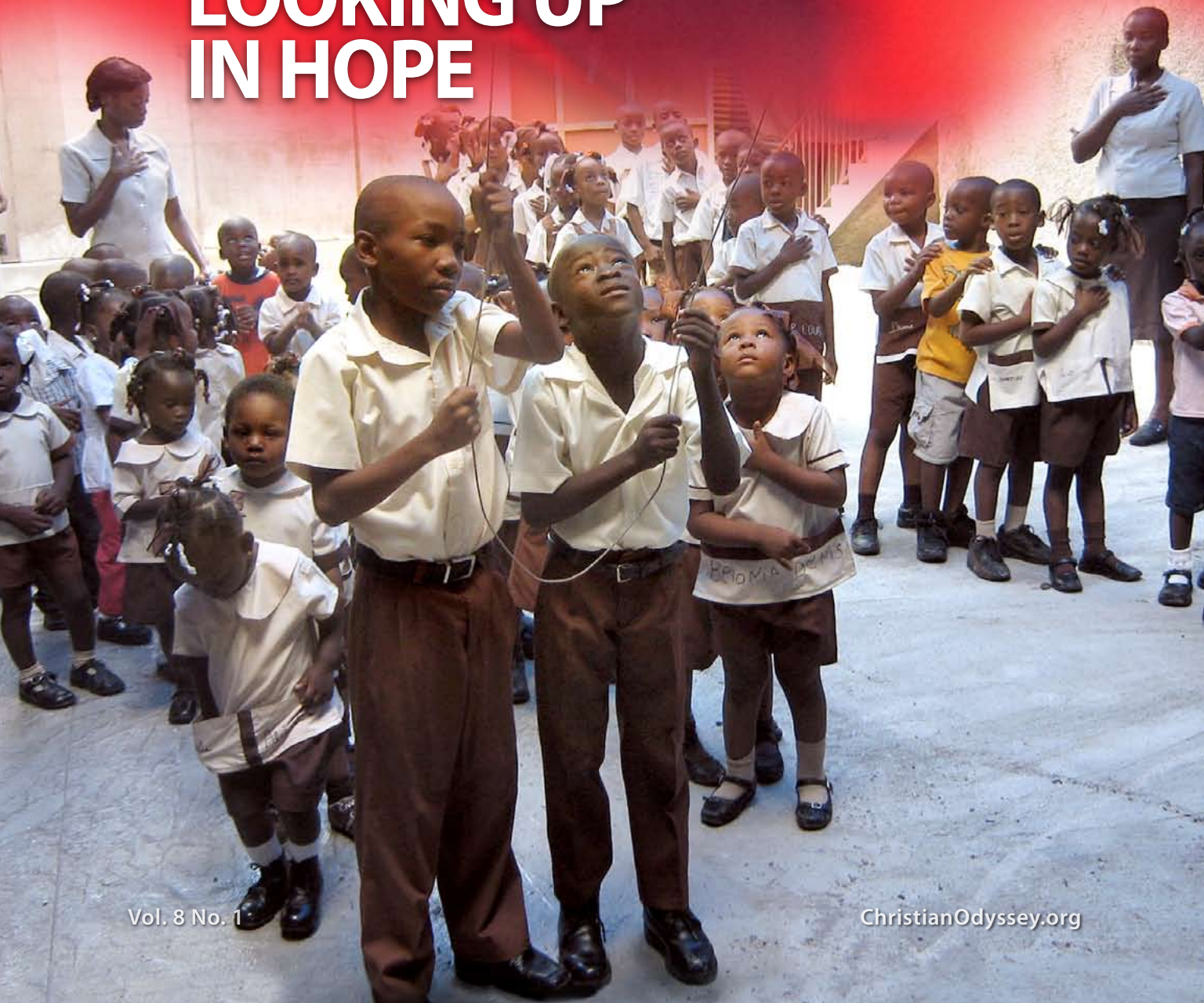


CHRISTIAN Odyssey

February—March 2011

Growing Together in Life & Faith

Haiti: LOOKING UP IN HOPE



Just Me Being Clever

Mr. L. was a member of a church I once pastored in Southeast Asia. He was small, excitable, and in some ways, eccentric. Sometimes I wondered if he was “playing with a full deck,” but he seemed harmless enough.

One day, one of the members asked me, “Do you know that Mr. L. is a qualified graphologist?”

“A what?” I asked.

“He’s a graphologist. He looks at your handwriting and tells you things about yourself from it.”

I didn’t like the sound of that. It seemed spooky. And anyway, telling people about themselves was my job as pastor, not Mr. L’s.

“Yes, yes. I do that,” Mr. L. admitted cheerfully, when I asked him. “Do you want me to look at your handwriting?”

Well, why not? It might be a good way to assert my authority and expose Mr. L’s nonsense. So, as the members gathered around, I wrote a short sentence for Mr. L.

He looked at my sentence for a few moments, and then said, “Very interesting. It is clear that you are a very clever man, Mr. John.”

Okay. Maybe there was something in this graphology thing after all.

He continued, “You have many ideas, and you are very good with words.” (Yes. True enough.) “In fact,” said Mr. L., studying my handwriting writing closely, “You are so clever that some people may think you are brilliant.” Then he looked directly at me, and said, “But you are not brilliant. You are only clever. So do not believe it if

people say you are brilliant. Stay clever and you will be successful. If you start to think you are brilliant, you will fail.”

Hmm. Everyone looked a bit embarrassed. You didn’t talk to the pastor like that, not in those days, but Mr. L. didn’t know any better. I decided to just smile and thank him. But I have never forgotten his advice. He was right.

It is true that ideas come to me easily. I am adequate at what I do, but I am not brilliant at it. I can easily get out of my depth academically and intellectually. Thankfully I have friends who have the education and expertise to support and supplement my “clever but not brilliant” efforts.

What a blessing it is to know and accept your limitations. I think Paul the apostle was brilliant, but he recognized that he was inadequate, calling himself the “least of the apostles” (1 Corinthians 15:9). He wrote to the self-confident Corinthians, “Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential... but God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise” (1 Corinthians 1:26-28).

As I look over this issue of *Christian Odyssey*, I see the work of many people. Most are clever; a few are brilliant in their fields of expertise. As long as we work together, each doing our best work while accepting our limitations, we know that the magazine we send you will be greater than the sum of its parts. We hope that means it will be well worth your read.

