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Remember to Breathe

Generation gaps have a way of widening without warning.



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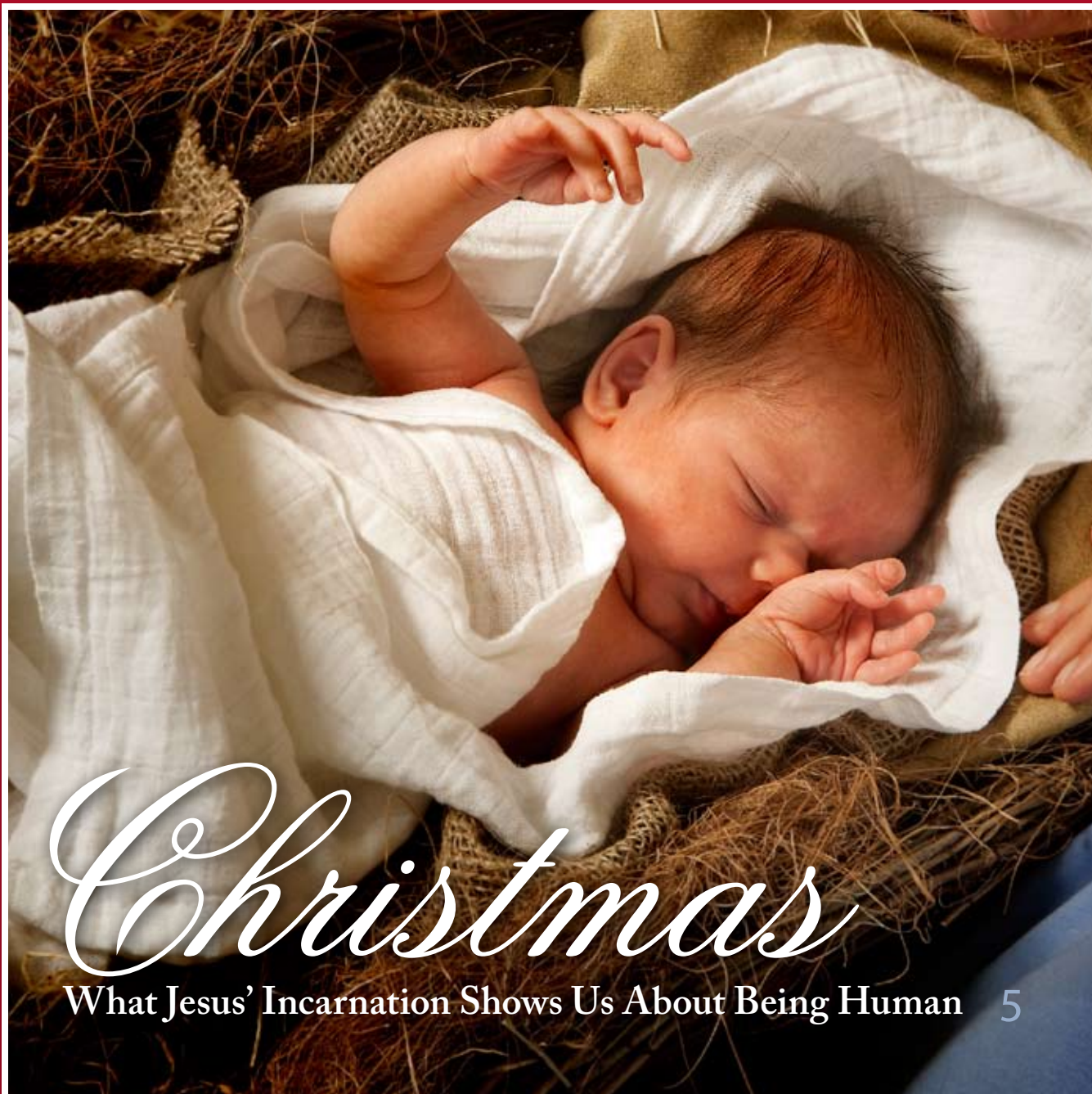
The Nightingales of Bangladesh

Practical help and spiritual comfort for the poorest of the poor.

CHRISTIAN Odyssey

December 2009-January 2010

Exploring Life and Faith



Christmas

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Letters to the Editor

I really enjoyed reading your articles about holidays. I think they are very informative and definitely prove that it's not a sin to celebrate our Lord during Christmas and Easter. I understood what the writers were trying to say when they pointed out that God can and has taken pagan traditions and customs to use for his glory. But I think this could be said a better way. In several scriptures, God tells his people not to worship him in a pagan way. So the best way to explain worshipping Christ on days such as Christmas and Easter is to understand that those dates never belonged to pagans anyway. God created days, the sun, the moon, fire, water, etc. A specific time period, or day, doesn't belong to a pagan. Just as an egg or a tree doesn't belong to a pagan.

In whatever we (Christians) do, we must make it clear that we aren't doing the same things pagans do and we aren't using God's creation in their way. All in all, one of your writers said that God transformed these pagan things to use for his glory. But in reality, God didn't have to transform. Inventions are man-made. Creation is God-made. So, when pagans use nature, they are stealing from God. I'm typing fast, but I hope I'm making sense. Anyway, other than that, the articles are wonderful and I enjoy your ministry.

AJ, email

Update

We have been asked if there is any news on Giacomo Tarroni, whose story we featured in the December 2007 Christian Odyssey ("Small Miracles," p. 14). We recently received this update from Giacomo's father, Gianni.

More than two years have passed since the accident of our son, Giacomo, which took place on June 14, 2007. After two years' stay in the hospital for physical and cognitive rehabilitation, he is now back home, facing school. It is very hard for Giacomo to accept that his left arm is completely paralyzed

and that he can only take slow steps and needs a walking stick to keep his balance. But, thank God, he is not discouraged or depressed and he keeps on hoping for continuous improvement.

The road is long and often very hard, but our Lord always gives us the strength to continue. He has promised that he will never abandon us and that he will always be with us. Experiencing this day-by-day makes our hearts full of joy.



What happened to our family has not discouraged us, disappointed us or depressed us. Rather, it has given us an incredible joy that goes beyond human understanding and allows us to completely enjoy everything life gives us daily, with simplicity, gratitude and thankfulness for God's love.

Vaccolino, Italy

Oops!

I just received my copy of the September-November 2009 *Christian Odyssey*, and as

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@gci.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 normally do, when a scripture is quoted, I read it in my Bible. I was reading "God's Masterpiece," by Barbara Dahlgren, and the fifth paragraph quoted Psalm 129:14. When I found the 129th Psalm, I found it had only eight verses. The reference should have been Psalm 139:14. It was a very nice article.

AG, Baton Rouge

Who wrote the article on the worst movie ever made in your September/November issue?

AM, email

Our apologies to our readers and to Al Doshna, who wrote the article, "Silk Purses From Sows' Ears," in the September/November issue. Al is a movie historian living in Southern California. His name was accidentally omitted from the printed edition, although it did appear in the Web edition (www.ChristianOdyssey.org).

I just wanted to thank you for the wonderful series of interviews that you have put on the Internet. I have been following what has been happening in your church for a while now. I download each new Trinitarian speaker onto my iPod so I can listen daily, and in doing so, my whole life has been turned around. Listening daily to your speakers allows the Holy Spirit to take me bit by bit out of my faulty thinking. I don't know what I would do if I didn't have this wonderful website. I just can't thank you enough.

SH, Sydney, Australia

The video series "You're Included" and "Speaking of Life" can be viewed at www.graceci.org. You can also download the audio of each program.

I just wanted to let you know how greatly I appreciated your article on the "Arian Controversy," and the thorough way in which it was presented. I am writing a research paper and many of my friends (including Returned Mormon missionaries) plan to read it.

KH, email

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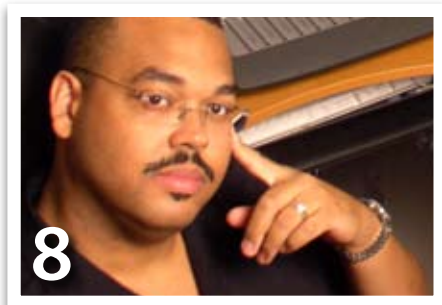
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Goodwill to all men?

By John Halford

On the day Jesus was born, a choir of angels sang: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests” (Luke 2:14). Or something like that. The original language is a bit cryptic and it is difficult to translate it. Consequently there are many variations of this angelic hymn of praise.

