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Letters to the Editor

A very timely article on church; one that will encourage and challenge. Beaut job! Thanks again.

RB, Australia

I could go to any number of churches and have all kinds of supportive small group meetings, like choir practice, praise team, in-home Bible studies, prayer meetings or even women's clubs. But it's not "home."

I think of my local congregation like I do my family. I have a history with them, and I am concerned that if I don't stay (for them), that they will have a harder time in their walk with God. I have a role with them, even though I don't heal them or cure their problems. Sometimes all I can do is cry with them.

I can't see that happening anywhere else. Each week is like a new family reunion with this family of God that I love so much and whom God loves and is leading to grow together in the grace and knowledge of Christ.

LF, email

Nice Bible study. I also like the other articles. Kudos to *Christian Odyssey*. More and more, I find the magazine really worthy and enlightening.

NB, email

We were having an email discussion about the use of capital letters for pronouns that

refer to God. *Christian Odyssey* uses lower case, and there must be a good reason why. Could you enlighten us?

HJ, South Africa

It is a matter of current prevailing grammatical style—it has nothing to do with respect or reverence or righteousness. Greek and Hebrew did not make any typographic distinction between divine pronouns and other pronouns.

Your magazine is like a fresh breeze of spiritual peace every issue. (I read it on your Internet site.) Thank you for being there.

AN, Scotland

Thanks for the articles in *Odyssey*. You seem to have a knack of bringing principles to the fore in easy-to-understand everyday language.

I am trying to find a "church home". 4 years ago I started attending a large church which I felt seemed to have a good mix of Christian teaching, outreach, friendliness, etc. My problem is that I have not really connected with anyone even though everyone is very friendly and the messages are very thought provoking. I feel alone in a sea of 300/400 people.

Now, I have some friends who I do connect with who go to another church. I have attended that church a few times and enjoy

the fellowship BUT I find the sermons a bit dry. The message is fine, it's just the delivery.

So I have a conundrum (at least I think I have). I was toying with the idea of going to one church for the sermons, then leaving and going to the other for the fellowship. I am not particularly keen on the idea but I am going to a church just for the messages with no close bonds to the people. At the same time going to church just for the people doesn't seem quite right either.

It probably sounds like I am trying to be a buffet Christian and going to where "I" feel best and it's all about me.

I am not asking for you to tell me what to do, just some thoughts would be great. I am sure I missed something!

PM, email

There is nothing wrong about attending two churches, but you also say you are trying to find a "church home." In that case, although congenial people and inspiring sermons are certainly factors, let's stir another ingredient into the mix. A church home is a place where you can be served, but also where you can serve. So you might ask yourself, "Where am I needed? Where can I use my abilities and expend my energy most effectively in serving others?" As you say, it is not "all about you." Perhaps the "right" church is not one that you need so much as one that needs you.

About Our Cover

Although it has been several months since a devastating 7.0 earthquake leveled Port-au-Prince, we felt we needed to say something about Haiti. But how to illustrate it?

We could have chosen the usual route—pancaked buildings and gaunt-eyed refugees. But there is another side to the Haitian story. We asked Andre Naval, a Haitian professional artist, to paint us a cover symbolizing how he felt about the future.



Andre's work is filled with vibrant

color and energy, reflecting life as it could and should be rather than the drab poverty of life in Haiti as it actually is today. Andre may be surrounded with squalor, but his art is filled with life and brilliance. He especially loves painting butterflies and flowers, the quintessential symbols of transformation and new life, a whisper of hope for the future.

You see the result of Andre's work on our cover—truly a glimpse of heaven, painted from the fringes of hell.

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Haiti—help and hope

By John Halford

Sadly, it took an earthquake that leveled Haiti to put it on the map. Before January 12, I doubt many of us could have located Haiti, and knew very little of its history. Then, for several days it became front-page news. By the time you read this, the media will have moved on.

I know Haiti well. I have many friends there. Thank God they all survived, and are doing what they can to help their neighbors. We must not forget them—their country will need intensive care for many years if it is to survive and rebuild.

It was interesting to see, as the scope of the tragedy unfolded, how people around the world began to discover the history of this unlucky nation: its struggle to become a free country after a determined fight against slavery only to be abandoned by the USA and exploited by Europe at its greatest hour of need, and finally victimized by corrupt national leaders who appropriated what little wealth was left.

Sadly, this story is often told from the perspective

sinned, and he is not to blame for ours. So when he took our sins on himself, he did not do it out of a sense of guilt. But he did accept the responsibility for them, because he loves us. He said he came to give us life (John 10:10), and he did it “while we were yet sinners” (Romans 5:10).

As we look past Haiti’s ruins, poverty and misery, we see a people Jesus loves. I always come away from Haiti with a new feeling of respect for what it means to be human. There is so much to love about Haiti and the Haitians. I look into the eyes of the market lady asking to sell me a match—just one match. They are not the eyes of a beggar. It is a dignified transaction. As I pay for my match she thanks me, and offers me change from handful of tattered bank notes.

There used to be an old man at the airport who would clean the shoes of departing passengers. He crouched at my feet, polishing away with his battered brushes and a tin of polish scraped nearly dry. A lowly job? Hardly. He told me that he had put several of his sons through college. These are not unusual Haitians. Those who know these people well will tell you they are asking for a hand up, not a hand out.

A rebuilt and restored Haiti would be a wonderful monument to the 21st century. By some estimate the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are costing about \$122,000 every minute. Just suppose, in the name of our common humanity, our adversaries agreed to a cease-fire, or even a temporary truce, to allow America and her allies to divert some of that to rebuilding Haiti.

OK, let’s get real—that isn’t going to happen. It is not the way of this world. But we who represent another way and a higher kingdom can show there is a better way. We must not forget Haiti, for in its sad ruins is an opportunity for all of us to show what it means to be human. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul reminds them how “those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor” (1 Corinthians 12:22-23). The tragedy that has hit Haiti calls us all to fresh priorities. If we can set aside sectarian and political rivalry and work together for a common cause, the hell that is Haiti might show us how the kingdom of God can come—on earth, as it is in heaven. ☪



If we are to really help Haiti rebuild, there must be a stronger motivation than just feeling sorry for them, and sorry about what we collectively might have done to them.

of blame, and certainly, much blame can be laid at the developed world’s feet. But blame leads to guilt, and guilt is a strong emotion. Stir guilt into the mix of ruined buildings, broken people and abandoned children, and you can guarantee an immediate outpouring of concern and generosity. The trouble is, guilt is also an emotion that can quickly evaporate. Putting the world on a temporary guilt trip will not produce the kind of long-term commitment that Haiti needs.

If we are to really help Haitians rebuild, there must be a stronger motivation than just feeling sorry for them, and sorry about what “we” collectively might have “done to them.”

Guilt-edged compassion

We Christians are especially susceptible to feelings of guilt. But it is rarely constructive. Jesus never



“Haiti will not die, Haiti must not die!”

So said Haiti’s President Rene Preval, on the day of national mourning, one month after the earthquake leveled the city that was once my home. I pray he was right.

Will my homeland live again?

By Marie Antoinette Monaus

I was born almost half a century ago in Port-au-Prince, in the poorest and unluckiest country in the Western Hemisphere. Haiti is a rough, mountainous land with few coastal plains, valleys or rivers and lies in the hurricane belt. It suffers from extensive deforestation, erosion and lack of drinkable water.

In the 1700s, some 200 years after the native Arawak Indian population had been decimated by disease and enslavement under the Spaniards, Haiti became a prosperous French colony on the backs of black slaves imported from Africa who worked the sugar cane plantations. In 1804, after a bloody rebellion by the slave population, Haiti became the first independent black nation in the Western Hemisphere. With no outside support and trade embargoes from every slaveholding nation in the world, including the USA, Haiti had little hope for economic success.

