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The Problem of Forgiveness

To forgive is more than just an ideal Christian virtue.



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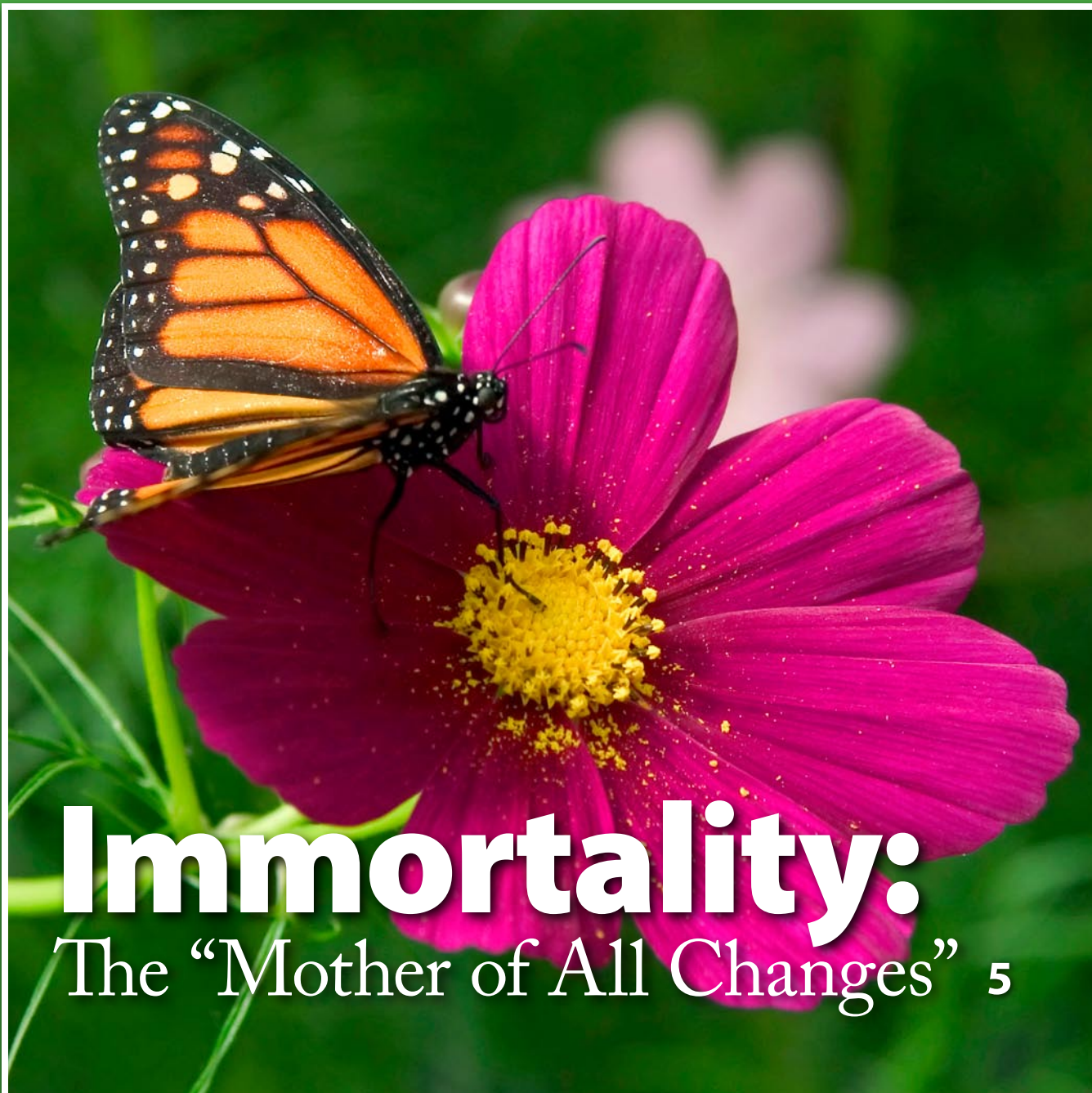
Facing up to Autism

"When our son was diagnosed, I was devastated."

CHRISTIAN Odyssey

August/September 2007

Exploring Life and Faith



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Letters to the Editor

Thank you for Mr. Morrison's article "Victory on the cross" in the April/May 2007 edition.

There are some aspects to this article that I ask you to please think about. It says, "Christ is fully divine, and he has (present tense) a human body."

Did you know that the New Testament does not teach that Jesus had a human body after his resurrection? This is a Roman Catholic teaching.

KW, e-mail

The bodily resurrection from the dead of Jesus Christ is central to Christianity, not just a belief of the Roman Catholic Church. Scripture, traditional Christian confessions and orthodox Christian belief deny that Jesus was resurrected as immaterial spirit. The empty tomb of Jesus attests to this fact.

I liked very much the article entitled "Evidence of Black Africans in the Bible." However, I'm confused as to your organization's belief that "all" are God's children. Don't you have to be a believer (i.e., a Christian) to be an adopted child of God?

Don't all others sit under the wrath of God awaiting judgment? Therefore they cannot be his children, but rather vessels fitted for destruction. Are not all people on the path of condemnation until God causes them to regenerate and believe and become children of God?

E-mail

The statement you quoted and the article itself was not discussing the resurrection to life as opposed to the judgment to condemnation (John 5:28-30) or who will be in either, and on what basis. It pointed out that all races are equally God's creation—and thus equally his children—and that no one, black, white, yellow, or brown, is excluded from his love and purpose. As the Scripture says, "For God so loved the world [meaning everyone] that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

The article "No Contest" in the June/July 2007 *Christian Odyssey* is aptly titled. I suggest that the article will ignite more conflict and polarization rather than move all readers toward logical resolution of the current concepts among Christians surrounding Genesis and Creation. The article was not big enough to cover all of the paradigms of the players involved and so it is aptly titled, "No Contest."

RG, Australia

The article was intended to be a contribution to the debate—not the last word on the topic. It focuses on one aspect of the debate, and makes no attempt to cover all the questions. How could



it? How could anything? This is a vast and controversial subject. Whatever our preconceived ideas, or whatever side of the debate we find ourselves on, we need to update our thinking and not cling to ideas that both modern research and reliable biblical scholarship have shown to be untenable.

Your argument that Genesis isn't to be taken literally is not surprising. So many church leaders have taken this stand to avoid the fuss—and need—to explain that Genesis is the literal word of God. "Let's just all get along and not upset anyone" is the call of the day for many church leaders.

Why defend the Christian faith as the word of God when you can change the story(s) however you wish?

Please delete me from any of your mailing or email lists. I get enough information telling me "well...the Bible doesn't really mean that" all the time.

BH, Ohio

We will remove your name from the list if that is what you really want. But why can-

cel just because you don't agree with an article? Are you sure we have "changed the story"—or have we tried to understand it in the way that it was intended? If you read the article carefully, you will see that it supports the Bible by offering a sound explanation to a subject that causes many people to dismiss the whole book as nonsense.

Thank you, thank you, THANK YOU for your cover article in the June/July issue of *Christian Odyssey* ("No Contest: Why the Argument over Genesis?"). We are constantly wearied by the seemingly solid front of young-earth creationism presented by the "mainstream" American evangelical establishment. The most militant of these

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"young-earthers" essentially insist that one cannot be a Christian without subscribing to their paradigm. It is refreshing to read an unshackled perspective. The information about cosmogony was interesting and makes so much sense.

E-mail

I love your magazine. It's colorful and full of thought-provoking articles. Enclosed is a check to help meet your costs. Thanks for a job well done.

LP, Pennsylvania

I would like to give a donation to help support your ministry for others to have *Odyssey* also—as far as it reaches.

EM, Colorado

Letters for this section should be addressed to "Letters to the Editor." Send your letters to Worldwide Church of God, PO Box 5005, Glendora, CA 91740-0730, or by e-mail to john.halford@wgc.org.

The editor reserves the right to use letters so addressed in whole or in part, and to include your name and edit the letter for clarity and space. We welcome your comments.

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Cover Photo: iStockphotoa

Stirred—but not shaken

By John Halford

Unlike James Bond's famous cocktails, our faith should be stirred, but not shaken.

These are stirring times to be a Christian. Critics are having a field day, questioning, undermining and ridiculing every aspect of our beliefs. Nothing, it seems, is sacred.

That is because, if you are to believe some popular authors, nothing is sacred. The whole idea of God is a delusion, argues the enthusiastic atheist, Professor Richard Dawkins. Others suggest that religion has had a negative impact on human society, and should be banned, and that those who insist on teaching religious concepts to children be considered guilty of child abuse. Recent published books ask us to believe that non-biblical "Gospels" may give us a more reliable source of understanding of Jesus than the New Testament.

