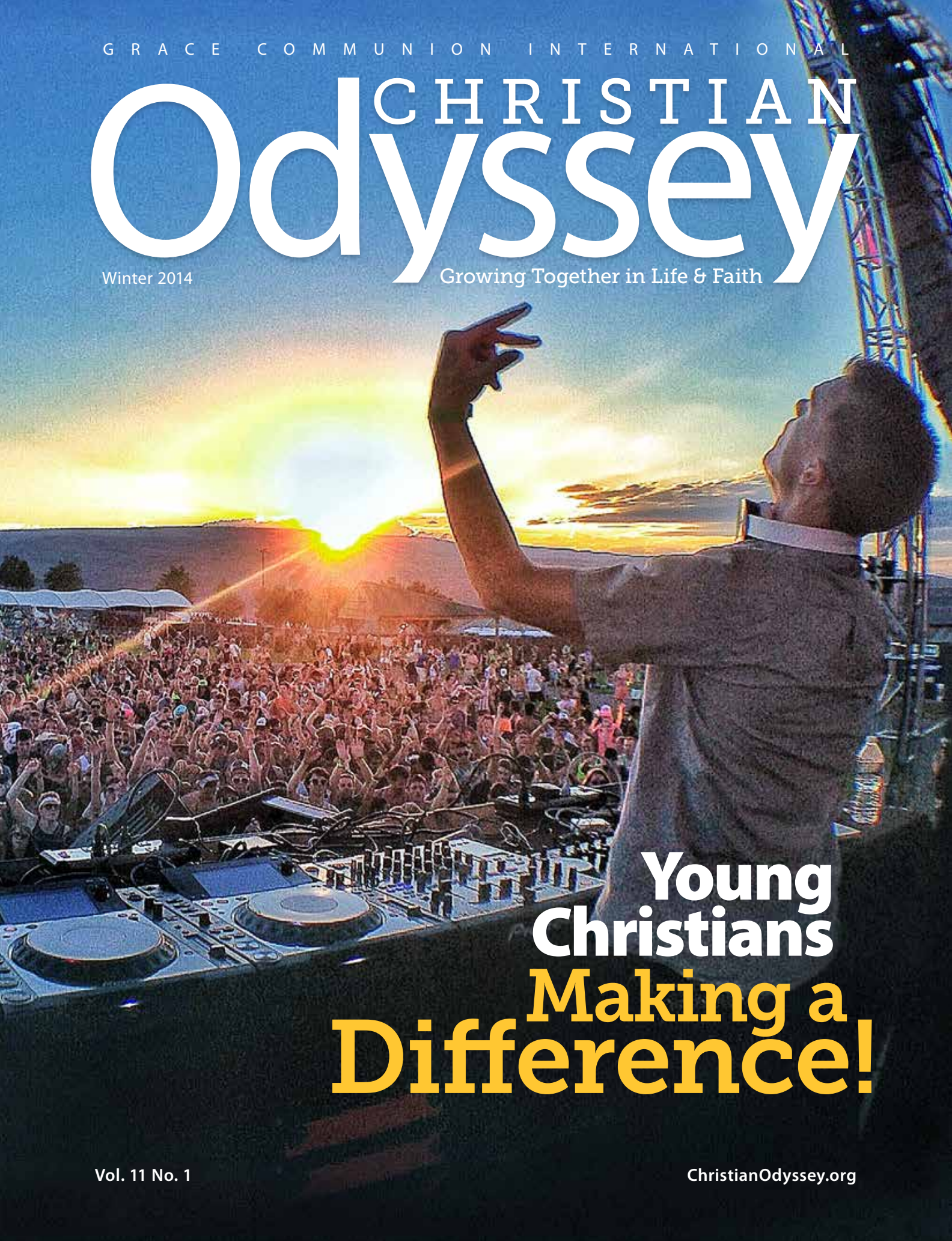


GRACE COMMUNION INTERNATIONAL

CHRISTIAN Odyssey

Winter 2014

Growing Together in Life & Faith



**Young
Christians
Making a
Difference!**



My head hung low I as stood at the grave of my two-week-old sister, Tanya. We had been told she contracted spinal meningitis at the hospital at birth. All around me people were whispering clichés; many were crying, some silently walked by. My grandmother put her arm around me, and when I saw the tears in her eyes, I cried for a moment, but only for a moment. I was too angry to cry. I was angry for a lot of reasons. I was angry that people were saying ill-advised things to me and to my parents. I was angry with the hospital and the doctors. I was angry with my parents—my mom had been told to not have any more children. But most of all I was angry with God. Why did he allow this to happen? Again!

It had happened four years earlier when I was 12. My family and I were returning from a Thanksgiving trip to New York. A drunk driver ran a light and broadsided our car. One sister was killed immediately, another died a couple hours later. My mom was given a 5 percent chance to live and was in the hospital for months as they pieced together her crushed hip and thigh. We'd already been through enough personal hell. Why would God allow us to go through it again? The more I thought about it, the angrier I became.

My parents were too filled with their own grief to notice my emotional response. Or perhaps they assumed my lack of emotion was just my way of dealing with the grief. Regardless, I couldn't talk to them. And I couldn't talk to my friends; they had no idea what to say. Other adults seemed more focused on my parents. I walked around angry for several weeks until one adult noticed and started walking alongside me, asking me questions and listening.

It took a while for me to admit I was angry. I was a Christian and the church I attended would have frowned upon my anger—especially my anger with God. I had been taught God was to be obeyed; he was to be worshipped. He certainly wasn't to be questioned—and especially not by a child. At 16, I was still a child in the eyes of my church.

