greer and Greg Lafferty
(InterVarsity Press)

Adapted from *40/40 Vision* by Peter Greer and Greg Lafferty. Used by permission of InterVarsity Press, P.O. Box 1400, Downers Grove, IL 60615, USA. www.ivpress.com.

Wilson's Bookmarks

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

MAZE OF BLOOD

MARLY YOUNG (MERCER UNIVERSITY PRESS)

This is one of the strangest books I have read in a long while, and also one of the best. It is a novel based on the life of Texas writer Robert E. Howard, creator of Conan the Barbarian and many other memorable characters. Spoiler alert: Young's protagonist, Conall Weaver, commits suicide at the outset, just as Howard did (at age 30), and the story proceeds in reverse chronology. Does this sound daunting? It isn't at all, if you read with a child's willingness to be astonished and a grown-up's hard-won hope that somehow our tangled lives are part of a larger Story, the outlines of which we glimpse even now.

TIPPING POINT

DAVID POYER (ST. MARTIN'S)

When literary folk talk about American fiction of the past several decades, you will rarely if ever hear David Poyer's name mentioned. But for my money, he's one of our most consistently interesting novelists. He's best known for his *Tales of the Modern Navy*, featuring the recurring character Dan Lenson; *Tipping Point* is the 15th installment in the series. Poyer combines a deep knowledge of all things seafaring (including the latest technology) with a grasp of geopolitics, insight into the human heart, and a philosophic temperament. Try this book—you may be hooked.

TRANSFORMATIONS IN BIBLICAL LITERARY TRADITIONS

EDITED BY D. H. WILLIAMS AND PHILLIP J. DONNELLY

(BAYLOR UNIVERSITY PRESS)

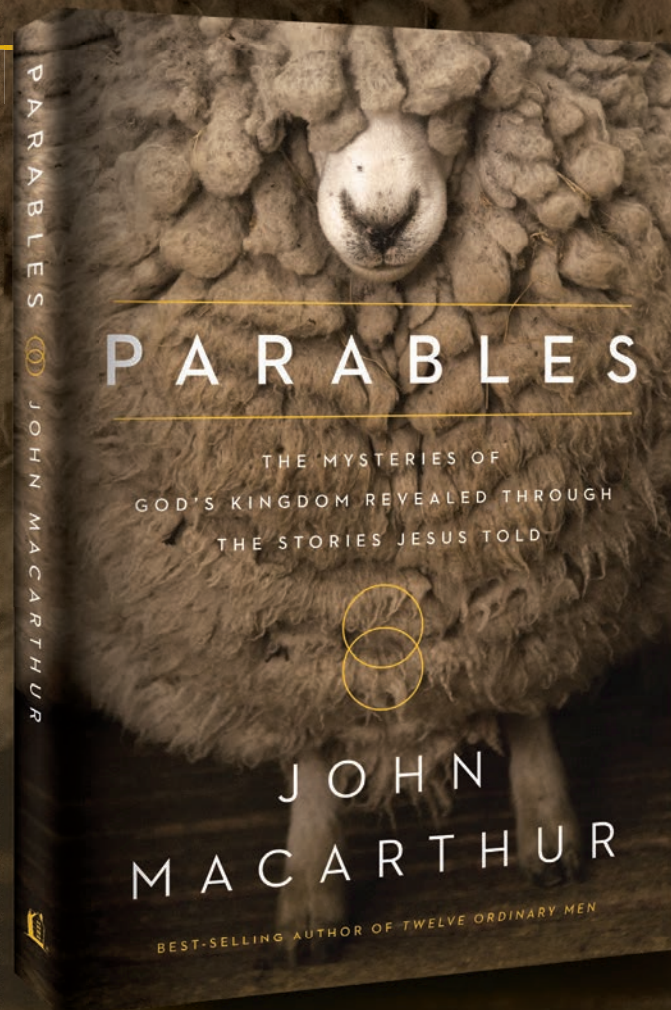
It took me a while to catch up with this 2014 volume, a collection of essays in tribute to Baylor literature professor David Lyle Jeffrey, but I'm very glad that I did. As befitting a scholar of such wide-ranging interests, the subjects range from *Paradise Lost* to studies of literature and religion in China (where Jeffrey has spent a good deal of time), and the lineup of contributors is stellar: Dennis Danielson, Sarah-Jane Murray, Stephen Prickett, Ralph C. Wood, Mark Noll, Eleonore Stump, and Liu Yi-Qing, to mention only a few. Pure gold.