What are we poor ordinary Christians to make of all this? We seem to be outnumbered and outgunned. Unable to really understand, let alone respond to these sophisticated attacks on all that we hold dear, perhaps the safest course of action is to retreat behind the barricades of tradition.

We must not do that. Jesus made it clear that he did not light our lamps only to have us hide them. So before we allow ourselves to be spooked by the opposition, let's remember something else he said:

"Can you imagine a king going into battle against another king without first deciding whether it is possible with his ten thousand troops to face the twenty thousand troops of the other? And if he decides he can't, won't he send an emissary and work out a truce?"¹

Ah, but what if he decides he can win? And we can. You see, the opposition is not as overwhelming as it sometimes seems. Media hype may leave you personally feeling ill-equipped to face up to the challenges. But you can be sure that there are capable men and women out there who are more than able to defend the Christian turf. They have education and experience, and they are not intimidated by clever arguments. When given the opportunity, they can more than hold their own, and show that the opposition has not really done its homework.²

Many believing scientists assure us that the ever-increasing understanding of life's processes has deepened, rather than shattered, their faith. Truth has nothing to fear from more truth, and you can be sure that "our side" is holding the line.³

So don't let the anti-religious, anti-Christian propaganda destabilize you. This is not a time to cower and bury our Christian heads in the sand. Most of us are not trained to challenge complex arguments or indulge in sophisticated debate. But all of us are more than able to make a significant contribution in a way that really does count.

In a series of fascinating studies, Baylor University Professor Rodney Stark has thrown new light on how the Christian faith spread throughout the Roman Empire.⁴ Using the skills of a sociologist, Stark has analyzed the data to show that Christianity gained influence and credibility, not by cleverly winning debates, but by the influence of its followers' way of life. In times of plague and famine, it was the Christians who cared for the sick and destitute. In an age when slaves and women were without power, it was the Christian way of life that gave them a voice and self-respect. Stark shows that it is simply nonsense to claim that Christianity has had an overall negative impact.

As the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah said: "Don't let the wise brag of their wisdom. Don't let heroes brag of their exploits. Don't let the rich brag of their riches. If you brag, brag of this and this only: That you understand and know me. I'm God, and I act in loyal love. I do what's right and set things right and fair, and delight in those who do the same things. These are my trademarks."⁵

That is not a put-down of genuine scholarship. Neither is it a flip slogan for self-righteous triumphalism. It is a challenge for us to live up to what we say we believe, whatever our opportunity and station in life.

Yes, these are indeed faith-stirring times. In this magazine, we do our best to bring you information and understanding. We believe that bigotry and ignorance from the Christian community are far more damaging to the cause of the gospel than all the cleverly constructed attacks from outside.

There is much that is happening in this complex modern world to stir your faith. But nothing that need shake it. ●

1 *Message Bible*, Luke 14:31-32.

2 For example, *Dawkin's God* and *The Twilight of Atheism*, both by Alister McGrath.

3 For example, *The Language of God*, by Francis Cousins, Director of the Human Genome project.

4 *Cities of God* and *The Rise of Christianity*, by Rodney Stark.

5 *Message Bible*, Jeremiah 9:23-24.





Immortality: The “Mother of All Changes”

By Paul Kroll

There’s nothing certain in life except death and taxes, goes the old saying. Taxes we might be able to deal with by making more money or getting government to lower them... but death? What can we do about death? Well, not much—nothing, in fact.

That's why the hope of all Christians is to live again—and live forever—by a resurrection from death, an event the Bible says is to occur at Jesus Christ's return. But this brings up an intriguing question: What kind of body will God provide for us? If you've ever wondered about this, you can be sure you are not the first. In fact, there's a discussion of the "body question" in the New Testament where the apostle Paul tried to enlighten his parishioners in Corinth.

In this letter, after explaining that the dead in Christ would indeed be resurrected to immortal life, Paul asked: "But someone may ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?'" (1 Corinthians 15:35).

If we are Christians who believe in the resurrection of the dead, then we already believe, by faith, that with God all things are possible—that, though we die, we will live again in the resurrection. I got to thinking of a fascinating analogy from nature that might help us see that all things are possible with God—the dead can live again! I'm speaking of nature's marvel of metamorphosis. The word simply means "change of form."¹

A stunning marvel

If you know anything about the life history of a moth or butterfly, you know it undergoes complete



body and nature, will have metamorphosed or changed into a new form of life, a moth. This "death" of the hornworm, its intermediate existence in a cocoon and then the "resurrection" of a moth is a profound and moving sight to see!

Mortal to immortal in resurrection

Now, I'm going to suggest an analogy between metamorphosis in nature and the "metamorphosis" in resurrection that will occur to those in Christ when he breaks yet again into our history in visible glory and power.

I don't mean to say that the resurrection is like natural metamorphoses, of course. The worm and the metamorphosed butterfly and moth are both physical and mortal creatures. They both die. In the hornworm's pupa stage its caterpillar structures are reorganized and replaced by those typical of the Carolina Sphinx moth (see box). But our metamorphosis at Christ's return will occur because God gives us a transformed, spiritual body, not another mortal or physical body that develops

out of the old physical body, as in natural metamorphosis. The dead in Christ will be called forth by the power of God and given new bodies. This will be the mother of all metamorphoses!

Nevertheless, natural metamorphosis is intriguing in that it can point beyond itself to God's work with us in the resurrection. The worm ceases to be a worm and lies dormant in a pupal cell in which it finds new, metamorphosed life as a moth or butterfly. We human beings first live a physical, mortal human life. Then we die, awaiting the coming of the Lord, at which time we will receive spiritual bodies.

Thinking about the "new body"

So what kind of bodies will God provide for us in the resurrection? Paul answered the question by explaining the process with the help of another analogy from the natural world: "What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else" (verses 36-37).

Yes, that is a marvel. A field of wheat from a handful of seeds. A mighty oak tree coming from a tiny

“Our metamorphosis at Christ's return will occur because God gives us a transformed, spiritual body, not another mortal, physical body.”

metamorphosis. It gets a completely new body. You can see this for yourself. Take the eggs of a moth or butterfly—let us say, tobacco hornworm eggs (about the size of a pinhead)—and place them on leaves that they would eat.

Watch over time as the eggs hatch into larvae, each measuring about half an inch in length. The larvae will grow quickly as they gorge themselves on the leaves. At full maturity about three weeks after hatching, the hornworm caterpillar larvae will be about three inches long.

Each hornworm will then wrap itself in a cocoon that it creates under a thin layer of soil. After a time, the chrysalis with its brown color and varnished-like finish will begin cracking and out will struggle, not a worm, but a completely different life form—a Carolina Sphinx moth.

One form of life, with a distinctive caterpillar

What happens in a chrysalis?

Have you ever thought of a butterfly as a caterpillar with wings? Think again. What happens inside a chrysalis is a wonder of creation, and a striking analogy for the transformation from mortality to immortality that is the hope of all Christians.

When the caterpillar has eaten enough, it finds somewhere safe and spins itself a cocoon. It then molts its outer skin, secreting a new covering that is much thicker and stronger. In this form it cannot eat, excrete and usually does not move. To all outside appearances it looks dead. But it is far from lifeless. Inside, a miracle of transformation begins to take place.

The first thing that happens is that most of the caterpillar's old body dies. Enzymes are released that digest all the caterpillar tissue, so that the cater-

pillar is converted into a rich organic soup. It actually digests itself from the inside out—a process called “histolysis.” However, not all the old tissue is destroyed. In a number of places in the insect's body are collections of special embryonic cells, called “imaginal buds” or “histoblasts.” Until now they played no part in the insect's life. These cells start developing early in the caterpillar's life, but then they stall, remaining inert in the caterpillar's body. As soon as metamorphosis gets under way, these cells start growing again.

The job of these imaginal bud cells is to supervise the building of a new body out of the soup that the insect's digestive juices have made of the old larval body. One will become a wing; others form the legs, the antennae and all the organs of the adult

butterfly. In this way, the entire internal contents of the caterpillar—the muscles, the digestive system, even the heart and nervous system—is totally rebuilt.

What eventually emerges out of the chrysalis is not just a caterpillar with wings. It is a new creature, no longer confined to crawling around and preoccupied with eating. Although the potential to become a butterfly is inherent in the caterpillar's old body, the change cannot happen until the old creature in effect dies. Then, and only then, the wonderful process of metamorphosis begins to unfold, until eventually, a totally new kind of creature emerges from the “tomb.”