So when I finally blurted out that I was angry with God and further, that I wasn't even sure he existed, I expected to be in serious trouble—especially because the one adult who had noticed me and started walking alongside me was my pastor. To my absolute amazement, he said, "I would be mad at God, too, and if you didn't question his existence, I'd wonder about you." That simple sentence opened the door for many conversations. Further, those conversations helped mold me to who I am today. It was at age 16 I decided I wanted to be a pastor—so I could help others the way my pastor helped me.

My pastor didn't see me as just a rebellious teenager (which I was on many occasions); he saw me as one of God's beloved children who was hurting and who needed comfort and affirmation. He saw that some of my rebellious behavior was the result of acting out of my anger. He listened, he explained, he asked questions; he got inside my emotions and helped me work through them. He taught me how to notice when others are hurting. He taught me how to listen, and he taught me how to show love to others. In a nutshell, my pastor saw me, not my anger.

Over the years I've had the opportunity to help many teenagers and young adults through times of trauma and trial. I'm not always successful, but I won't stop trying. One thing I've learned is that teenagers and young adults around us are often deeper than we think. This issue of *Odyssey* points out some of that depth.

We are focusing this issue on the millennial generation who are making a difference in their communities, in their sports, in their schools, in their relationships, and in their ministries. I hope what you read inspires you to notice the teens and young adults around you. There may be one who needs you to walk alongside him or her and ask some questions, and listen, and love and build a relationship. You just might be training the next pastor, or the next editor of *Odyssey*.

Blessings... Rick

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Making a Difference!

“Making a difference” is a common theme we hear among the millennial generation (age 19-29), and numerous surveys reveal this generation believes they can make a global difference. We asked several young adults what “making a difference” means to them.