The traditional rendering—the one you’ll find in the carols and Christmas cards—is “Peace on earth, Good will to men.” Whatever version you settle on, one idea comes across clearly. God “favors” us—he has “goodwill” toward us. Let’s think about that for a moment.

Earlier in my ministerial career I was privileged to work in Southeast Asia. My congregation was mainly young Chinese, whose previous experience with religion had been very different from my own. Most had come from a mixture of Buddhism mixed with ancestor worship and paganism. These dedicated young people had no difficulty understanding that God had to be obeyed, but the idea that God actually loved them was harder for them to grasp. When I visited the temples where they had once worshiped, I began to see why.



Jesus did not come just to throw some wannabe good guys a lifeline. He came because God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—love us and want us. Far from wanting something from us, God put everything on the line to redeem us and make us new.

Although there were many gods, none of them seemed to be showing much goodwill toward humanity. Instead, they seemed to be the very opposite of what their names implied. The natural proclivity of the rain god was a drought, and in order for it to rain, he had to be persuaded with offerings and incantations. The same approach was needed to get a good harvest, or a healthy baby. From the look on the face of the Goddess of Mercy it was obvious that you did not want to catch her on a bad day.

The relationship people built with these gods was defensive. They assumed that the default mode of

these “deities” was to *withhold* their blessings. You had to buy their favor with gifts or burnt offering or special temple money (that you had to buy with real money). So it was not surprising that members of my congregation were interested in what they had to *do* in order to win the favor and stay on the right side of the God of the Bible. Legalism came naturally to them.

Thankfully, most of us who have grown up in the Western tradition don’t have that problem.

Or do we?

Our relationship with God, although perhaps more sophisticated than burning incense or offering special money, often has the nature of a transaction. We believe God is displeased with us, and that Jesus came to be a sacrifice for our sins and to show us how to live to keep him from getting displeased with us again. If we accept Jesus, and then shape up to his example, he will put in a good word for us. Even then, it will be touch and go, since we have such a knack for falling short of perfection. And, of course, people who don’t accept him before they die have no hope at all. But is this so different from the temple worshippers who assume that the natural mode of their gods is to be angry, or at best indifferent to us?

Jesus did not come just to throw some wannabe good guys a lifeline. He came because God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—love us and want us. Far from wanting something *from* us, God put everything on the line to redeem us and make us new. Surely there can be no more sincere a demonstration of God’s positive feelings towards us than the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

As Paul wrote in his epistle to the Romans, “We can understand someone dying for a person worth dying for, and we can understand how someone good and noble could inspire us to selfless sacrifice. But God put his love on the line for us by offering his Son in sacrificial death while we were of no use whatever to him” (Romans 5:7-8, *The Message*).

Several articles in this issue explore this theme, and we will continue to develop it with more articles in the future. We hope you will read them carefully and give them some thought. We want you to see the gospel is not just good news. It is better news than we could have possibly imagined. **co**



Christmas

When Jesus Showed Us Who We Really Are

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.
We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from
the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).*

By Rick Shallenberger

“**T**he Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us,” is arguably the most profound and exciting statement in the Bible. We know Jesus came to seek and save the lost, but the good news goes much farther than that. Salvation is not merely the removal of our sins, it is a new creation, a radical transformation of what it means to be human.

You might even say that Christmas is not only about Jesus; it’s ultimately about you!

True humanity

When John wrote in John 1:14 that Jesus became flesh and dwelled among us, he used an ancient image the Jews were familiar with. The word he used that is translated “dwelled” literally means “to pitch one’s tent.” It was a reference to God’s dwelling among the Israelites in the tabernacle, a special tent that was the precursor to the temple of Solomon (see Exodus 40:34-38). The difference is that the Word—Jesus—didn’t just dwell *among* humanity, he *became* human.

As the perfect human, Jesus is the definition of everything it means to be human. Whatever Jesus is, that is what he has made humanity to be in him.

This tells you at least three things about yourself.

1. It tells you that God is on your side. Jesus is God's beloved Son in whom he is well pleased (Matthew 17:5). Because your life is in Jesus, and in fact, he is your life (Colossians 3:4), you share in his personal relationship with the Father. With him and in him, you are God's beloved child.

2. It tells you that your sins have been removed. Isaiah 59:2 declares that sin separates people from God. When Jesus came, he took that sin upon himself so that we could be reconciled to God. In other words, Jesus became sin (2 Corinthians 5:21) so that we could be completely reconciled to God.

3. It tells you that nothing stands between you and God. John 1:14 says that Jesus "came from the Father, full of grace and truth." Jesus restored us to God through grace, without our input or help. We were reconciled even when we were still sinners, Paul wrote in Romans 5:10. It's a gift.

in Christ Jesus." We are not waiting for God to accept us. For the sake of Christ, he already has accepted us, and it never depended on us.

In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, Jesus illustrates God's unconditional love for wayward humanity. In this parable the betrayed father represents God and the prodigal son represents all of us. The Father never rejected us—we rejected the Father. Yet he eagerly awaits our repentance (turning our hearts back to him) and stands watching down the road for the first sign of our return. As soon as he sees us, he runs down the road to embrace us, honor us, and declare us his beloved child.

To be fully human is to know God

Jesus is the perfect revelation of the Father. As Ray Anderson put it in his book, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, "To know Jesus is to be confronted with the reality of God himself." There is no difference

The Father stands eagerly watching down the road for the first sign of our return. As soon as he sees us, he runs down the road to embrace us, honor us, and declare us his beloved child.



Jesus restored us to God by taking our broken human condition on himself. He became the representative and the substitute for all of humanity. Paul sums this up in 2 Corinthians 8:9: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich." As a human, Jesus brings humanity into perfect relationship with God and as God, he brings God into perfect relationship with humanity.

Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:4-5, "Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved." This is reconciliation at its finest. But then Paul went one step further in verse 6, saying, "God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms

between the heart of Jesus and the heart of the Father. Jesus said he was one with the Father (John 10:30). To know Jesus is to know God.

In coming to be with us, Jesus showed us the Father's love and compassion toward us. He "pitched his tent" among us because he *wants* to be with us and to identify with us. God didn't turn his back on sinners, he came to live among them, to love them and to heal them.

God created us to be in relationship with him. This was the plan from the foundation of the earth. Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:4-10, "In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ... And he made known to us the mystery of his will...to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ."

Jesus was never "plan B." It was always God's plan

and purpose to be in loving communion with those he created in his image.

When “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us,” he didn’t come to live in a tent or a temple. He came to live in *us*. He bound himself to us, taking up our cause, bearing and vanquishing our sinfulness. He called us his friends and made us his brothers and sisters, bringing us with him into the Father’s embrace.

As Anderson said: Jesus confronts us with the reality of God. The Spirit leads us to Jesus, and when we know Jesus, we know the Father. When we are in communion with Jesus, we are in communion with the Father and with the Spirit.

To be fully human is to know God—to know he loves us, wants us, and will never let us go. Jesus heals and restores our full humanity, becoming for us the image of God into which we were created.

Jesus shows us what life is all about. It’s about walking in communion with God—being in relationship with the One who created us, loves us, dwells among and in us, and adopts us as his own precious children.

Yes, Christmas shows us what it means to be truly human. The Christmas story finally is about you.



Rick Shallenberger is Pastor of Christ Fellowship Church, Cincinnati, Ohio.

A Fresh Look at Nothing

“[Jesus], being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”

When Paul says that the Son of God made himself “nothing,” he is not implying that humans are nothing. Paul is using a figure of speech to express that Jesus humbled himself in love in order to serve us. We, then, should follow his example by humbling ourselves in order to love and serve one another.

Theologian Gordon Fee summarizes it this way: “In Christ Jesus God has shown his true nature; this is what it means for Christ to be ‘equal with God’—to pour himself out for the sake of others and to do so by taking the role of a slave. Hereby he not only reveals the character of God but also reveals what it means for us to be created in God’s image. To bear his likeness and have his ‘mindset.’ It means taking the role of the slave for the sake of others” (Gordon Fee, *Philippians*, InterVarsity Press, 1999).

—Rick Shallenberger

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

By Steve Schantz

In 1739, Charles Wesley penned the lyrics to a song he called, “Hark How All the Welkin Ring Glory to the King of Kings.” A century later, Felix Mendelssohn scored the second chorus of a cantata commemorating John Gutenberg’s invention of printing.