Let me know what you think at john.halford@gci.org. ☺

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When the Sleeping Warrior Awoke

In November 2010, GCI European Mission Developer James Henderson and his wife, Shirley, were attacked by a Cape buffalo in Kenya.

Shirley's story:

November 17 dawned beautiful over Kenya's Great Rift Valley. We were celebrating my husband's 60th birthday in the style of his choice—a bird safari near the banks of Lake Elementaita.

Our camp sat just below the impressive heights of the Sleeping Warrior, an extinct volcano. Our complimentary bush walk involved a hard climb for over an hour that finally brought us to the “chin,” the highest point on the rim. We were awed by the beauty that surrounded us. James said that this was the very best birthday present he could possibly imagine, and I had to agree with him!

We decided to finish the bird safari by walking inside the volcanic crater, through a steep, narrow gully and descending to our waiting vehicle. When we reached the gully, James noticed an animal scent and asked Samson, our Maasai guide, what animal it was.

Samson said, “It's buffalo, but it's old spoor, not fresh.”

We ascended the gully, and just as we neared the top, we heard a loud snort and saw something large moving in the grass. Samson shouted, “Buffalo! RUN!”

I stood frozen to the spot long enough to look at the massive creature, which was not three feet from me, directly in the eyes. Terror, helplessness and confusion gripped me. I saw in its eyes the split second that it decided to charge. Too late, I turned to run. I felt the animal's horn hit my back and slam me against the rock wall. I screamed in pain and remember saying, “Dear God, please save us!” The pain and pressure eased momentarily before the buffalo rammed me again, goring my lower back. I felt like a rag doll as it tossed me and then began trampling and kicking me. My eyes must have been shut, because I didn't see or want to see or know what was happening. I just prayed for it to stop.

And then suddenly it did stop. I sensed the buffalo thundering on down the narrow gully, and I vaguely remember thinking and possibly even shouting, “James! Get out of the way!”

Everything went quiet and I was so scared, afraid to look. Then I saw James staggering up the gully toward me holding his right arm, his clothes soaked with blood. I was terrified. I thought he had been gored in the stomach, but he kept saying he was okay and asking if I was okay.



Above: James and Shirley Henderson. Top: The Sleeping Giant volcano.

James' story:

I didn't know how to get out of the charging animal's way.

It's amazing how much can go through your mind in a split second. I wanted to get to Shirley. I remembered that with rhino, because of their bad eyesight, you are supposed to throw yourself flat into the long grass. With a hippo, you make sure you're not between it and the water. And with a Cape buffalo, you quickly climb a tree.

No tree!

I threw myself on the ground to the side of its path as I saw it lower its head to attack. I thought it was going to kill me, and I turned my head away and closed my eyes with Stephen's prayer on my lips, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

An Attack of Satan?

Some have suggested that Satan entered the buffalo and attacked us. I do not believe that is what happened. The buffalo's aggression is simply part of its violent animal nature, from which all creatures will be delivered when Christ returns. It is true that Satan is the "adversary" or "enemy" of humanity. Satan, the scripture says, walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). That means that Satan seeks the opportunity to discourage us in the faith, and to turn us away from God. It does not mean that Satan has the power to literally attack us in a physical sense. Whatever Satan does, we have nothing to fear, because our trust is in the faithfulness of God. As Paul wrote, "The Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one" (2 Thessalonians 3:3).

The buffalo hit me hard as it sped by, shattering my right shoulder, goring me beneath the elbow and slamming my tense body across the rocky ground before thundering on down the gully into the crater. Perhaps it was moving so fast that it could not break its own momentum.

Initially I could barely move. It felt like a huge rock was crushing me and pinning me down, but, I believe with God's help, I was able to struggle to my feet and make it up the path to where Shirley lay. It is hard to describe the emotion of relief and gratitude mingled with agonizing pain that we each felt on realizing that the other was still alive. Even now, tears well up as I type those words.

Later we learned that the buffalo had actually lifted Samson between its horns and carried him several feet before flicking him off. Although severely battered and bruised, Samson heroically stood guard over us in case the beast would return, something a Cape buffalo will typically do. Thankfully, this one did not come back.

Looking back, we realize that things could have been much worse. Usually a Cape buffalo leaves no survivors. Despite the indiscriminate violence and the fury of the attack, we both instinctively turned to God, and we felt that we were protected. Throughout the recovery period we both have felt God's presence and comfort. God is there in good times and in bad. Where was Jesus when the buffalo attacked? He was right there with us, sharing the suffering.

Some have written to ask me why God allows such things to happen. I do not torment myself by trying to answer that question. The fatalistic idea that whatever happens is specifically ordained by God's will is not valid biblically. Nor do I regard this as a trial that the God of love has sent us in order to prove us in some way.

All of us have witnessed or experienced tragedy and crises.

I think of my mother who is lost in Alzheimer's, and I cannot explain the why of that, either, other than to say that time and chance are part of the order of things (Ecclesiastes 9:11).

The Bible tells us that we all share in suffering, and that Jesus suffers with us. Personally, I am more able to observe the how than the why. How God comforts, how he intervenes in little and in big ways, how he gives peace of mind when peace of mind seems impossible, how he helps us smile in the face of adversity, how the Spirit speaks for us when all we have are tears, and how, with God, there are moments of inexpressible joy. For me God is always in the process, always present, always involved. And that's more important to me than the "why." **co**

(Editor's note: The Hendersons underwent extensive surgery in Nairobi and are now back home in the UK. They are recovering well and send their heartfelt thanks for all the prayers, cards, letters, and expressions of love and concern.)

The African Cape buffalo (*Syncerus caffer*)

The Cape buffalo is among the top ten most dangerous land mammals on earth. The British military engineer, wildlife artist and hunter, Sir



William Cornwallis Harris wrote the following description in his book, *The Wild Sports of Southern Africa*, published in 1839.

"All writers are agreed as to the hazards of invading the haunts of this savage animal, whose skulking habits, no less than his tremendous strength, render him an object to be greatly dreaded...he is described to of so irascible a disposition that he will attack his great enemy, man, without the smallest provocation. And should he succeed in destroying his victim,

it is his wont to stand over the inanimate corpse, goring and tossing it in vindictive fury with his formidable horns, trampling it under his feet, crushing and mangling it with his knees and stripping off the skin with his rough and prickly tongue; desisting occasionally, but to return again with renewed appetite, as though his revenge might never be glutted!"