“Trends in social awareness towards global and environmental issues have caused today’s generation to look towards the future. In doing so we place an emphasis in impacting future generations by ‘making a difference.’ To me personally, I strive to impact the future of my local and global communities by first, opening myself to new experiences and perspectives, and secondly build positive meaningful relationships with the people around me.”
—**Daniel Leon**



“I have come to understand that the only difference I make comes from letting Jesus work through me and by showing others, in the way I live, how Jesus has and continues to work in me and my life.”—**Jasmine Broadnax**



“The phrase ‘to make a difference’ can be taken in a variety of ways. What sticks out the most when I talk about making a difference, is to make something better. To help someone see the beauty of life as I do. To be able to come to God as I have. To trust and love in life and God with every breath they have. I want to make a difference in children who have been abused (physically, mentally, sexually), or neglected. I want to get a degree in children’s psychology and a degree in children’s ministry. I want to take both of those degrees and use them to become a children’s social worker. Even if I can only help one child be safer, that would be a difference.”—**Danica Fischer**



"The present generation often says, 'I want to make a difference' in reference to helping groups of individuals in need. They are usually people who have not yet found or created a way to help people by doing something they are passionate about. Typically people want to make a difference by providing necessities for those in need, showing love to those who feel alone, or making someone more able to fix his/her recurring problems. Perhaps these people want to make a difference by being a positive influence in someone's life. Not just helping that person, but making that person more equipped to face future challenges as well.

"To me, we can make a difference by showing love to strangers and acquaintances while providing support that helps those in need get back on their feet. Most people think to make a difference you must change several peoples' lives for the better, but I think helping one person to realize his/her resources or potential could be more meaningful to both the helper and the one in need. Usually younger people cannot afford to financially support others but instead they can be supportive in others' lives through short encounters or sincere conversations. We can make a positive change in peoples' lives if we share love through actions in ways that make us happy too."—**Michelle Davey**



"How I want to make a difference is a loaded question to me. In the past I would have said I would like to influence cultural change to reflect more of how God desires human beings to live on a grand level, but I believe that's a burden that God does not want us to bear.

"I would answer this now by saying if I can help bring a positive aspect to things, and reflect the life of God through the personality he has given me, then that is how I am meant to make a difference. God has brought a select group of people for us to encounter so we can participate in what he's doing in their lives. It is the chain effect of community, and that way God gets the credit. I don't think there is anything wrong with being ambitious, but I think some Christians carry a burden that does more harm than good to their souls."

—**Joe Lamb**



"I think that making a difference means doing what you can with what you have. This can mean time, talents, or money. Most of the time, it means just doing little things to help the people I interact with during my normal day."

—**Quentin Kuhlman**



"I've always felt like my purpose in life is to 'make a difference'. To me, making a difference means that other people's lives are better because of me. Maybe because of my actions, or because of my words. Maybe because I showed love to a needy child or was a friend during a rough time. However I end up doing it, I want to feel like I've helped other people and have positively influenced their lives. I don't believe it's necessary to make a difference by curing cancer or inventing the newest technology. Though it would be amazing to accomplish something impressive like that, I believe that you can make a difference in small, yet still meaningful ways. I want to make a difference because I need to feel like my life has meaning. I have to believe that God has a special plan for me and that I'm here for a specific purpose. While I don't know exactly what that purpose is, I have always believed that it is to help others.

"This belief has motivated my career choice to go into teaching. With every student I have the privilege of teaching at school, I hope to positively make a difference in their lives. There are many ways I hope to do this, such as by inspiring them, building their self-confidence, encouraging them to follow their dreams, showing them how to treat others, and of course enriching their minds and preparing them for further education and for life outside the classroom. I believe every child gives me the opportunity to help make a difference—to improve their life in some way."—**Kayla Elliott**



"To me, making a difference means affecting people's lives positively. I see myself doing this more on an individual basis, more one-one, than in an organized effort."
—**Morgan Kuhlman**

"My college group experience started with a small group in the college pastor's house. We would gather together, have discussions, take communion and would often give out free water and free parking during football games. Our numbers increased and we moved into the church's old sanctuary. That's when everything started to change. We were no longer serving the community but we were sitting and listening to a sermon every week. Many of us got burned out and left. I later got involved with an after-school tutoring program for inner city kids in downtown Denver. We would sing songs with the kids, pray with them, read with them and help them with their homework. Over time, relationships were made and lives were impacted. It felt more like church because I felt that I was making a difference in someone's life.