French and Creole are the official languages. Catholicism is considered the state religion, but other religious practices are widely spread. About half the population practices voodoo. And then, as if we didn’t have enough problems, my poor, unlucky country suffered a magnitude 7.0 earthquake on January 12, 2010. I am overwhelmed with grief as I hear the news and see the photos and video of thousands of my people injured and killed, and thousands more buried under the rubble without hope of rescue. My emotions are jerked between sadness and relief as I listen to reports of trapped survivors being recovered one moment, then stories of families losing loved ones the next.

My soul is experiencing a deep sense of loss and grief as I see my people trying to recover from this devastation without food, clean water, shelter, and medical help.

You see, most Haitians living abroad and considered as part of the Diaspora, still consider Haiti to be our home, even if we are citizens of another country.

Some countries allow their citizens to keep a dual citizenship, but Haiti doesn't. So most of us adopted the citizenship of the country to which we emigrated, and where we now are getting our livelihood and raising our families. We are very grateful for this opportunity to have a better life abroad. It allows us to be able to support family and friends in Haiti who count on us for their daily existence. We are all still Haitians in our hearts.

I thank God that so many nations are helping us. A multitude of helpers, equipment and supplies has descended on Port-au-Prince. I stand in awe at the rallying spirit of the nations standing together to help my people. But my soul is still exceedingly grieved as I don't know how we are going to make it in the long term.

We are going to need help for many, many years—perhaps decades. Jobs must be created, schools must start over, infrastructure and homes must be rebuilt in order for hope to grow again in the heart of the people. Courageous, honest leaders must rise up from the destruction and ashes. But are the nations of the world and the Haitian people ready for such a heavy undertaking? Will Haiti find the support it needs as the months and years go by?

If Haiti was the poorest nation in the Hemisphere before the earthquake, what about now?

Who knows what the future will bring? I certainly don't. What I do see is that right now my people are expe-

riencing Jesus in the flesh. The Haitian people are feeling, touching, smelling, and seeing Jesus through the help and sacrifice of the humanitarian workers.

The heart, mouth, feet and hands of Jesus are evident in the smiles, tears, hard work and love of the volunteers. As he was touching his children in Haiti, he also allowed me to experience him deeply through the phone calls, notes, emails, and hugs of others who shared with me their sympathy, love and prayers. Jesus was embracing me through the caring and love of the most unexpected people.

When we are going through something we don't understand, we have to trust Jesus. In trusting him, we can keep hope alive. We can remember that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are with us always.

Only God can turn something as desperate as this monumental tragedy in Haiti into something good. Only God can turn hearts to love. Only God can rebuild lives. That's our Father's way! It is his love in us that blesses the hurting and the helpless. May that work continue until the job is done. ☪



Marie lives in California with her husband Morange and three children. She enjoys reading, traveling and writing as a hobby in her spare time. Connect at MarieMonaus@HealingShepherdOnline.org

Haiti and America

Everyone knows that the United States was the first nation in the Western Hemisphere to throw off colonial rule and declare independence. But how many realize that Haiti was the second?

In the years following the Revolutionary War and the Declaration of Independence, large parts of what is now the USA were still very much "up for grabs." The French had dreams of a North American Empire, and had claimed a huge slice of territory reaching from New Orleans to the Canadian border.

The determination of Haitians to remain free became a factor in the future power and prosperity of the United States.

Much of this was still a wilderness. France's most important New World colonies were the Caribbean islands. And the richest and most prosperous of all was the one they called the "Pearl of the Antilles"—the land that is now Haiti.

Haiti's wealth was founded on slave labor, and the slavery in Haiti was particularly brutal. In the late 1700s, when France was convulsed in its own revolution, the Haitians also rebelled and demanded freedom. There was not much the French could do about it, and for a few years, the slaves

enjoyed a measure of freedom. But in the early 1800s, the Emperor Napoleon, now firmly in charge of the new French Republic, decided that he needed to safeguard his North American territories against the Americans, the British and other rival powers. He sent a large force to strengthen his stronghold in New Orleans. On the way, they were ordered to stop over in Haiti to restore Imperial rule and reimpose slavery.

This was supposed to be a quick mopping-up operation. But Napoleon underestimated the determination of the Haitians, who had no intention of becoming slaves again. They fought back, and the "mopping-up operation" became a long and brutal war. The French army was decimated, and had to retreat. In 1804, Haiti declared itself an independent nation.

With his army decimated, Napoleon was left without sufficient forces to defend his North American possessions. Faced with wars in Europe, France abandoned the dream of a North American Empire, and in 1803 France sold Louisiana and its territories to the United States, for about 3 cents an acre.

The determination of the Haitians to remain free became a factor in the greatest real-estate deal in history, and the future power and prosperity of the United States.



Where was GOD?

By J. Michael Feazell

If God loves people, why does he wipe them out? We inevitably ask that after a disaster. Like when the devastating Indian Ocean tsunami on the day after Christmas in 2004 shook the faith of religious people the world over. What kind of God would kill 200,000 people in a single stroke?

And now the disastrous earthquake in Haiti on January 12, 2010, along with its crippling aftershocks, raises the question again. Where was God when tens of thousands were being crushed, maimed and trapped in rubble until they died of thirst or starvation if not their injuries? If God is all powerful, surely he could have stopped it. So why didn't he?

Who's to blame?

"God didn't do it; he just allowed it," some say. Maybe they think that's a good defense. I don't, and I doubt you do. Allowing something that you could stop is not much better than doing it yourself.

When something bad happens, we want someone to blame. When the bad thing is a natural disaster, there's no one left to blame but God. Earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, tidal waves, lightning strikes. The insurance companies call them "acts of God." Nobody is to blame—nobody except God, that is.

The Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 and the Haitian earthquake are just recent examples in a long line of history's mind-numbing natural disasters. Looking back, more than 3.5 million died in the North Korean floods and famine of 1995-98. More than 900,000 died in the Ethiopian famine of 1984. Two hundred forty-two thousand died in the Tangshan, China, earthquake of 1976. The Ethiopian famine of 1974 claimed 200,000.

The Bangladesh sea flood of 1970 took 200,000-500,000. China's famine of 1960 took 20 million. One million died in the flu pandemic of 1957, and up to 100 million died in the flu pandemic of 1918. Earthquakes in Nansan, China, in 1927 and in Gansu, China, in 1933 killed 200,000 each. Up to one million died in Huayan Kou, China, in the Yangtze Kiang flooding of 1887.

The French smallpox epidemic in 1870-71 killed 500,000. One million died from the Irish famine of 1845. The Iran earthquake of 1780 killed 200,000. Ten million died in the Bengal, India, famine of 1769. The Shensi, China, earthquake of 1556 claimed 800,000. And the black plague of Europe and Asia in 1346-42 took 25 million lives.

People ask, why does a loving God let such astounding mayhem happen?

I have another question. Why does God let *anyone* die?

God could have made the universe so that nothing ever went wrong. But he didn't. For some reason, he thinks that is good.

Not long ago, I attended the funeral of a woman who was celebrated for her many personal ministries of love. She died of cancer, and her suffering was nothing short of horrible. A friend's teenage daughter died in a fiery car crash on slick winter roads. She was on break from a Christian college, and her suffering and the grief of her parents, relatives and friends was



every bit as real as the suffering and grief of any individual who died in a tornado, a tsunami or an earthquake.

Why did God let Grandma die? “She was old,” someone might say. “It’s the natural way of things. We grow old and die.”

Yes, it is the natural way of things. Bodies wear out. Plaque builds up in arteries, and if enough builds up, it cuts off the blood flow and causes strokes or heart attacks. Sometimes cells get mixed up and go crazy, becoming cancer cells and disrupting the tissues and organs around them. Over time bones lose their density and an accidental fall can break a hip. Joints lose their elasticity. Eyes lose their sharpness.

The ground erodes too, and the earth’s crust shifts. Water evaporates. Rain falls. Rivers rise. Winds blow. Even healthy people and young people can get hit by falling rocks or flying debris. People get caught in flash floods, mudslides and collapsed mineshafts.

People fall off roofs, out of windows and off scaffolding. Sometimes it happens when they are doing humanitarian work, trying to help or save someone else. And God, far, far more often than not, sits by and watches it happen without lifting a finger to stop it.