Borne aloft on its beautiful wings, the butterfly can experience life in a way a caterpillar could not begin to imagine.



acorn! A worm buried in a tomb-like cocoon reappears as a different life form, with a totally different body.

That's analogous to what will happen to us in the resurrection of the dead. Paul explains: “The body that is sown is perishable [our present state], it is raised imperishable... it is sown a natural body, *it is raised a spiritual body*” (verses 43–44, italics mine).

The metamorphosed body we are to receive will be a “spiritual body.” Paul didn't say we receive a nonmaterial, spirit body, but a “spiritual body.” So what did he mean by the phrase? The Greek word is *pneumatikos*, like in a pneumatic or air-filled tire. *Pneumatikos*, “spiritual,” means in a general sense, to exist in a manner corresponding with

or appropriate to the Spirit. That doesn't tell us anything specific about the make-up of spiritual bodies.

Another apostle, John, also understood that there's no explaining what our metamorphosed bodies or life will be like in the resurrection except in general terms: “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

The same but not the same

Our post-resurrection “spiritual” existence will be decisively different from our present fleshly, earthly

existence. Yet, a singular continuity will exist within this fundamental discontinuity. We will still be ourselves “on the other side,” but fully regenerated in nature and immortal in body.

New bodies for old

So what is it exactly that our changed—metamorphosed—new bodies will have that they do not possess now? Paul again explains: “Listen, I tell you a mystery.... The dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality” (Corinthians 15:50-53). Yes, the mortal will be clothed with or put on immortality. Continuity, but also fundamental discontinuity.

Resurrection bodies will be imperishable and immortal. Think about it. None of our present fleshly weaknesses will exist. Never to be tired. Never to be thirsty or hungry. Never to be sick and in pain. Never to suffer from anxieties and fears. Never to sin. Never to die.

Paul knew what it meant to suffer deprivation and pain in this temporal, physical body, which is our present heritage. He longed to rest in peace, waiting for the resurrection: “Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.... For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life” (2 Corinthians 5:1-4).

The book of Revelation exults in this time after the resurrection, when we will have new bodies: “God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (21:3-4). God’s gift to us of a new spiritual and immortal body and a mind and heart regenerated and perfected through Christ and in the Holy Spirit will make all this possible.

Scripture testifies to our human experience that physical human bodies grow old and infirm, become sick and pained, decay and die. It also testifies that in the resurrection we will receive a new body from God that will give us true and eternal freedom and joy.

All creation anticipates the day when it will join God’s children in glorious freedom from death and decay. For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pangs of childbirth right up to the present time. And even we Christians, although we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, also groan to be released from pain and suffering “We, too, wait anxiously for that day when God will give us our full rights as his children, including the new bodies he has promised us.” (Romans 8:21-23, New Living Translation).

A new body in which to live forever in a restored world, where nothing will ever go wrong again. It is indeed the mother of all changes. ●

The Random House Dictionary of the English Language defines *metamorphosis* in biological terms as a “profound change in form from one stage to the next in the life history of an organism.”

In Other Words

Advice to husbands from a nomadic tribe

By James R. Henderson

The Tuareg, once a nomadic tribe in the Sahara, but now living mostly in Western Africa, have a saying: “*Ur é erz aw Adem akus wa day y isass.*” It means literally, “Man, don’t break the vase from which you drink.” But it’s used to convey the thought that your wife is precious, so don’t in any way abuse her.

In the Bible we are told to “be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life” (1 Peter 3:7). In other words, knowing that your wife may be physically weaker than you and that she is your equal partner spiritually, hold her in high respect and treat her accordingly.

What is your attitude toward your wife? Do you surround her with caring compassion? Do you love her with kindness and gentleness, always taking good care of her? ●



“If you really had repented...”

By Mike Feazell

“If you had really repented, you wouldn’t have done it again” is a refrain many tormented souls have heard from well-meaning preachers. We are told that repentance is to “turn around and go the other way,” and it is explained in the context of turning away from sin and turning toward a life of obedience to God’s law.

Christians set out with the best of intentions to change their ways. Some ways change, but other ways stick like super-glue. Even the ways that seem to have changed have a nasty way of cropping up again.

And just when we are feeling frustrated and depressed about our failure to measure up to the high standards of God, we hear another sermon or read another article about how “real repentance” results in a complete turning away from sin. So, we crank up the commitment jalopy and go at it again, with the same, miserable, predictable results. And our frustration and despair deepens, because we realize that our turning away from sin is anything but “complete.”

We can only assume we have not “really repented.” Our repentance was not “deep” enough, or “heartfelt” enough or “true” enough. And if we have not really repented, then we must not really have faith. Which means we must not really have the Holy Spirit. Which means we must not really be saved.

Finally, we either get used to living like that, or, as many have done, we throw in the towel.

Two sides of the same coin

Repentance and faith mark the beginning of our new life in the kingdom of God. But they don’t mark it because we did the “right thing.” They mark it because that is when the scales fall off our eyes and we see in Jesus Christ the glorious light of the gospel (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Everything that ever needed to be done for forgiveness and salvation has already been done through the death and resurrection of the Son of God (Romans 5:10; Ephesians 2:1-10). There was a time when we were in the dark about that. But when we turn to God in faith, all that changes.

Faith and repentance go hand in hand. When you put your trust in God, two things happen. You real-

ize you are a sinner who needs God’s mercy, and you decide to trust God to save you and redeem your life. In other words, when you put your trust in God, you have also repented.

Belief, or faith, is part and parcel with repentance. In Acts 2:38, Peter told the crowd, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” By saying, “repent,” he was also implying “believe,” or “trust.”

Later in the story, Peter puts it this way: “Repent, then, and turn to God...” (Acts 3:19). This turning to God is a turning away from yourself. It does not mean you will now be morally perfect. It means you have turned away from selfish ambition as the driving purpose of your life, and instead put your trust in Christ, and your hope in his word, his good news, his declaration in his own blood of your redemption, forgiveness,

“This turning to God means you have turned away from selfish ambition, and instead put your trust in Christ.”



resurrection and eternal inheritance. Now you begin to live for him, and you begin to put the needs of others ahead of your own (Philippians 2:3-5).

Say “Yes!” to God’s “Yes!”

God has declared an almighty, thundering, eternal “Yes!” to you through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Repentance is your saying “Yes!” to God’s “Yes!” It is turning to God to accept his blessed gift, his righteous declaration of your innocence and salvation in Christ.

To trust God in this redemptive way is utterly life-changing. It frees us for obedience from the heart, obedience rooted in love rather than obedience rooted in fear of punishment. And whenever we fall short, we can rest in his relentless love and get back in the race, knowing he will never let us go.

God is on our side; he’s proven it in Jesus Christ. And because he’s on our side, nothing can come between him and us (Romans 8:31-39).

Trust him. It’s his good news for all of us. He is the Word, and he knows what he is talking about. ●



By Lila Docken Bauman

In my city a few years ago, a woman started out from home with her two young sons to visit their grandmother. As they crested a hill, an impaired driver with a suspended license crossed the center lane and collided with her car. As frequently happens in these scenarios, he survived. The mother did, too. But her husband had to tell her, as she lay struggling for survival in intensive care, that both their boys had died in the crash.

Taking a moment to absorb the devastating news, the mother, a Christian, looked up at her husband and asked, “Have you told the other driver we forgive him?” Yes, he had—while his wife lay in a coma a few days before.

These parents extended God’s grace as their first response to a tragic injustice. They were not theologians, yet they understood one of the toughest concepts Christians must face.

Forgiveness is more than merely an ideal Chris-

The Problem of *Forgiveness*

tian virtue; it penetrates to the very heart of life. Jesus brought up the subject repeatedly and with great urgency in his ministry. It becomes clear as you read through the New Testament that when we forgive each other’s trespasses, we reflect and participate in the divine character of God, who for the sake of Jesus has also forgiven us (Matthew 5, Ephesians 4:32-5:2).

Judging from the gospel’s message of forgiveness and reconciliation, the whole point of creation and of salvation is relationship. This does not mean that pursuing a relationship with an offender in this life is always possible, or advisable. It means that even before humanity became alienated from God because of sin, God in his love launched his plan to reconcile humans to himself, and to each other (1 Peter 1:20). The cross of Jesus vividly teaches that forgiveness lies at the heart of reconciliation.

Theologically, that makes sense. But then someone hurts you—really violates you or yours—and things seem murkier. You ask: Doesn’t forgiving this person

mean that I am justifying what they did? Isn't forgiving them, in essence, letting them get away with it?