"That's what my generation is passionate about. We are tired of sitting in a pew. We don't want a consumeristic faith but a practical one. We want more than a personal salvation gospel. We want a gospel that does justice, loves mercy, and walks humbly (Micah 6:8). We want to care for the 'least of these' (Matthew 25) and to put our faith into action.

"I see this every day in the lives of my youth groups, friends and college campuses where I work. Whether we are people of faith or not, we are putting our passions ahead of our careers and are content with living on less in order make the world a better place. God's action is being played out in all of us."

—**Jonathan Warren**



Let Someone Else Do It!



A common unspoken (or sometimes spoken) attitude is, I don't have to do (fill in the blank) because someone else will. Someone else will come along and clean the table in the fast-food restaurant. Someone else will write that letter to the editor about a current issue. Someone else will clean the trash off the street, so I can feel free to throw my paper cup out the window.

Yes, I know, I do it too (well, I don't throw my trash out the car window!). But I've noticed I'm often the "someone else." When my kids were teenagers, I opted to stop traveling and stay home so I could be with them during those years. While my husband traveled, chores I might have put on the honey-do list often couldn't wait for him to come home, so I had to do them.

Many times in the past I've been *the someone else*. When an opportunity arose, such as speaking or working with women's ministry, I would look over my shoulder to see who else might be available and realize I was the only one standing there. I didn't always want to, but I jumped in, sometimes not knowing what I was getting myself into.

Several biblical characters tried to hand off their calling to someone else, but it didn't work. Moses came up with some good excuses for not going back to Egypt. Gideon wondered if God was really talking to him. Mighty warrior? Not me! Jonah tried to run away, but the fish was faster. Each of them became *the someone else* he hoped would do the job.

When Jesus came to earth as a baby, he wasn't just someone else; he was the only one who could do what needed to be done. This sinful world needed "God with us."

No one else could heal the sick and calm the storms. No one else could move the crowds with his words and feed them with a basket of fish. No one else could fulfill each and every one of the prophecies of the Old Testament.

Jesus knew why he came to earth, but he prayed in the garden for his Father to take the cup from him. He did add, "if you are willing" and prayed not his will but his Father's will be done. Jesus knew no one else could take his place on the cross. There was no someone else whose blood could cleanse the sins of humanity.

Being a Christian, just as being an adult, often requires us to be the responsible one, to be the one who stands up and says, "I'll do it!" Jesus calls on us to be someone who will answer his call and fulfill the royal law of love to him and our brothers and sisters.

Let's stop looking around for someone else and do what needs to be done. May we all be like Isaiah, who answered God's call with these words: "Here am I. Send me!" (Isaiah 6:8). **co**



Adversity through the eyes of a Christian football player

Dealing with Adversity

By Gatlin Williams

I am currently playing my last season of organized football—when I hang up my cleats I will never play this game again in the same way. As I wind down my football career I look back with lots of great memories. I have played on championship high school teams, and I have the rings to prove it. I have three high school friends who are playing in the National Football League. I've learned a lot over the years, but what stands out the most is the adversity I have dealt with.

First, I have dealt with adversity in my body. By my 8th grade year, my flat feet had become a real problem. Not only had the condition slowed me down, but the pain in my feet was unbearable. My parents and I consulted three podiatrists before we found one who gave me a clear diagnosis. I ended up having two major surgeries and spent almost a year on crutches. The doctor who worked with me through surgery and therapy said that he doubted I would ever play high school or college football. His comment just fueled my drive and determination to keep playing.

I'm not unusual; almost all players in college football deal with nagging injuries. My daily routine includes going to the training room 30 minutes before every practice and every game to stretch and get taped before going onto the field. My trainer told me my body might be 22 years old, but it thinks it is 37 due to the wear and tear.