When someone we love grows old and dies of “natural causes” we accept it as the way God has designed the creation—there’s a time to be born and a time to die.

But when someone we love dies before growing old, we ask, “Why would God allow this to happen?”

Not an automaton creation

No doubt, God could have made the universe in such a way that nothing ever went wrong. But he didn’t. He created a world that is free to be itself—and to express its identity in continually fresh and creative ways. For some reason, he thinks that is good.

Maybe that’s because it takes such a world, a wild and free world, to be the breeding ground for things God values in human beings—things like courage, devotion, loyalty, self-sacrifice, kindness, generosity, hope, trust. By anybody’s reckoning these are a few of the noblest features of humanity. Would such qualities exist in a world without risk, danger, calamity—and death?

And where would love be in such a world? Love

God made a world in which love can grow. In love, humans pull together and respond to suffering and calamity, encouraging and standing by one another.

isn’t just a matter of getting along. Love is made real in the crucible of suffering, of self-sacrifice, of loyalty and devotion against the odds.

“Oh really,” someone might say. “If God thinks that is so great, why doesn’t he just come down here and go through what we go through in his so-called good creation?” Well, that’s just what Christians believe he did. And just like death happens to every one of us, he died. But Christians believe that his death changed death itself. He made death a pathway to resurrection, to new life, to a new creation in which “there is no more death or mourning or crying or pain.”

As much as we hate to admit it and hate to talk about it and throw stones at those who do, we all die. We all die of something. Whether we die of “natural causes” or of “natural disasters” makes little difference in the end. Either way, we die, and nothing will stop it, regardless of how kind we are or how mean we are or how smart, careful or wise we are. But the good news is, regardless of how or when we die, Jesus resurrects the dead.

God could stop all natural movement of earth, air and water. He could stop humans from making mistakes, making unwise decisions, being selfish, or stubborn or rude. God could have made a “Stepford Wives” style creation in which everything worked automatically. But he didn’t. God created a world in which something far more valuable than long physical life could exist. He made a world in which love can exist and grow. In love, humans pull together and respond to

suffering and calamity. In love, humans forgive one another, help one another, encourage one another and stand by one another.

God suffers with us

God is not a stranger to human suffering. Christians believe that God became a man, suffered as a human and died as a human, and because of that, humanity itself has been taken up into God's own being. In Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, humanity's cause is now God's cause. When we suffer, God suffers with us.

God loved the world so much, John the Gospel writer recorded, that God gave his Son that whoever believes in him would have new life. God sent his Son to save the world, he added, not to condemn it (see John 3:16-17).

Death is part of life, and every person who lives will also die. Even you and even me. But death is not the end of the story of our lives.

God did not make human beings merely for this life of suffering and grief—he made us for his new creation of fulfillment and joy. The lives cut short now, deprived now, stifled now, cheated now, will find their fulfillment in the life of the new creation. This is the Christian hope, and Christians hold this hope in faith—faith that God who freely took up our human cause as his own, even to the



point of dying like a criminal as one of us, is true to his word. Every person who dies will also live.

In this hope and in this love, we extend compassion and help to others. As we do, we experience the deepest riches of true life, riches that are unseen but more real than physical security and safety. Love truly does “make the world go ’round.” ☪

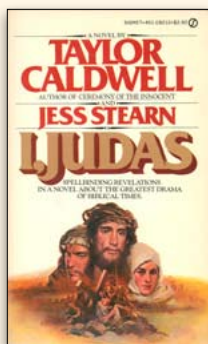
I've Been Reading

I, Judas

by Taylor Caldwell | Reviewed by Kerry Gubb

If God can speak through a donkey,¹ he can also “speak” to me through the pen of a novelist. Taylor Caldwell's² three most famous biblical works³ have enhanced and plausibly fleshed out some fascinating minutiae of stories that were necessarily summarized in the Bible. Caldwell's background research in history and archaeology is on a par with James Michener.

I, Judas, written as an autobiography, attempts to explain the most infamous betrayal in history. This immediately appealed to me because for many years I could not understand why Judas betrayed Jesus to the priests, then back-pedaled, renounced his own testimony, threw back the 30 pieces of silver, then hanged himself.⁴ Wasn't Jesus' downfall the very outcome Judas had plotted? Taylor Caldwell thinks not.



That's the point of the book.

Is she correct? Wiser minds can decide, but the benefits I derived from the book didn't depend on that.

After reading the book, one isn't rendered sympathetic with Judas. He safely remains western history's greatest villain. But should he ever come up in conversation (he doesn't that often!), I am perhaps less self-righteously judgmental, because Caldwell has disturbingly demonstrated that I have something in common with Judas—as do we all.

Despite not knowing how to pray as we ought,⁵ we may find ourselves holding passionate opinions about how God “should” act in response to our prayers. We might feel let down if God doesn't respond the way we'd like him to. We might find ourselves taking it out on others⁶ or even resenting the way God deals with us.

Like Jesus' use of Lot's wife⁷ as a word to the wise, *I, Judas* improved my grasp of some of the nuances and real-life implications of “Thy will, not mine, be done.” ☪

¹ Numbers 22:28.

² Janet Miriam Holland Taylor Caldwell (1900–1985)—Anglo-American novelist and prolific author of popular fiction, also

known by the pen names Marcus Holland and Max Reiner, and by her married name of J. Miriam Reback.

³ *Dear and Glorious Physi-*

cian (1959), about Luke; *Great Lion of God* (1970), about the apostle Paul; and *I, Judas* (1977)—an “autobiography” of Judas Iscariot.

⁴ Matthew 27:1-6.

⁵ Romans 8:26.

⁶ Luke 12:45.

⁷ Luke 17:32.



“With what body are the dead raised?”

—*Corinthian believers, around A.D. 51-55*

By Paul Kroll

The resurrection of believers to immortality at Christ’s appearing is the hope of all Christians. It’s not surprising, then, that when the apostle Paul heard some members of the church in Corinth were denying the resurrection, he challenged their misperceptions in 1 Corinthians, chapter 15.

Paul first rehearsed the gospel message, which they believed, that Christ had been resurrected. Paul reviewed how the crucified Jesus was laid in the tomb a dead corpse, but three days later was bodily resurrected to glory (verses 3-4). He then explained that Christ was raised to life as our forerunner—pointing the way to our future resurrection at his appearing (verses 4, 20-23).

Christ resurrected

Paul validated the truth of Christ’s resurrection by referring to more than 500 witnesses to whom Jesus appeared after he rose to life. Most of the witnesses were still alive when he wrote his letter (verses 5-7). Christ had also appeared to the apostles and to Paul himself (verse 8). The fact that so many people saw Jesus this side of his grave in material form confirmed he had been raised

bodily, though Paul didn’t make an issue of this in the chapter.

But, he did tell the Corinthians it was plain foolishness—with absurd consequences for Christian faith—to doubt a future resurrection of believers, since they *did believe* Christ had been raised from the grave. To disbelieve in a resurrection was to logically deny that Christ himself had been resurrected. If Christ had not been resurrected, believers would not have any hope. That Christ was resurrected guarantees believers will also be resurrected, Paul told them.

Paul’s message about the resurrection of believers is thoroughly Christ-centered. He explains that the work of God through Christ in his life, death and raising him to life makes the future resurrection of believers possible, leading to God’s ultimate defeat of death itself (verses 22-26, 54-57).

Paul had steadfastly preached this good news—that Christ had been raised to life and that believers would also be resurrected at his appearing. In an earlier letter, Paul wrote: “We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him” (1 Thessalonians 4:14). Such a promise was, said Paul, “according to the Lord’s word” (verse 15).

The church, following the hope and promise of Jesus in the Scriptures, has taught a belief in the resurrection throughout its history. The Nicene Creed of A.D. 381 says, “We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life to come.” The Apostle’s Creed of around A.D. 750 says, “I believe in... the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.”