Six days after the Hendersons were attacked, a Cape buffalo killed two people not far from where their attack took place.



St. Paul's Church, Shurdington, Gloucestershire, United Kingdom

Grandma's Old Church

By Bill Hall

When you travel outside of North America, the definition of “old” takes on an entirely different meaning. In my part of Western Canada, if you come across a building that is over 100 years of age, you would say it was old. No so in England, where “old” can refer to structures built more than a thousand years ago.



I was in England recently, and while there I had the opportunity to visit the village of Shurdington near the town of Cheltenham. Shurdington was the home of my grandmother Evelyn, who came to Canada around 1900. It was a thrill for me to walk down the very same road that she walked along as a young girl. In fact, we had the opportunity to see Primrose Cottage, where she was born and raised.

But perhaps the highlight of the visit was to go inside the village church my grandmother attended as a young girl—the very same church my relatives attend today. One can tell that not a lot has changed in St. Paul's, Shurdington, since my grandmother's time. This church was built in the 1200s on the foundation of another church that is dated to about 900. While showing me the interior, my cousin pointed out the plaque near the entrance, which listed all the pastors of the church from its inception until today. I can just imagine someone commenting, “Do you remember old Reverend Smith? His sermons were pretty boring back in 1483!”

It was a moving experience for me to sit in the church pew that my ancestors may have occupied on a given Sunday morning or Evensong. It made me wonder about those who came before me, whose bodies are now buried in the graves around the church.

What kind of life did these people of faith have? What kind of hopes did they have for their families? How many friends did they have? What kind of work did they do? How long did they live? Most importantly, how did they relate to God and their life of faith in him? If only those stone walls could speak. I'm sure they would reveal some very interesting details about my family!

Although we as Christians have a personal relationship with God, we all belong to the community of faith that Jesus has drawn us into. Jesus said, “On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you” (John 14:20). None of us is ever alone; we are one with God and one with each other (John 17:22-23). The community of faith we've been made part of is much bigger than the congregation we may attend. It is global. It also spans the sands of time.

Being in my grandmother's church that morning reminded me of the words found in the book of Hebrews, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:1-2).

We've been welcomed into the eternal communion of faith created by our great God of love—into a great cloud of witnesses to the joy of life everlasting as the one Body of Christ formed by the Holy Spirit. We stand together in the same faith as all those who have gone before us, who are part of us today, and who will be with us forever into the future. [co](#)



These Pancakes Taste Like Rubber!

By Joyce Catherwood

About 3 pm one Tuesday, we received a phone call informing us that my Aunt Polly, my late mom's beloved baby sister, was in a hospital and not expected to live through the night. We immediately drove four hours to a small town south of Austin, Texas. My aunt recognized us, but she was confused and groggy due to medication and needed to rest.

Early the next morning, we hesitantly entered her room expecting the worse. But there she was, sitting up in bed eating breakfast, complaining to her son, who had just arrived from Florida, about the rubbery pancakes. She was

Too often, elderly people feel insignificant. Capturing her past in writing reminded aunt Polly that her life had significance.

back to her feisty self and mad at the hospital because, as she put it, "When they think you're gonna die, they call all the relatives." Two days later, she was back in business in her nursing home.

Since at age 87 her mind was sharp as a tack and she was quite mobile, she practically ran the nursing home where she was a patient, always volunteering and acting as liaison between staff and residents.

She participated in everything—bingo every afternoon, annual fishing from a children's play pool in the yard,

watermelon-seed-spitting contests, riding on parade floats and even an occasional gambling night. She always seemed to win first prize for the costume contests, her most notable outfit being that of Little Red Riding Hood accompanied by the man who lived across the hallway impersonating the Big Bad Wolf. Dancing the Charleston in her flaming red flapper costume was another big hit. And when a visiting Mexican band threw a big sombrero in the middle of the lounge area floor, she jumped up and did a Mexican Hat Dance. Even though her physical surroundings were dismal and her physical stamina was fragile, she decidedly made the best of it.

During one visit with Aunt Polly, I presented her with a diary and asked her to write anything she wanted. "Naw, why would I wanna do that?" was her response. "Who would read it?" Assuring her that I would read it still didn't convince her. But on a subsequent visit a few months later, with a big smile on her face, she proudly laid the diary on a table in front of me. She had written almost 60 pages. And were we in for a treat! She insisted on reading every page to us out loud, acting out parts and singing songs where appropriate.

Aunt Polly told us that when she started writing she couldn't stop, laughing and crying over the memories as the past flooded into her mind. She wrote about growing up in a poor, but loving, hardworking Swedish immigrant family in rural central Texas. Every Saturday, her daddy would give her 25 cents for doing chores and they would go to town. She spent her 25 cents on a hamburger, Woolworth's candy and a toy, then a "picture show." She writes in her dairy:



Jumping to Conclusions



When my husband was a guest speaker at a church in Illinois many years ago, I sat in the congregation with some friends. Mel preached a very moving sermon, expounding point after point. I thought, "WOW! What a great sermon!" When your wife is impressed, it must be good. However, a young man sitting on the aisle in front of me did not share my enthusiasm. He looked rather distant and kept reading a magazine. Granted, it was a Christian magazine, but he obviously wasn't impressed or interested in what Mel had to say.

I sat there, getting more and more irritated. "How rude!" I thought. I tried not to glance at him, but my eyes kept drifting back in his direction. What was his problem? Didn't he get it? Why bother to come to church?

If we really want people to give us the benefit of the doubt, then we'd best do that for them.

After church my friend said, "I'd like you to meet our newest member." As she led me straight over to this disinterested fellow, she informed me, "Jeff is deaf and we don't

have anyone to sign for him yet, but he loves to come to church." I also learned he could read lips if you spoke slowly, but not from a distance.

The lesson I learned is—don't jump to conclusions. Things are not always what they appear to be.

Jumping to conclusions is like putting two and two together and getting five. When our minds race in the wrong direction, it can lead to false conclusions, stressful situations, flared tempers, and hurt feelings. Maybe that's why God says not to judge others. But another scripture comes to mind when I reflect on how quick I was to label Jeff as rude and unspiritual. It's found in Philippians 4:8, and reads: "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."

