

CHRISTIAN Odyssey

June-August 2012

Growing Together in Life & Faith

Worshipping in Spirit and in Truth

Going On-Line

No one who knows me would accuse me of being an “early adopter” of new technology. The first time I tried to make a call with my new cell phone I took a photo of my wife instead. I am still not quite sure what all those “apps” are, or what Bluetooth does, and I never last more than a few seconds in a video game.

I did get a Kindle electronic reader three years ago. It took a bit of getting used to, but I have grown to like it, once I remembered not to turn it over when I finished the page. I buy many books, and the Kindle means I don’t have to add several feet of bookshelves every year. It looks like electronic books are here to stay—Amazon and Barnes and Noble now sell more books in electronic form than they do in the traditional paper versions.

These changes are affecting every aspect of the publishing process. We still call new articles “manuscripts,” but that is exactly what they are not. They are not “scripted” and most are untouched by human hands. For several years I would only work with “hard copy” printouts, laboriously transferring the changes back to the computer. And I would always keep a printed copy—just in case. I think the change came gradually, but now I find editing and writing on screen is second nature. In fact, the first time I ever see this magazine in print is when you do—when it arrives in the mail. Everything—writing, editing, proofing and copy editing, selection of photos, page design and final approval—*everything*—is done electronically.

As the cost of printing and mailing increases, small circulation magazines and newsletters have to think seriously



about abandoning a print edition and going on-line as what is called an *e-zine*. We knew we would have to do it with *Christian Odyssey* sooner or later.

Well, it’s sooner.

The next issue of *Christian Odyssey* will be the last one we produce as a printed magazine. After that, we will continue with an on-line edition.

We realize there is a risk in making a move like this. Some will welcome it and find the electronic format exciting. Others will not like it at first, but, as I did with my Kindle, they will get used to it. However, I am afraid some will be tempted to throw up their hands and say, “Count me out.”

We really don’t want that to happen. So we are making our next issue a transition issue, in which we will do our best to explain how everyone can have access to *Christian Odyssey*. Even the most dyed-in-the-wool technophobes may be surprised at how easy it is, once you know how (or have grandchildren, who seem to be born knowing how).

In the meantime, a suggestion: We already have a web-based version of the magazine. By the time you read this, it will be available at ChristianOdyssey.org. Why not get a preview at how we will look on-line?

See you in cyber space.

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Worshipping in Spirit and in Truth

By Joseph Tkach

In the last two decades, many churches have made major changes in the way they conduct worship. They have become more flexible and even adventurous, realizing that “praise and worship” (as worship in song and prayer is often referred to) is an important component of the service.

Congregations that formerly were extremely conservative and tradition-bound have learned to embrace multiple music styles. They have also learned the importance of qualified worship leaders, musicians and others who facilitate worship. Many churches, who previously would not have allowed anything but a piano or organ to accompany the hymns, now have praise bands with multiple musicians. And of course, we have seen the increasing use of electronics to enhance worship.

Not all have appreciated this change, and worship styles, especially in regard to choice of music, have become a point of contention in many churches. Some have even talked of “worship wars.”

Something important is being lost in the clamor. Worship is so much more than just what style of music you choose, or what gizmos you hook up to go along with it. So let’s remind ourselves of what worship is, and why it is important.

Worship is an interesting word. It comes from an Old English word, *weorth* meaning “worth.” In its earliest form, *weorthscipe* (worth-ship) meant the appropriate treatment of something or someone of worth. So worth-ship or worship is the act of affirming God’s worth. It does not mean we flatter God to boost his self-esteem. Rather, it is a declaration that God is worthy—to be praised, preached about, confessed to and served.

Jesus makes one of the most pointed scriptural statements concerning worship in his encounter with the Samaritan woman. Living in a society polarized over the details of “getting worship right,” this woman seized the opportunity to ask Jesus about it. “I can see that you are a prophet,” she said. “Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem” (John 4:19-20).

Jesus explained that the practical details of worship were not most important. “A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks” (John 4:23).

The true worship of God is expressed in a number of ways. We see this by noting that there are three basic meanings to

the Greek and Hebrew words translated as worship in our English Bibles.

The first meaning is that of praise and adoration. We express this when we sing and pray (together or individually).

The second meaning pertains to public or ceremonial gatherings, like church services, where we sing, pray and fellowship together.

The third meaning, which is the broadest, is to serve. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *abad* is used for both worship and for work. The Greek verbs for this meaning are *latreuo* and the similar word *leiturgeo* which is the root word for our English word liturgy.

The most important point about worship is found in the New Testament book of Hebrews, where the risen and ascended Jesus is said to be our *leitourgos* (“minister”); our worship leader (8:2). He leads us in worship, conveying all of God’s graces to us and taking all our responses to him, sanctifying them and giving them to the Father in the Spirit.

Our worship of God, with and through Jesus, can occur in large groups and small. For the first 300 years of Christianity, church services occurred mostly in homes, and thus in small groups. There is something about that original pattern that carries the inherent blessing of simplicity.

Whenever Christians are drawn together into Christ as the common center of their desire and faith, it is worship.

The early church did not set up banks of amplifiers, speakers, soundboards, microphones, projectors and such. These resources are not needed in small congregations. In fact, it would be ridiculous to set up for a group of 250 people when there are only going to be 10 to 20 in attendance. Sitting in a circle is just as good as sitting in several rows—in fact, it is often better for small congregations, providing an intimate environment where genuine, quality worship can happen.