Resurrection body question

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul responded to the Corinthians’ specific disbelief of and mistaken view about the bodily resurrection: “But someone will ask, ‘How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?’” (verse 35). The issue was how the resurrection would work, namely what kind of body, if any, would those raised to life receive. The Corinthians wrongly thought Paul was teaching it was the same kind of mortal, sinful body they possessed in this life.

What need of a body in the resurrection, they wondered, especially the present corrupt body? Had they not already achieved the goal of spiritual salvation and actually needed to get rid of their body? In the words of theologian Gordon D. Fee: “The Corinthians are convinced that by the gift of the Spirit, and especially the manifestation of tongues, they have already entered into the spiritual, ‘heavenly’ existence that is to be. Only the body to be sloughed off at death, lies between them and their ultimate spirituality.”¹

The Corinthians had failed to understand that the resurrection body would be of a higher and different order than the present physical body. This new “spiritual” body would be necessary for life with God in the kingdom.

Paul used a farming example to point to the greater glory of the resurrection body over our present physical body, appealing to the difference between a seed and the plant that grows from it. The seed may “die,” or cease to exist, but the body—the plant—that comes from it is much more magnificent.

“When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else,” Paul wrote (verse 37). We can’t predict what our resurrection body will be like by pointing to our present physical body’s characteristics, but we know that it will be of vastly greater glory, as is the oak tree in comparison to its seed, the acorn.

We can have faith that the resurrection body, having glorious life without end, will make our eternal life much more splendid than our present physical life. Paul wrote: “So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power” (verses 42-43).

The resurrection body will not be a clone or exact replica of our physical body, Paul is saying. Nor is the body we receive at the resurrection composed of the identical

atoms of the physical body we had in this earthly life, which decayed or was destroyed at death. (Besides, which body would we receive if that were so: our body at age 2, 20, 45, or 75?) The two kinds of bodies will be as different in quality and glory as is the beautiful butterfly that emerges from the cocoon that previously housed a lowly worm.

Natural and spiritual bodies

There is no use to speculate on exactly what our resurrection body or immortal life will look like. We may, however, say some general things about the major difference between the two types of bodies.

Our present bodies are physical like an animal’s, subject to decay and death, and sinful. The resurrection body will possess a different order of life—immortal and imperishable. In Paul’s words, “It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body” (verse 44)—not a “spirit” body, but a spiritual body in the sense of being appropriate for the life of the age to come. The believers’ new body in the resurrection will be “spiritual,” not immaterial, but spiritual in the sense of having been created by God to bear the likeness of Christ’s glorified body, transformed

The Corinthians failed to understand that the resurrection body would be of a higher order than the present physical body.

and “adapted to the life of the Spirit in the coming age.”² The new body will be utterly real; believers will not be bodiless ghosts or specters.

Paul contrasts Adam and Jesus to underscore the difference between our present body and our resurrection body. “As was the earthly man [Adam], so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man [Jesus], so also are those who are of heaven” (verse 48).

Those who are in Christ when he appears will have a resurrection body and life in Jesus’, not Adam’s form and being. “Just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man” (verse 49). The Lord, said Paul, “will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body” (Philippians 3:21).

Not subject to death

This means our resurrection body will not be perishable flesh and blood as we know it now—not dependent on food, oxygen, and water for life. Paul was adamant: “I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood

cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable” (1 Corinthians 15:50).

At the Lord’s appearing, our mortal bodies will be transformed into immortal bodies that are eternal and not subject to death and decay. Hear Paul as he tells the Corinthians: “I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet [a metaphor signaling the future appearing of Christ]. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed” (verses 51-52).

Our being raised *bodily* to immortality is our joyous and sustaining hope as Christians. In Paul’s words: “When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality,” at the appearing of Christ, “then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory’” (verse 54). [co](#)

¹ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 778.

² *Ibid.*, p. 788.

Is Our Brain All There Is to Who We Are?

Nobel Laureate Francis Crick, co-discoverer of the structure of the DNA molecule, has written that we “are in fact no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules... nothing but a pack of neurons.”¹ Vilayanor S. Ramachandran, a renowned neuroscientist, claims: “All the richness of our mental life—all our feelings, our emotions, our thoughts... our religious sentiments... [our] own intimate private self—is simply the activity of... our brains. There is nothing else.”²



Is the richness of our mental lives, feeling, emotions and spirituality no more than the firing of neurons in our brains?

Neuroscientists do not find evidence of a distinct mind or “soul” when they do their research. They only witness “brain work”—the firing of neurons when we think, emote or are engaged in a creative activity. Further, when a person’s brain is injured, his or her ability to reason, relate to others and create can be impaired, depending on the injury. On such visible evidence, scientists and philosophers naturally conclude that this is all there is to who we are—brain, neurons and body.

Christians believe that the essence of what a human being is—call it mind, self, being or “soul”—survives the death of the body and brain. Jesus said, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul” (Matthew 10:28), thereby distinguishing between physical body (including the brain, obviously) and the essence of personhood—our conscious being.

Scientists such as Gerald L. Schroeder (*God According to God*) and best-selling author on Christian topics, Dinesh D’Souza (*Life After Death: The Evidence and What’s So Great About Christianity*), provide a number of analogies to help us think outside the box about a parallel existence of both brain and mind—our consciousness.

Think of the brain as the radio receiver and radio waves as the mind. If the radio is turned off, one might conclude that radio waves don’t exist. But turn on the radio and tune it to a station, perhaps playing a piece of music, and the existence of radio waves suddenly becomes evident.

For the radio waves to be manifest, we must turn on the radio receiver. Turn the radio off or smash it, and there is only silence. Now, the radio waves appear not to exist. The radio doesn’t create the radio waves, but they can’t be played for us to hear without it being turned on and in working order.

Let’s look at the analogy of a DVD of a movie. For the contents of the DVD to be seen, it must be played through a computer’s hardware or DVD player. Smash the computer or player and the movie disappears as though it didn’t exist. But the DVD contents do still exist and can be played on another computer or DVD player.

In a similar way, the mind is impaired if the brain is impaired, and the mind disappears from our view if the brain dies and decays. But it is not hard to see that a mind could be “played” again if given a different body by the God who created us in the first place.

Dr. Schroeder explains what the real conundrum is about the mind-brain connection: “The puzzle of the mind-brain interface is not in the recording and biochemical storage of the incoming sensory data. That is brainwork... The puzzle is in the replay. There is no hint in the brain of how you hear or see what you have heard or seen... The location of that perception is the puzzle.”³

The promise of Christ in the Scriptures is that a person’s mind or soul will be “brought back” by the power of God, despite the death and decay of the present physical body. God will provide a new and glorious body for us in the resurrection.

¹ Francis Crick, *The Astonishing Hypothesis: The Scientific Search for the Soul* (New York: Touchstone, 1994), p. 3.

² V.S. Ramachandran, *A Brief Tour of Human Consciousness* (New York: Pearson Education, 2004), p. 3.

³ Gerald L. Schroeder, *God According to God: A Physicist Proves We’ve Been Wrong About God All Along* (New York: Harper One, 2009), pp. 151-152.

Drawing First Blood

By Nan Kuhlman

I'd like to say that I finally overcame my lifelong fear of donating blood, but that wouldn't quite be true. The truth is, I volunteered to write an article about the American Red Cross for a local magazine. I could have chosen a simple approach, such as the history of the Red Cross, but I knew deep down that it would promote a worthy cause if I, gulp, wrote a first-person article about giving blood. I never dreamed that I would meet Jesus at the blood drive that day.

It happened to be 9/11/09, Patriot Day, as it's now called, a day when Americans are encouraged to do something sacrificial. I hadn't thought of that when I decided to make my way to the blood drive, but I liked the idea of being part of something that honored the nearly 3,000 people who had died that day in the World Trade Center eight years earlier.

The blood drive was busy that day, so in the hour that I waited, I talked to other potential donors about their experiences giving blood and why they did it. One 20-something woman, with piercings and tattoos, told me she donated blood to honor her dear grandmother, a loyal Red Cross volunteer, who had recently passed away. I saw Jesus in the love and honor that this young person was bestowing on her grandma's memory.

