



The lady with the lamp
Meeting Florence Nightingale in a
Portland hospital.

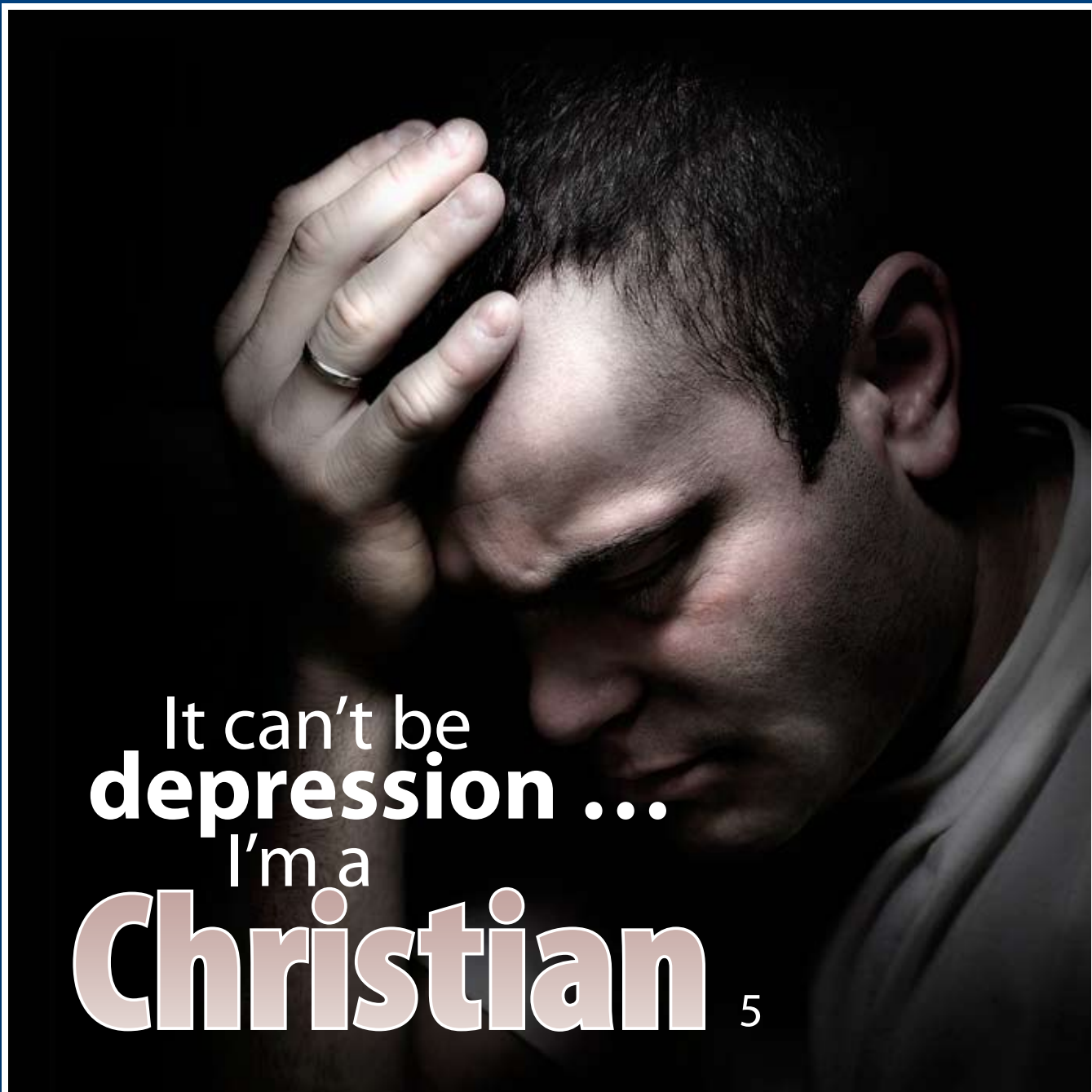


Mirror, mirror
What we see is only a poor reflec-
tion of what we really are.

CHRISTIAN Odyssey

September–November 2009

Exploring Life and Faith



It can't be
depression ...
I'm a
Christian 5

Letters to the Editor

I want to heartily thank the writer(s) of the new booklet *A Brief Introduction to Trinitarian Theology*. As well as the solid foundation of Christian theology that was expounded, I was especially delighted to see the truth about what is "Judgment Day."

I pray that the article will profoundly encourage the many who view the judgment with such fear and trepidation. It is the very first time that I have ever seen that marvelous good news in print!... This booklet is truly a godsend to the world.

Keep up the good work.

JK, email

Thank you, on behalf of all who worked on the booklet. We must have beautiful feet (see our December 2007 editorial), because Isaiah 52:7 says, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news." Jesus had great-looking feet, too. People in first-century Judea had heard about Judgment Day, and that idea did not seem like good news to most of them. So they flocked to the Good Shepherd, who brought a much more optimistic message. Jesus revealed a Father who is out to save us, not one who wants to punish us (John 3:16-17).

If you would like a copy of this booklet, see www.wcg.org/lit/booklets/theology.htm. Subscribers who live in the United States may get a free copy by phoning our toll-free number, 1-800-423-4444.

I just read your article, "New Glory," in the June-August *Odyssey*. It made me cry because I understand the experience so well! I came to the States in 1969 from Germany. In 1997, a few months after my husband died, I finally became a citizen. My husband was glad to know that I was in the process for citizenship, as it was the assurance that I would remain in America with our sons, after he'd leave this world.

I understand about "this is my country now" and "wanting to do right" and "defending America" and "honoring America," etc. When I come home after travelling abroad,

I "proudly" walk in the American line at the airport and show my American passport. This is now my country and I love my country. Comparing this with Christian citizenship is quite appropriate.

MS, email

In your article ("New Glory" June-August 2009 issue) you refer to "The law of God." I assume you mean the law given to ancient Israel through Moses.... If you look carefully through those scriptures you'll find that... this Law was given strictly to Israel plus those gentiles living within its borders. Most of the citizens of this earth were never asked by God to keep the law given through Moses.

AP, email

John Halford responds: *I think you might have missed the point. I said "So why would a citizen of the kingdom of God want to live contrary to its laws and way of life as revealed by Jesus?" I was referring to what the Bible calls the law of love and the law of liberty.*

Thanks again for your website and magazine, *Christian Odyssey*. The articles I have read have helped me to understand with new clarity the grace we share in Christ, and the hope set for us in him. I hold all of you in my prayers continually.

TS, email

Bravo to Mike Feazell for his "Where Are We Now in Prophecy?" Such no-nonsense, plain speaking is a breath of fresh air, and is much appreciated. The brilliant ending brought forth a hearty "Good on yer, Mike!"

KS, Western Australia

Letters for this section should be addressed to "Letters to the Editor." Send your letters to Grace Communion International, PO Box 5005, Glendora, CA 91740-0730, or by e-mail to john.halford@wcg.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.

I have enclosed a cheque for \$40 as a donation towards *Christian Odyssey* magazine. I find this an excellent publication—very thought-provoking and contains articles which challenge a lot of past beliefs. It is most encouraging and puts a lot of things into perspective.

LL, New Zealand

I have one question about the wording of a sentence in the article "Duty of Care" (June-August 2009). On pages 7-8 the author states, "Happily, the environmental distress experienced by creation was resolved by the death and crucifixion of Jesus, but the age to come has not yet fully arrived." Not only does the order of "death" and "crucifixion" seem reversed, but I wonder if the author meant to say "death and resurrection" (or even including ascension). While the crucifixion/death is certainly a key step in the redemption of all creation, it seems that the reality of a new life (resurrection/ascension) is needed to complete the redemptive process.

LB, email

Thank you. That should indeed have read "death and resurrection."

I noticed the quote box associated with my article in the June-August issue (page 20). Usually those seem to be quotes taken from out of the article, but in this case it has nothing to do with it. That'll be a good head-scratcher for readers as they try to figure out what that quote has to do with the article... nothing!

Sue Berger

Sorry about that, Sue. It was a carryover from a previous issue that we missed in the editing process.

I received *Christian Odyssey* yesterday and finished the whole magazine. You're magazine is truly incredible and awe-inspiring. I feel the men and women who wrote this are inspired by God. The truths in it are just what I need right now. I've been a practicing Christian for 51 years but have never understood things so clearly. God bless you.

JS, phone call

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CHRISTIAN Odyssey

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How to be effective and memorable

By John Halford

Recently an aspiring writer asked me, “What is the secret to writing a memorable and effective article for *Christian Odyssey*?”

That is a hard question to answer. I have been writing and editing articles for more than 30 years. Some are memorable—like the first one, of course—and a few were exceptionally creative. But the vast majority of what I have written and edited has been pretty much boilerplate Christian journalism.