I think this extends beyond just thinking "good thoughts" in general. I think it includes trying to think the best of others instead of imputing motives, making assumptions, and jumping to conclusions. If we really want people to give us the benefit of the doubt, then we'd best do that for them (Luke 6:31).

So I'm trying to take a closer look before jumping to conclusions. I could be leaping in the wrong direction. **co**

"What a beautiful life.... What loving and caring parents we had.... No one ever had as much fun as we did. We laughed and loved a lot. Never had an argument. Not very many can say that."

Her journal describes various jobs: one stitching 30 mattresses a day in a mattress factory and another cracking 80 buckets of eggs a day in a factory that made powdered eggs. She tells about being widowed twice, first as the wife of a WWII Purple Heart paratrooper. With her second husband, she worked day and night in the oil fields. He taught her to hunt, deep-sea fish and how to build a boathouse. Though her life was far from easy, she wrote: "If I had my life to live over, I wouldn't change a thing."

Little did I realize how much writing in that journal would validate Aunt Polly. Too often, particularly as we age, we feel insignificant and old and in the way. Capturing the past in written expression reminded her that her lifetime had significance. There is an inherent longing in every person to feel that their existence on earth has meaning and value. And it does. Jesus put the greatest value possible on each of our lives not only by living, dying, and rising from the dead for us, but also by taking us with him to the right hand of the Father (Colossians 3:1-4).

Three months after her hospital stay, Aunt Polly died. Not wanting to be fussed over, she asked the staff not to contact family immediately. This time, she was simply too exhausted to hang on and was eager to finally be with her Lord.

During the long drive to attend her funeral, I fretted about whether many would attend to honor her memory. Silly me. Her funeral service was full of warm tributes, and numerous portions of her treasured journal were read aloud. Even her beloved pastor laid aside her normal clergy robe to conduct the service and wore a bright red blouse and cherry red lipstick because red was Aunt Polly's favorite color.

A small grave for her cremated remains was dug next to that of her second husband. Her passage here on earth was over. But the stories in her diary and the memories of her nonsense demeanor and determined participation in life live on, rubbery pancakes and all. **co**

Standing Fast in Hope as Haiti's Misery Continues

In 2010, the small, poverty-ridden Caribbean nation of Haiti was struck with a crippling earthquake, soon followed by a devastating hurricane and a resulting outbreak of cholera, all accompanied by the ever-present political unrest and a general breakdown of social order.

GCI has several small congregations in Haiti and operates a small school in the capital city of Port-au-Prince. We spoke with Pastor Joseph Franklin about how things are going for our members and for the struggling nation.

Christian Odyssey: Would you describe that moment at 4:55 pm on the evening of January 12 when the earthquake struck?

Joseph Franklin: The earth shook for about 30 seconds. My wife, our helper and I were blessed with the chance to get out of the house. Billy, our younger son, was caught in the street nearby. Thanks to God, he managed to reach home after a few minutes.

We spent two nights sleeping outside. We live in an area where the houses are not crowded together and have back and front yards, so we were comparatively less exposed to danger. In downtown Port-au-Prince, unfortunately, the buildings are crowded together. When they collapsed, they did not leave any space for people to escape. That was the main cause of such a high loss of life.

From the top of the hill where we live, we could look over the town. It looked like a huge pile of crushed carton boxes. The first estimation calculated the number of deaths at 300,000. That number was far from the reality. It became evident that perhaps as many as half a million inhabitants in Port-au-Prince perished under the debris.

We can predict a hurricane—even give it a name and determine its trajectory. But an earthquake is a different story. You cannot know if or when the earth is going to tremble under your heels. It's sudden and it's horrifying.

CO: How are things now, one year after the earthquake?

JF: There has not been much improvement. In less than a year we have experienced a hurricane, the cholera epidemic, increasing criminal activity and political unrest. Essential services are still unreliable. Every single institution existing in this country has received its share of the adversities. The gen-



Although our old church building was shaken, it remained standing. The interior had to be gutted and refinished. There was only minor damage to the other school buildings.

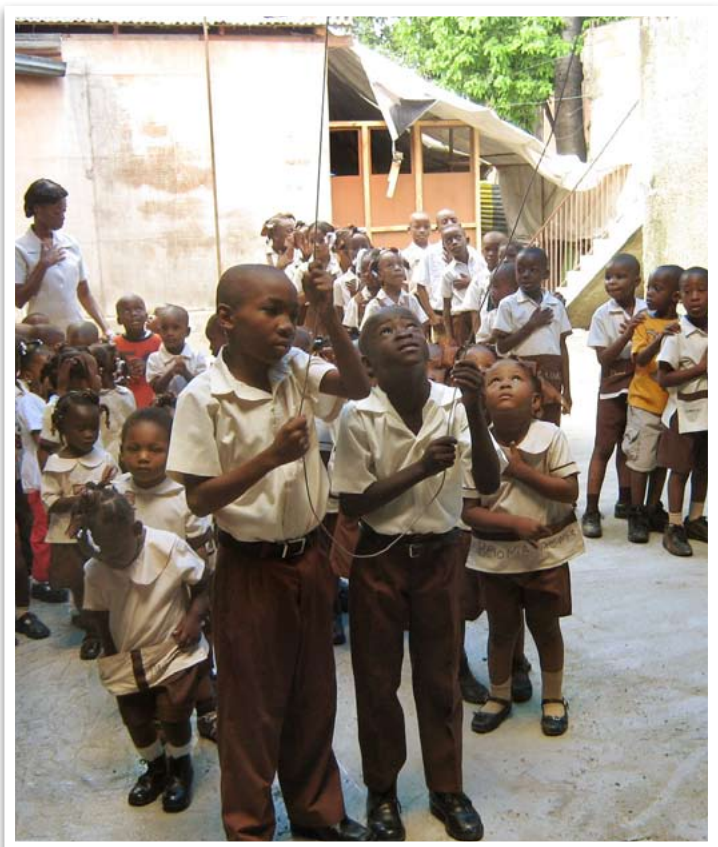
eral condition has gotten even more agonizing for individuals and for institutions alike. Governments, non-governmental organizations, churches, schools, the university—all are struggling to keep going.

CO: Is the situation in Haiti hopeless?