I chatted with a middle-aged mother, and found that she had nearly died in childbirth many years ago. Had it not been for four units of blood, she wouldn't have been talking to me. I saw Jesus looking out for her through the simple sacrifice of a blood donor, and I saw Jesus in her, looking out for the future recipient of her donated blood.

As I was giving my pint of blood, Jesus ministered to me through the loving care shown by the Red Cross nursing staff. Through their experience and expertise, he soothed my discomfort and his peace filled my heart and calmed any fears.

Story after story affirmed the presence of Jesus in this simple group of local people doing something good for their community. Almost all the folks I talked to acted as if giving blood were no big deal. They weren't looking for praise or even a pat on the

back. To me, it was evidence of the Holy Spirit moving each of us to do something small so that synergistically we could do something big.

The ancient Christian hymn by St. Patrick, known as "St. Patrick's Breastplate," is a good reminder of how Christ ministers to us and through us, even in the most unlikely places:

*Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.
I bind unto myself the Name,
The strong Name of the Trinity;
By invocation of the same.
The Three in One, and One in Three,
of Whom all nature hath creation,
Eternal Father, Spirit, Word:
Praise to the Lord of my salvation,
Salvation is of Christ the Lord.*

The Holy Spirit was moving each of us to do something small so that synergistically we could do something big.

On my way out the door, the local coordinator of the blood drive reminded me that by giving a pint of blood that day, I had saved three lives. I thought about that for a while, and concluded that Jesus' blood is the real life-saver. He conquered sin and death once and for all at Calvary, and today he works through each of us, inviting us to participate in our small way as he ministers to the vast sea of humanity he calls his brothers and sisters.

Whether it takes the form of rescuing others from a collapsing building, a kind word to a harried check-out clerk, or a simple donation of a pint of blood, Jesus is at work in every act, big and small, of courage, concern and care in every corner of our darkened world. ☪

Label Me Loved

By J. Richard Parker

As long as I can remember, I have never been comfortable with labels. I guess it goes back to when I started school and found myself in that vague zone between those who already knew how to read and those who didn't. Those who could read were labeled "normal readers" and attended the regular reading class. Those who couldn't read were labeled "non-readers" and were placed in the beginners class. Well, since I could read a little, but not well enough to be labeled a normal reader, I floated (quite uncomfortably, I might add) back and forth between the two groups, never really feeling a part of either.

Now I am an adult who can read, thankfully, and reading has helped me better understand the wideness of the grace of God. However, that uncomfort-

God is not in the condemnation business; he's in the salvation business, and he's good at what he does.

able feeling about labels has come up again as I study this wonderful good news in the Scriptures. Those who actually believe that salvation comes by grace through faith and not by human works are sometimes labeled pejoratively as "universalists," implying that that they believe that everyone will be saved regardless of whether they ever come to know and trust Jesus Christ.

I don't believe that, of course. I know that salvation is only in Jesus Christ, and although Jesus has drawn all humanity to himself and reconciled all

humanity to the Father, only those who believe it can embrace and enjoy his free gift.

But I do believe that no one is left out of God's grace and love, and that what Jesus did, he did for every person who ever lived. What they ultimately do with the salvation he secured for them is another matter. But maybe I am a "universalist" in the sense of believing in the power and love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit toward humanity. And maybe I am even a hopeful "universalist" in the sense of thinking that God is so loving and so faithful and so persistent that maybe he will eventually win the allegiance of even the most evil and rebellious and stubborn of his children.

Is that kind of "universalism" a good thing or a bad thing?

A couple of questions come to mind.

1. If God finally does win over everyone when all is said and done, would that be a bad thing?
2. If God proves to be so good at his work of salvation that in time everyone freely ends up accepting his grace and love, would that be contrary to God's stated will and purpose?

For me, the answer to both questions is "NO!"

People coming to faith is a very good thing, and it is precisely God's stated will and purpose.

John 3:16-17, for example, tells us, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." God is not in the condemnation business; he is in the salvation business, and he is good at what he does.

The apostle Paul wrote in Colossians 1:19-20, "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in [Christ], and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."

First John 2:2 tells us, "[Christ] is the atoning



Do It Anyway

By Barbara Dahlgren

sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”

Jesus tells us in John 12:32, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

Paul said in 1 Timothy 2:5-6, “For there is one God and one mediator between God and human beings, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time.”

And the apostle Peter declared, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

But does the fact that God wants everyone to come to repentance mean that everyone finally will?

Well, frankly, I don't know. God does not check with me on such things. What I do know is that God loves the world, has reconciled the world to himself in Christ, and has made Christ the atonement for every human being. What I do know is that Christ draws all people to himself, is the ransom for all people, and doesn't want anyone to perish.

So if God himself proves to be the supreme Universalist in his faithful love and power for salvation, who am I to argue with him about it?

The fact is that God will do what he will do to save people, and he uses means and methods far above our skills and understanding to do so.

As Paul said in Romans 11:32-36, “For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all. Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! ‘Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them?’ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.”

So I will just let God (as if he needs my permission) do his thing and I will delight in whatever way it plays out through Jesus Christ. When someone loves you as much as God does, you can trust him with anything and everything, even with your as yet unbelieving loved ones.

If that labels me a “universalist,” so be it. However, I would prefer, if labels are needed, to just be known as a believer in the name of Jesus Christ and leave the things of God, including my life and the lives of everyone else, in his faithful and loving hands. ☪



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I marvel when I see my daughters work with their children. Once, when Sherisa instructed her son to do a certain task, he balked and told her he didn't want to. She didn't get upset like I probably would have. She just calmly and sweetly replied, “That's too bad. Life is full of things you will have to do that you don't want to do, but you will have to do them anyway.” What a wonderful way to weave a life lesson into an everyday occurrence!

Do it anyway! What a concept! The Bible is full of instructions that I would rather not do. I struggle with all those “love one another” scriptures. I struggle with loving my neighbor as myself (Mark 12:31), loving my enemies (Matthew 5:43, 44), and even sometimes loving those closest to me (Ephesians 5:25).

It's hard to love people who are self-centered, unappreciative and unreasonable. It's hard to love people who don't love you back. It's hard to love someone who is irrational, illogical or selfish. It's hard to love those who verbally attack you, put you down or spread unfounded rumors about you. However, the biblical instruction seems clear—love them anyway.

The “love chapter,” 1 Corinthians 13, describes love as patient, kind, not envious, believing the best, enduring, not resentful, and so on. It doesn't say that love condones and accepts everything others do. Nor does it say that love lets people run roughshod over it, nor that it gives them everything they want. Love is not gullible.

At times, in other words, love is more of a choice than it is an emotion.

Nowhere is this more evident than with the sacrifice Jesus Christ made for us. God so loved the world that he gave his Son for us (John 3:16-17). Jesus so loved the world that he gave himself for us (John 10:18). His motive was love. But those he loved rejected him and killed him.

Was it easy for him? He said, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me...” (Luke 22:42). It was an agonizing choice. Luke 22:44 says, “And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.” It was agonizing, but he did it anyway. He loved us in spite of our selfishness, our lack of appreciation and our rejection.

We're unworthy of such love. But Jesus did it anyway—for you and for me. I'm so glad he did.

But he didn't just die for us; he rose for us, ascended for us, and through the Holy Spirit, he lives in us. And that makes all the difference.

It's still hard for us to love people who don't love us back, who are hurtful, unkind or cruel. But because Jesus in us does it anyway, we can, with him, do it anyway, too. ☪

So Why Go to Camp?

Because it's fun,
you make friends,
and you learn a lot
of really cool stuff.
That's why!

By Greg Williams and Rick Shallenberger

Making new friends. Fishing in a mountain stream. Playing flag football, soccer, softball and water sports. Going canoeing or hiking. Climbing walls or towers or going through a challenge course. Serving meals to the homeless. Participating in drama or playing paintball. Worshiping around a campfire or spending time with teens in another country. Teaching and playing games with kids in Ohio or the Bahamas or Mexico. Improving your photography or learning arts and crafts.