Wesley intended his lyrics for slow, solemn music. Mendelssohn intended his music for non-religious, secular use. But neither genius nor genre could prevent the work of these two richly talented men from coming together to herald the good news!

In 1855, another musician, William Cummings, brought the work of Wesley and Mendelssohn together in spite of their express wishes. He took Wesley’s words and Mendelssohn’s tune and combined them as “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing.”

Isn’t that the Christmas story in a nutshell? God in Christ is always doing something that we could never imagine! Sometimes, even our “No way!” can become “Yes, his way” in Christ.

We appreciate you, Chuck Wesley, Herr Mendelssohn and Billy Cummings, for the beauty of the gospel set to music! But we thank the Father most of all for revealing to us his Son! Let the power and message of the music ring. *“Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel!”*

"Dr. Proverb"



By Jeff Broadnax

What do you call a Christian Board Certified Family Physician who created a musical genre called "HealthHop®" as a strategy to educate teens and young adults on the latest medical and "biopsychosocial" information? It's hard to nail down a fitting title because he's like a psalmist speaking proverbs with the convicting vocabulary of a prophet. The title I came up with for Dr. John Clarke of New York City is "Dr. Proverb."

In a recent interview, Dr. Clarke introduced me to his simple, yet profound, approach to Christian ministry. "I use rap music as an indirect marketing technique to promote healthy behavior and a Christian lifestyle." He continued, "I teach without preaching because too often the firewall of the teen mind is set to block out important issues, particularly health-related ones." In our postmodern/post-Christian culture, he accepts his role as a plowman who culti-

vates the soil of the mind to allow the physical, social, psychological and most importantly, spiritual, seeds of truth to germinate and grow.

Rap lyrics meet medical intervention

His love for writing rap lyrics began when he was 8 years old. He entered the medical profession in the 1980s, after his father suffered kidney failure and his father encouraged both John and his brother, Matthew, to consider the medical field as a career.

As a physician, John was struck by a level of ignorance mixed with skepticism within certain groups in the community at large and felt compelled to do his part to clear the clutter and relieve the resistance. At times, he encountered similar levels of confusion with Christians who struggled to balance roles of faith and medical interventions.

Seeing the need, he chose to demystify confusing medical information and protocols as well as show that medicine and walking in faith don't have to be mutually exclusive. Dr. Clarke rests in the belief that God is our Healer and the One who inspires the scientific community to discover better treatment op-

tions. “It’s not a lack of faith to choose a medical modality for treatment, because whether you are in a hospital bed or your own bed, God is the true Healer.”

How then, would he help bring such knowledge to those who need it? He would add music to the traditional methods of training.

Research based

The use of music to help teach difficult information is validated by research noting the powerful communicative effect on attitudes and behavior of the hearer. Multimedia presentations have been shown to plant information deeper than mere lecture or spoken word. Also bolstering his missionary strategy are studies that suggest teens of all races and genders will listen to approximately 10,500 hours of music between the 7th and 12th grades, which turns out to be just under the “cumulative time spent in the classroom from kindergarten through high school.”

“Education is key when it comes to health matters, including general information, treatment compliance and prevention issues.” Believing the younger generation is especially at risk, he and his wife, Elizabeth, formed Clarke Multimedia Inc. in 2004 to produce and distribute educational CDs and videos on health topics.

Dr. Clarke targets the 45 million 13- to 34-year-olds that Forbes.com reported in 2004 spent 10 billion dollars annually on Hip Hop music. He tackles issues of teen pregnancy, HIV, eating disorders, violence, drug and alcohol use, allergies, sickle cell anemia, asthma and diabetes with the same poetic potency that King Solomon used in Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon.

Getting past the barriers

Holding firmly to the conviction that all truth is from God, Dr. Clarke uses HealthHop® Music to cut through the lies and misrepresentations that affect our youth medically, socially, psychologically and relationally. He has no problem allowing his proverbs to bust up the rocky soil of the mind or even pull some weeds, but he plows among those who would be repelled by an overt spiritual call. Like Solomon’s lament in Proverbs 5 about the young man who was unaware that he was like an ox going to the slaughter in the hands of a seductress, Dr. Clarke “keeps it real” with songs like “Choose to Live,” which deals with depression and suicidal ideation and “Playaz Klub,” about the consequences of unhealthy sexual behavior.

Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes,

“Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him—for this is his lot. Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work—this is a gift of God. He seldom reflects on the days of his life,

because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart” (Eccl. 5:18-20).

In the same way, Dr. Clarke recognizes that nothing strips human beings from enjoying life like chronic health challenges. And asthma, diabetes, HIV and other debilitating health issues are often exacerbated by destructive behaviors such as smoking, drug and alcohol use, stress or risky sexual conduct. These weaken the body’s defenses, making people even more susceptible to common and seasonal illnesses like the flu.

Swine flu rap

2009 saw the introduction of a virulent strain of swine flu — the H1N1 virus. According the World Health Organization (WHO), there were only 12 cases of human swine flu reported between December 2005 and February 2009. In June, the WHO declared H1N1 to be a pandemic, and as of this writing, the CDC reports that the flu is widespread in 37 U.S. states.



Dr. Clarke uses his music to cut through the misrepresentations that affect youth medically, socially, and psychologically.

In July 2009 the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services decided to hold a public service announcement (PSA) contest to find innovative ways to spread the word about good hygiene and limiting the spread of H1N1.

With information gathered from Flu.gov, Dr. Clarke put the finishing touches on a song he titled “H1N1 Rap (Stop the H1N1).” His cousin, Hugh Applewhaite, Jr., filmed and edited the video on the campus of Columbia University and Dr. Clarke entered it in the HHS public service announcement contest.

On September 22, 2009, after more than 50,000 votes were cast during an 18-day period, Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services Kathleen

Sebelius informed Dr. Clarke that his video was selected from over 200 submitted as the top PSA by a host of video communications and public health experts. Now, no longer a mere YouTube sensation, “H1N1 Rap” was being shown internationally as a tool to slow the spread of the pandemic.

Kingdom living

Dr. Clarke has since been profiled on CNN, FOX, NBC, WGN and a host of other television and newsprint outlets. He feels blessed and validated in his belief that HealthHop® is evidence that music, and in particular the hip hop genre, is an effective means of influencing behavior and decision-making across all geographic, economic and racial boundaries.

While excited about the award, Dr. Clarke plans to use Healthhopmusic.com and Clarke Multimedia Inc. to demystify illness, educate chronic sufferers, share life-transforming medical information and empower all who will listen to embrace a lifestyle of stewardship of the gift

of God we call life.

Solomon concluded Ecclesiastes by saying,

“Not only was the Teacher wise, but also he imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true. The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails” (Eccl. 12:9-11).

For Dr. John Clarke, his educational proverbs and songs may be just the bridge needed for the plugged-in, post-Christian culture. He knows what the Doctor of all Doctors has ordered and is content doing his part to provide healthy soil for the heart and mind of the next generation. Offering his services to schools, community organizations, camps and churches, the man known to many as the “Hip-Hop Doctor” is ready to share his message of kingdom living with all who will listen.



Jeff Broadnax pastors several congregations in the New York area.

John D. Clarke, MD, FAAFP, is a board-certified family physician practicing in New York City. Currently he serves as the Medical Director and Medical Review Officer for the Long Island Rail Road. He received his B.A. in Sociology and Music from Columbia University and his Medical Degree from The Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York City. He also pursued training in multimedia design at New York University.

Dr. Clarke lives in Baldwin, New York, with his wife, Elizabeth, RN, MSN, their son John Clarke, Jr., age 3, and daughter, Sandra, age 1.

- Rapper’s delight: A billion-dollar industry. Investors finally see lucrative market in hip hop culture: msnbc.msn.com/id/4304261/
 - Clarke Multimedia Inc: healthhopmusic.com/dr.htm
 - www.whitehouse.gov/blog/Rapping-Doctor-Wins-H1N1-Video-Contest/
 - Health-Hop: An Effective Approach to Adolescent and Child Health Education
- John D. Clarke, MD & Elizabeth Clarke, RN, MSN

I’ve Been Reading...