JF: It all depends on how you look at it. You can see difficulties in every opportunity or opportunities in every difficulty. Those who still have a vision say that it doesn't make sense to give up, but it makes a lot of sense to stand fast.

By the grace of our faithful Lord, our little local church is strong. In French we often use this proverb: "*C'est par la tete que pourrit le poisson.*" (The fish only rots from the head.) The Body of Christ will stay sane as long as it stays attached to its head, Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, Christians sometimes are tempted to give up in frustration. Frustration is human, but giving way to it may lead to forgetting the abundance of the grace of God. The secret is not letting our frustrations obscure our vision of the kingdom.

David said that when he walked in the valley of the shadow of death, he was not afraid, because the faithful shepherd (Jesus) walked with him (Psalm 23:4). This is especially comforting because verse 6 says that walking with the Lord in the



To help children recover from the trauma, and to regain a sense of normalcy, routine activities, like raising the flag every morning, are very important.



Although the classrooms were not seriously damaged, many children are still afraid to be under solid roofs. Much of the school's classes and other activities take place outside or under tarpaulins.



One of the walls that surround the school collapsed. Fortunately no one was hurt. Ours was one of the few schools in Port au Prince not to suffer extensive damage. Many were entirely destroyed.

valley of the shadow of death leads to grace and happiness. Who could turn away from the path to grace and happiness? The members have lost belongings, but they have stayed strong in spirit. They have not lost hope. They have learned to stand

on the Lord's promises and to count their blessings one by one.

CO: Our school was one of the few in Port au Prince to escape major damage. Have you been able to reopen?

JF: Our school's concrete buildings were well built. They were partly damaged, but not as much as the wood building where the church meets. Nevertheless, we have been able to repair the wood building, thanks to financial help from our brothers and sisters around the world made through the home office in Glendora, California.

At the end of March we launched a four-month program for the children of the community around the school. It was a special session of psychosocial assistance to help the children get over the trauma and prepare for when things get back to normal.

The 2010-2011 academic year began on October 11 in spite of the political uncertainty prior to the elections. We opened with 80 children from a list of 134. We expect to have most of the rest of them return for the second quarter.

The situation is still very unstable. We have to take it day by day. But we pray for a peaceful political atmosphere next year. We trust everything to the mighty hand of God. We ask that everyone in our churches around the world please not neglect their prayers for us in Haiti. The prayers of our brothers and sisters everywhere have already brought forth abundant fruit, and we praise and thank God for them. **co**

God Brought My Heart to San Francisco

By Richard Roberts

I came to live in the USA from Trinidad and Tobago in 1975. My wife, Renee, is from the Philippines. We met in Connecticut while both attending military school and have been married for 28 years. We have been out of the military now for quite some time, and I currently work as a senior network engineer supporting the Department of Homeland Security (U. S. Coast Guard) computer network systems. My wife works in the same department as a Program Analyst. We currently live in San Francisco, California. And we moved here for the purpose of planting a church.

I don't think it was just my idea. I believe God chose it for me, and I just followed what he put in my heart to do. I attended the local GCI (then WCG) congregation, but I began to see that something more was needed in our area. I read an article in our church magazine about the need to start new churches in our communities. In 1997 our church participated in the San Francisco and Oakland Billy Graham crusades. It was then that I realized that these new believers coming out of these crusades needed places to meet and worship if they were to continue to learn about and grow in Jesus. Traditional and established churches might not have what they needed. They needed an environment where they felt comfortable. Like Isaiah, I said, "Here I am. Send me! Please send me!" I went to bed thinking about it. I woke up thinking about it. It was something I had to do.

I had no experience in doing something like this, but I decided to trust God to give me what I needed. I had always

enjoyed teaching new Christians and non-Christians about Jesus. There was so much that I wanted to share.

Now, when people ask me what you need to plant a church, I tell them that the most important thing is love. Love for God and love for people. Jesus said, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35). People are attracted to love. Love breaks barriers between culture and languages. It's amazing to watch our diverse group in San Francisco praying together, each in his or her first language, reading together from different Bible translations, and fellowshiping, eating and serving God together as one Body.

On December 5, 1998, we held our first house church service with seven people: my wife, my adopted daughter, her husband and their daughter, and my two nieces. The first few years were a struggle. We had some Coast Guard military people attend, but some of them have transferred out. At times there were only three of us. I remembered the parable Jesus told about being faithful in a few things. I suppose it might be easier to be faithful in big things and large numbers. But could we be faithful in small things with the same enthusiasm? Paul's words to Timothy, "Preach the word [of God]...in season and out of season" (2 Timothy 4:2) were encouraging. The Scriptures lifted me up, energized and kept me going, so I stood up and preached to three like I was preaching to 20.

Today we have 36 on the rolls, with a regular attendance of 25 to 30, and the numbers continue to increase.



We know God will keep it growing as he sees fit. Our job is to be faithful, whatever the numbers.

When the church outgrew our home, we prayed for wisdom in finding a new place to meet. We believe God answered our prayers with a commercial corner building, close to many bus lines, public transportation, easy freeway access, a half-mile from our home. We meet every Sunday at 11:30 a.m., and after the service we have lunch together, get to know one another better, talk about the week and encourage one another. We are never in a hurry to go home.

My wife and I enjoy meeting people of different races and culture. We want to reach out to everyone—rich, poor, all races, all cultures. Our neighborhood is the ideal place for that, and we believe it's where God wants us to be.

When it comes to growing a church, we have learned that people respond best to a simple, personal invitation. You get to know people, and when the time is right, you invite them to come to church with you. It's that easy. Over the years we have distributed a lot of flyers in our community, but all of our new members began attending by a personal invitation, not by reading a flyer.

If I were to do this all over again, I would do it a little sooner, without hesitation. I knew this was of God before I started doing it, but I was actually discouraged from it by some people, whom I am sure meant well. But knowing what I know now, I would definitely get started much sooner than I did.

Of course, reaching out in love is not just for new churches—it can happen in any church. But there is a need for new churches in places we don't have them. I found that planting a church is hard work and it takes time, but I have always felt God there beside me, encouraging me, giving me peace of mind, and filling me with joy as he works through me to open doors to people's hearts.


In the summer of 1992, I was led to start a church at work on a military base when the chaplains were reluctant to lead regular worship. I took over and held a weekly lunch-

I remembered the parable of Jesus about being faithful in a few things. I suppose it might be easier to be faithful in big things. But could we be faithful in small things with the same enthusiasm?

time Bible study and a worship service every three months while doing my regular computer support job. Little did I realize it was all in preparation for planting a church in our denomination.