So what has been both memorable and effective? From my personal point of view, two stand out. They are not the most significant, and they had no great theological insights. But what they have in common is that they both changed, in a small way, my behavior.



Most of you reading this will never see your written work in print. But if you are “the genuine article,” you can be “published” every day.

The first was written by a farmer, explaining some of the anxieties of being a farmer today. He described the frustration of driving his tractor along narrow country roads, with angry motorists blowing their horns and shaking their fists at him. He didn’t want to block the highway, but, desperate to get a few more working hours into the day, he had to move his cumbersome equipment to another field. He wished people would understand that their impatience added yet another layer of stress to an already difficult job. It isn’t easy making a living off the land today, and the writer asked us to cut him and his fellow farmers some slack. I live in a rural area—and I have never forgotten that article. And it has indeed changed my attitude.

The other one was written by a young woman who worked for a while as a part-time waitress. She explained that in the U.S.A., waitresses are paid well below the minimum wage. They depend on tips to survive. She wrote (and many waiters and waitresses I have since spoken to confirm this) that Christians are the stingiest tippers, and the after-church Sunday brunch crowd is the stingiest of all. “If you can’t afford a generous tip, you can’t afford to eat in that restaurant,” the writer dared to suggest. I had not realized these things, but I now remember that article

every time I go out to eat.

So what made those articles memorable and effective? They both caused me to think and alter my behavior. I doubt either of the two authors realized the impact they had made on me. And perhaps also on you, now I have wafted the secondary smoke in your direction.

In my position as editor, I get many manuscripts from new authors, hopeful of breaking into Christian writing. These first-time manuscripts often are all-encompassing extravaganzas about the greatness of God’s love, or the depth of Jesus’ suffering, or the depravity of sin or the glorious promises of grace—and sometimes all of the above!

I understand—spiritual insights do tend to come in tsunamis, and when they do, creative people want to share them with the world. Trouble is, your great insight, so irresistibly clear to you, just washes over most people and makes no impact. So I usually write back and say, “Now you have got that out of your system, send me a morsel that our readers can digest.”

Let me offer hopeful writers a simple formula: show or tell people something they don’t know, about something they are interested in, in a way they can understand. That is actually good advice not only for writers, but the Christian life in general. You just never know how something you do or say will be the catalyst that makes the difference.

Professor Rodney Stark of Baylor University has done some remarkable research on the development of Christianity in the Roman Empire. He has showed that the faith grew, not in response to elaborate campaigns, dramatic miracles or powerful evangelism. Those might sometimes have been instrumental in getting attention. But it was the steady, consistent, generosity and spirit of service of those early believers that made an impact. They didn’t do it to “get members.” They took seriously Jesus’ command to be “salt and light” (Matthew 5:13-16). In the often harsh, dog-eat-dog environment of the Roman Empire, they showed their friends and neighbors a better way to live.

Most of you reading this will never see your written work in print. But if you yourself are “the genuine article,” you can be “published” every day—by living the life of love Jesus commanded (John 13:34). You’d be surprised how often your kindness will, for someone, make all the difference. **co**



It can't be depression ... I'm a Christian

But it can, and you need to know how to recognize it and what to do about it.

By Mark Mounts

It was 11:00 a.m. on a weekday morning and the pastor was having difficulty finding the energy to get out of bed. He wasn't feeling very "pastoral," and the guilt was overwhelming. He had phone calls to make, people to visit, sermons to work on, and family obligations were mounting. But all he really wanted to do was get in his car, drive to anywhere but here and forget about everything.

Thirty minutes later he finally mustered the energy to get up and go into the bathroom. On the way, his wife met him. She had a look in her eyes he had never seen before. With a soft voice, but filled with tension, she looked him and said, "For the last few months, you have looked like a walking dead man. I'm worried about you and I don't know what to do." That was the straw that broke the camel's back. He knew something was very wrong, and he had to get help.

That was many years ago. The pastor did get help, and today his depression is under control. I know, because I was that pastor.

I'm still a pastor, but now I'm also a professional counselor and therapist, and my years of professional experience have shown me that depression is far from unique among Christians. Many pastors and parishioners feel that no matter how much they get involved and how much time they sacrifice, they just can't shed the gloominess that seems to follow them everywhere. So they work harder and give more with the hope

that this will make the gloom go away. They try Bible study, but they can't seem to focus. They try prayer, but they don't know what to say.

Even worse, they don't feel like being around people anymore, whether at church or at home. They're not as patient as they used to be. They get frustrated and angry more easily. Little things that never used to bother them now do. And guilt sets in; they get angry at themselves, try to set new schedules and goals to make themselves do what they know they should, only to be disappointed at their seemingly endless lack of "character" to follow through. Their tempers get shorter and shorter, or they escape to the isolation of their beds, not having the energy to even start the day.

This scenario is a textbook case of clinical depression. Oh no—surely not. Christians, of all people, born again with a new life in Christ, shouldn't get depressed, should they?

Should Christians get depressed?

As a pastor and professional counselor, this is one of the questions I am asked most often. Christians feel guilty about being depressed. They feel they should "know better." This leads to denial, which only makes matters worse. Well-meaning friends, and even pastors, who don't understand what is going on, encourage them to "snap out of it," and offer advice on "getting their Christian act back together."

But depression isn't something a person can "snap out of."

In the late 1990s and early 2000s several ground-

breaking studies brought significant insight into the biology behind depression. In laymen's terms, these studies showed that some people's brains simply do not have the capacity to recover from the biological effects of stress and crisis (Kramer, p. 131). This in turn literally shrinks a part of the brain that controls feelings.

The cause of depression is rooted in brain chemistry. The chemicals necessary to maintain this particular area of the brain are not sufficient. As a result, one's mood is affected, and depression eventually can set in. Genetics has a strong impact on a person's tendency to become depressed. It isn't a matter of being Christian or not Christian, converted or not converted or saved or not saved. As Dr. Peter Kramer states in his book, *Against Depression*, when talking about a study focused on twins:

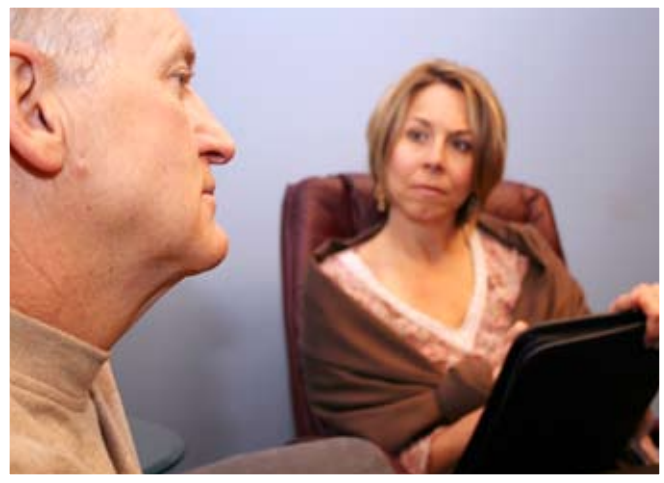
"Even bleak environments elicit depression only in the vulnerable. That a shared environment rarely

them, ask if they have a specialty. If they don't, ask if they will work with someone who is challenged with depression. If they answer yes, ask whether they refer their clients for medication evaluations, or use counseling only. If you happen to have a history of trauma or abuse (many do, so don't feel alone), make sure you ask whether the therapist is trained in such areas. It's important for you that they are.

Finding a counselor may feel like an overwhelming task, but it's extremely important. Admitting that you can't carry this load on your own is a huge step toward feeling better.

If you want a Christian counselor, you can check websites such as "The American Association of Christian Counselors" (AACC). They have a search option that will help you find a counselor in your area. Again, make sure they are state licensed, and don't be afraid to ask questions. You do have the right to find a

When you finally see a counselor, be honest. The more you tell them, the more they can help. Sometimes, when you talk with someone who has an objective perspective, it can make the gloom begin to lift.



shows up in the chain of what causes depression pushes a good deal of what we call environment into the background" (ibid., 135).

We all accept the fact that our bodies wear out and run down and are susceptible to disease. We can even accept the fact that our brains can be ravaged by diseases such as Alzheimer's. But some Christians will not accept the fact that clinical depression also has specific biological causes. They'd rather categorize depression as a "bad attitude" or "lack of faith."

What should you do?

If you suffer from depression, there are some things you can do.

First, find a good professional who can help you, someone who is licensed by the state where you live. They will have credentials like LPC (Licensed Professional Counselor), LCSW (Licensed Clinical Social Worker), a Ph.D. in clinical psychology, or a Psy.D. (Psychological Doctorate). When you contact

counselor you're comfortable with, but realize you will have to eventually make a decision; it may never feel "perfect."