Grace Walk: What You’ve Always Wanted in the Christian Life

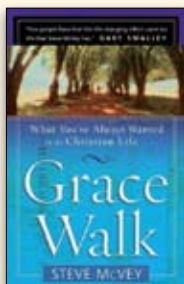
by Steve McVey

Reviewed by Barbara Dahlgren

Have you striven to do all the right things, such as attending church faithfully, praying fervently, serving cheerfully and reading the Bible daily in an effort to draw closer to God? Do you feel frustrated because you aren’t good enough and guilty because you can’t do enough? You are not alone. *Grace Walk* gives encouragement to those who find that no matter how hard they try, they still feel like spiritual failures.

Although we know we are saved by grace, most of us are still trying to earn salvation, or at least favor with God. Yet God already loves us and Jesus died for us while we were sinners. Doing things will not draw us closer to him, because he is already in us. You can’t get any closer than that. People believe the Christian life to be primarily a life of service, when it should primarily be a life of intimacy with God.

A byproduct of this intimacy is service, but our service does not



draw us closer to God; our closeness with God naturally manifests itself through service.

This intimacy will spill over into every aspect of our lives. Instead of approaching the Bible as a legalistic list of dos and don’ts, we will focus on knowing God. Instead of just saying scheduled prayers, we will enter into a continual prayer relationship with God. Instead of striving for victory, we realize that Christ in us is the victory!

I thoroughly enjoyed *Grace Walk* and McVey’s approach. This easy-to-read book helped me refocus on the fact that Christ isn’t simply in my life, he is my life. In him we live and move and have our being. *Grace Walk* suggests that the Christian life is a lot easier if we let Christ do it.

Steve McVey, *Grace Walk*, Harvest House Publishers, 2005, paperback \$11.99. co

“He Oughta’ Be Shot!”

By Sheila Graham

I couldn't help overhearing the two men at the doctor's office. "Well, I used to go to that church, but you probably heard what went on there. I go to a little church out in the country now. Not too many attend it, but you get to know everybody."

"Yes, I heard about that pastor. It's terrible when someone calling himself a man of God acts that way toward a young woman in his congregation."

"He oughta' be shot," they agreed.

Have you ever felt that way about people who abuse their authority? I admit I have. Slimy hypocrites, I call them, and worse. How can they look at themselves in the mirror and call themselves Christian?

We ought to be glad God doesn't respond to evil like we do. When we sin, we want mercy and grace, not justice. We certainly don't want to be shot.

The fruit of God's Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). We can be eternally thankful that he treats us that way and not the way we sometimes want to treat others.

Jesus said in Luke 6:37-38: "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

A few months ago my desktop computer woke my husband with a loud screeching sound. Next day we drove to a town about 30 miles away and I bought a new computer. I left it with them so they could transfer my old data and remove a lot of pre-installed junk software to save me the hassle.

We drove back the next day to pick up the computer. When we got home and I tried to access my data, it wouldn't open up. So we had to drive back again, our third 60-mile-round trip. The techies admitted they had forgotten to install some of the components and they would need to reinstall everything, including my data. This would take another couple of hours.

Another couple of hours!

We decided to get some lunch. We found a quiet booth in a corner. But then several rough-looking characters came in and sat at the table next to us.

I thought, "Oh no, why did they have to sit by us?" I prepared myself for rowdiness, obscenities and a lot of noise and lack of consideration.

My husband and I continued talking, and after a few minutes I realized the group of "rowdies" were sitting at their table and talking in regular tones with their food in front of them, but they weren't eating. Then, when another man walked in and joined them, they bowed their heads and asked God's blessing on their food.

Had I ever misjudged them!

Don't misunderstand; we have to make some judgments about people and exercise caution, otherwise neither we nor our families would be safe. There are a lot of unscrupulous folks out there. But Jesus is not talking about that kind of judging. He's talking about condemning people. For example, when we gossip, revile, slander or belittle people behind their backs, assume the worst about them, or harbor contempt for them in our hearts—that's the kind of thing Jesus was talking about.

At one time or another we probably all have hurt someone with our gossip, and we all have probably suffered from gossip. Words can and do hurt. But our Savior has forgiven us for everything we have ever done. We can rest in that forgiveness, free from the need to condemn those who have hurt us. We can forgive others because God has forgiven us.

Jesus said he didn't come to condemn sinners but to save them (John 3:17). And Jesus lives in us. In fact, Paul says he *is* our life (Colossians 3:1-4). Safe in his loving arms, we can forgive others even as God, for his sake, has forgiven us (Ephesians 5:1).

As for the computer techs who caused me all that hassle, I forgave them. And they gave me a \$50 gift certificate for my trouble. That didn't make up for the stress and frustration they caused me, but it about covered the cost of three 60-mile round trips. Besides, if it hadn't been for them, I'd never have had the chance to wrongly judge those rowdy-looking characters in the diner and be reminded to thank God that he is the ultimate Judge of us all. ☪

Hindsight:

Faith Reframing Tragedy

By Kerry Gubb

Oratorio. Opera. Popular. Sacred. She could—and did—sing it all. Genes, training and hard work conspired wonderfully to create my mother's soprano voice with the sweet clarity of a night-ingale and power to fill a huge auditorium.

Most of all, though, was the emotional impact. From recording her first studio "78" in the mid 1940s until the end of her singing career in the late 1980s, she could hold your soul in the palm of her hand and make you believe she was singing directly to you even though you were in a crowd of hundreds.

Mum has an emotionally rich personality that dramatizes her singing. She loves people. She cares deeply. She empathizes. It all found expression in her singing. She is totally head over heels in love with God, and her devoted life has through the years enriched the spiritual journey of many in her household of faith.

Then came the brain tumor.

Symptoms—diagnosis—shock—fear—options... the sequence familiar to many. Pathology: "benign." Great relief. "But it will still kill her by pressure on



Age and illness has silenced my mother's beautiful voice. But not her heart.

the brain as it grows"—fear revived. In the end, surgery saved her life, but it damaged facial and auditory nerves enough to end a wonderful singing career.

At such times, even families of faith ask questions they later regret. Mine was: "Why would God silence a voice that does little else but praise him?"

As if *he* had created this ugly anomaly. As if time and chance had played no role. As if I'd have been more compassionate to my mother than he seemed to be at that moment.

Thank God for his mercy to us in our pain-driven frailty (Psalm 103:12-14)!

Mum's faith and deep love for God helped her come to terms with it before the rest of us did. We did, though. We all do eventually—in our respective trials—if we remain "in him" (John 15:4).

For 20 years now, we've accepted that it was great while it lasted. We're thankful that Mum has precious memories of a 40-year experience, but realistically, it's well-and-truly over.

Or is it? Isn't it?

Flashback—1960s: As I grew up, there were two versions of my mother. There was the view from the front, the perspective most people had. She would come on stage, facing the congregation and enthrall them with worship music.

Then there was the view from the back. What I call "hindsight," the side of Mum that most people didn't get to see. She'd sit at the piano, learning a piece. She'd stand by the piano while her accompanist and she rehearsed. And the way our home was configured, whenever I passed by her on such occasions, I

Small Things

By Barbara Dahlgren

could see her back and shoulders moving involuntarily, rising, falling, swaying mildly, moving with the feeling and sincerity that so typified her singing, particularly of sacred music.

Flash Forward—2009: Standing in the congregation for a hymn, two rows in front of me, is my frail mother, age 80 in a few months, leaning on her walking-frame. Physically, she is a shadow of what once was. Her voice no longer packs a punch. Not many of those once thrilled by her singing are even alive to remember it.

And then it hits me: Her back and shoulders still move involuntarily—rising, falling, swaying mildly, moving with the feeling and sincerity that so typifies her singing.

True, I can no longer hear the crisp pitch, the dynamic range and power—nor all the other things that once coalesced into such a technically talented soprano. Then something else hits me: For 20 years I've regretted what *I* can no longer hear. But what has *God*, who sees and hears and knows all, been "hearing" over that time?

Two rows in front, her back and shoulders are still moving; the emotional intensity of love and praise are still there, intact. In fact, they haven't missed a beat.

"These are the ones I look on with favor: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word" (Isaiah 66:2, TNIV). That's my mother.

"As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God" (Psalm 42:1). That's my mother.

Then yet another thing hits me, courtesy of hindsight: "The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

Although we enjoyed listening to Mum sing, it was never about her voice, was it?

It was never about her performance.

It isn't about our performance.

It was always about her heart.

It's always about our heart.

I thought I'd learned this from my mother 50 years ago.

Clearly I needed to be reminded.