Today, when Renee and I see new people come to really know for the first time how much God loves them, we are renewed with joy, and we know that this journey has been worth every obstacle and hardship. It is so exciting to have the privilege to show new believers what the Bible really says about their life and their future, and to watch as God draws them to him.

I would never have known this joy if I had not followed what God put in my heart to do. You know, if you plant a tree in a place where it's really needed, you will enjoy watching it grow. And that is how I've found it to be with planting a church.

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Lazarus and the Rich Man: A Tale of Unbelief

By J. Michael Fezell

Have you ever heard that God is incapable of reaching those who do not become believers before they die? It's a cruel and destructive doctrine, and its so-called "proof" is a single verse in the parable known as Lazarus and the Rich Man. But like all of Scripture, the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man falls within a particular context and needs to be understood in that context.

It is always bad business to base a doctrine on one verse alone, and especially on a verse in a story designed to make a different point altogether. Jesus told the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man for two reasons: 1) to expose and condemn the refusal of the leaders of Israel to believe in him, and 2) to reverse common assumptions about riches being a sign of God's favor and poverty being proof of God's disfavor.

Lazarus and the Rich Man is the final parable of five that Jesus told in response to a group of Pharisees and scribes who, being lovers of money and self-importance, were disgruntled over the fact that Jesus welcomed sinners and ate with them (Luke 15:1 and 16:14). First, Jesus told three parables, The

The underlying revelation in this story is that, in fact, there is one who crosses chasms for the sake of sinners.

Shepherd Who Rejoices Over Finding His Lost Sheep, The Woman Who Rejoices Over Finding Her Lost Coin, and The Father Who Rejoices Over Finding His Lost Son.

In telling these three parables, Jesus wanted the tax collectors and sinners, as well as the grumbling Pharisees and scribes who believed they had no need of repentance, to know that "there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent" (Luke 15:7). But there's more.

Money vs. God

Jesus moves to the fourth story, the dishonest manager (Luke 16:1-14). Its point: If you love money, as the Pharisees did, you will not love God. Jesus then pointedly told the Pharisees, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts. What people value highly is detestable in God's sight" (verse 15).

The Law and the Prophets stand as witnesses, Jesus told them, that the kingdom of God has arrived and that everyone is urgently piling into it (verses 16-17). His implied message: "Because you prize the things of men, not the things of God, you are rejecting God's urgent summons to enter his kingdom, which can be done only through me."

Then in verse 18, Jesus implied that the Jewish religious leaders have "divorced" themselves from the Law and the Prophets, which witness to him, and in so doing have rejected God. (Compare Jeremiah 3:6.)

Then, beginning in verse 19, in the context of the previous four parables, Jesus told the story of Lazarus and the Rich Man.

A tale of unbelief

There are three characters in the story. First is the rich man (representing the Pharisees who love money), then the miserable beggar Lazarus (representing a class of people despised by the Pharisees), and finally, Abraham (whose bosom or lap was a Jewish symbol of comfort and peace in the afterlife).

In the story, the beggar Lazarus dies. But Jesus surprises the listeners by saying that "the angels carried him to Abraham's side" (verse 22). That was exactly the opposite of what the Pharisees expected would happen to a man like Lazarus. They believed that people like Lazarus were poor and diseased beggars because they were under God's curse, and therefore they believed that such people go to be tormented in Hades when they die.

"Not so," Jesus is telling them. "Your worldview is upside down. You know nothing of my Father's kingdom. Not only are you wrong about how my Father feels about the beggar, but you are wrong about how my Father feels about you."

Jesus completes the surprise by telling them that the rich man also died and was buried, but he, not the beggar, is the one who found himself being tormented in Hades. The rich man looked up and saw Abraham far off with none other than Lazarus by his side. He cried out, "Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire" (verses 23-24).

But Abraham had news for the rich man. He tells him in essence, "All your life you loved riches and had no time for the likes of Lazarus. But I do have time for the likes of Lazarus, and now he is with me, and you have nothing." And then

comes the verse that is so often torn out of context: “Besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us” (Luke 16:26).

Here and there

Have you ever wondered why anybody could possibly want to pass from “here to you”? It is obvious why someone might want to cross from “there to us,” but from “here to you” makes no sense. Or does it? Abraham began his words to the rich man by addressing him as “son,” then points out to him that not even those who might *want* to get to him are able to—because of the great chasm.

But the underlying revelation in this story is that, in fact, there is one who crosses chasms for the sake of sinners.

The Bridge across the chasm

God gave his Son for all sinners, not just for sinners like Lazarus, but for sinners like the rich man, too (John 3:16-17). But the rich man, a symbol of the Pharisees and the scribes who gathered to condemn Jesus, didn’t want the Son of God. The rich man wanted what he always wanted—his own comfort at the expense of others.

Jesus’ condemnation of the unbelief of the Pharisees in this story concludes with the rich man arguing that if someone would warn his brothers, they would not come into the place where he was. But Abraham points out, “They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them” (verse 29). Jesus had already told them (see verses 16-17) that the Law and Prophets are a testimony to him, a testimony they had rejected (compare John 5:45-47 and Luke 24:44-47).

“No, father Abraham” the rich man responded, “but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent” (Luke 16:30). Abraham responds, “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead” (verse 31).

And they weren’t convinced; the Pharisees, scribes and chief priests who conspired to have Jesus crucified also conspired to have soldiers lie about his resurrection (Matthew 27:62-66), and proceeded to persecute and kill those who became believers.

Missing the point

Jesus did not tell this parable to paint us a portrait of heaven and hell. It is a parable of judgment against the unbelieving religious leadership of the time, and unkind, selfish rich people of all times. Jesus uses the common Jewish imagery of the afterlife (that of Hades for the wicked and “being with Abraham” for the righteous) as a literary backdrop to make the point. In this parable Jesus was not commenting on the validity or accuracy of Jewish imagery of the afterlife; he was simply using that imagery as scenery for his story.

Jesus’ focus was not to satisfy our itching curiosities about

what heaven and hell are like. His priority is to let us in on God’s secrets (Romans 16:25; Ephesians 1:9, etc.), the mystery of the ages (Ephesians 3:4-5)—that in him, Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate, God has always been reconciling the world to himself (2 Corinthians 5:19).