Good question, but the answer is no. Your forgiveness has nothing to do with the natural consequences of sin taking their course. Sin is ultimately against God, and it is God's job to deal with the sins of others, not ours. Our act of forgiveness is an act of humility, our recognition that we too need God's mercy, and an act of love, extending to others what God has already extended to us. It is also an act of faith, of turning completely over to God our need, our right, for retribution, for getting even, and believing that God will deal with it in his own time and fashion.

When we hear the story of the parents who forgave the impaired driver who killed their young sons, or of the six Amish families who issued an immediate statement of forgiveness after losing their daughters to a crazed gunman, it is natural to ask: Don't they need to grieve first? Is it even possible for a victim to forgive that quickly? I believe it is possible, and that their forgiveness was the real deal.

Grieving takes time; it unfolds layer by layer, and it allows us to heal emotionally and physically after deep hurts. If you have ever grieved a loss—whether a death, a failed relationship, a lost job or the loss of your health—you know grief can include denial, waves of wrenching anger, numbness, sadness, bargaining and depression before acceptance of the loss ever comes.

Forgiveness is different. Forgiveness involves handing over injustice to the perfect and faithful Judge (Psalm 9), because trying to carry the burden yourself will destroy you—you were not designed to bear that kind of weight. Forgiveness involves accepting that God knows details you could never guess. It involves letting him take care of the situation because he is the most capable to do it right, and it involves getting on with the future he has prepared for you. Forgiveness involves knowing that there is more to living than just this present life.

Feelings can take a while to catch up. You might have to keep taking the hurt back to God for a while and say: "I gave this to you. I have forgiven. Please take it."

During my last months of graduate school, I received a letter from my college loan company. The letter informed me that the company had sold my debt burden to another company. I no longer owed the original company even a penny of the thousands of dollars I had borrowed. They wished me well with my future, officially washing

their hands of my debt. It was just a standard business notice, but I recognized a lightness behind the words. I still owed money, but not to them. They had freed themselves of being responsible for my debt. In that moment I understood something of the nuts and bolts of how to forgive.

When a mother, or a community, declares, "I have forgiven," it doesn't mean they will not grieve. It doesn't mean they have condoned evil. It doesn't mean they will not stand up against the horror of crimes against the innocent.

It means they give over the debt to God before revenge has a chance to take root in their hearts. They are saying, "It ends here." They then work out their grief cradled in God's arms. Imagine how civil wars and ethnic clashes and lingering regional hatreds might have looked now if someone, some community, way back when, had handed their burden off to God and said, "It ends here. God will work this out with them—I will no longer carry this."

“Your forgiveness has nothing to do with the natural consequences of sin taking their course. It is God's job to deal with the sins of others, not ours.”

The truth is, a lot is still owed to victims in a material way, and God does not expect a community or individual to tolerate injustice and wrong. A person who has faced institutional discrimination and humiliation his or her whole life can forgive while still working to make the institution accountable and just. And to the people, says Scripture, who fail to protect the weak, to provide for the needs of every member, and to fight injustice.

God made this promise: He will right all wrongs. When I read the last two chapters of Revelation I find myself in the midst of a vision where God wipes away every tear. "These sayings are faithful and true," announces an angel of the God who holds time in his palm.

I believe that the young boys' parents and the Amish families were able to extend forgiveness because they trusted God's faithfulness. They understood the difference between living under the bitter and crushing burden of unforgiveness, and living in the freedom that comes from entrusting one's hurts to the transforming light of God's grace. ●



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Facing up to Autism

By Judith Foyabo

Before my son was born, I had a few friends who had children with autism. But I had no clue what it really meant, other than that some of those children were very hard to control.

At 19 months, my son was diagnosed with autism. Autism is a developmental disorder that affects communication, social, sensory and emotional interaction in a toddler before the age of three. The causes are highly debatable if not controversial. It is believed to be caused by genetic and/or environmental factors.

When our son was diagnosed, we were devastated, although I had suspected something was wrong. At 19 months, he was at the developmental age of 0 to 3 months in cognition, language and communication skills. A diagnosis at this early age meant his symptoms were severe, but it was positive in that early intervention could help.

With no known cause or cure, the future looked bleak. One of his therapists advised us to just keep trying every day to teach him, although it could take months or years before he could say a word or two.

I went to a seminar for parents of newly diagnosed autistic children and left in tears. I sent a note to my minister's wife telling her of the diagnosis and asking for help. After a church service, several elders prayed for him. Brethren, friends and family also prayed for him, and God has given us a measure of hope and comfort.

With intensive therapy, our son is now able to speak, and his tantrums and moods have reduced, but autism still has no cure and therapy is expensive. My husband had to make a video presentation of my son's progress in order to secure funding for the therapies.

I am very grateful to be in this country where great medical breakthroughs can make an unknown or rare disorder manageable. In some developing countries, due to lack of awareness and education, coupled with traditional beliefs, many disabled people face neglect. Disabled children in some areas are regarded as objects of the gods' disfavor and are abandoned. Those who survive often end up living on the streets. This has led my sister and me to start a nonprofit foundation called The Foundation for Orphaned, Abandoned and Disabled African Children (FOADAC), a foundation that takes care of some of these abandoned and disabled children. If you would like to know more about it, please visit our web site at www.foadac.org. ●

“With intensive therapy, our son is now able to speak, and his tantrums and moods have reduced, but autism still has no cure and therapy is expensive.”

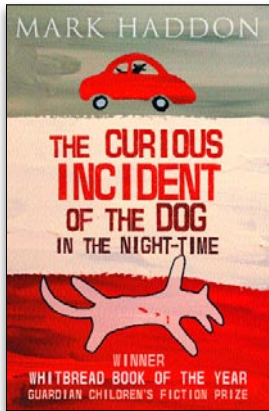
The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

by Mark Haddon

Reviewed by Victoria Feazell

A friend sent me a copy of the novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon. I thoroughly enjoyed the read.

The book provides a simple yet insightful look into the mind of a young person with high-functioning autism through his telling of events in his life from his own perspective. As he recounts his story, he allows the reader to become aware of family issues facing parents whose children have autism.



Although it is a fictional account, it is based on knowledge of many of the unique behaviors that people with autism often display.

As a special education teacher who has had the opportunity to teach students with mild autism, I found the novel based on reality, and reading it gave me a broader understanding of the challenges faced by children with autism and their families. I would recommend the book to anyone looking for a good read and wanting to become more enlightened about autism in the process. ●

Mark Haddon, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, New York: Vintage Books, 2004.



Dumpy, Dumpy moments

By David Harstin

In an effort not to disturb my slumber, my wife quietly slipped through the house trying not to let light from other rooms and the sounds of stirring children wake me. But her rustling and a two-year-old calling “da-DEE” woke me anyway. I grabbed my T-shirt on the nightstand and covered my eyes to block out the early morning sunlight in a futile attempt to sleep a little more. “Just a few more minutes,” I thought. So began another day in the life of a “Mr. Mom” home daddy.

Excuse me, while I pause to read my 2-year-old The Dumpy Dumpy Book. (That’s 2-year-old for The Humpty Dumpty Book.) Sorry for the interruption, but she asked, “Peas?” Just a moment...

...As a home daddy, I spend most days doing housework and tending to my children’s needs. Today has been especially frazzling because my first grader stayed home with a fever and upset stomach. So, besides reading *The Dumpy Dumpy Book*, changing four diapers, cleaning the kitchen, doing the laundry, vacuuming, preparing lunch for the family in advance of my wife bringing our middle child home from preschool and starting to write this article, I’ve also been Doctor Dad—taking temps and giving hugs.

Why am I sharing the details of my day with you?

Because of a discussion I heard on a morning news show. Three professional women were reviewing a book that asserts that most men don’t help with the housework.

I know some men come home from work, eat supper, and then sink into their recliners, remote in hand, until bedtime. However, “I’ve looked at life from both sides now,” and I believe such blanket allegations about either spouse are unproductive.

Busy all the time

For several years, I was the breadwinner while my wife was the homemaker. Still, I often cooked supper, washed dishes, and spent time with my children after work. I also performed those husbandly duties that wives generally avoid. I took out the garbage. I mowed our acre of grass. If anything broke around the house or on the cars, I fixed it. That’s not all. I held a part-time job to make ends meet, performed in community theater productions and served my church as worship leader. I was busy all the time.

Based on my experience and that of other couples I know, I think staying busy is the reality for most of us. In most families, husbands and wives work outside the home. Add obligations to church and community, getting children safely to their activities, tending to the home and squeezing in a little personal time, many barely have time for each other. We’re always on the run, taking care of things the best we can. But are we really?