These are just a few things offered in Generation Ministries (GenMin) camps and short-term missions in 2010. Grace Communion International sponsors 15 recreation-based camps scattered across the U.S., as well as three short-term mission trips. What is camp all about? Let's answer a few questions:

What happens at camp?

Each camp is run a bit differently, but every day at camp is filled with activity. You might start off with a sport, and then learn archery or run a challenge course. Your dorm may want to work on a drama that will be performed during chapel or worship. Lunch might be followed by a paintball game or doing a bit of work around camp. The evening meal is often followed by gathering

around a campfire or playing games together.

If you are attending a mission camp, each day will be spent teaching and playing games with children or feeding the homeless or teaching VBS to a group. Regardless of the camp you choose, a focus during camp is building new friendships and discovering more about the friendship you have with Jesus.

Is it like a Bible camp?

We are not a Bible camp, though we do use the Bible to teach about God's love for us. The goal at a GenMin camp or mission is not to teach you the Bible, but to teach you about your friendship with Jesus. For example, this year's theme scripture is Romans 5:11: "So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God" (*The Message Bible*). We will focus on this friendship with God throughout the week during the activities and worship.

What is GenMin?

Short for Generations Ministries, GenMin is an arm of Grace Communion International focused on families, leadership training, camps and missions. We help congregations identify and train young leaders. We work with churches to develop family ministries that bring genera-





More Than a Tool

By Tammy Tkach

tions and cultures together, and we sponsor camps and missions to give young people the opportunity to develop relationships with peers, staff and with God.

What do you mean by a mission camp?

Mission camps are hands-on experiences to introduce campers to working with others. *Word in the Street* is a hands-on urban mission in the inner city of Cincinnati, Ohio. The missionaries run a day camp for children ages 4-12 who live in the inner city.

Crossing Borders is our longest-running mission camp. The team of missionaries is housed in Laredo, Texas, and makes day trips across the Mexican border into Nuevo Laredo. The activities might include feeding large numbers of people, helping with adult and children's teaching services, praying with people, visiting orphanages and playing with the children, a construction project and conducting a vacation Bible school for children of "pallet city," a poverty-stricken shantytown with no electricity or water that consists of hundreds of small shelters made of salvaged materials.

We also offer a trip to another nation—this year the Bahamas; next year, Zambia. In these trips we offer day camps for local children and teens.

Where are your camps located?

California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, and Washington State.

How much do they cost?

Cost depends on where you go and how long the camp runs. Weekend camps usually cost from \$75 - \$150. The weeklong camps might cost between \$135 to \$460, depending on location. The mission camps cost \$395 for *Crossing Borders* and \$300 for *Word in the Street*; more in other nations. These costs include all meals and activities and often a T-shirt or two. Transportation costs to and from camp are not included.

How can we find out more?

Go to <http://genmin.gci.org> for more information about each camp, including registration forms, costs and contact information.

See you at camp! ☺

I like to go to home improvement stores and look at gardening tools. I love a well-shaped pair of pruning shears or sharp grass clippers. My favorite tool is the electric lopper my husband got me as a gift. That baby makes short work of pruning trees!

Not long ago I had to repair some of our lawn sprinklers but couldn't loosen one of the pipes. So I went rummaging in the garage and found an amazing tool. It's called Robo-Grip, and it worked like a charm. I even love the name. Doing repairs is so much easier with the right tools. They make any job more enjoyable.

Some liken Christians to tools God can use. As I used my Robo-Grip, I thought about that concept. Am I a tool in God's hands? Does he think of me as I think of my pruners, loppers or Robo-Grip?

What about an instrument? Am I an instrument in God's hands? I tried playing a clarinet when I was younger and regret not keeping it up. I remember how good it felt to make the clarinet produce the right notes to make a melody. It inspired me and made me feel creative.

I doubt God looks at me in this way. In fact, I'm sure he doesn't. We use a tool to do a job and we use an instrument to make music. I am more than that to God. We have a relationship.

By becoming human, Jesus has taken all humanity into himself, making us one with him. He calls us his friends and his brothers and sisters, and he invites all of us to participate with him in the loving relationship he shares with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Author C. Baxter Kruger likens what goes on in the realm of the Trinity to a great dance¹, an apt description. Tools can't dance. Mere instruments can't leap up and twirl around a room. Only human beings can participate in this great dance of life.

Join the dance, rather than sit on the sidelines as a wallflower. Join the dance, rather than think of yourself as a mere tool or instrument. Kick up your heels and fly across the floor to the incredible harmonies of God's boundless joy and love.

Thinking of ourselves as tools seems to me a limiting mindset. God gives us the freedom to choose, to think and to be creative in how we relate to him and to others. A tool has no freedom and does only what the user wants. Rather, we can think of ourselves as participants with God, as his beloved children working together in collaboration and cooperation.

I love my tools, but only as they are useful to me. If they break, I throw them out. Thank God he loves us all the time, even when we break, which we often do. We never become useless to him. He heals us and helps us keep going, because that's what family and friends do. ☺

¹ C. Baxter Kruger, *The Great Dance* (Regent College Publishing, 2005).





Funeral for a Friend

By Kerry Gubb

Yesterday I officiated at a funeral for a good friend. It happens more often as we age. Diagnosis confirmed, my friend put his life in God's hands. He prayed, sought medical treatment, got his spiritual house in order, resolved what could be, and gratefully committed what couldn't, to God's great mercy. He then planned a new 50-year business venture at the same time as asking me to do his funeral. Whichever way it went, he decided, he would be prepared. So typical of my friend.

Nobody welcomes funerals. If you find yourself attending one as a mourner and you know the gos-

Rebellion. Expulsion. Separation. Hope. Redemption. Rescue. Hope. Salvation. Sacrifice. Inclusion. Forgiveness. Mediation. Hope. Restoration. Sanctification. Intercession. Anticipation. Hope. Visualization. Farewell. Hope.

So much evoked in so little time. Time very well spent, if that's how you spend it.

Earlier in life I struggled to appreciate how something as final, empty and horrible as death could be the place where God's response seemed most enigmatic. It seemed so incongruous that he takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11), yet the death of a Christian is deemed "precious" (Psalm 116:15). Didn't Jesus come to give us life? (John 10:10).

In retrospect, I see this dilemma as a simple case of frustration that God didn't appear to be wringing his hands like the rest of us. The longer we live and the more we understand God, the more right and righteous and wonderful and powerful and merciful we realize him to be.

The sting of death is sin. But Jesus took the sting himself on a hill outside Jerusalem. When you know God holds the one you mourn safely in his loving arms, you mourn not with despair, but with hope!

Yesterday we celebrated my friend's life and bade him farewell with eulogies, recollections and fond nostalgia. It's an honor to participate in such a sendoff when you sense the peace of God and the overwhelming reassurance that the Master has it all under control. It's all going to be OK in the end.

That's what's precious to God.

It's precious to me too! It's a hope top-up when God brings another of his children safely along the journey of eternity in him. ∞

When you know God holds the one you mourn safely in his loving arms, you mourn not with despair, but with hope!

pel, you're free to mourn with hope, unlike so many who are not (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

Tradition claims, "When the student is ready, the teacher will come." Funerals tend to offer the rare moment when people pause from the humdrum and pay attention to the bigger issues of life.

The thoughts, recollections and reflections that a funeral evokes may well be, for Christians, the whole human story.

Creation. Perfection. Paradise. Innocence. Hope. Deception. Abdication. Defiance. Corruption. Fall.

A New Look at Passion Week

By Rick Shallenberger

I have a confession to make. For years, Passion Week, or Holy Week, depressed me. It seemed my pastor would always put the main emphasis on Jesus' pain and suffering. We would read Isaiah 52 and 53 and parallel those passages with the Gospel accounts of Passion Week and then focus on how badly Jesus was treated in an effort to make us feel more guilty.