Our preoccupation with the details of the afterlife can only lead us away from the very point missed by the rich man in the story: Believe in the One who came back from the dead. [co](#)

ASK:

QUESTION: Who are the “144,000” mentioned in the book of Revelation?

ANSWER: In vision, John saw 144,000 people who were sealed with the Father’s name on their forehead (Rev. 7:4; 14:1). This number (12 times 12 times 1,000) is symbolic; the group that John saw represented all who are faithful, and the “seal” symbolizes that every believer is safe in the hands of God.

The faithful are described as “virgins” (Rev. 14:4), which denotes spiritual faithfulness in the sense of not turning away from God.

QUESTION: How are the “two witnesses” in Revelation 11 to be understood?

ANSWER: Throughout the history of the church, commentators have interpreted the two witnesses of Revelation 11 in various ways, including as two actual people who prophesy before Jesus’ return. Similar imagery from Zechariah 4 describes them as servants of God. They can also be symbolically modeled after Moses and Elijah, who exhibited similar powers historically.

Revelation pictures the church as a martyr church. It is the souls under the altar, representing the church, who were “slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained” (6:9). The same is true of the two witnesses; they are martyred for their testimony (11:7). In this sense, the two witnesses are symbols of the entire witnessing church. Their invulnerability until their appointed time of death, resurrection and vindication denotes the ultimate triumph of the gospel over all obstacles.

In this column, *Christian Odyssey* can answer short Bible questions of general interest. Please send questions by email to the editor, john.halford@gci.org

He Knows Us Like That



I think I know my daughter pretty well. We spend a lot of time together and enjoy each other's company. When I tell her I understand her, she comes back with, "You don't know me like that." I tell her I do know her like that because I'm her mother. But perhaps she is right. We often judge others based on how well we think we know them, but we don't allow for growth and change. We put people in boxes with well-defined walls and corners.

We do the same thing to God. Just as we often treat people according to our expectations of how we think they'll act, we treat God with the complacency that comes from thinking we know how he'll answer prayer, how he deals with people and how he thinks. We have a tendency to make him over in our own image, imagining he's like us.

We don't know God like that, and that's probably a good thing. As David said in Psalm 139, "such knowledge is too wonderful for me." Our minds would go on overload. God, in his infinite glory and power, is way beyond our ability to comprehend. And that is why Jesus came. Jesus is one of us, and he's also the perfect revelation of the Father. We can relate to and understand Jesus, and what we know about him is that he loves us and will never leave us, which means that the Father loves us and will never leave us either. The Holy Spirit gives us assurance of that in the deepest parts of our hearts and minds. We may not know everything about God, but that is the one thing we can know for certain—he loves us.

And even though we don't know God inside and out, he does know us inside and out. He knows us in the secret, inner places no one else sees. He understands what makes us tick in our own unique ways. Does that make you nervous? It shouldn't—God isn't like you and me. He's like Jesus. We sometimes turn away from people the more we get to know them, but he never does.

Everyone wants to be understood, to be heard and noticed. I guess that's why so many are blogging. Everyone has something to say, whether anyone listens or not. But blogging will never take the place of face-to-face communication. A person could have the most viewed blog on the Internet and still be lonely and misunderstood.

Jesus makes us one with him, bringing us into the eternal communion of love he shares with the Father and the Spirit. In him we are heard, noticed, understood and known. Only God—Father, Son and Spirit—sees into our very hearts and knows everything we've ever thought. And he loves us in spite of what he sees. When the world seems cold and impersonal and I feel lonely and misunderstood, I take comfort knowing at least Someone knows me like that. co

Glass Half-full Theology



You are familiar with the old adage of looking at a glass and seeing it as half empty or half full. The idea is that if you are an optimist, you will see the glass half full. If you are a pessimist, you will see the glass as half empty. I tend to be a glass half full type of person. But I wasn't always that way—especially when it came to my spiritual life.

When I was younger, I tended to lean toward the glass-half-empty view of my life with God. Whatever I did, however good I tried to be, it was never enough. I always felt condemned, because I knew I was a sinner.

My view was fairly simple. God was good and holy; humans were evil. I memorized a few scriptures that reminded me that there is none good, that all have sinned and fallen short, that the human heart is desperately wicked, etc. These verses, standing apart the rest of the Bible, framed my thinking about God, about Jesus, and about myself.

Because of our sinful nature, I believed, God the Father had turned his back on mankind, and the Son had to give up his equality with the Father to build that bridge back to him. Jesus came to earth and lived a perfect life, only to die on a cross to pay the penalty for my sins. I knew I could spend the rest of my life doing good and I'd never be able to repay Jesus for his sacrifice. My half-empty-glass approach to life kept me focused on the human plight—the human failure.

Then one day when I was reading the book of Romans, God began to open my eyes to his love and grace. I started to see the glass as half full, not half empty. I saw that the Bible focused on salvation, redemption, and deliverance, not on sin and weakness. The great themes of the Bible do not dwell on human weakness, but on God's steadfast love and faithfulness to redeem and deliver. God got my mind and focus off of me and on to Christ. The glass became half full when I started to see what Christ gave me—forgiveness, acceptance, love, adoption, inclusion.

Seeing Christ at the center of everything increased my faith in the God who gives us the gift of salvation simply because he loves us.

My biblical, spiritual and theological glass is now half full, and as a pastor, I rejoice when I see others' glasses becoming half full as they see God's word not as condemnation but as a constant affirmation of God's love, acceptance and inclusion.

With the assurance of God's faithfulness, demonstrated by Christ, testified to in the Scriptures, and ministered to us by the Holy Spirit, I yearn for the day when the ascended Christ will appear, and we'll all finally see the glass neither as half empty nor as half full, but as totally full! co

The “New” NIV

Popular English translation updated



Biblica (formerly known as the International Bible Society) has announced an update for the New International Version. Since the NIV is the translation we use in *Christian Odyssey*, we thought it might be helpful for our readers to have some background about why the NIV was updated.

Bible translation is a never-ending process for two reasons. First, scholars continue to learn more about the original languages, in vocabulary, grammar, and idioms. Second, English (like all languages) is constantly changing. Our vocabulary and style of expression have changed a lot since the King James Version was translated 400 years ago, and even somewhat since the NIV was last updated in 1984.