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Angry Like Jesus:
Using His Example
to Spark Your
Moral Courage
Sarah Sumner
(Fortress Press)



Righteous Anger: Not Just for Jesus

Why more believers need the courage to get mad at sin. Interview by Dorcas Cheng-Tozun

As a young woman, Sarah Sumner never allowed herself to be angry, until her parents divorced when she was 22. The experience was one inspiration behind her doctoral dissertation (at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) on godly anger, which has blossomed into a book, *Angry Like Jesus: Using His Example to Spark Your Moral Courage* (Fortress Press). San Francisco-based Hermeneutics writer Dorcas Cheng-Tozun spoke with Sumner, former dean of A. W. Tozer Theological Seminary, about bringing a healthy dose of righteous anger to today's church.

Why is the topic of godly anger so significant to you?

Over the years, working in Christian organizations, I have seen fudging and compromise and blatant refusals to do things in a Christian way. And then people want to cover it up. That makes me angry. I don't mean blustery anger, where I want to slam the door. It motivates me to try righting wrongs in a structured, strategic way.

What's the difference between sinful and godly anger?

Sinful anger does not trust God, while godly anger does. Sinful anger is prideful, while godly anger flows from humility. Sinful anger participates in evil, while godly anger abhors evil. But the main difference is that godly anger is loving. It's not about feeling self-righteous.

In the book, you connect godly anger with virtues such as faith, love, and hope. How can anger express such qualities?

You can't have godly anger without faith,

in part because it's risky. Showing godly anger is bound to displease certain people. You need to have faith that God will sustain you through any backlash.

Godly anger is the guardian of love. Psalm 7:11 says that God is a righteous judge who "displays his wrath every day." Having godly anger means standing up for what's right, for the sake of honoring God.

Godly anger gives us hope. So often, people lose hope when they feel like there is nothing they can do about wickedness. But that is not the case. You can always pray. And most of the time, you can do more. You can talk to somebody. You can step out and intervene.



How can godly anger speak to those stuck in their own sin?

The essence of sin is falsehood. When people sin, they are bowing down to lies. Godly anger hates those lies and battles to replace them with truth. We're apt to believe the lie that God is not greater than our problems or chronic sins. But 1 John 3:20 says that if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts.

You argue that anger against God is sinful, even during suffering. What's wrong with being angry at God?

Sinful anger is so often our rebellion against pain that is providentially ours to feel. It's misguided to say, "I have such a close relationship with God that I can get mad at him and that bonds us more." Isaiah 45:9 says, "Woe to those who quarrel with their Maker."

Being angry at God implies that God

did something wrong. But God is holy. He is never the culprit. The lie in our head goes, "I know it's better for me not to experience this pain." But you don't know. Jesus is a man of sorrows, a man of pain. And if we are following a man of pain, we have to be willing to experience pain ourselves.

You mention "inirascibility," defined by Aristotle as a deficit in anger. Why is this so dangerous?

Inirascibility means not being angry when you should be. In 1 Samuel, Eli didn't have godly anger against his sons: They were priests, dealing with matters of holiness, but they had profane attitudes. And all the defilement happening in the temple affected everyone associated with it.

The same thing happens when we turn a blind eye to corruption. We are commanded, in Romans 12:9, to "hate what is evil." Many Christians brag of being loving or nonjudgmental. But if we don't abhor evil, we end up participating in it.

How can a lack of godly anger affect the church?

Many of the "nones" and "dones" are demoralized by compromising reactions, if not outright denials, toward evil in the church. We have to hate evil enough to tell the truth when we see something shady or flat-out illegal taking place. There needs to be a greater moral courage to do the right thing, even if it costs you. And then we will find that God has our backs.

CT

Ukraine: Helping Lives in Crisis

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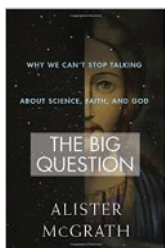


New & Noteworthy

Compiled by Matt Reynolds

"This book is not about *defending* either science or Christianity; I am happy to leave those tasks to others. What I can do... is to explore how they might intertwine and interconnect, offering us a rich palette of colors as we try to depict our beautiful yet complex world and live meaningfully within it."

~ from *The Big Question* by Alister McGrath



THE BIG QUESTION

Why We Can't Stop Talking About Science, Faith, and God

ALISTER MCGRATH (ST. MARTIN'S PRESS)

There is no shortage of opinions about the relationship between science and religion, but few know the terrain so well as McGrath, the Oxford theologian and frequent New Atheist sparring partner. *The Big Question* marshals McGrath's prodigious knowledge of science, theology, history, and currents of New Atheist thought to make the case that these two major ways of apprehending reality are hardly incompatible. "Science and religion are two of the greatest cultural forces in the world," he writes. "When rightly framed, a mutual conversation can be enriching and invigorating."