And I was—through "hindsight"—two rows behind as her back and shoulders rose, fell, swayed mildly, moving with feeling and sincerity.

It's about the heart, isn't it?

Always will be. ☪

The splendor of King Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem was renowned. Skilled craftsmen used only the finest materials in construction. Cedar beams, cypress planks, hewn stone, olive wood doors, gold chains, intricate carvings and enough gold overlay to rival Fort Knox adorned every inch. For more than 400 years it served as the focal point for Israel's religious ceremony and pilgrimage.

Then Babylon invaded, destroyed the Temple and took Jerusalem's inhabitants captive. About 50 years later, the Persians conquered Babylon and Jerusalem's exiles were allowed to return home. Under the leadership of a Jewish governor named Zerubbabel, they proceeded to rebuild their city and Temple.

Rebuilding the Temple was a slow process with many setbacks. Resources were few. Funds were low. Years passed and little more than a foundation was laid. Discouragement set in. Old-timers lamented that the size and grandeur of this second Temple would never equal the first (Haggai 2:3).

One can almost hear elderly Yiddish men whining, "Oy vey! You call this a Temple? You should have seen Solomon's Temple. Full of cypress, cedar, gold, and carvings! Now that was a temple!" People thought, "What's the use?" What they were doing seemed pitiful and small compared to this.

God had a different perspective. He encouraged them to take heart and assured them that the Temple would be completed under Zerubbabel's guidance. He also asked a rhetorical question containing a life lesson for all of us. "For who has despised the day of small things?" (Zechariah 4:10). In the eyes of the people, this work may have seemed pitiful and small, yet it was God's work all the same.

In a world that measures success by size, it's easy to think bigger is better. As Christians, we can fall into the same trap, thinking megachurches do more to further the gospel than small gatherings of people. But small does not mean weak and powerless—especially where God is involved.

God said, "Fear not, little flock" (Luke 12:32) and "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). He didn't say, "For where two or three thousand are gathered...." Of course God can be in the midst of a multitude as well as two or three, but having the latest technology and best acoustics does not guarantee making a greater impact for God.

In fact, God is rather adept at using small things for his glory. He sent deliverance through a baby named Moses found among the bullrushes, not through a mighty army. David defeated Goliath with a slingshot, not a cannon. Thousands were fed with two fish and five loaves of bread, not coupons for Hometown Buffet. Jesus entered the world as a newborn infant in a stable, not in a spectacular array descending from heaven.

Satan whispers in your ear, "You are worthless, puny and unimportant. What you do doesn't matter. Why continue on? What's the use?"

God whispers, "Take heart, my child. Believe me. Trust me. You are very valuable to me. I love you and will never leave or forsake you."

In the eyes of the world, who you are and what you do may seem small and insignificant. But in the eyes of God, little things mean a lot. ☪

The Nightingales Of Bangladesh

By Roger Lippross



Dr. John Biswas, founder of Bengali Evangelical Association (BEA), has worked for more than 20 years to bring the gospel message to the very poorest of the poor in remote villages of Bangladesh. John is an elder of Grace Communion International and coordinates his ministry with senior church officials. I recently accompanied him as he visited the BEA mission in one of those villages.

The dirt roads from Barisal, a bustling city of markets and rickshaws, to the BEA mission often run along the edge of steep riverbanks and are wide enough for only one vehicle. It was most harrowing when we met the occasional badly dented bus packed with passengers whose driver had little intention of giving way to anything smaller.

My arrival at the mission was scheduled to coincide with the graduation ceremony of the BEA nursing school. The names of 20 young Bengali women in their new white uniforms were read out and as they

passed before me, I had the great privilege of presenting them with their graduation certificates.

This nurse's aide training program accepts young village women of all faiths and makes them into what some have called nursing nightingales. This is not only because of Florence Nightingale's pioneer work in nursing, but also because the nightingale bird shares its beautiful song unconditionally, wanting nothing in return except that you enjoy its music. Nightingales are common in Bangladesh. Some say the bird was brought from England and released into the gardens of homesick expatriates when Bangladesh was part of India and under British rule. To the dreamer, the bird's haunting song foretells a paradise yet to come, a place where love and joy abound.

Let me introduce you to 18-year-old Nitka, one of the nursing graduates. We meet her in a small hut on the hot and steamy flatlands of Bangladesh. Here she, a Muslim, is comforting a dying farm laborer, a Hindu, whose hard life is coming to an early end because of malnutrition and disease. She is a nightingale of Bangladesh, providing care and kindness as she can to anyone who needs it, in spite of cultural and

religious barriers.

Nitka was happy to be selected for the training program because prospects for the future are grim for women in her culture. Females typically are forced into arranged marriages to men who treat them as their property. The training that Nitka received enabled her to hold her head high when she returned to her village. Her family and the local young men now treat her with respect, as she is the only person for miles who has any medical knowledge. She came from a poor Muslim family and has now become a woman of substance, as one nursing graduate phrased it. She is able to serve the villagers and has also secured a nursing job with a rich family, which enables her to support herself and her aging father and mother.

Like the many other young women who have graduated from the nursing program, Nitka has become like a nightingale that sings its sweet song for all who can hear. Of even deeper significance, Nitka's service and care foreshadow better things to come as she shares with the sick and dying the gospel hope that she learned while at the nursing school.

As far as we know, the training program is the only free one of its kind in all of Bangladesh. The students live in the school dormitory during the three-month full-time course in practical basic nursing, which is designed for service in the village situation. The course also exposes them to the gospel and to Christian values, which they in turn share with those they serve.

Although the course is free to them, it costs BEA \$200 per student to feed, train and supply them a nurse's uniform, first-aid kit, stethoscope, and other equipment and supplies.

When the final certificate is presented, the newly graduated nurses aides walk tall, because they have been given new reasons to hope, new reasons to live. The success of the BEA training program establishes goodwill with the village elders and speaks volumes about God's love for all of his children. BEA shows them by its action and impact that Jesus Christ did not come just for white Westerners, but for all the people of the world, including them. For many, this is a radical concept and they want to know more.

Back in Barisal the night before I was due to leave, I walked out onto the flat roof of the house where I was staying. A breeze came up, gliding freely across the rooftops into the homes of Muslims, Hindus and Christians, reminding me that God's Spirit moves wherever it wants, and that he loves all his children everywhere.

A nightingale warbled in the distance. [co](#)

If you would like to know more about the **Bengali Evangelical Association,**

visit www.bengalimission.org or

write to BEA Mission, P.O. Box 776, Bryn Mawr, CA 92318

In Other Words

Dze kotoku deka medea Kratsi o

By Kalengule Kaoma

The Ewe language of southeastern Ghana has a saying that emerges from the salt trade along the Volta River. The saying is *Dze kotoku deka medea Kratsi o*. It can be translated as "You don't go to Krachi with only one bag of salt."

Kete-Krachi, shortened to Krachi in the proverb, is about 200 miles (320 km) north of Ghana's capital, Accra. It isn't easy for salt merchants to get there, but if they undertake the journey, they will be able to sell all the salt they bring. Naturally, it would be foolish to bring only one bag of salt when you could sell far more than that.

In Christ, everything we do makes a positive difference for the kingdom of



God. As 1 Corinthians 15:58 tells us, "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."

Why take only one bag of salt to Krachi when you could sell 100? In the same way, the more we do in the name of Christ, the more his love flows through us and permeates the world. [co](#)

The Bond of Love

By Eric Wilding

“Who’s dat?” This is the repeated question of my 1-year-old as she points at people and clutches her favorite book, *Who Am I?* Meanwhile, my 3-year-old is constantly asking her friends, “What are your mum and dad’s names?”

At a very young age, humans start their quest to understand the identity of others and the relationships between themselves and others.

It’s the same with trying to understand God. As we get older, we want to know how God relates to us, but also how the Persons of the Trinity relate to each other. It’s not hard for us to get a handle on the idea of Father and Son, even though we know that that relationship somehow transcends our human understanding of persons and family relations.

The early church believed in one God, but the relationships of the Father, Son and Spirit were not clear until the fourth century.

For example, we see from the New Testament that Jesus is our Brother, and through him we learn to call God our Father or *Abba* (or Papa). With that, we might be tempted to think that we have figured out our relationship with God. But then a third Person, the Holy Spirit, drifts in, and exactly where he fits into these relationships is a little like trying to nail down the wind. We know he is a Person because he guides, hears, speaks (John 16:13), decides (Acts 15:28), ordains (Acts 20:28); and he uses the personal pronouns “I” and “me” when he speaks (Acts 10:19-20, 13:2).