So let’s remember that, although advanced technologies and live praise bands can enhance worship, they are not essential to worship. A small congregation need not feel inadequate because its worship service is not a “mega-media-event.” Keep it simple—make use of the resources you have, knowing that God will meet you where you are. Instead of becoming preoccupied with the mechanics of doing church (like Martha in the kitchen!), embrace the freedom that Jesus gives you to focus on worship (like Mary at our Lord’s feet). Remember what Jesus told us: “For where two or three gather in my name, I am there with them” (Matthew 18:20).

What about liturgy?

Another important aspect of worship to keep in mind is

that not all worship takes place in church, or even in a group setting. Remember, one of the Greek words that is translated as “worship” can also be translated as “liturgy.”

Churches with a “non-liturgical” worship tradition tend to equate liturgy with formal worship that incorporates standardized prayers accompanied by what my friend Professor Eddie Gibbs describes as “bells and smells.”

Though a “liturgical” approach toward worship might seem contrived and artificial to those used to a less formal style, it is perfectly valid when given to the Father, through Jesus “in spirit and in truth,” as Jesus explained to the Samaritan woman at the well. But if we limit our understanding of liturgy to this particular worship style, we miss something important.

Liturgy is not just something that “high churches” like Roman Catholics, Anglicans and Eastern Orthodox Christians do. Whether we recognize it or not, liturgy is fundamental to the rhythm of a Christian’s daily life before God.

The original meaning of *leitourgia* is a public duty or a service to the state undertaken by a citizen. A *leitourgos* was “a public servant.” In ancient Greece, *leitourgia* was performed by wealthy citizens at their own expense. It was not limited to religious good works. Any general service of a public kind could be described as liturgy (and a person who did not accept his public duty was known as an *idiotes!*).

In Romans 12:1, Paul writes, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship [*latreia*].” He saw a parallel: as citizens of a community accepted their responsibility for public service, so Christians should make themselves available to God for the work of the kingdom. He also draws from his own Jewish background of sacrifice associated with temple worship. The sacrifice here seems to represent an act of total self-giving of one’s life for the benefit of and in response to God’s mercy. But notice the radical transformation of the idea of sacrifice. In ancient Israel, the animal gave up its life as it poured out its blood. The life was given over for others so that it became dead. Here Paul proclaims that we are *living sacrifices, continually* self-giving.

Where did Paul get that striking insight? From the gospel of grace he laid out in the previous eleven chapters! Our sacrifice is a mirror image, reflecting the self-giving of Christ, who passed through death to eternal life, never to die again! We join in and participate in Christ’s own liturgy of pouring out his life even to the extent of death, but in a way that leads to fullness of life. Indeed Christ’s own worship transforms the very notion of sacrifice and worship. Paul goes on to say: “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:2).

Our sacrificial worship demonstrates a whole new pat-

tern of living that comes from sharing daily in the grace of Christ, our crucified, risen and ascended Lord. We read in Hebrews 8:2 that as one of us, in our place and on our behalf, he is truly our worship leader in every moment of our lives. In union with Christ we daily die to ourselves in repentance and rise with Christ to newness of life through faith in him.

Coughing up prayers

So you see, liturgy is not just something “religious” we do in church, or when we pray or study the Bible. It is characteristic of the whole rhythm of our daily life. When, in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (KJV), Paul admonished Christians to “pray without ceasing,” he was not saying that we continually pray and never stop. The Greek word he chose is used outside the New Testament to describe a hacking cough. When you have a hacking cough, you are not coughing all the time, but you feel like you are. That is what it means to pray without ceasing. It means being in an attitude of prayer at all times. So, when I say that worship is the rhythm of daily life, it is like saying that we “pray without ceasing”—just as we breathe without ceasing.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus showed how the practical aspect of living and worshipping in “spirit and truth” can be more important than engaging in more noticeable religious behavior. “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:23).

Whenever Christians are drawn together into Christ as the common center of their desire and faith, it is worship. Jesus’ teaching of a process to eliminate conflict between brothers includes purposful fellowship, prayer, and church involvement so that forgiveness and reconciliation can occur when there are members in conflict (Matthew 18:15-17). This act of reconciliation is worship.

The temple in Jerusalem was a liturgical place that involved more than sacrifice. At its dedication, Solomon prayed, “May your eyes be open toward this temple *day and night*, this place of which you said you would put your Name there. May you hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place” (2 Chronicles 6:20). We no longer have (nor do we need) a physical temple. Now God’s people are God’s temple—built up by the Holy Spirit, where acts of sacrifice and service continue day and night, “without ceasing” as together, we share God’s love and life with those around us (1 Peter 2:5).

Worship is much larger than what we do when we attend church. Authentic worship is how we conduct our lives at all times. Or as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). **co**

Changed Lives



My husband and I were once privileged to share a meal with Jaime Escalante, the math teacher who inspired underachievers at an East Los Angeles high school to score high marks in calculus in the early 1980s. This impressive accomplishment was documented in the 1988 movie *Stand and Deliver* starring Edward James Olmos.

Escalante shared the following story about a couple of his former students, both named Johnny.

The first Johnny was a top-notch pupil. He turned in all of his homework on time, made excellent grades, was respectful and never disruptive. You might say he was a model student—the kind all teachers dream of having in class.

The second Johnny was annoying and for want of a better word, a “pain” Escalante couldn’t get rid of with aspirin. This Johnny rarely turned in homework, was seldom on time, made below-average grades, was not all that respectful and quite disruptive.