My point is that life for many of us is simply out of

The Unclean Woman

By Joyce Catherwood

Mark 5:21-42

People cautiously stepped aside when I walked by. Most were disgusted by my presence. I was the unclean woman. For 12 years I suffered from a hemorrhage of blood. Anyone who touched me or touched anything I touched, was considered unclean until evening, then required to wash their clothes and bathe with water. Initially, a few had pity on me, willing to perform the rituals after having contact with me. But that quickly grew tiresome for my family and friends. Plus, there was the lingering foul odor and untidiness of it all. It was easier for people to avoid me. Doctors didn't know how to treat my disease and often the "cure" was humiliating and painful, worse than the illness. The cost of treatments left me in poverty. I felt abandoned and useless.

Then Jesus arrived in our town. The afflicted and hopeless whispered his name with deep affection. He offered healing of mind and body and soul, a new beginning. I dreamed of being whole again, doing the normal things women do.

I searched the neighborhoods and found Jesus surrounded by men, women and children, all wanting to see his face, to receive healing and a promise of better things. My heart soared. I was caught up in the excitement and decided if I could just touch his garment, somehow that would be enough. Then I noticed Jairus, a prominent synagogue leader, was with Jesus. They were on their way to Jairus' house because his daughter was dying. My hopes shattered. Touching Jesus' clothing as I planned would render him ritually impure and he would not be allowed to enter Jairus' home. But I was desperate and instantly convinced myself he wouldn't know who touched him. As he passed by, I stooped down and reached for him, barely touching the fringe of his robe. I felt a surge of healing and strength! Breathless, I struggled to my feet and backed away.

Jesus immediately asked: "Who touched me?" I froze. He repeated the question. I wanted to run but instead fell at his feet, terrified because he had caught me. Sobbing and choking on my words, I poured out my story.

There was no rebuke, no scolding for delaying and defiling him. Instead Jesus praised my faith and said, "Take heart, daughter, you are free from your suffering!" But as he spoke, a servant ran up with the news that Jairus' little girl had died. I swallowed hard, thinking I had selfishly delayed Jesus, causing a synagogue ruler's only child to die. I feared retribution from Jairus, but Jesus reassured him, saying: "Don't be afraid. Just believe." Soon after, Jesus raised Jairus' daughter from the dead! The master graciously delivered us both!

What a glorious time I had returning to normal living. No more hiding in the shadows. No more shame and rejection. For the first time in 12 years, I embraced life and all those around me! ●

balance. As a result, we feel isolated, even among family and friends. We push aside our personal and spiritual needs, and our vision turns inward. We develop the false perception of "Why is it that I do everything around here?"

Earning an income, doing household chores, and tending to our children's needs are our parental responsibilities. But to have more fulfilling lives, each of us needs a healthy level of recreation, community involvement and private time. An overabundance of these, however, may detract from our real quality of life. That depends on the value we place on our marriage and time spent with our children—on making sure we take time to know and enjoy each other.

The Martha syndrome

Too many women *and* men are like Martha. You remember her. She was the disciple who invited Jesus into her home. In her enthusiasm, she became absorbed in tending to her household responsibilities. Then she noticed her sister, Mary, enjoying time with the guest of honor. Starting to despair, Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

Jesus replied, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:38-42).

Many of us are in danger of losing the "better" part of our lives, because we've become too absorbed in *busyness* and sometimes forget the need for togetherness. We need to reflect upon what we really value in life in light of the things to which we give so much attention—our careers, household chores or personal interests and activities.

Becoming a home daddy is not something that I planned to do. After losing my "dream job," my wife found work before I did. Unable to bear the thought of leaving our two younger children with a sitter or in a daycare facility, I chose to stay home for them. At this time in their lives, I believe they need my attention more than an employer does.

Today and every day, I have housework to do. There's laundry to wash, dry and put away. (I just leave the machines on the "never-ending" cycle.) Our house is not ready for a dinner party, but Jesus doesn't mind. Loving each other and letting some things go for a while allows me to focus on the better part of my life that Jesus talked about.

Considering my time as chief cook and bottle washer, I can say that I truly have appreciated spending time with my children. That doesn't mean I will cherish memories of housework and dirty diapers after I return to the work force. But I will always hold in my heart those "dumpy dumpy" moments, which will not be taken away. ●



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Getting it back to front

By John Halford

Although I was born in England, I have lived quite contentedly in the USA for many years. But there is something about many Americans' backyards that leave me feeling uncomfortable. They don't have fences.

"Good fences make good neighbors," as the saying goes. But I notice that many American neighbors seem to get along without them. Both my daughters live in Ohio, in beautiful homes on big lots in nice neighborhoods. Out back is an expanse of well-kept lawn that blends seamlessly with the next-door properties. This has its advantages. Children can run free, and there are no awkward "can we have our ball back?" confrontations. But I always feel a bit exposed. I like my backyard to be clearly demarcated with a good solid fence or a hedge, or ideally both. That's how they do it across the pond.

Front yards in America often tell the same story. No walls or fences—just an unbroken stretch of neat lawns with a couple of trees and some individualistic landscaping here and there for variety.

I do think that's better. In Britain we like to fence off our front yards too—no matter how small they are. Even if it is just a patch of lawn the size of a small rug, surrounded by

narrow flower beds, we will still often add a chesthigh wall or hedge and a barred gate to seal it off from the outside world. The Englishman's home is his castle, and any self-respecting castle has to have walls.

Castles maybe—but churches? Churches, like British front and backyards, seem to like to separate themselves with walls. Congregations of different denominations in the same town, or even the same street, often have nothing to do with each other. Often the biggest hurdle to joint projects is just getting the local pastors and priests to sit at the same table, let alone darken each other's doors.

There are exceptions. I belong to our local Ministerial Association, along with ministers from Baptist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist and Pentecostal congregations. We all get along pretty well, but we do have to respect each other's space.

Perhaps that is the key. Denominations are like families, and they have developed their own ways of doing things. One Christian's tradition may be another's "heresy." I don't just mean major doctrinal and theological differences. It is often minor sociological variations that keep churches apart; things like speaking in tongues, clapping during the hymns or how they "do" baptism and communion.

Those differences need to be respected. Eager evangelists urge Christians to "come out of our comfort zones." And so we should, but not all the time. A church is to some extent a refuge (it is, after all, called a sanctuary), and if those who come there are made to feel continually uncomfortable, they will go somewhere else. Anglicans, Methodists, Catholics, Baptists, Pentecostals and other Christian churches are different, and they need places to be themselves. They need, so to speak, *British-style* backyards.

But what about out front? Here is where we could learn something from our American townscapes.



The open lawns and lack of fussy dividing fences turn what would otherwise be a row of houses into an inviting neighborhood.

Why do Christians, who essentially believe

the same things and face a common challenge, find it so hard to work together? Why should what others do to worship God pose a threat? Certainly Jesus prayed that the church be "one." But that did not necessarily mean "one size fits all." To work together with other Christians need not mean abandoning the traditions that make *your* church your spiritual home.

So enjoy your spiritual backyard. But surely at this time when the whole idea of Christianity is under threat, we need to blend our front yards into a more inviting neighborhood. Yes, even if those who visit do not end up knocking on *our* door. Is it not time that more of us knocked down some of those silly walls, and gave the hedge a severe pruning? We owe the world a better view of our beautiful Christian neighborhood. Is what those folks across the street do really so awful that you can't work with them? ●

Still small voices

By Shirley Henderson



I was recently asked to be one of several guest speakers at a women's conference in South Africa. It was clear that a lot of planning, preparation and prayer went into the presentations. Some were polished, some were full of humor, some were thought-provoking, some were all of the above. All of us who spoke wanted God to speak through us.

One speaker mentioned Elijah's experience with God on Mount Horeb, and how God was not in the powerful wind, nor the earthquake, nor the fire, but instead God was in the small still voice. Another speaker discussed the topic of listening for God in the silence.

Interestingly, that is what happened at the conference. We guest speakers were polished, prepared and politic in our presentations. Some of us shouted, some quoted Scripture, some leaped or otherwise put on an impressive performance. But did the weight of our quoting Scripture generate the wind in which we would find God? Did the leaping antics and mimicry create the earthquake that would shake us to our foundations?

I'm not saying God was not in those things, but for me the voice of God was in the still small voice of one woman who stood up unprepared and spoke from her heart to the hearts of everyone there.

This woman was from Zimbabwe. She, along with seven other women from Zimbabwe, had traveled long and hard by bus, even crossing national borders, to join the conference. When asked about how our brothers and sisters in Zimbabwe were faring in the midst of the turmoil that has gripped that country, she smiled and said, "I don't think the church in Zimbabwe has ever been so strong."