Gregory of Nazianzen, a prominent church Father who wrote in the mid-to-late fourth century, in describing the biblical revelation of the triune God, wrote, “The Old Testament proclaimed the Father openly, and the Son more obscurely. The New manifested the Son, and suggested the Deity of the Spirit. Now the Spirit Himself dwells among us, and supplies us with a clearer demonstration of Himself.”¹

The apostle Paul, in Ephesians 4:3-6, calls the Spirit “the bond of peace” who maintains unity in love among believers and between them and God. In a way we cannot comprehend, the Holy Spirit is the essence and presence of the Father and the Son with us. In other words, the very love shared by the Father and the Son is a third divine Person, eternally springing from their perfect union and communion, distinct from them, yet one with them.

But the primary question confronting the church in its first 300 years was “Who is Jesus?” The church struggled with this question in the crucible of Roman persecution, pagan worldviews, Greco-Roman philosophies and its own Jewish heritage. From its earliest creeds, doxologies and baptismal formulas, it is clear that the early church believed in one and only one God while acknowledging the personhood and divinity of the Father, the Son and of the Holy Spirit.² But exactly how to express the relationships between the Father, Son and Spirit did not reach clarity until the fourth century.

Confronting the questions

In the early 300s, a priest of Alexandria, Egypt, named Arius created a major controversy by popularizing the idea that the Son was not divine in the same way as the Father, but was instead crowned with divinity as the first and greatest creation of the Father before all time. According to Arius, the Father first created the Son as a unique and special creation, and then delegated the rest of creation to him. At the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325), the church took up the controversy and ruled the teachings of Arius as heretical. The council, consisting of bishops from all over the Empire, dogmatically affirmed in what became known as the Creed of Nicea, that the Son is not of a similar essence as the Father, as the followers of Arius contended, but of the very same essence, or being, as the Father. The council also included in the creed the statement, “We believe in the Holy Spirit.”

Later in the same century, controversies arose over the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Certain groups, disparagingly referred to as the *Pneumatomachi* (fighters against the Spirit), taught that the Spirit was only the greatest creature, like an angel, a power, or an instrument of God.

The church turned its attention to the Holy Spirit in order to counteract these heresies by reflecting further on Scripture in order to clarify and explain what the church had always believed and experienced. Athanasius, the chief opponent of the heresies of Arius, concluded that

the Christian baptismal formula “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19) demonstrated that the Spirit shared the same divine essence as the Father and the Son.

Gregory of Nazianzus, a younger contemporary of Athanasius, confirmed that the Holy Spirit must be God since he does what only God can do, such as sanctify human beings. With Scripture and the arguments of these and other great theologians, the Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381) affirmed that the Holy Spirit is “the Lord and life-giver, proceeding from the Father, object of worship and the same glory with the Father and the Son.”

In each age of the church, the full divinity of the Son and of the Spirit has been attacked from without and within. These attacks force the church to explain, in its limited human vocabulary, the mystery of the Triune God.

With us and for us

Paul says, “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Romans 5:5, NRSV). In Revelation 22:1-2, the water of life (an image of the Spirit) flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb (an image of the Son) toward the servants.

The Holy Spirit is the gift of God in our lives (Acts 2:38-39). The Holy Spirit is the Giver who gives us his gifts (1 Corinthians 12-13) and his fruit (Galatians 5:22-23). The fruit and gifts go together to edify and unify the body of Christ. And the greatest gift of the Spirit is the same as the first fruit of the Spirit: love.

As God is in eternal loving relationship as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, so also he has made us to be in loving relationship with him and one another. As the Holy Spirit unites the divinity and humanity of Christ (Matthew 1:18, 20), so the Spirit also unites us to the Son so that we are united with each other as the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12: 12-13).

Because Christ has taken humanity into himself, we are partakers and participants in the divine nature with him (Hebrews 2:14, 3:14, 6:4, 12:10; 2 Peter 1:4). Because we are in Christ, because he is both the Son of God and the perfect human with us and for us in our humanity, we share in his perfect relationship with the Father. In Christ, we are the beloved children of the Father, in whom he is well pleased. And because we are united with Christ in his humanity, we share in the Trinity’s grace, love and communion (2 Corinthians 13:14).

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of adoption (Romans 8:15), who ministers to us our union with Christ, who is our righteousness and our life. As Jesus’ brothers and sisters we are children of the Father, and with Jesus, we stand in the Father’s eternal love, calling him “*Abba*.” ∞

¹ Gregory Nazianzen, *Orations XXXI Theological V*, 26.

² Stanley Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Traditions*, p. 16.

You’re Included



Cherith Fee Nordling, of Antioch Leadership Network in Grand Rapids, Michigan



Dr. Gary Deddo, Senior Editor of Academic Publications at InterVarsity Press



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Remember to Breathe

By Joyce Catherwood

I have five absolutely gorgeous and delightful teenaged granddaughters, ages 13 to 18, who live nearby. It was so simple to interact with them when they were little girls, happily playing dress-up or making mud pies. But the days of ribbons and bows and little froufrou dresses are over. I sometimes struggle to maintain the same intensity of interaction now that they are in their teens.

Generational gaps have a way of widening without warning. I already have the reputation of needing to be “protected” from some of the pressures of their teen-aged world. More than once they’ve said: “We didn’t tell you because we didn’t want you to worry.”

Recently, clever girl that she is and knowing that Papa and Mema speak French, our 18-year-old granddaughter asked us how to say “breathe” in that language. She wanted it tattooed on her wrist. Well, the three of us immediately became engaged in a deep discussion about how “breathe” could best be translated, have a nice ring to it, and still convey the meaning of remembering to breathe, i.e., to give yourself some space. Later, our daughter asked us very politely if we realized that we were giving our lovely granddaughter tacit approval for a tattoo. Uh, no... We didn’t. That had gone completely over our heads.

OK, so what’s a grandma to do? Just how is it possible to retain a viable grandparently presence that my granddaughters think is “cool,” without it being interpreted as Mema meddling. That’s my dilemma!

Could it be they simply need an environment where they can “remember to breathe”? A temporary escape from their teen-aged world of injustices, peer pressure, jealous classmates, embarrassment, puberty? A refuge from demanding classes and teachers, boyfriends, new-driver classes, fender-benders, jobs, interviews, auditions, recitals, movies, texting, Twittering, Facebook?

Does grandma really need to be “protected” from their reality? Especially when they’re the ones who oc-

asionally need some refuge from their whirlwind, often confusing lifestyle, and grandma might just be one of their only safe havens.

I don’t think so. If the ambiance created by grandparents is blighted by the usual generational misunderstandings and shocked reactions, teenagers won’t want to “hang out” there. I’m thinking a lot more can be accomplished by providing an inviting space for them, emotional or physical or both, where they really can “remember to breathe.”

A safe place where they can feel free to unburden if



they want to, or just close the door and read Harry Potter. They are not naïve. They already have a good idea of what I would approve or disapprove of. I’m not sure how much spoken “guidance” they really need from me, unless it is solicited. They get plenty of guidance at home.

More importantly, maybe in some small way, finding refuge with grandparents could also help them understand that Jesus is also always there to provide breathing room for them in the midst of life’s troubles. He literally did just that for a 12-year-old girl and her parents almost 2,000 years ago.

When Jesus entered the home of Jairus and his wife, it was filled with mourners playing funeral dirges on flutes and people clamoring, wailing, scoffing and fretting. Inside a back room lay their beloved only child on a bed. She was dead.

Jesus shouted above the ruckus, telling them all to get out. Only Jesus, three of his disciples, and the

Blessed Are the Includers

By Brent Meranda

My son, Johnathan, had a bad day at preschool the other day. I didn't realize how bad, however, until I tried to drop him off the next morning and he panicked. I leaned in to see what was wrong, and he gripped my neck with a death hug, buried his head in my shoulder, and refused to let go.

This wasn't like him. He had never complained before when I dropped him off, and he had never seemed to care when I left. In fact, he loves school. Just a couple of weeks earlier, when we were touring the place, he nearly cried when his mother and I made him leave. Yet, here he was, clinging to my neck for dear life, terrified I would go without him.