When it came time for the first parent/teacher conference of the year, Johnny’s father and mother were surprised by the glowing report Mr. Escalante gave regarding their son’s progress: “I must say that Johnny is the type of student every teacher dreams of having in class. I really enjoy having him as a student.” The parents were pleased and rushed home to tell Johnny how much Mr. Escalante liked him.

About half an hour later the other Johnny’s parents came in. It was then Escalante discovered he had gotten the two Johnnys mixed up. That glowing report was given for the wrong boy.

The next day disruptive Johnny came up to Mr. Escalante and said, “My parents told me what you said about me.” And from that day forward, Johnny changed. Escalante never had a bit of trouble with him again. He was responsive, attentive and eager to learn. Something happens when children feel validated, loved, and appreciated!

Guess what? The same applies for adults. In fact, that is one reason Christ came to earth. He wants us to know we no longer need to feel down-trodden, unloved and unwanted. We don’t have to be a disruptive “pain” to get everyone’s attention or build our self-esteem. When we let Christ into our lives, our identity and our perception of ourselves changes—if we believe what he says about us.

Christ tells us that we are loved (John 3:16), forgiven (Colossians 3:13), chosen (Ephesians 1:11), accepted (Romans 15:7) and not condemned (Romans 8:1). We are justified (Romans 5:1), righteous (2 Corinthians 5:21) and blessed (Ephesians 1:3). We are God’s children (John 1:12) and his heirs (Galatians 4:7). The list goes on and on.

All these gifts are freely given to us. Of course, we have to believe, just like Escalante’s student. Once Johnny believed the good things his teacher said about him, his life changed. If we believe what God says about us, our lives can be changed too. **co**



God Lives Under the Bed

By Kelly Adkins

I envy Kevin. My brother, Kevin, thinks God lives under his bed. At least that's what I heard him say one night. He was praying out loud in his dark bedroom, and I stopped to listen, "Are you there, God?" he said. "Where are you? Oh, I see. Under the bed..."

I giggled softly and tiptoed off to my own room. Kevin's unique perspectives are often a source of amusement. But that night something else lingered long after the humor. I realized for the first time the very different world Kevin lives in.

He was born 30 years ago, mentally disabled as a result of difficulties during labor. Apart from his size (he's 6-foot-2), there are few ways in which he is an adult. He reasons and communicates with the capabilities of a 7-year-old, and he always will. He will probably always believe that God lives under his bed, that Santa Claus is the one who fills the space under our tree every Christmas and that airplanes stay up in the sky because angels carry them.

I remember wondering if Kevin realizes he is different. Is he ever dissatisfied with his monotonous life? Up before dawn each day, off to work at a workshop for the disabled, home to walk our cocker spaniel, return to eat his favorite

macaroni-and-cheese for dinner, and later to bed. The only variation in the entire scheme is laundry, when he hovers excitedly over the washing machine like a mother with her newborn child.

He does not seem dissatisfied. He lopes out to the bus every morning at 7:05, eager for a day of simple work. He wrings his hands excitedly while the water boils on the stove before dinner, and he stays up late twice a week to gather our dirty laundry for his next day's laundry chores. And Saturdays—oh, the bliss of Saturdays! That's the day my Dad takes Kevin to the airport to have a soft drink, watch the planes land, and speculate loudly on the destination of each passenger inside. "That one's goin' to Chi-car-go!" Kevin shouts as he claps his hands. His anticipation is so great he can hardly sleep on Friday nights.

And so goes his world of daily rituals and weekend field trips. He doesn't know what it means to be discontent. His life is simple. He will never know the entanglements of wealth or power, and he does not care what brand of clothing he wears or what kind of food he eats. His needs have always been met, and he never worries that one day they may not be.

In my moments of doubt and frustrations, I envy the security Kevin has in his simple faith. It is then I realize that perhaps he is not the one with the handicap. I am. My obligations, my fear, my pride—all become disabilities when I do not trust them to God's care.

His hands are diligent. Kevin is never so happy as when he is working. When he unloads the dishwasher or vacuums the carpet, his heart is completely in it. He does not shrink from a job when it is begun, and he does not leave a job until it is finished. But when his tasks are done, Kevin knows how to relax. He is not obsessed with his work or the work of others. His heart is pure. He still believes everyone tells the truth, promises must be kept, and when you are wrong, you apologize instead of argue. Free from pride and unconcerned with appearances, Kevin is not afraid to cry when he is hurt, angry or sorry. He is always transparent, always sincere. And he trusts God.

Not confined by intellectual reasoning, when he comes to Christ, he comes as a child. Kevin seems to know God—to really be friends with him in a way that is difficult for an “educated” person to grasp. God seems like his closest companion.

In my moments of doubt and frustrations with my Christianity, I envy the security Kevin has in his simple faith. It is then that I am most willing to admit that he has some divine knowledge that rises above my mortal questions. It is then I realize that perhaps he is not the one with the handicap. I am. My obligations, my fear, my pride, my circumstances—they all become disabilities when I do not trust them to God's care.

Who knows if Kevin comprehends things I can never learn? After all, he has spent his whole life in that kind of innocence, praying after dark and soaking up the goodness and love of God. And one day, when the mysteries of heaven are opened, and we are all amazed at how close God really is to our hearts, I'll realize that God heard the simple prayers of a boy who believed that God lived under his bed.