During my college career I have experienced a broken hand, torn muscle in my knee and chronic pain in my shoulder and

wrist. My body has bounced back, but the more difficult situation is that once I was injured, I was dropped from first string back to third string. Coaches don't have much sympathy for injured players' feelings. Their number one priority is winning games, and many injured players attempt to return to the field before their bodies are ready. It is a vicious cycle.

The second biggest area of adversity is dealing with dominant, abusive coaches. Most football coaches have not discovered that in the 21st century, talking reasonably to the players and treating them with respect actually works.

In the 7th grade I was asked to run the ball over and over on the practice team while the larger 8th graders beat on my body. It was especially difficult when we ran the same play over and over and the defense knew it was coming, so the defense teed off on me. Dad had to ask the coach to let me move from running back to receiver.

In high school, just after winning the state championship in Georgia, our head coach left and a new coach came in. The new coach had a different approach and brought in new players. In spite of our record, this coach didn't seem interested in viewing past performance. He had his way of coaching, and the result was many team members were displaced and moved to new positions. It was so rough some guys quit playing football altogether. Being overlooked and pushed to the side is such an empty feeling.

Playing college football has been a different experience. While it has been cool being part of a growing program that has gotten better each year, the competitive nature of the NCAA football program makes football a business. This can quickly take the fun

out of what should be, after all, a game.

My head coach is also my position coach. In most cases this would be a good thing, but Coach and I have had a “rocky” relationship. It has taken me four long seasons to understand that he actually cares for me in his own way; but the times he has yelled at me, embarrassed me in front of the team and picked on me are too many to count. For whatever reason, coaches believe that yelling and humiliating players is the preferred way to motivate. I can honestly say that this approach is ineffective, and it left me and many other players feeling frustrated and abused.

Don't get me wrong, I have had coaches that have believed in me and encouraged me. The real upside to football has been the camaraderie built with teammates. Not to mention the scholarship money that has paid for my college education. However, it is hard to shake the negativity of being screamed at and belittled. All you can do is quietly take it. It was hard keeping my composure, and it tested my faith, but I can happily say I gave it my all and

overcame. If dealing with bodily injuries and belittling coaches is the hardest obstacle I have to deal with in life, I will be just fine. In the greater scheme of things, injuries heal and coaches are only dictators for a season.

The strong positive words of the apostle Paul lift me up and give me an eternal perspective. “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

Playing football has molded me into a strong person. Facing diversity in my bodily suffering as well as in my emotional suffering has prepared me for future challenges. The most important lesson is that my identity is not in playing football but in my relationship with Jesus and the eternal glory he will share with me. **co**



My Call to Youth Ministry

By Xiara Lee

When I first told my pastors about the call God put on my heart for youth, I genuinely cared about the youth and I was eager to serve them. Yet there was also a small part of me looking for glory. Those kids were going to love me, open up to me and ultimately let me change them. I had visions of success stories about teens moving from drugs and abuse to a passionate love for Jesus. I wanted to be a rock star to these kids. It was only a small part of me, I promise, but it was there.

My fantasy view of youth ministry came from watching inspiring movies of teachers and coaches taking on inner city kids who were plagued by gangs and abuse and teaching them life lessons, hard work, and teamwork. The movies often end with tear-jerking scenes when the kids line up to tell that teacher or coach “Thank you.” I secretly wanted that line-up. The reality of youth ministry is much different, but just as meaningful.


I work for an urban church in California, in a city infested with gangs and drugs. Over the past few years our church has

been introduced to some heavy issues going on in the community that many of us were not aware of. The two main issues include the growth of gangs and sex trafficking targeted at the junior high kids who walk to school and back home every day.

Our youth ministry is relationship-oriented, using various programs and events to develop those relationships. One day a week one of our pastors and a youth worker sit on the sidewalk where a lot of junior high kids walk home from school and offer cookies and prayer. Their presence on that sidewalk has made a difference in many young lives, especially since that is also the time of day a lot of those kids are being targeted by gangs and drug dealers.