When you finally see the counselor, be honest. They are there to help, not condemn. The more you tell them, the more they can help. Sometimes, when you talk with someone who has an objective perspective, it can make the gloom begin to lift.

Some come to me and say, "I've tried talking with my family, and it doesn't seem to be getting any better." Their attempts at trying to talk with their family, especially a husband or wife, have actually added to their gloominess or depression. This makes them feel even worse. What they don't realize is that depression affects not just the victim, but also everyone close to them. People who try to help can end up taking the inevitable rejection personally and become upset. It's not their fault; they simply don't understand the dynamics of what's going on. But their reactions can actually make your depression worse. That's why it's so

important you get a professional, objective perspective.

But what if you see a counselor for several sessions and the cloud doesn't seem to be lifting?

To medicate or not medicate ... that is the question

When I went through my serious depression, I believed that working harder, praying more, and serving more would make me feel better. But that simply isn't true. After weeks of therapy, my therapist told me I was a good candidate for anti-depressant medication. At first I felt like a total failure. Me...a Christian pastor...needed...happy pills!

So my therapist wisely explained to me in understandable terms what was going on biologically in my brain, and how the medications would help. It had nothing to do with demons, not being good enough, or not being converted. I was able to understand that I was one of those people who had a vulnerability to depression. In my case, my therapist had realized that anti-depressant medication was not the first resort. But as he began to understand my situation, he realized medication could help.

When I started thinking about it, I realized I had probably been depressed several times in my life; I just didn't know what it was. But this time was worse than anything I had ever experienced. I couldn't get out of bed and I had constant shortness of breath. I was yawning and sighing all the time. I felt a tremendous pressure in my chest and experienced chest pains. My eyes felt like they were going to fall out of the back of my head. I didn't want to be around anybody, and I had developed a temper, especially with my children. It felt like something had wrenched my soul from my body. It was horrible! So, I decided to take the medication, and what a difference it has made.

You have to be aware of something regarding these medications. People are different, and our body chemistries differ greatly. So, be patient! These medications take several weeks to show results, and they may have side effects. Those can eventually go away; they did for me. But if they don't, there are other medications you can try. The key is to find one that works for you and realize it may not be the first one you try; so hang in there!

Antidepressant medications are not happy pills. They certainly were not for me. But they did lift the cloud so I could begin to talk about how I was thinking and feeling. Before taking the medication, talking about my thoughts or feelings would only add to my depression. The medications changed that. I still had to talk, and I stayed in counseling for more than a year. I learned that I had been taught some pretty unhealthy ways to think about people and situations.

Clinical depression defined

The definition of clinical depression or a major depressive episode as recognized by most clinicians is as follows:

"The essential feature of a Major Depressive Episode is a period of at least 2 weeks during which there is either depressed mood or the loss of interest or pleasure in nearly all activities" (APA, DSM-IV-TR, pg. 349, 2005).

To further clarify this condition, one must experience at least five or more of the following symptoms *for at least two weeks* to meet the criteria for a Major Depressive Episode. They are:

1. Depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day, as indicated by either subjective report (e.g., feels sad or empty), or observation made by others (e.g., appears tearful). **Note:** In children and adolescents, can be irritable mood.
2. Markedly diminished interest or pleasure in all, or almost all, activities most of the day, nearly every day (as indicated by either subjective account or observation made by others).
3. Significant weight loss when not dieting or weight gain (e.g., a change of more than 5 percent of body weight in a month), or decrease or increase in appetite nearly every day. **Note:** In children, consider failure to make expected weight gains.
4. Insomnia or hypersomnia (can't get out of bed) nearly every day.
5. Psychomotor agitation or retardation nearly every day (observable by others, not merely subjective feelings of restlessness or being slowed down).
6. Fatigue or loss of energy nearly every day.
7. Feelings of worthlessness or excessive or inappropriate guilt (which may be delusional) nearly every day (not merely self-reproach or guilt about being sick).
8. Diminished ability to think or concentrate, or indecisiveness nearly every day (either by subjective account or as observed by others).
9. Recurrent thoughts of death (not just fear of dying), or recurrent suicidal ideation without a specific plan, or suicide attempt or a specific plan for committing suicide (ibid., 356).

Note: Many clinicians feel that if one has only two or three of these characteristics for an extended period of time, they are still at risk for becoming seriously depressed and should seek help.

But, thanks to a great counselor, a loving and supportive family, anti-depressant medication, and most importantly, a loving and forgiving God, the cloud finally lifted.

What about personal spirituality?

In Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Jesus understands our dark feelings, our doubt, our discouragement, and yes, even our depression; and his desire is to help us. Sometimes, the help we need might include professional counseling and antidepressant medication. After all, God created the minds that created these medications, and it is not a sin to take them if you truly need them.

If you are depressed, there is help for you. It is okay to admit it, and it is okay to get help. Life will still have its ups and downs, but there are options for you if the “downs” last for a long, long time.

If those around us are telling us that something is

wrong with us and they don’t know what to do for us, we need to listen with a humble heart. ☪

Mark has a Masters in Professional Counseling from Liberty University and is a Licensed Professional Counselor in the Houston area. Mark did his pre-graduate internship at Texas Children’s Hospital in Houston and focused in the area of Early Childhood Intervention. Mark now has a part-time counseling practice at the Houston Center for Christian Counseling where he counsels children, teens, families, and individual adults. He is also a full-time pastor for Community Christian Fellowship (a congregation of Grace Communion International). Mark has been married to his wife Debra for 25 years and they have two teenagers, ages 14 and 15.

References:

- Peter D. Kramer, *Against Depression*. London: Viking Penguin, 2005.
- *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fourth Edition, Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR). American Psychiatric Association, 2005.

I’ve Been Reading...

Magnificent Desolation: The Long Journey Home From the Moon

by Buzz Aldrin

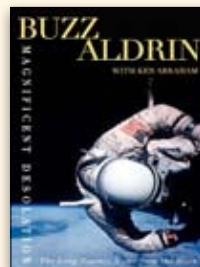
Reviewed by John Halford

I have always found the story of the moon landing fascinating, so I was looking forward to reading this account by Buzz Aldrin, the second man to set foot on the lunar surface. It was not quite what I expected.

Aldrin is famous for his “magnificent desolation” description of the lunar landscape. But the focus of this book is not about his epic adventure 40 years ago. He gets that out of the way in the first few chapters. He then tells the story of the not-so-magnificent desolation his life became in the decade following the moon landing.

In a remarkably frank account he describes how, after reaching the heights of fame and acclaim as a genuine American hero, he allowed himself to become a drunken derelict. In his own words:

“I...achieved the greatest success, universally acclaimed as one of mankind’s most extraordinary achievements to date, and then found adversity crouching at my door, waiting to trip me up. Once entangled, I didn’t unwittingly fall into depression and alcoholism; I took willful steps in the wrong direction, thinking I could turn around at any point. But like a motorboat idling on the Niagara River, I soon found myself being swept along, past the point of no return, out of control, drowning my sorrows and disappointments in alcohol, and heading for the precipice and ultimate destruction. Having been to the moon, I plummeted into my own personal hell on Earth. Had it not been for some friends who cared enough to call a drunk a drunk, even if he had walked on the moon, I might have perished” (pp. 305-306).



Aldrin describes his collapse honestly and candidly. It is a compelling story, and I found myself caught up in his struggle, and wanting him to succeed. Eventually he does:

“Finally, in October 1978, I laid down alcohol once and for all. My willingness to do so was not an act of willpower so much as a coming to the end of my own selfishness. I had always been self-centered, and because

of my abilities or my intelligence or my fame, people had let me get away with it. When I began to see myself for what I really was, and had a group of fellow travelers who knew me for what I was—and were not impressed—I began to take baby steps toward getting well. Along the way, I learned that to truly keep something and hold onto it, you have to give it away” (172-173).

What I thought would be a book about outer space is more a story of the conquest of inner space, and I recommend it to anyone who is interested in personal growth and development. If you are struggling with an addiction or depression, you may find it particularly reassuring. Buzz Aldrin shows how anyone—even a genuine hero—can become a victim. But with courage, humility and the right support, you can face up to your problem, and change.

Buzz Aldrin and Ken Abraham, *Magnificent Desolation: The Long Journey Home From the Moon*. New York: Harmony, 2009. ☪



The YOKE was on me!

By Kerry Gubb

No—it's neither misprint nor "typo." The yoke really was on me. Both of us, two students participating in an archaeological excavation at the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, had decided to cross the Judean Wilderness, Beit Hanina to Jericho along the Wadi Kilt, on foot. Way outside the tourist box, perhaps, but, hey, you're only young once!