The still small voice of faith!

She then proceeded to tell us about the blessings that

God has showered upon the church there: people helping one another out in times of crisis; needs being met through unexpected circumstances; members and congregations seeking ways and means to do mission outreach; spiritual growth in times of physical dearth.

But for me the most inspiring and humbling feature was that before she even began to speak, she asked us to join her in prayer. The first thing she did, before sharing what was happening in her country, was to offer her thanks and praise to God. When she finished telling us of the events happening in the churches in Zimbabwe, she offered up praise to our Lord for his abundant mercy once again. Her first and last thought in talking about the plight of our Zimbabwean brothers and sisters was in looking to the things that are above.

Her view of the Zimbabwean churches' situation wasn't the severe food shortages or the astronomical inflation that has made money virtually meaningless, nor the infrastructure that is scarcely recognizable as a structure. Instead her view was on the blessings that God has bestowed on them through spiritual growth and of individuals stepping up to shoulder the job of feeding the sheep.

She spoke with excitement of the baptism in one day of 60 people—people who had walked miles to a river to be baptized. She told how the women's ministry in Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi will be celebrating their tenth annual retreat next year. That's stepping out in faith.

Despite all the polished, well-prepared presentations, the real highlight of the conference was the message of positives in the face of a mountain of negatives brought by the ladies from Zimbabwe. In their "still, small voice" they modeled hope and faith and enthusiasm for us all. ●

Billy Graham

Evangelist to the World

By Paul Kroll

“My one purpose in life is to help people find a personal relationship with God, which, I believe, comes through knowing Christ.”

—Billy Graham

Graham’s evangelistic tours in America and around the world have awakened many people to the need for a spiritual rebirth and a personal relationship with Jesus. It is estimated that some three million people have responded to Graham’s offer at the end of his campaign sermons to come forward and accept Christ.

Graham has reached countless other millions with the gospel of Christ through television specials, satellite crusades, radio ministries, motion pictures, a literature ministry and the books he has written. Training ministries and seminars have equipped thousands of grass-roots evangelists in large-scale and one-on-one evangelism.

Graham has met with the pope, the queen, several prime ministers and kings and celebrities. He has consulted and prayed with every U.S. president from Dwight Eisenhower to George Bush the younger. Graham has often been called on to serve as “America’s pastor,” helping to inaugurate or bury a president or otherwise lend a public voice of assurance in times of tragedy or crisis.



Early life and education

William Franklin (“Billy”) Graham, Jr. was born November 7, 1918, near Charlotte, North Carolina, the eldest of four children. His parents, committed Christians, regularly attended the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church with the children.

While attending revival meetings in Charlotte at age 16, Graham experienced conversion, committing his life to Christ. He changed his denominational affiliation to the Southern Baptist Convention in 1938 and was ordained the next year as a Baptist minister in the St. John’s River Association.

From 1936 through 1943, Graham attended three different Christian colleges. He stayed at the ultra-conservative Bob Jones College in Tennessee for only a few months, graduated from the Florida Bible Institute in 1940 with a Bachelor of Theology degree and from Wheaton College in Illinois in 1943 with a B.A. in anthropology.

At Wheaton he courted fellow student Ruth Bell. The couple married on August 13, 1943. After gradu-

ation, Graham served for a little over a year as the pastor of a Baptist church in the Chicago suburb of Western Springs.¹

In 1945 Graham became the field representative of a dynamic evangelistic movement, Youth for Christ International. For the next four years, Graham traveled throughout the United States, Canada and Europe speaking at rallies and organizing YFC chapters.

Evangelistic missions

Graham gained sudden national attention in 1949 with a seven-week tent revival campaign in downtown Los Angeles attended by 350,000. Graham said of the Los Angeles tent campaign: “Overnight we had gone from being a little evangelistic team...to what appeared to many to be the hope for national and international revival.”²

In part, Graham gained national attention because newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst instructed his newspapers across the country to “puff Graham.” Other newspapers and the Associated Press also picked up the story of his evangelistic rally. Newsreels of the campaign began to appear in theaters.

Graham launched his worldwide ministry with his 1954 London campaign, supported by a thousand churches in the greater metropolitan area. More than two million people heard Graham speak during his three-month-long series of sermons, and thousands came to Christ. The outstanding success of the Greater London Crusade³ helped establish the validity and scope of Graham’s international ministry.

Graham’s stunningly successful 1957 New York City evangelistic campaign established him as the acknowledged standard-bearer for evangelical Christianity. At the 16-week rally in New York City, almost 2.4 million people packed Madison Square Garden and other venues and events to hear the young preacher.

It is estimated that 96 million people saw at least one of the Madison Square Garden meetings on television. “That experience showed us that God was opening the door to a new medium for the furtherance of the Gospel,” said Graham.⁴

Those are but three examples of hundreds of evangelistic campaigns through the decades that Graham has organized and led. He has preached the gospel to more people in more nations and territories before live audiences than anyone else in history—more than 210

The Billy Graham Library

The Billy Graham Library in Charlotte, North Carolina, was officially dedicated on May 31, 2007. Located on the grounds of the international headquarters of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA), it opened to the public on June 5.

Though ill and infirm, 88-year-old Billy Graham was on hand for the festivities and briefly addressed the 1,500 guests. Former presidents George H.W. Bush, Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton also spoke at the opening of the \$27 million dollar, 40,000-square-foot complex.

Graham's son, Franklin, explained the purpose of the Library, pointing out that his father didn't want "too much of Billy Graham in it." He wanted it to reflect the message of the gospel he had preached for 60 years. Graham, speaking from in front of the Library, repeated this hope in his address. "The building behind me is just a building," he said. "It's an instrument; it's a tool of the gospel."

The Library complex includes state-of-the art, innovative multimedia exhibits, a theater, bookstore and rustic café. Visitors will take an inspiring and exciting tour through six decades of the evangelistic work of Billy Graham and the BGEA, bringing the gospel to people of all walks of life. The cavernous lobby of the structure is styled after a dairy barn to highlight Graham's upbringing on a farm only four miles away.

The Library is open to the public free of charge. For information about the library, please visit the website www.billygraham.org/BGLibrary_Index.asp.

million people in over 185 nations.

Creating a sure footing for evangelism

As Graham's fame increased, so did criticism of his evangelistic style. Some branded him a real-life "Elmer Gantry" preacher, after the 1925 Sinclair Lewis novel and 1960 film about a salesman who teams up with a female evangelist to sell religion to America in the 1920s.

To counter such complaints he knew were sure to come, early on in 1948, Graham and his associates created "The Modesto Manifesto." They determined to avoid behavior that failed to reflect Christian values and which gave evangelists a bad name.

The Manifesto dealt with the problem of evangelists

falling into the trap of seeking financial self-enrichment and indulging in sexual immorality. Adherence to strict ethical standards allowed Graham to remain untouched by the sensational financial and sexual scandals that embroiled prominent television preachers during the 1980s.

Fundamentalists would accuse Graham of corrupting the gospel message by accepting help and support from mainline Protestant denominations and liberal Christian clergy. Despite the criticism, he was determined to seek a broad base of ecumenical support for his evangelistic campaigns. Graham once said, "I intend to go anywhere, sponsored by anybody, to preach the gospel of Christ, if there are no strings attached to my message."⁵

To enable his ministry to run on an orderly, business-like basis, Graham, his wife and a number of key people in his ministry incorporated as the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) in 1950.

What next for the BGEA

The heart of the BGEA program has always been the mass evangelistic mission events that Graham led with fellow evangelists and in partnership with churches around the world. They are now chiefly conducted by his son, William Franklin Graham III, who has stepped into his father's shoes as president of BGEA (since 2001).

Graham's evangelistic campaigns have always been meticulously planned and organized down to practical details such as recruiting choir members, ushers and counselors. The BGEA sends out teams of workers to assist communities planning to hold evangelistic meetings. The organization holds rallies only where they have been invited by a large number of local pastors and churches.

People coming forward to "accept Christ" at the evangelist's service-ending invitation meet with volunteer counselors, who refer them to participating pastors in their community. BGEA's follow-up programs have proved successful. According to surveys, 70-80 percent of those converted at evangelistic missions remain committed Christians.

In 1992 the BGEA announced that Graham had Parkinson's disease and would be less involved in mission activities. Today, he is no longer active in BGEA's day-to-day operations.

Despite his weakened physical condition, Billy Graham is still committed to preaching the gospel message with all the energy he can muster: "Whatever strength I have, whatever time God lets me have, is going to be dedicated to doing the work of an evangelist, as long as I live."⁶ ●

1 Graham and his late wife, Ruth, have lived in Montreat, North Carolina, since 1945. Ruth Bell Graham died at age 87 on June 14, 2007, at their home. They have three daughters, two sons, 19 grandchildren and many great grandchildren.
2 Billy Graham, *Just As I Am* (HarperCollins, 1997), p. 158.