Our youth group has what I call a “crusader heart.” We really enjoy doing work that reaches out to our community. We had a “Free Yard Sale” that gave us an opportunity to give to people in need at no charge and with no agenda except to share God’s love. We also found a way to have a more hands-on effect on our city

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“I See Jesus in You”

When we love him, worship him, and share his life with others, everyone wins.

By Jessica Morgan

I was working one day at my job as a cashier in a sporting goods store, talking and just being friendly with a customer when, before leaving, she turned back to me and said, “I see Jesus in you.”

I wasn't quite sure how to respond. Her statement not only warmed my heart, but it got me to thinking: What did she notice? My definition of worship has always been: living a life of love and light for him. I believe Jesus gave me that moment to encourage me to keep living that life of worship and to keep shining bright for him.

I didn't always feel this way. My understanding of worship has developed as I've matured in my faith. As I've grown and served more in the church, I've come to realize that worship is not just singing praise songs and teaching children's church; worship is wholeheartedly living the life God gave me. Worship is my response to God and him living in me.

For example: While I've always believed it is important to walk arm in arm with our Creator, because he is the reason we exist, it took me a while to realize that when I'm enjoying creation, I'm worshipping. It's more than just enjoying a beautiful view; it's realizing a Creator who loves me created the view for my enjoyment. When I think about this, I worship.

I've come to understand that the root of worship is love. Because he loves me, I want to respond in love to him. When

I do, I am worshipping. This is what the apostle said in 1 John 4:19, “We love because he first loved us.” Love (worship) is our normal reaction. When I love God with my actions and words, I am praising him and pointing my life to him. Francis Chan puts it wonderfully, “Our point in life is to point to him.” I want my life to be completely lost in him—this is how I worship. And because my worship is a reflection of my love, my worship becomes visible to those around me. And sometimes that visibility brings out a response, like the customer at the store.

Her response reminded me that others notice how I treat them. The way I treat others is not only an aspect of my worship, it is also a reflection of the one I worship. So what I exude by my personality is a form of my worship to God.

Worship is also expressing myself in gratitude to my Savior. In the life I have been gifted, I continue to try my best to spread his light and learn from him—whether it is reading a devotional and being open to his will, praying with and for people in my life, or connecting with praise song lyrics that refocus my mind on the important parts of life. When I sing or think about praise songs in the car, in my head, at work, while painting and anywhere else in between, I am reflecting the one who gave me life—that is worship.

My worship affects my relationships with others. If God is the glue in my relations, then he is being honored and glorified. My best friend and I almost always pray for each other after we hang



Youth Ministry

... From page 7

by participating in our Community Clean-Up Day. We painted curbs, picked up trash and covered graffiti.

Though we had to get up at 4 a.m., almost no one complained about the time or the hard work. We had fun knowing our work would give hope, showing we care too much about this city to let it fall apart. That's our job as Jesus' followers—to show people hope and to be people from whom true hope comes. My personal hope leads to my personal goal for youth ministry.

My desire in youth ministry is to create an environment where love, grace, and compassion are coupled with conviction and accountability. With only love, grace and compassion, all we get are kids who like coming to church because the people are nice and because it can be fun. But then, when "more important" things like school activities and jobs come along, they drop out. By holding young people accountable for their actions and showing them how to be taught by their convictions, we help them build character and we create leaders.

One of my gifts has been to create an environment where the youth feel free to open up, be honest, and talk about the things they are going through: family conflict, forgiveness, gossip, dating, all the concerns of teenage life. I often lay out the topic, question, or idea and allow the youth to lead the discussion. The discussions give space for them to ask questions, learn about each other and even address some personal conflicts and struggles. I also found that it allows for the youth to say things they didn't think they had permission to say, such as: "I don't know if I believe in God," or "I don't see the point in church." Sharing these thoughts out loud gives the leaders an opportunity to come alongside and help them in their personal struggles.