Therefore, as translators attempt to convey the ancient meaning in contemporary language, there is always a need for periodic review. Biblica’s Committee on Bible Translation has met each year since 1965. Changes have been adopted only when 70 percent of the committee approved, so the process is a conservative one. In this most recent edition, only five percent of the NIV has been changed. The changes occur in three categories. We’ll give examples of each:

Understanding the original languages

In the 1984 edition of the NIV, the nativity story in Luke reads that Jesus was born in a stable “because there was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7, NIV¹⁹⁸⁴). However, more recent research has revealed that Bethlehem was such a small village that it is not likely that it had an inn, and it is now fairly well established that the Greek word referred to a guest room rather than an inn.

So, we do not need to imagine an innkeeper who was so heartless as to refuse a woman in labor. Rather, we realize that Bethlehem was a village, and there were not many houses with guest rooms. So the updated version of the NIV reads: “... because there was no guest room available for them.”

Jesus was crucified between two “robbers,” says the earlier translation of Mark 15:27. But now it is known that the Greek word generally referred to rebels, to guerrilla fighters, rather than ordinary robbers. The rebels sometimes robbed traveling merchants, but the primary crime for which they were executed was rebellion against Rome. So the NIV now calls them “rebels.”

An effort to be clearer

Many people have memorized Philippians 4:13: “I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (NIV¹⁹⁸⁴). Unfortunately, many people misunderstand this to mean they can do everything from winning a foot race to raising ten thousand

dollars if Jesus is with them. But if this is intended as a divine promise, what are the people to conclude when their wishes do not come true?

The context makes it clear that Paul does not mean “everything.” Rather, he is saying that Christ gave him the ability to be content even when he was poor and hungry (verse 12). So, to make the verse less likely to be taken out of context, the NIV now reads: “I can do all *this* through him who gives me strength.” The word “this” refers readers to the previous verse, where they can see what Paul was talking about.

In a literal translation, 1 Corinthians 7:1 reads, “It is good for a man not to touch a woman.” Is this really what Paul meant? No, for two reasons. First, “to touch a woman” is now known to be a Greek idiom for sexual activity. And second, the sentence was apparently a quote from the Corinthians, not Paul’s view at all. So the NIV now puts this inside of quote marks: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” That was their idea, not Paul’s.

Contemporary English style

Several decades ago, “alien” meant someone from another nation. Now it commonly makes people think of invaders from outer space. So in the revised NIV, Abraham does not announce that he is an alien, but that he is a “foreigner” (Genesis 23:4). Most readers would understand “alien” correctly, of course, but why use a word that can be misunderstood when a different English word conveys the same meaning without confusion?

Another area in which English has changed considerably in the last 20 years is the use of gender-specific words. Most of us who are over 40 are familiar with the word “man” being used as a synonym for humanity, but a new generation is growing up with school textbooks that do not use the word in that way. For these people, “man” usually means a male.

Again, why use a word that some people will misunderstand? If the original language did not specify a gender, then the translation should not specify one, either.

We have other English words that work just as well, communicating clearly to all generations. So the NIV now reads, “God created *mankind* in his own image” (Genesis 1:27). It uses the word “ancestors” rather than “forefathers,” and it reads “brothers and sisters” instead of just “brothers” when women are likely to be part of the group.

The updated NIV is now available on biblegateway.com. Printed editions will become available in March 2011. For more information on how the NIV was updated, visit www.biblica.com/niv/accuracy/. [co](#)



H m m ...

It's extremely important not to assault people. I gave a sermon about the extraordinary variability in the way that Christ approached different people when he was giving a message. He kind of confronts the young ruler: "It's easier to pass through the eye of a camel than for a rich man to get into heaven." Even Christ tried to meet people where they were rather than just being harsh with everybody. He speaks to the woman at the well. Sometimes I think evangelicals come at people so hard and so fast and don't take time to listen to where somebody is. We can just try to have a lighter touch sometimes.

Condoleezza Rice
interviewed in *Christianity Today*

Songs of all kinds make me feel thoughts of God—sometimes directly, more often indirectly. This appears to be a universal phenomenon. Songs can give rise to the sensation that almost all believers say they have experienced: the sudden "flash" of understanding that this world is not all that there is.

Roy Williams, God Actually

Live your life as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as though you were to live forever.

Mahatma Gandhi

If you want to make peace, don't talk to your friends. Talk to your enemies.

Moshe Dayan

Most Christians are like the man who was toiling along the road, bending under a heavy burden, when a wagon overtook him, and the driver kindly offered to help him on his journey. He joyfully accepted the offer, but when seated, continued to bend beneath his burden, which he still kept on his shoulders.

"Why do you not lay down your burden?" asked the kind-hearted driver.

"Oh!" replied the man, "I feel that it is almost too much to ask you to carry me, and I could not think of letting you carry my burden too."

And so Christians, who have given themselves into the care and keeping of the Lord Jesus, still continue to bend beneath the weight of their burden, and often go weary and heavy-laden throughout the whole length of their journey.

Hannah Whitall Smith

The first question which the priest and the Levite asked was: "If I stop and help this man, what will happen to me?" But the Good Samaritan reversed the question: "If I do not stop and help this man, what will happen to him?"

Martin Luther King Jr.

Many a time I have wanted to stop talking and find out what I really believe.

Walther Lippman

The predominant model of evangelistic preaching is to use your 20-minute opportunity to take people very quickly on a journey from Genesis to Revelation, encompassing sin, judgment, eschatology, the passion, resurrection, conversion and sanctification. After they have received this quick first-year course in biblical theology they are then faced with a decision whether to follow Christ or not.

The poor confused, unchurched person, who got stuck on the Genesis bit, is then consigned to hell if they don't come forward and kneel at the front! How different this is to Jesus, who, basically told people stories that usually concentrated on one point of truth.

Roger Sutton

Mahatma Gandhi once said to some missionaries in India, "You work so hard at it. Just remember that the rose never invites

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anyone to smell it. If it is fragrant, people will walk across the garden and endure the thorns to smell it."

Now that is not the whole story about evangelism. But it is an important part of it. People are not going to want the Savior we proclaim if they cannot see that He makes a difference to our lives and that our churches are really attractive.

Michael Green
Evangelism Through the Local Church