But one day my whole approach to Passion Week changed. I suddenly realized that Jesus didn't want us focusing on his pain, but on his love.

It happened in the days following the 9/11 terrorist attacks as I read story after story of firefighters and other heroes who died saving the lives of others. These men and women were being remembered for what they did—save lives—not for the suffering they went through as they died.

In September 2009, Muelmar Magallanes, an 18-year-old construction worker in the Philippines, rescued more than 30 people in a raging flood before losing his own life when he went back into the waters to save two more people. Family members and those he saved called him a hero as they gathered at his funeral. One woman whose baby he saved said, "I will never forget his sacrifice."

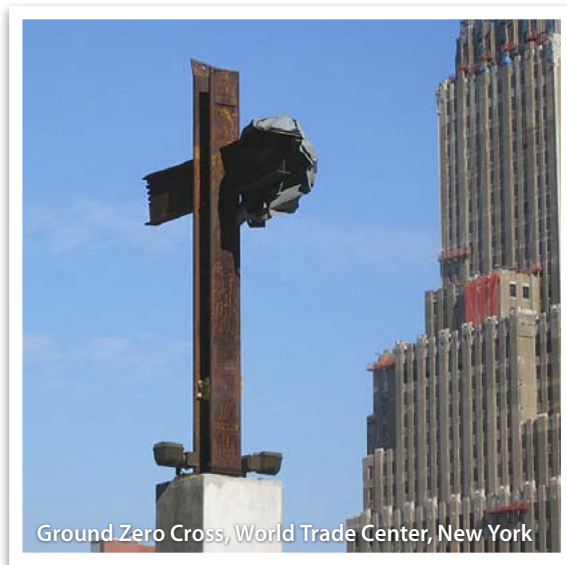
Those he saved will continue to give praise for his sacrifice, focusing on what he accomplished, not on the terrors of drowning.

I went back and read Isaiah 52 and 53 again. The passage that parallels Jesus' struggling begins with these words: "How beautiful is the person who comes over the mountains to bring good news, who announces peace and brings good news, who announces salvation and says to Jerusalem, 'Your God is King'" (Isaiah 52:7, New Century Version throughout).

Isaiah 53 ends by telling us: "He willingly gave his life and was treated like a criminal. But he carried away the sins of many people and asked forgiveness for those who sinned." This is reason to rejoice! We don't rejoice in the excruciating details of how Jesus died, but in the fact that in undying love he willingly gave himself for us. He took our suffering, our pain, our wrong, and our evil (verses 4-6), in order to "make many people right with God (verse 11).

This is why the Lord's Supper is a time of celebration. The sacrifice of Jesus gives us reason to rejoice.

The message of Passion Week is good news! It's a message of joy, triumph and glory, not a message of sadness and guilt.



Ground Zero Cross, World Trade Center, New York

These men and women were being remembered for what they did—save lives—not for the suffering they went through as they died.



My pastor believed he was doing right by helping us feel all the more guilty about our sins by focusing on all the gory details of death by crucifixion. He believed he could motivate us to follow God through guilt. But guilt wasn't the approach Jesus used.

Knowing I have a Savior, I don't need to wallow in guilt. Instead, I follow and I worship my Savior in joy, praise and adoration as I join him on his journey of sharing his love and life with others.

Passion Week is a reminder that Jesus, who is in perfect communion with the Father, wants every one of us to share in that joyous relationship. He became sin for us, bearing our burdens, so that we could become righteous, bearing his perfection. He is the one who reminds us that nothing can ever snatch us out of his hands.

Paul put it this way in Romans 8:38-39, "I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor ruling spirits, nothing now, nothing in the future, no powers, nothing above us, nothing below us, nor anything else in the whole world will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Passion Week is no time to bathe in guilt; it's time for celebration. He died for us all, but now he is risen, he is risen indeed! ☪

Nobody prepares you

By Greg Williams

I work for a parachurch organization called Youth for Christ. Recently, several co-workers and I had an enlightening conversation during a work break. One lady shared a series of stories about her 88-year-old father-in-law who is now living in her guest room and his odd behavior of showering at 2:00 a.m. Another man talked about his in-laws, who struggled to sell their home in Michigan to move closer to their daughter whom they expected to be their caregiver. This same man suggested that instead of being “Youth” for Christ that we were becoming “Senior Care” for Christ.

In 2006, the Baby-boomer generation turned 60 and began a wave of retirement such as the U.S. has never experienced. Some 78 million boomers will retire over the next decade, representing 25 percent of the population of the country. My co-worker was probably on to something when he suggested changing the focus group to seniors.

As I write this article, my father just completed a nine-week stay in the hospital. He went to the operating room four times and spent six weeks in intensive care. He had fallen when a ladder collapsed under him and fractured the C7 and T9 vertebrae in his neck and back. Now he is in an intensive rehabilitation center learning to move as much as he can. Whether he will be fully mobile is yet to be determined, and he still faces weeks or months in rehab. Nothing prepares you for this kind of emotional roller-coaster ride.

My mom currently faces the 40-minute one-way drive back and forth every day to visit my dad. She has been the one to consult with the doctors and make tough decisions on my dad’s behalf. She is the one who

will have to sort out bills from multiple doctors and institutions, and pray that the insurance satisfies the massive costs. She is the one who will have to make arrangements for the house to be remodeled to become handicap-friendly. It helps that she is a nurse, but that is of little consequence, because she cannot lift or move my father with her aging body.

I say that nothing prepares you for the difficulties of aging and all of the medical maladies that follow, but some 3,000 years ago King Solomon wrote these words of wisdom:

*Remember your Creator
while you are young,
before the days of trouble come
and the years when you say,
“I find no pleasure in them.”
When you get old,
the light from the sun, moon, and stars will grow dark;
the rain clouds will never seem to go away.
At that time your arms will shake
and your legs will become weak.
Your teeth will fall out so you cannot chew,
and your eyes will not see clearly.
Your ears will be deaf to the noise in the streets,
and you will barely hear the millstone grinding grain.
You’ll wake up when a bird starts singing,
but you will barely hear singing.
You will fear high places
and will be afraid to go for a walk.
Your hair will become white like the flowers on an
almond tree.
You will limp along like a grasshopper when you walk.
Your appetite will be gone.
Then you will go to your everlasting home,
and people will go to your funeral.
Soon your life will snap like a silver chain
or break like a golden bowl.*



*You will be like a broken pitcher at a spring,
or a broken wheel at a well.*

*You will turn back into the dust of the earth again,
but your spirit will return to God who gave it.*

Everything is useless!

*The Teacher says that everything is useless
(Ecclesiastes 12:1-8).*

“The days of trouble” have certainly come upon my father. The imagery that Solomon uses to show the effect of age on our physical frame is a reminder that the golden years might not be so golden after all. It might not be a carefree life of golf and long walks on the beach with your sweetheart. It might instead be time spent in a doctor’s waiting room and standing in line at the pharmacy more than time on the greens or dipping your foot in the ocean. Growing old and weak is not an easy journey.

It is difficult to be a spectator and limited caregiver in this hard journey. I am noticing that even more painful than being bedside with my dad is the deeper pain of noticing his absence when I go home.

I live less than a football throw from my parent’s back door. The Williams homestead is 40 acres, made up of my home, my parent’s home, my older brother’s

home, and a surrounding apple orchard. My father is retired, but up until now, he had been quite active. I am accustomed to seeing him go about his routines; back and forth to the mailbox, across the road to feed his cats, riding his lawn mower twice a week through the summer months, and often showing up at my house (suspiciously around meal times). He was always available to pick up grandkids and happy to have you come into his living room to share a movie. This has been missing for more than two months now, and it has created a hole; the Williams homestead is not the same.

I realize that as my parents cared for me through the helpless stages of infancy and toddlerhood, that my turn has come to help them as they are aging and growing more helpless, but there is more to it than food, clothing and shelter. Life is about relationships at all stages, from the joy experienced at the day of birth until grief on the day of death. I am realizing that the mere presence of my father, even in the mundane things, is a priceless value that won’t be replaced when he is gone. Having a loved one who is close by

Nothing prepares you for the difficulties of aging and all of the medical maladies that follow.

and always on standby to share a meal, a movie, or a simple conversation is the substance of life that the relational God extends to his created children.