What I also love about the personal and organic interactions with the youth is that it builds trust between the youth and the leader. When youth are being listened to without interruption or judgment, they feel safe, and they want to share more. This is when they know you actually care. It's when I choose to sit and talk to a teen *after* church, that I'm often asked for an opinion or advice.

There is a small part of me that would still love a line-up of people who I've impacted to say "Thank you." And there have been a few occasions when some of the students have thanked me for being there for them, listening to them and giving them rides. But I will probably never know the difference I have made in many of the young people I have come across. And that's OK. Because youth ministry really belongs to Jesus. It's his story and his name that has power. My job is to love people and introduce them to him and let him make a difference in their lives. I believe youth ministry is one of the church's greatest resources for introducing people to Jesus. And if we are training our young people to become servants for the kingdom, when they are adults the congregations they serve will be unstoppable. ☪

When I'm enjoying creation, I'm worshipping. More than just a beautiful view, I see a creator who loves me and created the view for my enjoyment.

out and before we go our separate ways. In looking to God and seeking his will, we are thanking him for our lives and for the relationship we share. Because we know he is part of our relationship, our gratitude for our friendship is worship.

It's amazing how easy it is to worship. When I invite God into my mind, heart and life—and seek his presence in my daily activities and relationships—worship is as simple as choosing to live for him and live and loving others as he lives and loves. I love living a life of worship and knowing God wants to share in my day. I often ask, God, how do you want me to share your love today? In other words, how can I live in worship?

God's plans are far greater than we could ever imagine. He knows all the pieces to our life puzzle; like how a customer's encouraging words echo in my mind to this day, and contributed to my perspective on what a worship-filled life looks like. ☪

Words of Life at a Young Age



Words spoken into my life as a child during my early elementary education set me on a specific course. When I began first grade, I was thrilled to make new friends, and the days spent playing kickball on the playground and doing pasting projects were good days. I distinctly remember my mother coming to meet the teacher and get a report on my progress. Mrs. Rogers told my mother, "Greg is a happy child." My mother was pleased about my temperament and my social skills, but years later she shared with me that she knew I couldn't read a word and Mrs. Rogers didn't seem to be concerned. The summer after first grade my mother spent many evenings with me teaching me to read the Dick and Jane books.

Second grade was a bit easier, especially since it was a split class that had both first and second graders together. Other than adding rope skipping to recess time, this year was rather uneventful.

Our words can be used for good to build others up or for evil and tear others down.

By the time I got into third grade things picked up. I recall being assigned to do reports about the states, and I prepared reports on Michigan and Georgia. I recall that Michigan produced apples, and that was exciting because my dad grew apples. I remember that Georgia is the "Granite State," and that seemed appropriate because I had visited Stone Mountain Park, the largest exposed granite monolith in the world. School was clicking for me, and then one day my heart stopped when the teacher called me to her desk.

Miss Pryor was a young, pretty teacher who was full of life and energy. She was also a teacher who didn't put up with misbehavior from her students. One time when the class was being disruptive she lined up all the boys and girls and gave us each two swats. She didn't mess around.

Now this spirited lady had called me to her desk. What had I done? Was I in trouble? Would my mother be coming to another meeting? Miss Pryor called me close and she pulled out her grading chart. She went through each subject one by one and showed me that I had an "A" in each area of study. Then she said, "If you keep it up you can make all A's." Wow, I, the kid who couldn't read in first grade, was able to get all

A's! Her words made such an impact that not only did I make all A's for that nine weeks, but I went on to make all A's for the entire year.

The rest of the story is quite interesting. When I gave my report on Georgia, I also displayed a model C5A Galaxy jet that my uncle in Georgia worked on as an aerospace engineer with Lockheed. Miss Pryor later told me that she mused in her mind while I gave my report, "Who cares about what Greg's uncle does in Georgia?" Long story short, I played a role in introducing Miss Pryor to my bachelor uncle, and Miss Pryor became Mrs. Garrett, my aunt.