Kevin won't be surprised at all! **co**

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Popcorn and God



I love the salt, butter and crunch of hot, fresh popcorn. It's my snack of choice in the evening, even over dessert. We had popcorn a lot as I grew up, so part of my fondness for it probably has to do with childhood memories.

Have you ever thought about popcorn? No other variety of corn is like it. With a little heat and oil, the kernels explode into fluffy white morsels, completely different from regular corn, which softens up and stays the same color—and doesn't explode! When I think of popcorn and several of my other favorite foods, I marvel at the profusion of wonderful flavors we get to enjoy.

If everything in life were random and accidental, I doubt we'd have popcorn, avocados, chocolate or tea. And, if life were merely a matter of survival, why would we have all the things that make life sweet and fun? All we would need is something to keep us alive and give us energy, much like the bland, nondescript food in the movie *Matrix*.

Only someone who loves people could have come up with all the foods that make life enjoyable. And not only food, but also colors, fragrances, sunrises, sunsets, clouds, rainbows, flowers—the list goes on. That someone is God, who loves us so much he even included popcorn on his list of what would make life more interesting for us.

Eating has been likened by some to a worship experience. “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). Now I realize in the context, this verse is referring to food offered to idols, but it can apply to any time we eat and drink. In Ecclesiastes 9:7, Solomon also referred to eating: “Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for God has already approved what you do.” It seems God wants us to enjoy our food and drink.

The last part of 1 Timothy 6:17 says God richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Isn't it interesting that even though life can be dreadfully difficult and full of problems at times, God gives us many things that remind us of him and his thoughtfulness? For those with eyes to see, the rainbow and the silver lining of the clouds remind us he is there and we can continue to hope. Being thankful for all the little blessings keeps us mindful that someone cares for us and has made provision for us beyond this life too.

Noticing and thanking God for popcorn (insert your favorite food) draws us into unplanned moments of worship. We can worship God through cooking, eating, drinking, exercising, sleeping, gardening, crafting and any other human activity. As we engage in any endeavor, we can acknowledge God, thank, praise and honor him. Everything we do is participation in the life of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, even eating popcorn! **co**

Waters of Life

By Tim Maguire

Sometimes we forget what a blessing it is to be able to turn on a faucet and have fresh, clean, cool water gush out. Many are not so fortunate.

I am most often reminded of this on my trips into rural areas of Southern Africa. A 25-liter container and a several-kilometer walk to the nearest muddy stream provide enough water to keep a household alive for another day.

This thought inspired a recent well-digging project in Zambezia, one of the northern provinces in Mozambique. Grace Communion International has about 80 congregations in Mozambique, all of them rural, and none of the villages where the churches are located have easy access to fresh water. Several generous congregations in Canada had offered to finance digging wells in the hope of improving the quality of life of our brothers and sisters in Mozambique.

Accompanied by two friends and trailers loaded with concrete pipes, we headed for Morrumbala, a small village north of the mighty Zambezi river where GCI Mozambique is establishing its headquarters.

We travelled for four days and slept uncomfortably alongside the road or in the front seats of the vans, but the incredible welcome we received when we finally arrived, accompanied by much singing and dancing in true African style, made it all worthwhile. We collapsed exhausted into our tents.

Early the next morning, we three intrepid first-time well diggers arose, hoping beyond hope that our project would be successful and we would be able to assist the village by providing them with easily accessible fresh water for the first time in their lives. Two sites were chosen: one in the village where Pastor Mariano Binzi (GCI National Leader) lives, and the other on the GCI church property, which is on a crossroads. A well there, where the roads meet, would benefit many more of the local people.

Teams of diggers were assembled, the pipes unloaded, and digging began, with the local chief removing the first spadefull of earth.

Fortunately, the ground was soft and sandy and progress was rapid at first, with the diggers driven by the excitement of the project. As we dug deeper, we used buckets to haul up the soil being removed, and additional rings were positioned to protect the workers and the well from cave-in.

The diggers worked all day and well into the night, always hopeful and on the lookout for any sign of water. Early the next morning a cheer arose as the first well hit water. A few



This dirty mud-hole was where the villagers in Fraqueza, Morrumbala, had been drawing water for washing and drinking.



Mike Rabe and Dawie Maree taking a lunch break on the long trip from Johannesburg, South Africa, to the Zambezia province in Mozambique.

hours later we were doubly rewarded with water in the second well back in the village, just about five meters below the surface.

We departed three days after arriving, with one well completed and the second just requiring another half-meter of deepening to increase the water supply. I knew that life in the village would never be the same again.

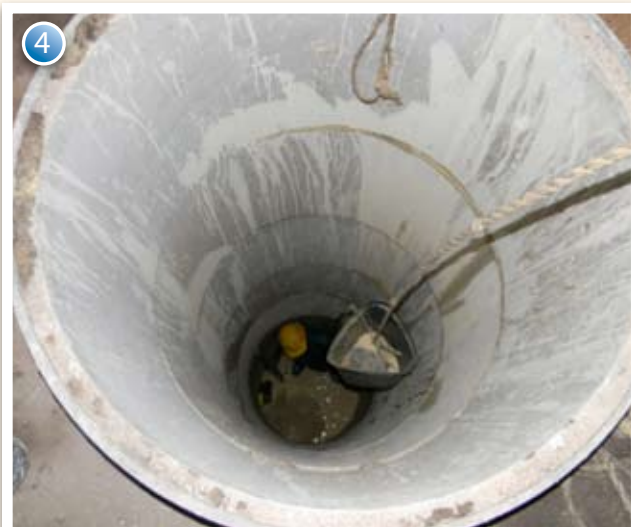
I couldn't help but think of the analogy that Christ used:



The local chief starts the well-digging process by removing the first spade full of soil.