So why was he scared? The day before, a couple of kids had refused to play with him. That's it. They hadn't threatened him, laughed at him, or bullied him. They'd simply excluded him. I hadn't thought much of it when he told me the previous night. After all, that's what kids do, right? It didn't seem like a big deal. Yet, here I was late for work, hugging my boy for dear life, and terrified because I knew I had to leave him.

I'm not sure why I was surprised by his reaction. Our need to be included is fundamental to our humanity. It isn't secondary or nice to have. It's hard core—right up there with our need for oxygen, food, and morning coffee. Okay, the last one might just be me. But the rest are common to all people.

It reminded me of the incident between Taylor Swift and Kanye West at the MTV VMA awards this year. Taylor, a 17-year-old country music star, was accepting

an award for best female video. She had just started to explain how much it meant to her to be accepted by “mainstream” music, when rap star Kanye West took the microphone from her. He then explained that she really didn't belong there after all. Actually, he said that Beyonce deserved the award, but I'm sure Taylor and the rest of America heard, “You're not in the same league as Beyonce. You don't belong.” Understandably, Taylor broke down and was seen crying with her mother backstage.

Fortunately, the story didn't end there. Beyonce received another award later in the evening, and she took the opportunity to tell everyone how much she related to Taylor. Beyonce explained that she'd been a teen when she received her first VMA, and she remembered what it was like. She then invited Taylor back onstage to have her moment. Her message to Taylor was clear: “You do belong. You're one of us. You're included.”

My son, Johnathan, had a similar moment. Before I could figure out how to escape his grip, another little boy saw him clinging to my neck and asked, “Is his name Johnathan?” Surprised that he knew my son's name, I said, “Yes, what's yours?” He told me. Then he started telling Johnathan all about the stuffed animal he was carrying. Slowly and gently, Johnathan released his grip. Then he faced the boy and started telling him about his toys. A few moments later, as the new friends were playing, I slipped away without my son ever noticing.

Never forget the importance of inclusion.

I'm not going to end this article with a lecture on ways you can and should make others feel included. You're smart enough to figure that out on your own. All I'm going to say is, blessed are the peacemakers.

Now, I think I'll go buy a Beyonce album. ☪

parents remained. By ejecting the crowd, he had given the hassled and grieving mom and dad room to breathe. Then, in a calm, non-judgmental environment, Jesus bent over their daughter, affectionately took her hand and told her to rise up, to breathe once again! Not missing a beat, he then encouraged the astounded and joyful parents to give her something to eat. She was hungry after her ordeal. And I don't think Jesus meant for them to give her sprouted bread and Brussels sprouts. I think he meant for them to give her something special. Something she really liked, maybe a first-century version of mac and cheese and Sunkist!

I do so admire those grandparents who have figured out how to give their teenaged grandchildren space so they can “remember to breathe.” If I revealed the contents of this article to my granddaughters, they would say I try too hard and worry too much. That's probably true, but sadly, I can think of all too many failed opportunities to provide breathing room for them.

Actually, “giving yourself some space” is not bad advice for all of us, young and old. So, next time life seems to be closing in on you, or your loved ones, take a big, deep breath. *Détends-toi et respire*—remember to breathe. ☪

A High School Reunion Story

By Greg Williams

I recently had the good pleasure of attending my 30-year high school reunion. It was better than the 10th and the 20th reunions because classmates were less inclined to compete and compare. The 30 years of living provided the roller coaster of life's ups and downs that tend to mature people. Who has the biggest house or the fastest car just doesn't matter so much any more. It was a time of talking about kids going off to college and seeing baby pictures from the first wave of grandkids.

It was fascinating to see what some of my fellow East High classmates have been doing. Nate became a geophysicist who searched for oil deposits all over the world until he tired of the demands of supervising large crews of people and returned to western North Carolina where he started GQC – Good, Quick, and Cheap demolition services. Bill was a basketball-playing, hippie type who joined a cowboy church in New Mexico and became a missionary to East Africa. I'm sure both Bill and I would have been voted "most unlikely to become ministers" back in 1979.

Then there were Jim and Mike.

After 30 years, who has the biggest house or the fastest car just doesn't matter any more.

Big Jim was one of the most memorable characters in my class. He stands 6' 5" and has a charismatic personality. His sense of humor and smooth-talking way with people have been a great asset for him. He plays a mean bass guitar and has the vocal range to sing cover music from any rock band of the '70s. Jim worked in sales and management during the regular workday, but by night became a rock star in the clubs surrounding Chattanooga. When he became a father

a little later in life than most of us East Highers did, he made the decision to give up the night club stage. He told me, "I am trying to do right."

Mike didn't actually go to East High. He is one of those spouses who married into the class. Mike studied forestry in college and the possibility of work in Pisgah National Forest is what lured him to western North Carolina. He met and married Karen and therefore became permanently attached to the class of '79. Mike eventually became a policeman and then a probation officer. He picked my brain about my story and my journey in ministry. He said he has seen his role in working with released prisoners as a type of ministry, explaining that he treats prisoners like people instead of like numbers, and through that act of respect conveys the love of Jesus. Mike sees God as an unconditional lover, and he is committed to sharing the gospel as *good news*.

Mike's close relationship with God and the way that moves him to care for hurting people greatly encouraged me. But Jim, on the other hand, worried me. Surely God is calling his children to much more than a life of giving up rock-n-roll and performing at bars. I am not faulting Jim for taking stock of his life and considering what he wants for his child, but my prayer for him is to come to know the God who will abundantly enrich his life through a real and meaningful relationship, not a god who simply offers a list of rules demarking right and wrong behavior.

The Bible clearly indicates that we humans are not even capable of producing righteousness apart from Christ.

Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). The entire chapter of John 15 addresses this shared life in Jesus—remain in him, abide in him, make your dwelling in him because he chooses to remain, abide and dwell in you. God is more interested in you and me knowing him, relying on him, and trusting him more than he is in our faltering efforts to live righteously. He is our righteousness; he is our life (Colossians 3:4).

Rain to Rainbows

By Tammy Tkach

In Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, Aunt Norris couldn't bring herself to be happy for her niece, Fanny Price. When Cousin Edward suggested giving Fanny a horse, Aunt Norris objected that it would be too extravagant a gift. When Fanny was invited to a ball, Aunt Norris didn't think it appropriate for her to go. After all, Fanny wasn't from the noble part of the family and didn't deserve the same perks her cousins enjoyed.

Have you ever known someone like that? Someone who can't seem to endure seeing others blessed and who always rains on everyone's parade? Perhaps you're like that. I have been from time to time. Instead of rejoicing with others, either out of jealousy, self-pity or just plain meanness, we sometimes say or do things to bring happy people down.

Many Christians, unable to accept the magnitude of God's grace, add conditions to everything from church membership to teaching children's classes—and even to salvation. Being accepted by God can't be as easy as simply believing! Surely people need to be made aware of just how horrific sin is to God and how angry he is at it. No one can get away with anything less than repenting on bloody knees, going through a gauntlet of misery and emotional suffering to prove their understanding of sin, followed by years of doing good works. Being saved is the easy part; actually getting to heaven requires much effort.

Or does it?

Do you still wonder how God can let everyone in on the fun of grace, regardless of how serious their sins? How

he can pay the latecomers to the vineyard the same as those who started work at dawn? How he can welcome the prodigal son, who hadn't even taken the time to have a bath?

The beautiful thing about understanding God as a Trinitarian being is a simple concept called inclusion. Father, Son and Spirit include each other in everything. Each does nothing without the others. The love enjoyed by Father, Son and Spirit overflows to the whole of creation and includes all of us, every living thing from beginning to end. No one is left out. No one must feel the sting of rejection or abandonment—not with God.

The import of this truth is enormous. Every single person you see (and those you don't see—everyone who ever lived) is included in God's life. There are no exceptions. Some will choose to exclude themselves, but that's between them and God. Our business is to love and include everyone to the best of our ability and leave the judging to God.

What a difference this understanding would make to churches everywhere! I can't imagine how many tracts would have to be reprinted if this truth were embraced. The sinner's prayer would become the beloved's prayer or the believer's prayer. That little bridge used to illustrate the gulf between God and humanity? Gone! Instead you might see a picture of the loving arms of God, holding someone who may still be in need of a bath, clean clothes and a meal, but grateful, happy and loved.