Not a lot of special gear required. Temperatures of 125° F in the shade did, however, mean we needed to carry water. And water is heavy to hike with.

That was my introduction to the Bedouin pack. It was unlike anything I had seen in the West, where we tend to focus the entire load on our backs—then compensate for it with harnesses and extra straps, *et al.*

The Bedouin pack is simplicity itself. A variation on their camel saddle-bag, it's like a colourful, thick goat-hair woven poncho with a hole for your head and large pouches front and back. When your burden is distributed evenly between the pouches, you can carry quite heavy loads, because the pressure is directed evenly and vertically through the spine, enabling healthy, upright posture. No narrow straps biting or chafing your shoulders. No leaning to compensate for pressure on your back.

Ingenuous! Nifty! Just what we needed: a valuable lesson learned from desert nomads.

Years later, opportunity came to preach to Chris-

tian congregations about Jesus' wonderful invitation in Matthew 11:28-30: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Understandably, the Bedouin pack found its way as illustrative material into my message. After all, there were some valuable parallels, such as:

- redistributing one's life-burden more manageably by reframing our priorities to be more Christ-like.
- better preparing for potentially "chafing" situations by adopting Christ-like attitudes.

Poor exegesis and enthusiasm for a metaphor had left my poor Bedouin pack unintentionally, misrepresenting the extent of Jesus Christ's mediation.

All of it grist to the mill—and I reckon I can squeeze as much learning content out of a metaphor as the next preacher. That Bedouin pack served faithfully for 35 years as a ready-to-go, familiar "chestnut" whenever the occasion arose—until I read A.W.

Tozer's *The Pursuit of God*, chapter 9: "Meekness and Rest."

Metaphors and analogies are wonderful—to a point. As a student and young minister keen to please the Master, I had grabbed hold of a personal experience and used it in support of his teaching.

The spirit was willing; the exegesis was terrible. Sincere as the day is long...and irrelevant to the point Jesus was making.

Jesus invites us to take his yoke willingly—voluntarily join with him so he can bring us safely through the complex training-ground that is life.

The flaw in my ready-to-go, familiar "chestnut" was that it left the yoke—the burden—on me... alone. Redistributed, yes. Easier, yes. Better able to do my bit, yes. But poor exegesis and enthusiasm for a metaphor had left my poor Bedouin pack unintentionally—and woefully—under-selling, and thus misrepresenting the extent of Jesus Christ's mediation on our behalf and role on our life.

The metaphor Jesus used wasn't the Bedouin pack.

It was the Jewish cattle-yoke, to which an inexperienced ox could be harnessed alongside a stronger, seasoned "veteran" from whom:

- it could learn how to fulfil its role.
- its weakness could be compensated for by the other's greater strength.
- it could not stray at a whim; the yoke would keep it focused in the right direction.

And, of course, there's the biggie of them all: cattle are given no choice. We are—that's Jesus' wonderful invitation: that we take his yoke willingly—voluntarily join with him so he can bring us safely through the complex training-ground that is life.

These are reassuring dimensions of the Master's role in our relationship that are not even suggested in my Bedouin pack. In retrospect, if I had completed the ACCM (Ambassador College of Christian Ministry) course on good exegesis, *Jesus and the Gospels*, I would not have made that mistake.

But I hadn't, so I did. And so the yoke was on me...alone. It needn't have been, but I'd made it that way in sincere, well-intended ignorance.

Now that it's fixed, what we're left with is Jesus' original intent, as Tozer puts it: "The needed grace will come as we learn that we are sharing this new and easy yoke with the strong Son of God Himself. He calls it 'my yoke,' and He walks at one end while we walk at the other."

It's much better Jesus' way, isn't it? **co**

In Other Words

Mako Ndi Mako

By Kalengule Kaoma

Maliko came from a poor family, but he was able to attend a boarding high school. One day his mother visited him, but when two of his fellow students saw the scruffy looking woman, Maliko was embarrassed by her appearance and protested, "That is not my mother! How dare you insult me? I do not have a mad woman for a mother!" And he trotted away.

But Maliko's mother persisted. She asked one of the students to call him back. Maliko still insisted she was not his mother. "If she is not your mother, how does she know your name?" Maliko's friend asked. Maliko did not answer. Instead, he threatened his friend.



"Well," said the old lady sadly, "then you take this sugar cane and money that I brought for Maliko. Please have them." She went away very sad.

During that term of school, Maliko fractured his leg while playing football. As he recuperated in the hospital, he longed for his mother every day, but honoring his wish that she not embarrass him, she did not come to see him.

The Chewa people of Malawi have this saying: *Mako ndi mako; usamuone ku chepa mwendu*. "Your mother is still your mother even if one of her legs is shorter than the other."

Maliko learned a hard lesson. Those who despise their origins cut themselves off from those who love them most. **co**



The Lady With the Lamp

I don't know her name. But for about 20 minutes, she was Florence Nightingale for me.

By Bernie Schnippert

They called her “The lady with the lamp.” Her real name was Florence Nightingale (1820-1910), perhaps history’s most famous and beloved nurse. Born to wealth and privilege as a daughter to an upper-class British family, she forsook the comforts of her pedigree to become a humble nurse who served the ill with such skill and devotion that her very name is a synonym for these virtues.

Florence gained the nickname “the lady with the lamp” as the result of her loving service to the British wounded of the Crimean war. She was said to be seen in the dark of night, when all others were asleep, moving from wounded soldier to wounded soldier to give them aid and comfort, carrying a lamp so she could see them and they could see her.

Choosing service over the comforts of inherited status and wealth, Florence felt a calling from God: “God called me in the morning and asked me, “Would I do good for Him, for Him alone without the reputation.”¹ Ironically, her willingness to do good “without the reputation” re-

sulted in her attainment of the highest of reputations.

I should know. I was visited personally by “the lady with the lamp.” That’s right. I have met Florence Nightingale.

“What?” you say. “You could not possibly have met Florence Nightingale. She died in 1910, almost 100 years ago.”

“Ah,” I respond, “but wait until you hear my story. Once you hear my story, which I shall now relate, you can decide for yourself the truth of my testimony. You may just find that not only have I met Florence Nightingale, but you have as well.”

I met Florence Nightingale about two years ago. The place of our meeting was a hospital in Portland, Oregon, called Oregon Health and Science University Hospital, where I was a patient. I had undergone surgery a day or two before to remove a cancerous tumor in my small intestine, along with my gall bladder. Although I knew at the time that I had, and have, other tumors in my liver that cannot be removed, the mission of this particular surgery was only to remove the small intestine tumor, and it was a success. Therefore I was in a hospital room recovering my strength.

At the time of Florence's visit, I was only a few days into my recuperation. I was hooked up to numerous intravenous fluid delivery devices, including one which kept me hydrated and another that delivered a strong pain medicine that was needed because of the 12-inch-long abdominal incision that could be quite painful if I moved. I was very weak, was not allowed to eat, and worse, I was allergic to the pain medicine and so did not use it unless the pain was unbearable, which sometimes it was.

Part of the regimen of recovery, among other things, is to have a nurse—more accurately, a “CNA,” which stands for “certified nursing assistant”—to come by your bed from time to time, day and night, take your blood pressure, take your temperature, and perform a few other duties associated with collection and analysis of a certain unnamed body fluid. (The patients, including me, find this humbling. The nurses, strangely, think nothing of it).

It was somewhat unpleasant to be visited by these nurses, because they would disrupt you if you were reading

For about 20 minutes two years ago, in a hospital room, in the middle of the night, I was visited by “the lady with the lamp.”



or sleeping, force a thermometer into your mouth and a pressure cuff onto your arm, proceed to take the readings, and usually not bother very much with small talk. They just interrupted you, did their job, and walked away. It was especially bad at night because sometimes—although not often—I actually fell asleep, and I resented being awakened by them for this seemingly meaningless routine.

Furthermore, it was especially unpleasant to be visited by one particular nurse for a couple of reasons. First, she obviously smoked a lot, and she always smelled very strongly of tobacco smoke, an odor that I did not like when I was feeling well and especially found downright repellent when I was weak, hadn't eaten, had a sensitive stomach, and was in pain.

Second, she was unusually rough about her chores. She would grab my arm violently and tug it to the side of the bed, jam on the pressure cuff, push the thermometer into my mouth, pump the cuff so hard I thought my arm would fall off, take the reading, pull off the cuff and pull out the thermometer, and then basically throw my arm back onto the bed not caring where it landed.

As I said, I especially dreaded the visits of this nurse, until that is, one night I will never forget. This particular night I was wide awake and very cold. I was having “goose bumps” from being so cold, and I was shivering. I was extremely fatigued, in pain, and had a great deal of anxiety from being so cold, but also being hot at the same time. I had a fever! Then, in the middle of my suffering, the dreaded nurse's assistant appeared and went through her usual ritual—roughly, seemingly uncaringly, smelling of tobacco, and not speaking a single word.