The first well, finished and capped, admired by Pastor Mariano and other villagers.



Working within the cramped confines of the well, the soil is removed bucket by bucket, until finally water is struck.

he is the source of living water, and that those who thirst should come and drink of his eternal waters and never thirst again.

The Holy Spirit, the gift that Christ offered to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, is compared to a fountain of water (John 4:10). He imparts growth and gives life. Without a relationship with God, which is made possible through Christ's sacrifice and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we remain spiritually dead and lifeless, living in much the same state as so many in Mozambique do. They had survived from day to day, unaware that the amazing gift of water was right there with them, but they just could not see it.

Next time you turn on your faucet, think of those who are less fortunate than you and who don't enjoy free access to an endless stream of living water! You will probably never have the chance to dig a well for somebody who needs life-giving wa-

ter, but there are many who thirst spiritually and don't realize that Christ is near and they need never thirst. Why don't you offer to show them the well of life, where they can drink freely and never thirst again? **co**



How can you help?

Our 87 congregations in Mozambique are very poor, and communication in rural areas is difficult. A basic bicycle, costing less than \$100, makes a big difference to the effectiveness of the pastors serving their people. GCI's congregation in Indianapolis is partnering with Tim Maguire to provide bicycles. They hope to eventually provide bicycles for each of the pastors serving our 87 churches in Mozambique.

Would you or your congregation like to help? Contact Pastor David Perry: J.David.Perry@gci.org

Where Do *You* Scratch the Cat Box?

By Shiela Miller

Three years ago I answered an advertisement to buy a three-month-old kitten for \$10. She was adorable, pure white with one blue eye and one brown. We named her Daphne.

Daphne was incredibly calm on the ride home. That should have warned me that something was not quite right. My last cat used to moan miserably every time he was placed in a moving vehicle. Later, when my children and I were in the kitchen making smoothies, I observed more strange behavior. I asked them to watch Daphne's reaction when I started the blender. But she showed no reaction at all.

As I observed her throughout that first evening, the light finally came on. Daphne was profoundly deaf. Some quick research on-line showed me that deafness is common in a cat with one blue eye. At first I was a little worried, but I soon realized that with two preschoolers, it was a blessing to have an extremely calm animal. She is always well rested, as she sleeps not only through everyday commotions, but also loud noises, like the children's occasional crying or screeching, the vacuum cleaner, telephones and all high-pitched alarms.

There are a few drawbacks to having a deaf cat. We can't call her to come, "Here, kitty, kitty!" (That actually didn't work well with the last cat, either, but at least he'd come running when he heard the can opener!) We had to un-train ourselves from "kitty-speak," as she can't hear anything we say, and I had to teach her some sign language also. She understands the "no" sign when I snap my first two fingers and thumb together to show her she's doing something wrong, and I also wiggle my fingers so she knows when I want to pet her. The main drawback to having a deaf cat appears to be that she's a terrible mouser. She'll get a whiff of one and prowl around as though she's an expert, but since she can't hear, she's no hunter and we still have to rely on actual mousetraps.

Daphne's litter box has a large opening for her to enter and is topped by a plastic hood to keep all the litter inside. Although I can't blame it on her deafness, Daphne has an



unusual habit after doing her "business" inside. She will exit the box and then scratch on the OUTSIDE of it. She promptly gallops as fast as she can to the far end of our long house and then back again to scratch more in the same odd area. For those of you who are not familiar with a cat's normal behavior, they should completely cover their "business" with the clean litter so there's no bad odor. Well, we've all decided that she is so proud of her uncovered, extremely smelly deposits that she must wildly run to announce to the world what she's accomplished. Believe it or not, I have actually learned some spiritual truth from cleaning her box out.

Apart from Jesus, our actions are nothing but smelly deposits. We may be proud of them and proclaim loudly that we did something valuable. But in the end, it's really

nothing greater than reeking cat poo. If we realize we've screwed up and harness our energy to hide the mess ourselves (like Daphne, scratching uselessly on the outside of the box), it will NEVER get covered up. It is only when we willingly accept Jesus as our Savior and cover our sins with his blood that our true stench goes away and we can be purified from all sin. "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

It did occur to me that comparing the blood of Jesus to cat litter could offend some readers. But guess what? I am in good company. The Bible itself makes great use of a pretty revolting description as it portrays our own righteousness

as "filthy rags" in Isaiah 64:6. "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away." Isaiah wasn't referring to some rags that got a little dusty and need to be shaken out. These were used, bloody menstrual rags that were ceremonially unclean. It was probably the most disgusting example Isaiah could have used to shock his audience. But Isaiah never knew Daphne!

Well, I may not be able to train my deaf cat how to cover her own stinking mess properly with clean cat litter. But thanks be to God who loves us that he's made provision for our own messes to be cleansed once and for all! Where do YOU scratch the cat box? **co**

Just Do Your Part

By Sarah Strub

My oldest child, Rebecca, is in junior high. She and her preteen classmates are becoming aware of romantic attraction. The school gives the children a healthy snack every day—often an apple.

The children grab the stem and see how many turns it takes to twist it off. For every turn, they say a letter. "A—B—C—D..." When the stem breaks off, they say the name of a potential boyfriend or girlfriend. I have talked to my daughter about dating at her age. "Learn about other boys and girls by just being friends for now," I told her. So when Rebecca showed me the apple game, I noticed she wasn't saying boyfriend names. "Good," I thought, "she is listening to me."