God, who exists eternally as Father, Son and Spirit, enjoys perfect relationship within himself and it pleases him greatly when his human children get along in peaceful, loving community. God has created us for relationship, and in the fullness of his plan he intends for you and me to experience whole, eternal relationships that will be liberated from loss and separation.

Growing old is one of the great challenges of this life, and death is the enemy because it separates us, if only temporarily, from our loved ones. But relationship is a divine quality that is experienced in this life and in the life to come. I believe that relationships represent the one precious treasure that we take with us from this life to the next.

Pain, tears and death are part of this human journey, but so are relationships. The journey I have shared thus far with my dad has been rich. I do not know how many days, week, or months we have left for this life, but the hope of eternity rests deeply in both of our hearts. ☪

The Transfiguration: Sneak Peek at the Resurrection

A study of Mark 9:1–13

By Michael Morrison

The disciples are discouraged—even dismayed. They thought they were following a Messiah into a glorious kingdom. But then Jesus told them that he was going to his death (see the Bible Study in the February–March *Odyssey*).

Where was the glory they hoped for, the kingdom that Jesus seemed to promise? Jesus needed to offer the disciples some hope for the future, and this is what comes next in the story.

The kingdom in power and glory (verses 1-4)

Jesus told his disciples, “**Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.**” Jesus assures them that the glory of the kingdom will indeed come—and it will be seen before the disciples die.



When the disciples catch even a small glimpse of the glory, they are frightened and don't even know how to speak intelligently. They had only a glimmer of understanding of what the kingdom really is.

The disciples had already seen some of the power of God's kingdom. Whenever Jesus cast out demons and healed the sick, the power of the kingdom was at work (Matthew 12:28). The disciples saw the power of the kingdom on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). They saw it in miracles, and in the spread of the gospel all the way to Rome.

But Jesus is referring to something else. His promise is found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and in each account, it is immediately followed by the Transfiguration, in which three disciples had the privilege of seeing Jesus in a special glory. In all three Gospels, we are told that the Transfiguration happened about a week after the prediction—the saying and the fulfillment are tied together by this literary technique.

After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. Tradition says that this was Mount Tabor, but that is only 2,000 feet high. Mt. Hermon is a better candidate, since it is the tallest mountain in the area (9,000 feet), and Caesarea Philippi is at the base of Mt. Hermon.

Peter, James and John were the disciples closest to Jesus. They also seem to have been the most ambitious—Peter was the most outspoken, and James and John wanted positions of honor when Jesus came in his glory (Mark 10:37). These three may have needed the most reassurance that something better would come after the persecution.

And they saw it: **There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.**

Were Elijah and Moses resurrected, or was this just an “appearance”? Matthew 17:2 says that Jesus' face “shone like the sun.” Was it a vision, or was Jesus really changed? We do not know. Why Moses and Elijah? That is more easily answered. Jews respected both of them highly, and they represent high points in Israelite history, corresponding to the Law and the Prophets.

What were they talking about? Luke 9:31 says that they were discussing Jesus' “departure which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.” They were talking about his death. Did Elijah and Moses know the manner and purpose of Jesus' death, or were they asking Jesus to explain it to them? Apparently it is not important that we know.

Listen to Jesus (verses 5-8)

If we had been there, we probably would not have understood it any better than Peter did. **Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)**

A week earlier, Peter said that Jesus was the Mes-



siah. Now, he uses the lesser title “Rabbi.” Which title is most appropriate? We will soon have an authoritative answer!

Why did Peter talk about shelters? In a state of glory, why would anyone need a shelter? Perhaps Peter was thinking of the Festival of Tabernacles, which many Jews associated with the arrival of the kingdom. Perhaps the shelters were an invitation for the prophets to stay a while.

Something even more astounding happened next. **Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”** The cloud was not just above them—it “covered them” in the sense of covering them up, as a dense fog, blocking their view.

And God tells us what is important: Jesus is the Son of God, loved by God, speaking the words of God. Even when the greatest prophets from Israel’s history are present, the disciples should listen to Jesus. Jesus is greater even than Moses and Elijah, and therefore greater than the Law and the Prophets. If he says that he is going to be their Messiah by dying in Jerusalem, then they should pay attention to what he says.

Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. Peter had hoped to prolong the moment, but it was over. The event was not to get them in touch with past prophets, but for them to be more dedicated to the leader they had, because he was more than a prophet—he was the Son of God, and God had just validated the path that Jesus was on.

The glory they saw in Jesus no doubt encouraged them that the glorious kingdom would be a reality. But it was not just a future reality. Jesus had been the beloved Son of God all along, and his disciples should accept his teachings, even if they are the opposite of what they wanted and expected. Since he is the beloved Son of God, the disciples could be sure that glory would follow, even if dark days lay in the immediate future.

The Transfiguration also shows that God’s kingdom transcends human kingdoms. God’s reign is not just a bigger and better empire, and the leaders in the kingdom are not just kinder and stronger versions of Roman or Judean kings. The transformed face and clothes of Jesus show that it is *far different*; it is not just a continuation of normal history.

Indeed, when the disciples catch even a small glimpse of the glory, they are frightened and don’t even know how to speak intelligently. They had only a glimmer of understanding of what the kingdom really is.

So what should the disciples do?

They should listen to Jesus, get behind Jesus and follow him. They should not take matters into their own hands, because their efforts are as useless as making shelters for glorified beings.

But what about Elijah? (verses 9-13)

“You had to be there,” the saying goes. But in this case, it didn’t do a lot of good to “be there.” **As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what “rising from the dead” meant.**

Jesus had predicted his own death and resurrection, but the truth was so contrary to what the disciples expected that they couldn’t understand the plainest of words. It was only after Jesus rose from the dead that they could begin to understand—but until that understanding came, they would not be able to tell the story right. So Jesus told them to keep it a secret until the time was right.

The Transfiguration gave them a glimpse of the glory that Jesus had, and the glory that he would share with all who took up the cross to follow Jesus into the valley of the shadow of death. ☪

Hmm...

(Humans) have never been good, they are not good and they never will be good.

Karl Barth

If the church is to be the witness God calls us to be, we must be ruthlessly honest with ourselves about the areas in which we are not where God wants us to be. And it is painfully obvious that one central area in which we are not remotely close to where God wants us to be is in our relationships with one another. Because of the pervasive, individualistic mindset of Western culture, modern Western Christians tend to view their relationship with God strictly as an individual thing. Church is usually thought of as a weekly, large-group gathering of believers who are for the most part strangers to one another. Even worse, we tend to identify the church as a building that simply houses individual Christians once a week for worship.

Gregory Boyd

We must face the fact that many different saviors can be smuggled in under the name "Jesus," just as many different deities can be disguised under the term "God" and vastly different ways of living can be promoted under the name "Christianity." Jesus can be a victim of identity theft, and people can say and do things with and in his name that he would never ever do.

Brian McLaren

God has "put forth" Jesus so that, through his faithful death, all those who belong to him can be regarded as having died. God raised him up so that, through his vindication, all those who belong to him can be regarded as being themselves vindicated.

N.T. Wright, *Justification*, page 206

I love talking about nothing. It is really the only thing I know anything about.

Oscar Wilde

Old Farmer's Advice

- Life is simpler when you plow around the stump.
- Words that soak into your ears are whispered ... not yelled.
- Meanness don't jes' happen overnight.
- If you find yourself in a hole, the first thing to do is stop diggin'.
- Don't corner nothin' ya know is meaner than you are.
- It don't take a very big person to carry a grudge.
- Ya cain't unsay a cruel word.
- Most of the stuff people worry about ain't never gonna happen anyway.
- Don't judge folks by their relatives.
- Remember that silence is sometimes the best answer.
- Live a good, honorable life. Then when you get older and think back, you'll enjoy it a second time.

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