In spite of my dislike of her, my suffering spurred me to tell her that I was cold and to ask meekly if she would get me an extra blanket or so. She left my bedside without comment of any kind, without even acknowledging my request. I thought I had been ignored, only to find her appearing back beside me in a few minutes with a couple of blankets fresh from being cleaned, and piping warm, either from being just taken freshly from a dryer, or from some heater they might use just for the purpose of warming the blankets.

She proceeded, again, without comment or fanfare of any kind, to carefully place a blanket over my feet and up towards my neck with almost military precision. I say “towards my neck,” instead of “to my neck” because I am very tall and the blankets are short, so they did not reach all the way to my neck — a phenomenon that might seem humorous to some people

but that bothered me greatly, since a person with cancer who is ill and has a fever has no sense of humor. At least, I don't. No matter. She noticed this and took a second blanket and placed it at my neck “towards my feet” so that the two blankets together reached from neck to toe and overlapped in the middle.

The warmth of the two blankets began to chase away my coldness, but they were not enough.

So, she again left silently and returned with more blankets, also steaming warm, which she again silently, neatly, and I dare say lovingly layered one upon another and back again—tucking the sides carefully under me—so that, in the end, I lay cocooned snugly, warmly and peacefully beneath a layer of hot, freshly laundered blankets, looking like a living mummy with only my head poking out of the pile so I could breathe. Underneath this pile of loving kindness I found warmth, peace and sleep. The nurse's assistant left without a word and silently resumed her rounds.

In the morning, I awoke without a fever, but bathed in a puddle of my own perspiration so heavy that all the

God's Masterpiece

By Barbara Dahlgren

blankets, bed coverings, and my hospital gown were soaked with sweat and had to be replaced. The night had been a turning point in my recovery, and I longed to tell her how much she had helped me in my time of need, but she had finished her scheduled hours for the week, and I never saw her again.

I also could not and cannot remember her name. Since I cannot remember her name, I feared that I could never find her to thank her. Then it hit me. I realized that I knew her after all.


I realized that, whatever her real name, for about 20 minutes two years ago, in a hospital room, in the middle of the night, I was visited by “the lady with the lamp.” The lamp that lit her way, and mine, was not one of wax, or oil, but rather the light that lights any person who serves the needy, the sick, the lame, the blind and the poor anytime they perform such an act.

Whether she was a Christian, I do not know. This I do know, however, that all acts of kindness come ultimately from God, no matter who delivers them at any particular moment, be they a monk, or a madman. James says, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17). The light she brought in her person shone brightly on me for a moment. It enlightened me, refreshed me, comforted me, and like a true lamp, it warmed me when I needed it most.

I decided that, whatever this nurse's assistant's real name was at that time, for about 20 minutes she was Florence Nightingale. At least she was to me.

Jesus said, “Whatever you did [i.e., some good deed] for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40). It is good to hear Jesus speak on behalf of people, like me, who have been helped.

But those who have been helped sometimes want to personally thank the Florence Nightingales who serve them. Perhaps they do not know the helper's real name. Perhaps they forget, or maybe never see them again. Perhaps when they are helped they cannot speak, or communicate, for they are ill or even unconscious.

It has dawned on me that I might, by telling my story, not only give thanks to my Florence Nightingale, but represent, humbly, everyone who has had a Florence Nightingale of their own. So, for myself and all others who have felt the love and kindness of another person whom they have never been able to thank, I say, “Thank you Florence Nightingale, wherever—and whoever—you are.” 



Bernie Schnippert is General Counsel for Grace Communion International.

¹Michael D. Calabria, *Florence Nightingale in Egypt and Greece: Her Diary and "Visions"* (State University of New York, 1996), page 45.

My husband and I have been privileged to visit some world-famous art museums. I consider it a privilege; my husband considers it a marital concession. Nonetheless, we've seen everything from Michelangelo's "Sistine Chapel" to Grant Wood's "American Gothic," which reminds me of old pictures of some of my dead relatives. I guess they didn't have much to smile about in those days. Speaking of smiles, we have even gazed upon da Vinci's "Mona Lisa."

Once we went to the Peggy Guggenheim Museum, which exhibits her collection of Cubism, Futurism, Metaphysical, and Surrealism. Here we're talking abstract work by such renowned artists as Picasso, Dali, and Jackson Pollock.


Not being a big fan of abstracts, I still found the artwork interesting. To me Pollack's paintings always look like someone took a bunch of worms, dipped them in various colors, and let them squiggle around a huge canvas creating a big mess. But art is in the eye of the beholder. What one person considers beautiful, another considers odd or, for want of a better word, ugly. However, both Pollack and da Vinci are considered masterful artists. Their paintings are worth more money than most of us will ever see.

When I read Ephesians 2:10, I think about artwork because it says: "For we are God's masterpiece" (NLT). As masterpieces go, I feel more like a Pollack painting, a bunch of disjointed colors flaring here and there, than da Vinci's "Mona Lisa" with every hair in place. All right, so she lacks eyebrows. She is still considered the most famous painting in the world. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. I'm glad, because even though I may not think of myself as beautiful, God does. After all, he calls me his masterpiece.

Some translations use the word "workmanship" instead of masterpiece, which gives the impression it is referring to physical attributes. And it is true that as God's creation we demonstrate his genius in every designed detail of our bodies. We are fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 129:14).

However, being God's "workmanship" has deeper meaning than God bringing us into existence. Perhaps that is why some translations use "masterpiece" and many commentaries refer to it. Ephesians 2:10 says: "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus..." (NLT). These scriptures are not referring to physical creation, but spiritual. In other words, Jesus Christ living in us gives our lives the highest value.

As an analogy to art, we are both finished in Christ and a work in progress that God loves spending time with. We are valuable and important to him. A valuable work of art is worth its weight in gold, but Jesus bought us with the highest price of all—he gave his life (1 Corinthians 6:20).

It doesn't matter if I feel like a Jackson Pollock painting and have to spend some days just asking God to "bless this mess." He loves me and can use me for his glory in spite of my flaws. His life in me gives mine value. I am God's masterpiece—and so are you! 

Silk Purses From Sows' Ears



Some lessons from the “worst movie ever made”

By Al Doshna

The home video and VCR boom of the early 1980s gave a new lease on life to the low-budget movies made for independent and drive-in theaters starting around the late 1940s. Video companies would snatch them up as fast as they could get their hands on them, and reissue them to a new audience.

The boom unearthed some cinematographic gems, but it also gave a new life to some truly awful creations. This soon helped, in part, to inspire a tongue-in-cheek series of books spawned by *The Fifty Worst Films of All Time*, written in 1984 by Harry Medved.

The film that sunk the lowest in this competition was *Plan 9 From Outer Space* (1959), which “won” the “Golden Turkey Award” as “The Worst Movie of All Time,” as did its director, Edward D. Wood, Jr., as “Worst Director of All Time.”

Ed Wood was a Marine vet who, after the war, moved to Hollywood from New York to pursue his passion to

make movies. Starting with short films, he eventually wrote, produced and directed a number of features, two of which starred Bela Lugosi, who had fallen on hard times after attaining stardom on the stage and screen in his role as Count Dracula.

Wood began shooting test footage with Lugosi for a third feature, but the sick and elderly actor passed away in his sleep in 1956. Wood kept the footage, which he incorporated into *Plan 9*.

Wood had the true entrepreneur’s ability to get people to share in his vision and invest in the production. But the film fell far short in terms of marketability in the eyes of potential distributors. And who can blame them? Rife with miserable narration and dialogue, bungled scenes, and awful acting, *Plan 9* was an obvious flop waiting to happen.

Like many so-called “B” films, it was a cheap rental for drive-in theaters to pick up and for TV stations to air at 2 and 3 o’clock in the morning. Then a strange thing began to happen. The movie was so awful that many viewers found it both amusing and fascinating. It began to develop a “cult” status—people wanted their friends

and relatives to experience this quintessentially horrible B movie. And as its popularity grew, the money began to roll in. The colossal flop, with all its amazingly poor scripting, acting and editing, slowly became a colossal success.

Ed Wood, Jr., never lived to see the full recognition and acknowledgement of his work. He died in December 1978.

Ironically, this film that once couldn't be given away, or was at best relegated to a pre-dawn time slot, eventually made many millions of dollars from rentals and merchandising and now costs more to rent than some local TV stations are willing to pay.

In a stunning reversal of fortune, *Plan 9*, arguably the worst feature film ever made, has nearly turned into a household word, owing to a host of tongue-in-cheek references in the media, including multiple jokes about it on the *Seinfeld* TV show, while many of its more prestigious and celebrated cinematic contemporaries have long since been forgotten.