If Aunt Norris had understood this, she could have contributed not only to her niece's happiness but also to her own. She could have changed the rain that ruined the parade into a rainbow, with blessings for everyone, just as God intends. ☪

It is not works that lead to relationship with Jesus; it is the relationship with Jesus that leads to good works. With Jesus abiding in you, you can treat released criminals as children of God living on this side of the cross. With Jesus dwelling in you, you are able to perform in bars and at rock-n-roll concerts (we are in the world, but not of the world).

So what can you do to make Jesus abide in you more? What can you give up to bring about a closer relationship? Nothing.

The choice to create you, to die for you and live for you, and to love you in spite of your sins and shortcomings, was

and is Jesus' choice, not yours. He is faithful to you, he loves you completely and unconditionally, and he will never love you more nor less than he does at this exact moment.

My prayer for Big Jim is that he sees himself as the loved child instead of the estranged sinner, and that he will learn to focus not so much on what he needs to subtract from his life, but on Jesus as his ever-present life and righteousness.

I'm already looking forward to our 40th reunion and learning where the roller coaster of life will have taken us by then. One thing I know. Jesus is on that wild ride with us, and always will be. ☪

“The time has come for my departure”

A study of 2 Timothy 4

By Michael Morrison

We now reach the last chapter in Paul’s last letter. He is in prison, waiting for his last trial. He knows that he will probably lose and then be executed for preaching the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. He is ready for death, and he encourages Timothy to continue the work in the coming years.

A commission (vv. 1-5)

This chapter begins with a solemn and formal declaration of duties: **In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge...** Paul is reminding Timothy that his primary allegiance is to Christ, and that Christ will evaluate Timothy’s work.

His assignment is to **preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful in-**

struction. That is, deliver the message, all the time, and in doing that, you will sometimes have to correct problems and rebuke heresies. You will need to teach again and again, so be patient. People’s enthusiasm will wane, so you’ll need to encourage them.

Why? For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. Timothy should teach diligently because heresies will come—indeed, they have already come. But Paul’s logic implies that Timothy can prevent some of the heresy by teaching faithfully. Every teaching, whether good or bad, is desired by someone or another, but it must all be

judged by the word of the gospel. **But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.** In doctrinal controversies, Timothy needs to keep his cool and accept some discomforts. In everything, he needs to preach the gospel, and in doing so he will fulfill his assignment.

For the immediate future, Paul wants Timothy to visit him in prison (v. 9). But Paul’s commission here will provide a focus for Timothy after Paul is dead.

My time has come (vv. 6-8)

Paul explains why he gives Timothy this commission: because Paul will soon die. He sees it as the culmination of a life well lived, in service to his King: **For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure.** He is in the final season of his life, and he looks back with some satisfaction:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. These metaphors are different ways to say the same thing, and all convey a sense of completion.

Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. Paul again refers to the Day of Judgment, and the rewards Christ will give.

A “crown” (*stephanos*) may refer to the laurel wreath given to people who won a race. The point is not that we will literally have something on our heads, but that we will be rewarded with the gift of being accepted by God. The righteous status we now have will then be ours permanently and in its fullness. We need to keep our eyes on the future reward.

Personal requests (vv. 9-13)

In the last part of his letter, Paul refers to a number of people and circumstances. In most cases we can only speculate about the details. **Do your best**



Do your best

to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. We do not know the nature of his desertion, or why he went to Thessalonica.

Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. Perhaps Paul sent these men, or they simply decided to get out of Rome.

Only Luke is with me. Verse 21 shows that other people are with Paul, too; what Paul probably means here is that Luke is the only one remaining from Timothy's generation of co-workers.

Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. Many years earlier, Mark had deserted Paul, but he later helped Paul in prison (Acts 13:13; Col. 4:10). How he helped is not known.

I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. He may have carried the letter to Timothy—and by staying in Ephesus, he would make it easier for Timothy to leave.

When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments. As winter approached, he needed that cloak. What was written on his parchments? Perhaps books of the Old Testament; perhaps copies of his own letters.

Resisting the enemy (vv. 14-18)

Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. We do not know if this is the man mentioned in 1 Tim. 1:20. He must have done something either to get Paul thrown in prison, or to lose a trial.

No matter what, Paul did not retaliate: **The Lord will repay him for what he has done.** However, Paul does not want Timothy to forget the danger of a repeat performance: **You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message.** We do not know whether Alexander's objections were political, pagan, Jewish, or Gnostic.

At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. Paul implies that he will have a second defense, although due to imperial policy in Rome, condemnation was probably inevitable.

But good came out of his trial anyway: **But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the**

Gentiles might hear it. Paul was not put in prison for any criminal action—the only accusation against him was his message, so it would be natural for him to present that message in court.

And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. He escaped immediate punishment, but his case was forwarded to another judge, perhaps Nero himself, who was almost certain to order an execution.

Paul believes his time is up, but he says with confidence, **The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom.** In context of this chapter, this seems to mean that the Lord will keep him faithful, and although his enemies can kill the body, they cannot kill the soul (cf. Matt. 10:28). Paul's salvation is secure in Christ. **To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.**

Final greetings (vv. 19-22)

Paul takes his last opportunity to greet some old and dear friends: **Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus.** Onesiphorus himself may have died.

Erastus—possibly the man mentioned in Rom. 16:23—**stayed in Corinth, and I left Trophimus sick in Miletus.** Even Paul couldn't heal everyone.

Do your best to get here before winter. Not only does it get cold in winter, it is difficult to travel, so if Timothy procrastinates, he might have to wait three more months, and that may be too late.

Eubulus greets you, and so do Pudens, Linus, Claudia and all the brothers. The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

Questions

- What would it take for me to be at peace with my own death? Do I have a sense of completion?
- In what way could I encourage someone in the next generation to continue the work of Jesus Christ?
- Is it possible for the Lord "to rescue Paul from every evil attack" by letting him be killed? Can I trust a God who lets evil get its way?

The Greeks Had a Word for It

Καῖρός

Greek had two main words for time. Sometimes they meant essentially the same thing, but sometimes they had different connotations. *Chronos* referred to a quantity of time, time that could be measured by a clock.

Kairos, the other word, could refer to a time that was significant

in *quality*, a significance that went beyond the number of minutes or days. It was a season of opportunity, an occasion for a special event. In 2 Tim. 4:6, Paul said that the *kairos* had come for his departure. It was not just a date on the calendar, but a tremendously significant milestone in his life and ministry. **co**

Hmm...

Our plight was hopeless. No amount of New Year's resolutions, pious good intentions or attempts to drag our moral and spiritual lives Godward was ever going to amount to anything. When we were complete, abject and utter failures, God moved. God in Christ entered the direst pit of corruptible humanity. Christ laid hold of lost humankind in order to offer us "holy and blameless before him in love" (Ephesians 1:4).

Andrew Purves,
The Crucifixion of Ministry

If it is painful for you to criticize your friends you are safe in doing it; if you take the slightest pleasure in it, that's the time to hold your tongue.

Alice Duer Miller

If you don't want anyone to know, don't do it.
Chinese proverb

Why are large champagne bottles given biblical names? According to champagne expert Francois Bonai, winemakers in Bordeaux have been using the name "Jeroboam" for the four-bottle size since at least 1725. It is presumed they selected the name because Jeroboam, who ruled Israel from 931-910 B.C. is referred to as "a man of great worth." The practice was continued with other kings and patriarchs: Rehoboam (six bottles), Methuselah (12 bottles), Balthazar (16 bottles) and Nebuchadnezzar (20 bottles).

At 18 our convictions are hills from which we look. At 45 they are caves in which we hide.

F. Scott Fitzgerald

The opposite of love is not hate. It is indifference.

Elie Weisel

Accept that some days you are the pigeon and some days the statue.

It seems to me that we would be able to

avoid the overly romantic sentimentalizing of Christmas if we remember that it is more fully a festival of the Father, the One who gave us the unfathomable gift of his Son. Christmas is not a cute baby in a cozy stable, but the harsh reality that God, the Creator of the whole universe, so condescended as to give us his Son as a creature in the flesh. Imagine if a shoemaker would become a shoe!

Marva Dawn,
The Unnecessary Pastor

This is the way in which we are surely to interpret the Incarnation, in which God has drawn so near to man and drawn man so near to himself in Jesus that they are perfectly at one.

Thomas Torrance,
The Mediation of Christ

In Jesus Christ, God himself has become the "neighbor" to Adam through his own humanity. The incarnation is the embodiment of God as the true form of humanity.

Ray Anderson,
The Shape of Practical Theology

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