3 Graham's evangelistic rallies, called "crusades" for many years, are now referred to as "missions."
4 *Just As I Am*, p. 323.
5 "Billy Graham: Evangelist to Millions," www.christianitytoday.com/history/special/131christians/graham.html.
6 *Ibid*.

Was Jesus Plan “B”?

By C. Baxter Kruger

The apostle Paul declares that the Father “predestined us to adoption as sons [and daughters] through Jesus Christ to Himself” (Ephesians 1:5). There are three huge points in this short declaration. The first is the idea of predestination, the second the purpose of our adoption, and the third is that this was planned to be accomplished through Jesus Christ.

Many are horrified by the idea of predestination, but it is actually at the heart of the gospel. For it means that we were known and loved, named and claimed by the Father himself before the foundation of the world. The Calvinists have done a hatchet job on predestination by limiting the Father’s heart and love to a select few, to the exclusion of others. But don’t let their error keep you from seeing that the Father himself loved you before he created the world and it has never crossed his mind to stop.

For Paul, the God who predestines is not the isolated, faceless, nameless, omni-being, or the cold, unapproachable, cosmic judge of our fallen imaginations. The God who predestines is Jesus’ Father. And this relationship is not sad or lonely or boring. This relationship is alive with other-centered love, with passion and fellowship. The Father’s purpose for us flows out of his relationship with his Son. So it is not surprising that Paul’s thinking moves from this relationship between the Father and the Son to our adoption. Could anything be more stunning than reading that we were predestined by Jesus’ Father to be adopted into his family?

A real relationship

Adoption means far more than being given legal status before a distant divine being. Status is not a bad thing, of course, but it is nowhere near real relationship. The gift to be given to us in adoption is nothing less than the Father himself. Read the verse again, “He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself.” What the Father desires is a real relationship with us, not mere legalities. He wants communion, fellowship, shared life, not religious and external obedience to a set of rules. He wants us to

know him and his love with his Son. His plan is to give us a real place in the life and fellowship and glory that he shares with his Son and Spirit. We are to be drawn in love and grace into the Trinitarian life of God. This is the truth that tells us how valuable and wanted and cherished we are.

When Paul glances back through history into eternity to find the rhyme and reason of it all, he sees the beautiful relationship between the Father, Son and Spirit and then he sees the decision to give us a personal place within it. That is what adoption means, and Paul tells us that this was the plan before the creation of the world. But as rich and beautiful and almost unbelievable as this news is, Paul adds one more revolutionary point.

Long before the creation

Who is responsible for bringing the Father’s dreams for us to fruition? Are we dealing here with a great dream of the Father for us but no strategy for its being worked out? Were the Father’s plans entrusted to Adam, to Israel, to the church? Note carefully what Paul says, “He predestined us to adoption as sons *through Jesus Christ*” (italics mine). Jesus’ coming is not plan “B” quickly thought up and implemented after the failure of plan “A” in Adam. Jesus is the original plan, the alpha and the omega, the eternal Word of God, the good shepherd appointed before the creation of the world.

What Paul is telling us is that the Father’s Son was “on the road to becoming flesh,” to borrow a phrase from the eminent Reformed theologian, Thomas F. Torrance, before the first particle of creation was called into being. The fall of Adam, the sin of humanity, the calling of Israel and the giving of the Law, all fall under the heading of “the coming of the Father’s Son.”

Before all these things happened in our history, God had purposed to make us his own through adoption by sending his Son, Jesus Christ, to make our redemption possible. Our faith rests “on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time” (Titus 1:2). ●



Dr. C. Baxter Kruger is the Director of Perichoresis Ministries and the President of Mediator Lures, which manufactures specialty fishing lures. For more information visit www.perichoresis.org.

“Not Long Now...”

By Kerry Gubb

Not long now,” the nurse says.
Can’t say I’ll be sorry
when it comes.

I don’t want to die. I
didn’t ask for this wretched cancer to eat
away my life and wrack my body with
pain.

So much pain.

So much.

They do what they can to mask the
stench of death enveloping me, but it never
fully works. I disgust myself. I hurt hor-
ribly.

So much pain.

So much.

They do what they can to ease it, but
the drugs leave me stupefied and incoher-
ent.

Is what I’m thinking now a single
stream of consciousness or am I still fad-
ing in and out, as I have done for weeks on
end?

“Not long now,” they tell me.

Good.

I don’t want to die, but I can’t endure
this much longer.

In the early stages I hoped for a
miracle that didn’t come. So I’ve done my
grieving this side of death. I don’t want
to leave those I love. Even now, they still
hope for a miracle. “Not long now” and I
will have left them, and their hope for a
miracle will mature into grief at my pass-
ing. I have sometimes thought it harder
to die in faith than to be rescued with a
miracle. “Not long now” and I’ll know for
sure.

All my life I’ve hated and feared this
enemy called death.

Everybody does.

But in the face of all this pain and
suffering, the thought of “not long now” is
almost a relief, an ironic source of hope.

It’s hard to think clearly when you’re
hurting.

There’s much in my mind and heart
about what lies beyond the grave. I’ve

walked with God for some time. Even
now, as I lie helpless in the valley of the
shadow of death, the Master holds my
hand in his.

It’s one thing to imagine this pending
moment when you’re young and healthy;
quite another now that it has arrived. I am
about to discover the truth or fallacy of all
I have learned in walking with him.

It’s here.

I can feel it.

In the corner stands a single long-
stemmed rose, brought by a friend.

So beautiful.

I’ll focus on it as I lapse again.

So beautiful ...

As I lapse

again ...

... and again ...

Not long now.

... and again ...

WHAT ON EARTH!?

A sudden surge of something wonder-
ful in an instant revives, relieves, rejuve-
nates, revitalizes me. Is this the miracle
my loved ones hoped and prayed for till
the very end? If it is, where’s my bed?
Where’s the rose? Why am I so indescrib-
ably happy? What’s happening...?

I feel different—whole—free—free
of pain. What happened to the pain? It
already seems like a distant memory, but it
was only seconds ago... or was it? Or was
it a lifetime? Somehow it does not seem
important. None of it now seems impor-
tant.

I feel alive—more alive than I have
ever felt before.

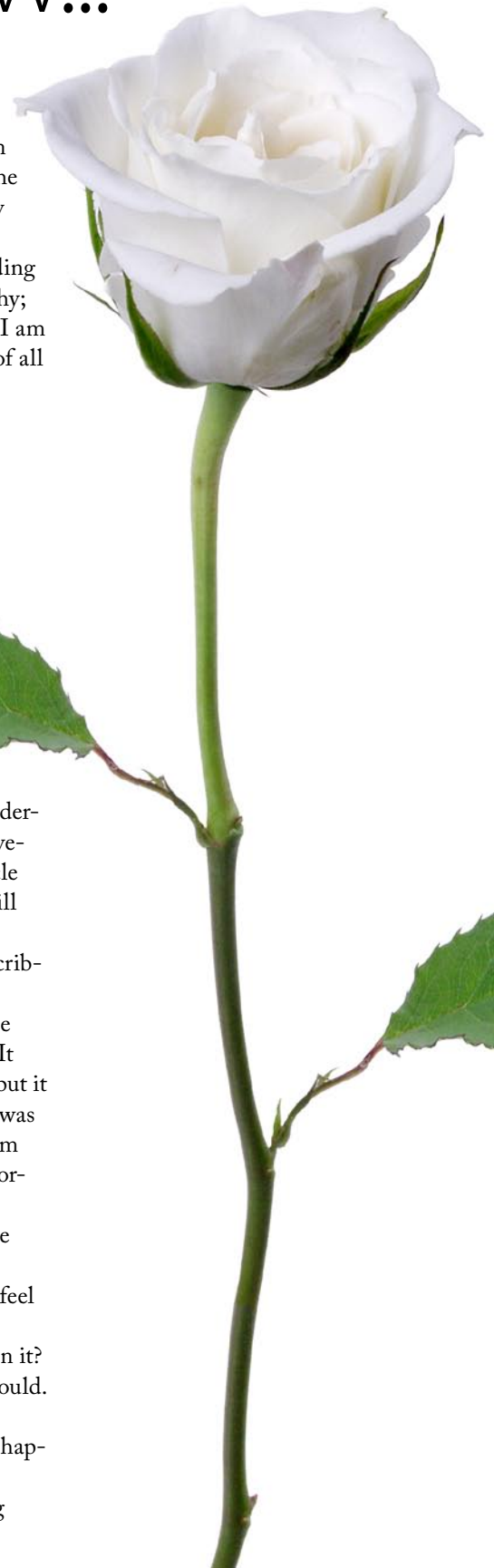
No more sorrow. No more pain. I feel
tears, but they are tears of joy.