Largely because of the popularity of *Plan 9*, Edward D. Wood, Jr., became the subject of a 1994 film biography starring future superstar Johnny Depp. That film went on to win two Academy Awards, beating out *Forrest Gump* in both categories.

Not every failure turns into success, of course. Not every flop becomes a hit. But if we can learn any lesson from the story of *Plan 9*, it might be this: Every sinner does become righteous—not because we actually are righteous ourselves, but because Jesus Christ gives us his righteousness.

It is precisely into the darkness of our sin that Jesus shines the light of his perfect righteousness, turning our failure into his success.

Plan 9 became a success because it was so bad that people just had to see it to believe it. Having no redeeming qualities of its own, it made money in spite of itself; it's a film people seem to love to hate.

We become a success in Jesus Christ because he loves us so much he will never let us go. We have no redeeming qualities, spiritually speaking, but that's why he died for us—precisely because we were sinful and utterly unworthy of him.

Every time I think of *Plan 9*, I am reminded of that. *Plan 9 From Outer Space* was an unmarketable movie that found success only in the "grace" of curiously interested audiences. We are sinners who find salvation only in the grace of our Creator who loves us without measure.

It's funny where we find encouragement sometimes. For me, the worst movie of all time reminds me that my salvation doesn't depend on me. It depends on Jesus. And any way you look at it, that's good news! *co*

You're Included



Elmer Colyer, professor of historical theology at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary



Ray Anderson, senior professor of theology and ministry at Fuller Theological Seminary



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How Are You Today?

By Jeb Egbert

I recently heard a story from a proud grandfather. His 14-month-old grandson, I'll call him James, had recently learned to put sentences together, and when Grandpa flew back to visit, the first words out of James' mouth were, "How are you today?"

The grandfather was surprised and asked his daughter about it. She explained, "Well, so many people today think of themselves first... and sometimes *only*. But Jesus put others first. I want James to learn to do that, too, so I'm teaching him that he should begin his conversations with others by demonstrating an interest in them."

I was impressed. Over the many years I've been involved in youth ministry, I have been on countless retreats that require sleeping arrangements in cramped quarters. (Isn't that what a youth retreat is all about?) In that kind of setting, one can quickly see how thoughtful others are. Some kids seem to keep an eye out



In John 15:13, Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." And he did just that. Before he died, Jesus prayed that this sacrificial cup would "pass from him." But then he added, "Not my will, but your will be done." Learning to think like Jesus means learning to think of others first. And our personal example, of course, is our most important teaching tool.

Some years ago on a business trip, I went to a friend's house for dinner. I was so struck by how willingly the children all pitched in to help prepare the meal, set the table, serve the dinner, clear the table and wash the dishes that I just had to call my wife and tell her about it. Of course, I don't really know whether they did it to impress guests or whether it was their regular routine. And maybe those children grew up considerate of others or maybe they didn't, but they did have the blessing of having parents who taught them what it feels like.

Can we help our children learn to be thoughtful and considerate of others? Can we teach them the importance of thinking of others first? Can we show them how to be observant of and responsive to the needs of others?

Well, according to one grandfather, we sure can! "How are *you* today?" ☺



Jesus put others first. I want James to learn to do that, too, so I'm teaching him that he should begin his conversations with others by demonstrating an interest in them.

for ways they can help others, while other kids seem never to notice the needs of others around them. It wouldn't occur to them to start a conversation with, "How are you?"

When I was young, one of our family standards was that chores had to be done first—before focusing on personal activities. I see now that doing the dishes, pulling weeds and mowing the grass were ways that we implicitly stated, "Family needs are more important than my fun." Having chores helped teach me the importance of thinking of the best interests of the community first. It is another way parents or caregivers can instill in children a sense of putting others first.



Mirror, Mirror

By J. Michael Feazell

What do you see when you look in the mirror? Snow White's evil stepmother, who turned out to be a witch on top of being an evil stepmother, saw herself as the most beautiful woman in the kingdom. Of course, she had to enchant the mirror to get it to tell her that.

My mirror doesn't talk to me, thank God, but it does render a remarkably high-definition rendering of my image, although a bit reversed. And that image, even if it weren't reversed, is not the most beautiful person in the land. What I see is an aging, balding, fattening, half-sleepy lout. More than that, I see a selfish, greedy, rather vain screw-up who despite a lifetime of trying to "overcome sin," still seems, from time to time, to lose his temper, act rudely, shade the truth, and behave in any number of negative ways that I despise.

Not everyone would see my reflection that way. Some would probably see an average, generally pleasant sort of fellow one might not mind having dinner with or going to a ball game with. That's because they don't know me the way I know myself. I'm glad they don't.

But there is one who sees me radically differently from the way I see myself or the way others see me. The apostle Paul refers to that in 1 Corinthians 13:12, when he says, "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."

Paul is telling us that what we see in the mirror is

not what we really are—we see only a poor reflection of the real us. But the day is coming when we will see ourselves as we really are. Now we know in part—we have only an inkling of what we really are, but the day is coming when we will know ourselves as God has made us to be in Jesus Christ. That is how God knows us already.

In Colossians 3:1-4, Paul is even more explicit. He says, "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

Paul tells us that what we see in the mirror is not what we really are—we see only a poor reflection of the real us.

Notice that Paul uses the past tense: "...you *have been* raised with Christ..." This is not something that is yet to happen in the future—it is already a reality.

When I look in the mirror, I don't see this new me that is seated with Christ at the right hand of the Father. I see the struggling sinner that I know I am. But Paul says that I have died and *have been* raised with Christ, past tense, and that this new life I have in Christ is, for now, hidden. That's why I don't see it,

why much of the time I don't even believe it. But, Paul says, when Christ appears, then I will appear with him as I really am, the way he has already made me to be in him. For the first time, I will see myself not as a poor reflection, but as I really am in Christ.

This means that it is not up to us to get salvation, or even to get righteous or moral or "better." God has already done that for us in spite of us. Paul does not admonish us to "set our hearts on things above" *in order* to be raised with Christ. Quite the reverse. He tells us to set our hearts on things above *because* we have already been raised with Christ, because we already are a new person in Christ.

We are to set our minds on things above, not earthly things, because our real life is already hid-

We seem to have a love affair with putting our spiritual carts before the proverbial horse. We can't seem to get it out of our heads that we have to be good before God will save us.

den with Christ in God. *Christ* is our life, Paul tells us, and only when he is revealed—what we call the Second Coming—will our real selves, made perfect in him, be revealed also. No more poor reflections in the mirror. We will finally see ourselves face to face, as the new creation our Father has made us to be in Jesus Christ.

Throughout the New Testament, Paul admonishes us to behave righteously *because we already are* in Christ. He never tells us to behave righteously in order to get Christ to accept us. And yet, we seem to have a love affair with putting our spiritual carts before the proverbial horse. We can't seem to get it out of our heads that we have to be good before God will save us.

But we are told simply to believe what is already true. Jesus Christ died for us while we were still sinners, Paul says in Romans 5:6. We were reconciled to God while we were still his *enemies*, he adds in verse 10.

The late Trinitarian theologian Thomas Torrance put it this way: "Jesus Christ died for you precisely because you are sinful and utterly unworthy of him, and has thereby already made you his own before and apart from your ever believing in him. He has bound you to himself by his love in such a way that he will never let you go, for even if you refuse him and damn

yourself in hell his love will never cease" (*The Mediation of Christ*, Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers & Howard, 1992, page 94).

Such complete commitment to us, such indescribable love, such unconditional grace, cannot be earned. It cannot be changed, either by good behavior or bad behavior. It demands only one thing: faith. God has already given us everything—grace, righteousness, salvation—through Jesus Christ. We can add nothing to that. All we can do is trust him to be our salvation, to be our life. "When Christ, *who is your life*, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Colossians 3:4).

Yet we have the idea that the gospel is primarily about getting us to improve our behavior, as in "straighten out your life and then God will love you." But the gospel isn't about us improving our behavior. The gospel is about love—not that we loved God, but that he loves us (1 John 4:19).

God loved you before you were born; he loves you even though you are a sinner; he will never stop loving you even though you fall short of his righteous and godly behavior every day. That is good news—gospel truth.

Jesus Christ is our righteousness, our holiness and our redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30). We're not. We bring nothing to the table. Instead, we trust him to be for us everything we are powerless to be for ourselves. It is because he first loved us that we are freed from our selfish hearts to love him and to love one another.

Love cannot be coerced or forced or enforced by any law or contract. It can only be freely given and freely received. God freely gives it, and he wants us to freely receive it.