Yesterday, I prepared my children's lesson for our church. Usually my lessons follow a familiar pattern: scripture reading, object lesson, review activity, and prayer. This week, as it is Transfiguration Sunday, I have some new ideas for a special display the children will put together to share with the congregation. I'm excited about the lesson but also sad. Rebecca is sick with the flu and will miss the fun. When children are absent from my class, I get concerned. "They're going to miss out on learning," I think, and it worries me.

As I was working on my lesson, a thought came to me. A Bible story that has been on my mind lately is about the boy who shared his lunch when the thousands of people who were listening to Jesus needed a meal. Jesus honored the child by accepting the woefully inadequate gift and miraculously multiplying it to fill everyone's need. Jesus was delighted with the child's willingness to do his part and



leave the rest to God. My worry about the missed lesson melted away. "All I have to do is my part," I thought. "God will do the rest."

At the end of the day, I was tired. I had worked hard all day, and it had been raining. I was weary of dealing with a sick child too. My daughter hadn't eaten much all day, but she wanted an apple for dinner. I washed it and gave it to her and wearily went about finishing my lesson plan. A small voice interrupted me.

"Hey, Mom." Rebecca stood there holding up the apple stem. "J is for Jesus," she said.

I had no need to worry. I had done my part. Rebecca has her own connection to God. **co**



Sarah is a member of the New Beginnings Christian Fellowship congregation in Big Sandy, Texas. She enjoys crafts of all types, including knife and tomahawk throwing!

Say It Loud, Say It Clear

By Jeffrey Broadnax

In March, 1989 Mike and Mechanics had the #1 song on the Billboard charts with the smash hit, *The Living Years*. If you are in my age range, you can already hear the guitar licks in your head while the lyrics flood to the tongue, overwhelm the heart and you join the chorus singing,

"Say it loud, say it clear; you can listen as well as you hear."

We sing along because that song, like "Cat's in the Cradle" a decade before, burrowed a mile deep into our souls and still has root decades later. The song deals with the breakdown in communication between a maturing son and his aging father. It speaks to the trivial generational arguments that separate them and become life's unfinished business when his father dies before reconciliation and acceptance could be completed.

"I just wish I could have told him, in the living years"

As Western culture has been lured into a Bluetooth® love affair with technology, it seems to have sacrificed the blue ink love letters found in personal intergenerational relationships. Think about it—when was the last time you saw a grandfather fishing with his grandson or a grand-

ing the memorial service. But by then it's too late to share them face to face.

"So we open up a quarrel between the present and the past"

Precious intergenerational relationship time is wasted trying to prove who's right instead of learning and growing with each other. Instead of giving the youth a twenty-, thirty- or even fifty-year head start on their lives, the elders of the village are frustrated with modern youth's perceived entitlement mentality and are choosing to "let them learn the hard way." The youth feel like we've given up on them, so they have decided the older generation could never understand their world anyway. What would happen if both groups challenged their perceptions and actually spent time listening to each other?

I would like to make a heartfelt call to all generations! Will you commit to listen and work to bring the generations together? The results will be incredible! There have been men and women, some as much as 60 years my senior, who poured their pearls of great price into my life. I will never forget one man, Harold Jackson, who told me at age 21 that to live the life God had in store for me, I must be willing to "plant seeds of trees that you may never sit under." I ac-

cepted that vision as a young man and have watered, weeded and nourished that seed for the past 20 years with tremendous results. If only Mr. Jackson could know the head start he gave me and hundreds (maybe even thousands) of others! He helped change the course of my life with one sentence. As I think

about it now, I'm sure he did know it.

"We just can't find agreement, in the present tense"

Technology allows us to send thousands of text messages and "status updates" to our smart phones, but one handwritten letter, a card with your personal signature and some home-baked chocolate-chip cookies would send a thousand messages to the heart of a young adult. It could be such an

Different generations see the world from different points of view. We must seek to understand other people's worldview before we demand that they understand and accept ours.

mother having her granddaughter over to share the family homemade oatmeal cookie recipe? Video chatting with Skype® too often replaces the extended family gatherings with parents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Unfortunately, the driving force behind such gatherings now is to mourn one of the family "oak trees" as he or she is being placed in a casket. It never ceases to amaze me how the life-altering lessons and stories of impact flow along with the tears dur-



encouragement to a student away at college, a sailor deployed on a Navy vessel or a prisoner incarcerated behind barbed wire. That's what intergenerational reconciliation looks like.

This thought became more than a paragraph a few weeks ago when I and 36 other men of various ages hand-wrote letters, baked and prayed over dozens of homemade cookies and spent three days listening to and showing genuine love to 36 inmates in a medium-security prison here in Ohio. If you had told me three days of cookies, conversation, one-page letters and genuine love could turn hardened, isolated inmates into tear-shedding brothers, fathers and sons who see themselves as a family in God, I would have called it a pipe dream. I would also have been wrong.

When the apostle Paul wrote about love, peace, longsuffering and the other fruit of the Spirit he said, "against such things there is no law" (Galatians 5:23). This now has much deeper meaning for me. I saw cultural, social, racial and generational barriers crumble in a weekend. I saw relationships change, pasts lose their grip and prisoners of all ages and stages burst into their present together.