It can’t get any better than this, can it?

It can. I know it will. He said it would.
I believe him!

I believed him in faith before this hap-
pened.

Now I cannot imagine ever having
doubted. ●



Relationships in and out of the Church

A study of Colossians 3:18–4:18

By Mike Morrison

In the last part of his epistle to the believers in Colosse, Paul describes the kind of conduct that is appropriate for people whose lives are “hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3). This is how Christ lives in his people in first-century Asia Minor.

Christian households

Paul includes brief comments for Christian marriages: **Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them** (3:18-19). Paul’s advice for women is typical for that time and culture, but his advice for husbands is unusual: It calls the men to self-sacrifice and puts limits on their authority.

Greek philosophers sometimes gave similar comments for wives, children and slaves—these are called “household codes.” The husband, father, and master were usually the same person; Paul gives instructions for him according to these three roles.

“Paul does not publicly call for an immediate end to slavery. But his teachings paved the way for eventual abolition.”

Paul’s next set of instructions is also brief: **Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged** (3:20–21). Paul addresses the children as morally responsible people who care about their relationship with the Lord. Fathers, who had primary responsibility for discipline, are warned to be careful in their role, and to consider the emotions of their children.

Paul’s advice for slaves is much more extensive: **Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord** (3:22).

Paul does not really mean “in everything.” If the masters told the slaves to stop believing in Christ, Paul would not want them to obey! He is speaking in generalities here, just as he did for wives and chil-

dren. Repeatedly, Paul connects his commands with the Lord. For slaves he says, “with...reverence for the Lord.” Our Master has something to say about the way we function in society.

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men (3:23). Slaves should work sincerely, not reluctantly, whether or not the master sees them. Their station in life, although far from ideal, is a way in which they can serve Christ. Paul does not publicly call for an immediate end to slavery—that would only invite persecution for something that was then politically impossible. But his teachings paved the way for eventual abolition.

Although our society is far different, the advice Paul gives here is often relevant to modern employment. Even if we feel trapped in an unpleasant job, we should be a good worker, because we are servants of Christ. But we show him no disloyalty if we look for a better job.

Reliable workers are often rewarded in this life, but there is an even more significant reward for Christians: **since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving** (3:24). In the Roman Empire, slaves could not inherit anything. But in Christ’s kingdom, they do. We belong to him, work for him, and are rewarded by him.

Paul next says, **Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism** (3:25). Paul is apparently referring to the rewards (or penalties) of the final judgment. Misconduct will be viewed negatively—and this applies to slave masters as well as slaves.

Paul addresses the masters directly: **Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven** (4:1). Masters should realize that they are slaves of Christ, and this should affect the way they treat their slaves. They should conform to what is right and fair. In time, Christians would ask whether slavery itself



was fair—and when they had the freedom to campaign against it, they led the way in eliminating this immoral practice.

Good words for everyone

Paul now begins to address everyone: **Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should** (4:2-4). Prayer should be a consistent part of our lives, and we should be watchful, or alert.

Paul does not ask that his prison cell be opened, but that the door might open for the gospel, and that the message might be clear, so people know what they are being asked to accept. Paul has years of experience in preaching the gospel, but he still asks for God's help. He may also be hoping that the Colossians apply these ideas to themselves—that opportunities might arise for *them* to relay the message, and that they do it clearly.

Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity (4:5). One element of wisdom is knowing that our conduct with others may affect their attitude to the gospel. If we are selfish, opinionated and judgmental, our neighbors may find our message a bit hard to believe.

Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone (4:6). If our words are gracious, they will make the gospel more attractive, more likely to be accepted.

Exchange of greetings

Ancient Greek letters often closed with an exchange of greetings, and Paul follows this custom, though he mentions many more friends than most letter-writers did: **Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord** (4:7). Tychicus is probably the one who carried the letter to Colosse.

I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts. He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here (4:8-9). Paul says three times that these messengers will bring news of Paul's circumstances—this hints at something important. Perhaps they will give details that Paul did not want to put in writing lest they be intercepted or censored.

My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas (4:10). Paul once objected to Mark (Acts 15:37-38), but he is on good terms with him now: **(You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.)**

Jesus, who is called Justus, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me (4:11).

Paul saves his longest comments for Epaphras, the person who started the church in Colosse (1:7): **Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis** (4:12-13).

Epaphras had a special fondness for these people, and Paul could hear his concerns and felt that it would be helpful to tell the Colossians what Epaphras wanted for them: steadfastness, maturity, and confidence.

Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings (4:14). Luke is the author of a Gospel and the book of Acts. Paul says nothing about Demas here; we learn from 2 Tim. 4:10 that he eventually deserted Paul.

Paul then greets people in and near Colosse: **Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house** (4:15). Nympha's church may have been nearby, in Hierapolis.

Paul tells them to exchange letters: **After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea** (4:16).

Tell Archippus: "See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord" (4:17). Archippus was part of the church that met in the home of Philemon (Phm. 2). We do not know what "work" he was doing, but Paul encouraged him and affirmed its importance.

Letters were normally penned by scribes who had experience in writing on papyrus, but the real authors often signed the letter themselves. So Paul takes the pen and writes, **I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you** (4:18). Grace is central to the Christian life, and Paul ends most of his letters on a note of grace. ●

Questions for discussion

- How do some parents embitter their children? (3:21)
- What options did first-century slaves have when masters commanded them to do something immoral? (3:22)
- How might trade unions and corporations make it difficult to apply verse 22 in the modern world?
- How can good behavior help me answer people's questions? (4:6)
- Am I wrestling in prayer for someone? (4:12)

Hmm...

Left to ourselves we tend immediately to reduce God to manageable terms. We want to get him where we can use him, or at least know where he is when we need him. We want a God we can in some measure control. We need the feeling of security that comes from knowing what God is like.

A. W. Tozer,
Knowledge of the Holy

You may be only one person in the world, but you may also be the world to one person.

We could learn a lot from crayons. Some are sharp, some are pretty and some are dull. Some have weird names and all are different colors, but they all have to live in the same box.

Archeology is the new frontier—untold dollars are being spent digging in Israel, looking for evidence of Jesus and his times. Not all these efforts can be said to be futile: while the search for the historical Jesus has given us very little about Jesus, it has given us a rich picture of the world in which he lived, a multicultural world of elites and peasants, of tyranny and impulses for freedom, a world where people struggled to balance their instincts for assimilation against their own religious roots—a world, in other words, very much like our own.

Lisa Miller,
Newsweek, May 21, 2007

I have held many things in my hands and I have lost them all. But whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess.

Martin Luther

When you cease to make a contribution, you begin to die.

Eleanor Roosevelt

A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle.

Unknown

The Wisdom of Will Rogers

Don't squat with your spurs on.

Good judgment comes from experience, and a lot of that comes from bad judgment.

Lettin' the cat outta the bag is a whole lot easier 'n puttin' it back in.

If you're ridin' ahead of the herd, take a look back every now and then to make sure it's still there.

There's two theories to arguin' with a woman. Neither one works.

If you find yourself in a hole, the first thing to do is stop diggin'.

Never slap a man who's chewin' tobacco.

It don't take a genius to spot a goat in a flock of sheep.

When you give a lesson in meanness to a critter or a person, don't be surprised if they learn their lesson.

Never miss a good chance to shut up.

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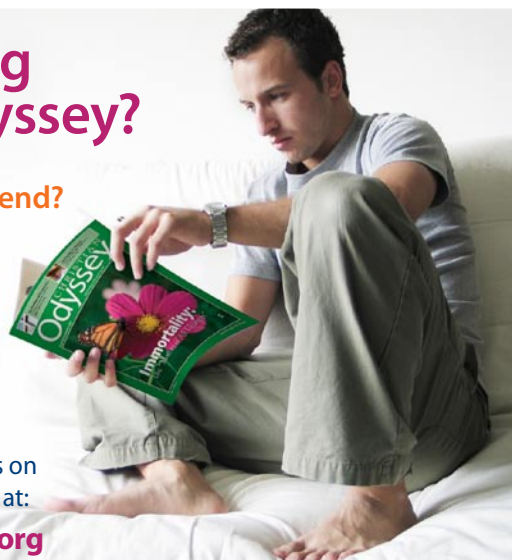
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