To this end, the Holy Spirit works in us, leading us, urging us, to participate in the new life of love God has given us in Christ—not to help us "measure up" or somehow "attain" salvation, but rather to help us learn how to be the new person God has already made us to be in Christ. We are a new creation—already seated with Christ at the right hand of the Father. That is the way God knows us, the way he sees us, even though it is still hard for us to see.

So the next time you look in the mirror, take heart. Regardless of all the rotten things you know about the wretch looking back at you, take a moment to think about how God sees you. Because what God sees is what's real. And he sees you as his beloved child—forgiven, clean, reconciled and made new in Jesus Christ.

Let the mirror reflect what it reflects. But never forget that there is a new you already seated with Jesus at the right hand of the Father, beloved and safe, awaiting the day of Christ's appearing. **co**

Worth a Million Words

A visit is worth a thousand pictures.

By Mike Swagerty

I am the pastor of an average-sized church. Not wanting to see our congregation focus only on its own local agenda and programs, we asked God to show us a missionary opportunity in another country. I also asked my denomination's headquarters to put me in contact with a dedicated congregation, who just needed some extra resources to make an impact.

I was given the name of a pastor in Bogota, Colombia, who seemed to be just what we were looking for. But being the pragmatic and somewhat skeptical individual that I am, I thought it would be important that we met this pastor and talked face to face. We decided to pay for him to visit our congregation. He could give us a sermon and we could hear of his plans and passion for Christ.

It is now seven years ago that I went to the San Francisco airport to pick up our guest. I had only a vague idea of what he looked like, but I told him to look for someone holding a copy of this magazine in plain view. Soon a gentleman approached me and said, "You must be Pastor Swagerty." And I said, "You must be Hector Barrero from Bogota, Colombia." And thus began what has proven to be a continuing history of friendship and cooperation.

Hector spoke to us of his passion for Christ and showed us how we could help him. We all felt God had brought us together, and we agreed to become partners in his church's outreach in Colombia.

For the next several years we wired to the church account in Bogota several thousands of dollars from our missionary fund. It helped our Colombian partners to have a regular radio program, to purchase their own building, to host training seminars for

other budding pastors and ministry leaders, and to grow. We were sent pictures and emails, and kept up on the progress. But it was still from a distance.

Hector and his wife had repeatedly invited me to visit them. Our church advisory council and my wife Sandy were in favor of this idea. There was only one holdout: me!

Why?

Because I am a "status quo" kind of guy. Getting passports, enduring long flights, dealing with the hassles of international travel and simply having to leave the comfort of my routine did not excite me at all. I told all the folks who urged me that I would go only if and when I was convinced the Holy Spirit wanted me to go.

To experience something firsthand, with full exposure to all the senses, stands in a class by itself. If a picture is worth a thousand words, a visit is worth a thousand pictures.

They told me they would continue to pray my mind would change, but I ignored them. Until one morning I was praying, and in a way I have experienced only four or five other times in my life, a clear voice came into my mind with this question: "Why do you continue to resist going to Bogota?" Before I could give an answer, the voice continued, "You don't have an answer. You are just a stubborn and hard-headed man. Now go to Bogota and I don't want to





During our stay we visited two churches he oversees, watched him make his radio broadcast, met with his ministry leaders and his youth group and attended a double wedding and the renewing of vows by three other couples.



bring up this subject again!" I don't ever want to be spoken to like that again. I bought the tickets and Sandy and I flew to Colombia.

After picking up our luggage and clearing customs, we were met by our wonderful hosts, Hector and Paulina Barrero. What a joy to see them. I was more than a little nervous about going to a strange country. My Spanish would best be described as "Spanglish." But I learned a valuable lesson about speaking someone else's language. If you are willing to swallow your pride and overcome your fears, and just try, most people will love you for it. They don't care if you are perfect or not.

During the next week we spent some very happy hours with them and their two talented and gifted sons, Juan Carlos, and Andres Philip. Between activities, we laughed and cried, told stories, compared ministries and shared our hopes, dreams, trials and failures.

I had asked Hector ahead of time to pack our week with as many church-related events as he could. I wanted to get the fullest exposure to his church and ministry. During our stay we visited two churches he oversees, watched him make his radio broadcast, met with his ministry leaders and his youth group and attended a double wedding and the renewing of vows by three other couples.

I began to see that the Body of Christ crosses every cultural barrier. My context for Christianity has been solely American. But the Holy Spirit is active with every nation, language and culture.

We were so warmly received by these congregations we visited. We ate their food, shared their music, and heard of their hopes and dreams. I even gave about half of my sermons in Spanish. I far exceeded what I thought I could do, but I made plenty of mistakes to keep my audience in stitches as well. One kind lady in Bogota came to me after my sermon and said she really enjoyed my message. I asked what really impressed her. She said it was that I was so funny! Humor was never more beautiful!

I have had time to reflect on our visit. I am so glad now that I listened to the Holy Spirit and "just did it"! The many smiling faces and wonderful times spent together will be with me for life. Words and pictures can only go so far. But to actually experience something firsthand, with full exposure to all the five senses, stands in a class by itself. If a picture is worth a thousand words, a visit is worth a thousand pictures.

Who knows? Maybe in a year or two that voice will again come into my mind and say, "You know, I think it is time to go back again!" With such fond memories I am sure the next time I won't be so hard to convince. ☺

GIVE NOW?

By Mathew Morgan

Economy in Shambles," "Unemployment Rate Skyrockets," "Chrysler and GM Bankrupt," "Retirement Savings Evaporate," "Housing Prices Plummet." Nearly 60 banks have failed this year, following the closure of 25 banks in 2008. The Department of Labor reports that unemployment in the U.S. is 9.5 percent, and it is expected to get worse before it gets better.

Fear is causing many people to postpone retirement and vacations, cancel purchases, sell assets or take other defensive measures. Some people have reduced donations to their church or other charitable institutions even as needs are rising.

Although some wisely reduce charitable donations out of immediate necessity or a healthy evaluation of personal and family circumstances, some otherwise generous people reduce their charitable giving out of fear or uncertainty, focusing on preserving all resources in case things get worse.

Yet others faithfully continue to give even though the future seems uncertain, some even increasing the amount they give, and others starting to give for the first time. Why do some respond to uncertain economic times with generosity?

Here are some possible reasons:

1. The future isn't really uncertain.

Although in times of disaster and economic upheaval, uncertainty is abundant, believers know that our salvation and our ultimate future are secure in Christ. Jesus created us and he sustains us (Colossians 1:16-17). He tells us not to worry because, like the birds and the flowers, he will provide for our needs (Matthew 6:25-34).

2. Our assignment hasn't changed.

Just before Christ ascended to the Father, he told the disciples to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).

3. Physical and spiritual needs increase during tough times.

In periods of trial and crisis, people are more receptive to the good news of the gospel. Those who continue giving generously know that it is important at such times for the church to reach out even more, rather than less. Believers function as Jesus' hands and feet in the

world when they provide for those in need.

4. We have hope to share.

When bank accounts disappear, jobs are lost and everything seems out of control, people naturally look for answers and hope elsewhere. As believers who experience the same kinds of troubles as everyone around us, we are equipped to share Christ's love and hope as it flows through us. We can point the weary to Christ, to the one who offers willingly to carry our burdens (Matthew 11:28). We know that his amazing grace conquers our sins, makes us alive in him and gives us hope, and



Some faithfully continue to give even though the future seems uncertain, others starting to give for the first time.

we want to share with others that peace of heart and reassurance.

Trusting Jesus

There is a time to cut back on giving in order to meet obligations. There is also a time to give more in order to help bring Christ's hope, joy and peace to human beings who are going through severe trials. Each person has to evaluate their own circumstances as they determine how best to respond to the current economic fallout. Whatever we decide, we can take joy in knowing that Jesus loves us and will never let us go, and that we have part in sharing his good news around the world. ☪

Matt Morgan is denominational Treasurer and Secretary of the Board of Directors for Grace Communion International. He lives with his wife, 2 children and two dogs in Glendora, California.

Staying on Track When Others Are Not

A study of 2 Timothy 3

By Michael Morrison

In Paul's last letter to his favorite assistant, he warns Timothy about the opposition that Timothy will face, and encourages him to continue what he already knows is true.

Living in terrible times (verses 1-5)

This chapter begins with a warning: **But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days.** Many Jews speculated about what the future held, and many predicted that society would reach its worst point just before God intervened to straighten everything out. As verse 5 makes clear, Paul is saying that the "last days" are already under way (see also Acts 2:16-17 and Hebrews 1:2).

But that was almost 1,950 years ago. How could the first century be the "last days"? Either Paul was mistaken as to how soon Christ would return, or else we are mistaken in how Paul is using the language of prophecy. Or both.