"Crumpled bits of paper, filled with imperfect thoughts"

Bridging cultural and generational gaps may be awkward, but the payoffs have eternal value. That is why I believe we must help the next generation be reconciled to their God-given history, heritage and destiny and intentionally pass the batons of life leadership to them when possible. To do so, allow me to offer a few simple insights:

History is a great teacher but heritage is a toolbox for the future.

we demand that they understand and accept ours.

The good old days are gone, and frankly they weren't as good as we romanticize them to be. Honestly, were James Dean, Pete Rose and Marvin Gaye better role models than Charlie Sheen, Barry Bonds or Lady Gaga? Do we really need to compare Vietnam to Iraq or JFK to George W.?

The younger generation has sat at the "kid table" for too long. They need us to invite them to the "big people table" and let them introduce us to their world. Now, unless they have nerves of steel, they won't venture to our table without a genuine invitation. So hand-deliver one, then stay awhile and learn how they play the game of life. Guess what? They will learn at the same time.

Equip them for their future—not our past

Life today consists of conveniences we fantasized about after being introduced to them by Captain Kirk and George Jetson. Beyond technology, many dreams of my fourth-grade essays are my children's realities. For example, my 21-year-old college senior wasn't alive to see the Berlin wall as a barrier, the

Reconcile with your past and embrace the present

Sure, parts of our culture have dramatically shifted, but if we pull the covers back far enough (and young people are good at that) I know we'll find more in common than we expect. Different generations see the present from different worldviews, but all worldviews are valid. We must intentionally seek to understand younger people's worldview before

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Say It Loud

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Showtime Lakers or the White House before Bill Clinton. She has, however, seen the first African-American President, a dream that was almost unimaginable when her dad was born. There is a new future to reach for, and that changes everything. We are charged to equip them to navigate the changes ahead, which means we must first let them show us their dreams.

Let go of the baton

It would be arrogant of us to assume we have all the answers for the world they are walking into. History is a great teacher but *heritage* is a toolbox for the future. Commit to passing the baton of leadership to them and letting go.

I have been blessed to serve as a director of a regional youth camp in the northeast corner of the U.S. for eight years. I have been involved in camp leadership and ministry

for 27 years. A month ago, I joined six other directors as we literally and publicly handed off the baton of leadership to the next generation of camp directors. We did so because it's time for their leg of the race. Now our job is to cheer, motivate and empower them run with all their might and hold the baton until the next exchange zone. They can't run their race if we don't let go of the baton.

So, let me say it loud and clear: Mike and the Mechanics had it right. "It's too late when we die, to admit we don't see eye to eye." There are generational and cultural gaps that can cripple our relationships and our future. It's time to listen to each other, hear each other, run with each other and cheer each other on. It's time to live out Jesus' dream, "that they might be one as we are one." **co**



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FOR THE LOVE OF GOD By Rick Shallenberger

The Power of Affirmation



I sat in a small circle with four young adults and thought, "What have I gotten myself into?" Our assignment was to speak words of life to each other. We were part of a group of pastors and pastoral interns who had just spent two and a half incredibly inspiring days together working on developing our denominational internship program. Before heading home, we were asked to get into small groups and affirm each other by sharing the good things we see in each other. In particular we were asked to affirm God's calling. When I realized I was sitting among four young adults, I almost went to be part of a group of people my age. I'm so glad I didn't.

We started with a young man (in his mid 20s) who said, "This is going to be awkward." But after the four of us told him what we saw God doing in his life and how he had positively impacted each of our lives, he said any awkward feelings he felt were replaced with feelings of encouragement and empowerment. We not only affirmed his calling to ministry, but we also shared the impact he had on each of our lives and how blessed we felt being in relationship with him. In essence, we spoke words of life to him.

We affirmed one more young man and then the four turned to me. I had no idea what they would say to a man more than 20 years their senior. I was literally blown away at the words of life they spoke to me—each one of them affirming that I was a personal blessing to them and a blessing to the denomination we are part of. As they spoke, I felt my heart

filling with praise that God was using me to make a positive impact in the lives of these four people. I had no idea the impact I had on them. If they hadn't shared this with me, I never would have known and thus I wouldn't have been encouraged to keep doing what God has empowered me to do.

Have you had words of life spoken to you? The Bible is full of words of life. You are God's child (John 1:12); you are Christ's friend (John 15:15); you belong to God (1 Corinthians 6:20); you've been anointed and sealed by God (2 Corinthians 1:21-22); you are blessed with every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3); you are holy and blameless (Ephesians 1:4); you are adopted (Ephesians 1:5); you are God's masterpiece (Ephesians 2:10, New Living Translation); you are included (Ephesians 1:13). These words of life are there to encourage, empower and affirm you. This is God's intent. He wants you to know how much he values you, how much he loves you, how proud he is to call you his child. And until you know this, it's difficult to be motivated to share God's love with others.

As ambassadors of Christ, as ministers of reconciliation, as the salt of the earth and light of the world, I believe we are called to speak words of life to each other. I believe we are called to build each other up, to encourage each other, to empower each other, to affirm each other. This affirmation motivates us to do what God asks us to do.

May I suggest you ask God to lead you to someone who needs to be affirmed? Then sit with that person, look him or her in the eye and speak words of life to them. You will be amazed at what happens. **co**

God Wants All to Be Saved

A Study of 1 Timothy 2:1-7



Paul sent Timothy to Ephesus to correct a few doctrinal problems in the church. He also sent Timothy a letter outlining his mission—a letter that was designed to be read to the entire congregation so that everyone would know that

Timothy was acting with Paul's authority.