THE GOSPEL AND PLURALISM TODAY

Reassessing Lesslie Newbigin in the 21st Century

EDITED BY SCOTT W. SUNQUIST AND AMOS YONG

(IVP ACADEMIC)

Lesslie Newbigin was among the most path-breaking missionaries—and mission-minded theologians—of the 20th century. His 1989 classic, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, is a foundational text of the "missional church" movement. It spurred fresh thinking about bringing the gospel to places where Christian beliefs are out of favor or almost wholly unknown. (Newbigin spent decades planting and developing churches in India.) Last year, Fuller Seminary's School of Intercultural Studies hosted a conference devoted to applying Newbigin's insights to new missions. The result is this book, which gathers essays from leading theologians and scholars on the future of Christian witness in the West and worldwide.



SKY LANTERN

The Story of a Father's Love for His Children and the Healing Power of the Smallest Act of Kindness

MATT MIKALATOS (HOWARD BOOKS)

A sky lantern is something like a miniature hot-air balloon. One Saturday, Mikalatos, a writer and director of Cru Portland, discovered one in his driveway, at first thinking it was a piece of trash. Upon examination, the lantern bore a brief, mysterious note: "Love you, Dad. Miss you so much. Steph." Brokenhearted over the circumstances of the father and daughter's separation, Mikalatos (who has three daughters of his own) posted an open letter on his blog, responding to Steph the way he hoped her own father might. *Sky Lantern* is the story of how Mikalatos eventually befriended Steph, and how this unlikely encounter changed everyone involved.

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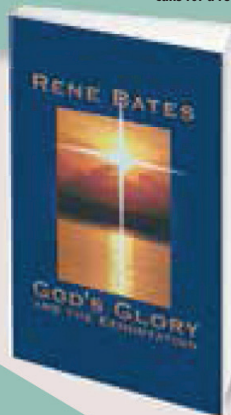


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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 80

their way from ditch to ditch, crawling toward the airport. It took them all night.

At dawn, they arrived at the airport security gates. My grandmother showed her papers to the guards, telling them her boss's name. "He told me he get us out," she said in broken English. "He tell me my whole family can come."

The guard shook his head. "I'm sorry. Your name isn't on this list."

"Please!" my grandmother begged. "I work for you, for the Americans. They will kill us all. Take this." She grabbed from her bag the gold jewelry and small items of value she had taken from the house. "Please," she said. "Take all of this."

The guard took all of it, then let them through the gate.

Somehow, my mother's family made it to the evacuation point. There, thousands of other Vietnamese waited to board helicopters that would fly them to ships. They were permitted to take nothing. They stood, waiting, emptyhanded, nothing to show for their lives, with no idea of what was to come.

As my mother and her family neared the front of the line, soldiers were barking orders, trying to fill each helicopter to maximum capacity. My grandparents and uncles urged the girls to get on the first available chopper.

"No!" my aunts and my mother cried. "We cannot separate!"

But my grandfather insisted. "You cannot wait! You go ahead of us so we can make sure you get out. We will be right behind you!" They finally agreed.

In the chaos, my grandparents and uncles lost sight of them. They did not see which chopper they boarded, though they were pretty sure it was the one they were watching.

As the chopper lifted off, they watched it power ahead into the darkness. Suddenly, the sky lit up. The helicopter exploded as a missile tore through it. My grandparents and uncles looked on in horror, believing that they had just lost the four young women in their lives. "No!" my grandfather said, turning toward my uncles. "That should have been us."

It would be another two weeks before they discovered they had been mistaken; the girls had boarded another helicopter, then a military ship that took them to the Philippines and, after that, Guam.

When my mother and aunts first disembarked from the helicopter that night, they turned and waited for the next helicopters to bring their parents and brothers. But with each helicopter that emptied, they saw no familiar faces. They waited. And waited.

Turning to strangers, they asked, "Please! We cannot find our parents!" People shook their heads. Some murmured that not all of the helicopters had made it. My mother and her sisters wept.

The ship that carried the women to Guam did not have enough food or space for the thousands crammed into it. Each family was given a bowl of rice and a can of milk daily. My mother would describe how her stomach gnawed at itself, how her eyes grew larger in her head. She would give her daily spoonful of rice to her youngest sister. When my mother reached the United States, she weighed 90 pounds.

In Guam, the girls lived in tents on a US Army base. There, one of my aunts stumbled across my grandfather. It was a miracle they found each other amid the chaotic crowds and tents. When the whole family was reunited, they held each other, overwhelmed at the mystery of this blessing. "I am *never*, *ever* letting you out of my sight again," my grandmother told the girls.