Some of the strongest evidence for the gospel is the example set by people who taught Timothy, especially Paul.

It is a mistake for us to look at Paul's description, see it happening around us, and conclude that Christ will soon return. We live in the last days, yes, but so did Paul. If Christ's return could be 2,000 years away from Paul, it might be for us, too. It could be very soon, but it might not, and current events do not prove it one way or the other.

Let's look at Paul's description: **People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power.**

Missing from this list is torture, murder and

genocide; the list seems a bit tame in comparison to atrocities that also existed in the ancient world. Paul is not describing the worst of all possible worlds—he is describing Timothy's opponents: people who might look like they are godly, but who are actually rejecting the gospel.

Paul does not say here what his opponents taught, but other ancient writings help us make an educated guess. Many Greeks thought that spirit is good and matter is bad, so a good God did not create the physical world. Rather, he created a lesser god, who created a yet lesser god, who created another, who created another, etc., in a long series of gradually less-good gods, one of whom was finally so far removed from perfection that he created the physical world, and human souls somehow got trapped in physical bodies.

Salvation was seen as the process of escaping matter, and it required a person to learn the genealogy of the gods and the way to navigate up through these levels in order to reach the original perfection. There was no evidence for these speculations, but they were attractive to some Christians in the first and second centuries. Paul's advice was simple: **Have nothing to do with them.**

Truth will prevail (verses 6-9)

Paul describes the result such people were having in the early church: **They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over weak-willed women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth.**

These smooth-talking salesmen were able to convince some women (sections of 1 Timothy seem to address the same problem), and even though the women learned all sorts of secret "knowledge," they never really learned anything useful. Their anxiety about their sins and desires made them easy prey for a philosophy that offered a way for them to work their way out of the problem. The real truth is much simpler: Christ has done it for us; we do not need to be burdened with guilt or enslaved to our own desires.

Paul compares them to Egyptian magicians: **Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these men oppose the truth—men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected.** “Rejected” is too strong of a translation; the Greek word *adokimos* may also mean “incorrect” or “unapproved.” God has not totally rejected them, but we should reject them *as far as the faith is concerned*, that is, we reject what they teach.

But they will not get very far, Paul concludes, **because, as in the case of those men** (i.e., Jannes and Jambres), **their folly will be clear to everyone.** Paul does not tell us when or how (indeed, he says in verse 13 that the deceivers will soon get worse). His purpose is not to make a specific prediction, but to encourage Timothy to stick to the truth because eventually everyone will see that Timothy’s opponents are wrong.

Staying on track (verses 10-14)

Paul reminds Timothy that he has a firm foundation: **You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love...** Timothy has heard the arguments, but Paul does not point him there. Rather, he points to the way in which Paul lived out the truth of the gospel. Paul’s own steadfastness is an important testimony to the validity of the message.

Not only did Paul have desirable qualities, he also had some undesirable experiences. Timothy knew about these, too: **endurance, persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured** (see Acts 13-14). **Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them.** Paul writes this from prison, and expects death, so he knows that the Lord does not rescue his people from *all* situations. The point is that he *can*, and often has, so Timothy can be confident that the Lord will take care of him.

Timothy will experience some trouble, too: **In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.** Indeed, it will sometimes look like the bad guys are winning: **while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.** Paul’s purpose here is not to make specific predictions—the purpose of this “battle rhetoric” is to steel Timothy for the hardships that will come. If he expects the worst, nothing will catch him off guard.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned

and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it. Elsewhere, Paul tells Timothy to keep the faith because it is true—but here he tells him to persevere because he knows the people who taught him. Some of the strongest evidence for the gospel is the example set by people who taught Timothy, especially Paul. If Paul can be faithful through persecutions and problems, Timothy can be, too.

The written word (verses 15-17)

Timothy has another reason to be faithful: **from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures—**which for Timothy would be the Old Testament—**which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.** Paul does not say *how* the Old Testament informs people about Jesus, but the book of Acts and several of Paul’s letters provide more than a hundred examples of how Paul used Scripture. The Old Testament describes our need for a Savior, predicts salvation through a suffering Servant, and teaches that God is completely trustworthy.

All Scripture is God-breathed, Paul says. He does not say which books are in Scripture; nor does he specify how God breathed these writings. In context, Paul is talking about the Old Testament rather than the New, but the early church said the New Testament writings are inspired Scripture, just as the older writings are.

The important thing about inspiration is not the precise method used, but the purpose: **It is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.** Scripture is not designed to teach us grammar, geography, math or science. It has a more practical purpose: telling us about salvation through Christ, and after that, how we should live. We focus on those, rather than on speculations about the future. ☪

Taking it personally

- Is humanity more sinful today than it was a century ago?
- Why did the ancient deceivers target women in particular?
- Am I loyal to the people from whom I learned the truth?
- Does the Old Testament teach me about salvation through Christ?

The Greeks Had a Word for It

ΘΕÓΠΝΕΥΣΤΟΣ

Theopneustos is a combination of *theos*, meaning God, and *pneō*, meaning “to breathe or blow.” Ancient Greek writers used this word to describe wisdom, dreams or speech that came from the gods.

In the New Testament, it is used only in 2 Timothy 3:16, where the focus is on the usefulness of the inspired writings, and not on the precise means by which God caused his message to be written. ☪



Hmm...

While exhorting us always to let our gratitude for God's forgiveness overflow into works of love, [Paul] never imagines that our moral progress will be worth writing home about—our bodies are dead because of sin (Rom. 8:10)! Admiring our good works is like looking at our loved one, stretched out in a casket, commenting on how good he looks in that suit—for all the good it's going to do him!

**Mark Galli,
in *Christianity Today***

Just because two people argue, it doesn't mean they don't love each other. And just because they *don't* argue, doesn't mean they *do* love each other.

We don't have to change friends if we understand that friends change.

Heroes are the people who do what has to be done when it needs to be done, regardless of the consequences.

Can a mortal ask questions which God finds unanswerable? Quite easily, I should think. All nonsense questions are unanswerable.

C. S. Lewis

God created matter; in Jesus, God joined it.

Philip Yancey

Our problem is not so much that God doesn't give us what we hope for as it is that we don't know the right thing for which to hope.

Max Lucado

Speech is conveniently located midway between thought and action, where it often substitutes for both.

John Andrew Holmes

When our faith fails, Christ's faithfulness doesn't fail.

**Elmer Colyer,
in an interview on *You're Included***

Jesus Christ died for you precisely because you are sinful and utterly unworthy of him, and has thereby already made you his own before and apart from your ever believing in him. He has bound you to himself by his love in such a way that he will never let you go, for even if you refuse him and damn yourself in hell his love will never cease.

**Thomas F. Torrance,
*The Mediation of Christ***

The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that our aim is too low and we reach it.


Michelangelo

We trained hard, but it seemed that every time we were beginning to form up into teams, we would be reorganized. I was to learn later in life that we tend to meet any new situation by reorganizing, and a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while only producing confusion, inefficiency and demoralization.

Petronius Arbiter, A.D. 66

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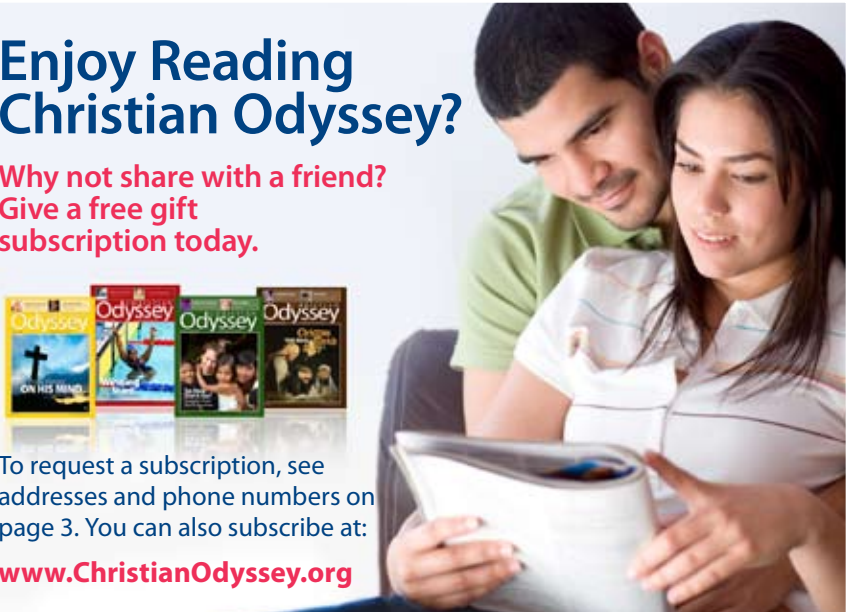


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