Prayer for public peace (verses 1-3)

Paul included some instructions for what should be done in the church meetings: **“I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people.”** The meetings would include prayer, and these prayers were to be positive, unlike the curses that became part of some synagogue liturgies.

But this was not just intercession for church members—the prayers were to be for all, including **“kings and all those in authority.”** Paul did not want the church to be elitist, nor become identified with an underground resistance movement. A parallel may be seen in the way that Judaism dealt with the Roman Empire. Although Jews could not worship the Emperor, they could offer worship to God on behalf of the emperor; they made prayers and sacrifices *for* him (see Ezra 6:10).

Similarly, Paul wants church members to pray for government leaders. The purpose is **“that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.”** The early Christians were persecuted for the gospel, and for proclaiming allegiance to another Lord. They did not need to provoke officials even more by being anti-government agitators.

This approach has the approval of God himself: **“This is good, and pleases God our Savior.”** Although the word “Savior” usually refers to Jesus, in this case it seems to refer to the Father.

A message of salvation for all (verses 4-7)

Paul then includes an important digression about what God wants: **“who wants all people to be saved...”** Our prayers should not curse or condemn the rulers, because God does not want the worst for them. His desire for them is salvation—but this begins with an acceptance of the gospel message: **“...and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”**

Does God always get what he wants? Will *everyone* be saved? Paul does not address that question, but it is obvious that God does not always get his wishes, at least not right away. Even now, almost 2000 years later, “all people” have not yet come to a knowledge of the gospel, much less accepted it and experienced salvation. God

wants his children to love each other, but it doesn't always happen. His will is that humans have wills of their own.

Paul supports his claim by giving reasons: **“For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus.”**

There is only one God, who created everything and everyone. His purpose for every person is the same: all were created in God's image, to be a reflection and a representation of God on earth (Genesis 1:27). The oneness of God means that there is unity in his purpose for his creation. All humans are included.

Further, there is one mediator. We all have a relationship with God through Christ Jesus, who became a man and can still be called “man” because he did not abandon his humanity to the grave. Rather, he was resurrected as a glorified human, and he rose to heaven in human form, for he has incorporated humanity as part of who he is. Since humanity was made in God's image, essential aspects of humanity were in God's mind from the beginning; it is no surprise that humanity can be given expression within the Godhead by Jesus.

As our mediator, Jesus **“gave himself as a ransom for all people.”** Some theologians object to the plain meaning of this verse, but it fits well with verse 7, and with what Paul wrote a little later: God **“is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe”** (1 Timothy 4:10). He died for the sins of all people, even for those who do not yet know it. He died only once; he did not wait for us to believe before he acted to save us. To use a financial analogy, he paid the debt, even for people who don't yet realize it.

Now that Jesus has done this, what remains to be done? Now is the time for people to come to the knowledge of what Jesus has done for them, and that is what Paul is trying to do. **“This has now been witnessed to at the proper time. And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a true and faithful teacher of the Gentiles.”** That is what he wants Timothy to be, too. ☪

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Questions for discussion

- When we pray for our rulers, is it for their salvation, or for our own peace and quiet?
- When we realize that Jesus died for our cantankerous neighbors, does it change our attitudes toward them?

H m m ...

Lord, where we are wrong, make us willing to change; where we are right, make us easy to live with.

Peter Marshall

To one who has faith, no explanation is necessary. To one without faith, no explanation is possible.

St. Thomas Aquinas

Be yourself. Everyone else is taken.

Oscar Wilde

All I have seen teaches me to trust the Creator for all I have not seen.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

George Washington:

I hope I shall possess firmness and virtue enough to maintain what I consider the most enviable of all titles, the character of an honest man.

No people can be bound to acknowledge the invisible hand which conducts the affairs of men more than the people of the United States. Every step by which they have advanced to the character of an independent nation seems to have been distinguished by some token of providential agency.

Worry is the interest paid by those who borrow trouble.

Abraham Lincoln:

I have always found that mercy bears richer fruits than strict justice.

Whenever I hear anyone arguing for slavery, I feel a strong impulse to see it tried on him personally.

Public opinion, though often formed upon a wrong basis, yet generally has a strong underlying sense of justice.

No matter how much cats fight, there always seem to be plenty of kittens.

He who rejects change is the architect of decay. The only human institution which rejects progress is the cemetery.

Harold Wilson



I would be most content if my children grew up to be the kind of people who think decorating consists mostly of building enough bookshelves.

Anna Quindlen

There are those who look at things the way they are and ask why...I dream of things that never were and ask why not?

Robert F. Kennedy

Education, n.: That which discloses to the wise and disguises from the foolish their lack of understanding.

Ambrose Bierce

Obedience is really not as burdensome as it seems at first blush. We are doing nothing more than falling head over heels in love with the everlasting Lover of our souls.

Richard Foster

God's power operates best in human weakness. Weakness is the arena in which God can most effectively manifest His power.

John Stott

An objective atonement as act of God only upon man is not sufficient of itself if they are to be saved. It must be worked through the heart and mind of men and women, until they are brought to acquiesce in the divine judgment on sin and are restored in heart and mind to communion with God.

T.F. Torrance, Atonement, p. 158

If we are honest with ourselves and biblical in our theology, we should proudly proclaim, "Jesus is much more than a crutch. He is a whole hospital! Where would I be without Jesus?"

Brian Dodd



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