RESCUED FROM CERTAIN DEATH

My grandparents were well-educated. They had provided comfortably for my mother and her siblings their whole lives. But they had left Vietnam with only the clothes on their backs. And the United States was full of antiwar and anti-Vietnamese sentiments. They were refugees from a war that nobody

had wanted to fight.

Yet a generation later, my sisters and I were *here*, snuggled up next to our aunts, listening to the tale of a family who crossed the sea, emptyhanded, to a new land—and flourished there. How had our family's story ended so well?

Far away, at a small Baptist church in Lafayette, Indiana, some Christians were convinced that God's heart was for those nobody wanted. Together, they committed to sponsoring a refugee family. They raised money, found housing, and provided clothing and furniture. Then they opened their hearts and their homes to a strange family from a foreign land.

My mother's family knew nothing about Jesus or the church when they lived in Vietnam. But as they were welcomed by this community, they encountered a generosity they had never witnessed. "It wasn't just the money and the things they provided," my mother would say. "My country was full of hardness, violence, and constant fighting. We saw in these people a kindness we had never seen before."

Despite the language barrier, my grandfather couldn't wait to go to church each Sunday. My aunts and uncles looked forward to youth group. And over time, my mother and her family began to realize how they had been *saved*—not just from war and death in Vietnam, but also from a life lived without a warm, generous, and compassionate God.

Each time I heard my aunts recount this story, in my child's mind I pictured my mother's family coming across the sea, journeying through the waters. These were the waters of their Exodus, the waters of their own baptism, the waters that God would part in order to show himself as their Deliverer. This was their Passover story—the night they were rescued from certain death by a God who protected them when they had no home, and numbered them among his people.

This is also *my* story. I grew up knowing that I *existed* because somewhere in the world, a group of people believed that a merciful God was asking them to show mercy to those who needed it. I grew up knowing that this sort of God was a God worth trusting. His mercy echoes down through the generations. **CT**

JULIET LIU WAITE is a co-pastor at Life on the Vine, a church in the Chicago suburbs.

Far away, at a Baptist church in Indiana, some Christians were convinced that God's heart was for those nobody wanted.

TESTIMONY



The Waters of Their Exodus

When my family traveled by boat to America, God was their Deliverer.
They just didn't know it.

By Juliet Liu Waite

Tell us the story again?"

I remember those warm summer nights, lying next to my aunts. Some of us would be on a mattress on the floor; the others, the lucky ones, got the bed. There wasn't enough room for three aunts and four nieces in the attic room with the sloped ceiling. But I was warm and comfortable, sleepy and secure lying beside them.

"Again?" one auntie would say. "But you already know it." My sisters and I would plead. "Please? We want to hear it one more time." And one of them would give in.

"It was a warm night, like this one. . . ."

My mother, her siblings, and her parents were in their home. It was April 30, 1975, a warm evening in Saigon, South Vietnam. This night would become known as the Fall of Saigon and the end of the 20-year-long war for Vietnam. My mother's family had just finished dinner when a loud explosion blew out the windows at the back of the house.

My grandmother had worked for 20 years as a translator

and administrative assistant at a branch of the US Department of Defense. Her office coordinated intelligence shared between the US Army and the South Vietnamese military. She was recognized as a hard and loyal worker. Her boss, an American, had assured her over a period of weeks that when the time was right, he would send word about where to go with her whole family. "Don't worry, Rebecca. We won't leave without you. We'll make sure you are taken care of."

But she had not heard from him in days. She did not know that he had already left the country, leaving her and her family behind without so much as a telephone call.

Now, with her family sprawled across the floor, their ears ringing from the blast, my grandmother decided: *It's time to go.*

With explosions shaking the street and homes nearby, the family scrambled. My mother and her siblings each packed a small bag of essential items. Outside the house, they could hear chaos. Bombs were exploding, taking down shops, houses, and people. They ducked low, making

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PHOTO BY TOM MADAY

**“We respond to God’s call
when we become faithful,
resourceful, lifelong learners
who focus on important
problems and solve them.”**

Russ Tuck, Ph.D.

Professor of Computer Science



After two decades as a Silicon Valley systems architect and award-winning Google software engineer, Russ Tuck now trains Gordon students to be faithful contributors in the high-tech industry.

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Marcus Doe is a third year Master of Divinity Student and student government president at Gordon-Conwell's main campus in Hamilton, Massachusetts.

"I returned to my home country of Liberia in 2010 and saw so much suffering and bitterness. God put it in my heart to do something about the social injustice. My mission is to go back and be able to have a self-sustaining organization that will help the people of Liberia to have the opportunities that we take for granted in the Western World."

– Marcus Doe, M.Div. '16

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