My new aunt, Aurelia Garrett, continued to track my life and continued to encourage me and celebrate each level of education I achieved. This coming spring I expect to graduate with a Doctorate in Ministry, and the one regret I have is that Aunt Aurelia won't be at the ceremony; she died at

the young age of 64. If she were there, I would hug her and thank her from the bottom of my heart for the words she spoke into my life when I was only eight years old.

The Bible has much to say about the power of the tongue. Proverbs 18:21 says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it

will eat its fruit" (ESV). To put it

simply, our words can be used for good to build others up or for evil and tear others down. The talkative nature of people can easily produce words that have to be eaten in shame, or words that are powerfully life-giving. Aunt Aurelia spoke abundant, positive, life-giving words into me and the power of those words has resounded in my mind and heart throughout my lifetime. **co**



Finding My Freedom

By Mychelle Fleming

This year marks an important anniversary in my life. A ten-year friendship-versary with nine special women. Over the past ten years we have navigated the beautiful mess of life, celebrating marriages, new life entering the world, and healing of terminal illnesses. We have grieved with one another through the losses of relationships, jobs, homes, and even the loss of a parent.

Today I was meditating on the crucial role these friends (and their expanding families) have played and continue to play in my life. I was overwhelmed with gratitude and reminded their presence in my life is the result of an answered prayer.

The year was 2003, my sophomore year of college. If I had to sum up my fall semester in one word it would be FREEDOM. Oh the sweet taste of freedom! I had moved past the homesick phase that encompassed much of my freshman year, and was enjoying the ability to make decisions based solely on my own thoughts and desires. After only a few months of “free” living it began to feel stale. Counter-intuitively, the freedom to make my life all about myself made my life seem smaller. Although my social life was blooming, my individualistic approach was also isolating, because I was the only person investing in my future. During this time I began to pray for real community. I wanted more than just “fun” friends to go out with—I wanted friends who would also hold me accountable. Through a series of serendipitous events, I was introduced to this group of girls. I immediately felt welcome and was invited to attend a small group with them. Throughout the rest of my time as an undergrad and over the past ten years, these women have been my prayer partners and cheerleaders.

Sacrificing my independent life-style for community and accountability changed my perspective on freedom and shifted my worldview. Society champions the virtues of independent living, but I realized I was not on my own. My best was brought out in community. As my spiritual life developed, I began to see this was God’s plan all along. Because our Triune God is a God of relationship, and since we are created in his image, we flourish when we are in communion with one another.

A verse encapsulating the change in my view of freedom is found in the Gospel of Mark. Here Jesus tells his disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it” (NASB). During my sophomore year the majority of my

time was spent hopping from one social event to another. Thursday through Sunday was a series of sporting events, beach days, and parties. Although none of these festivities were evil or bad, I began to feel a heavy emptiness in my life. I vividly remember one of my friends informing me the output of my life was a result of where I was investing my time. I realized in focusing on myself and my social desires, I was losing my sense of purpose, passion, and hope, which flourish when I pursue the perfect plans God has for me.

Self-centered living at face value appears satisfying, but a freedom from external constraints leads to internal brokenness, and cultivates a desire to be the god of our own kingdom. A life surrendered to God opens us up to the freedom for the life God created us to live. If we live as if we are God, our illusions will be crushed by the reality of our limitations. When we live in surrender, we have the freedom to bring our desires to God, and are made complete by the fullness of life and power that comes from him.



Mychelle Fleming (second from right) and her community of friends.

I have learned the power of community in my life. I am more aware of times I withdraw from community, and I have learned God works in and through the community he plants us in. Like my friend’s admonition to re-prioritize my time, God has spoken his truth and love to me through countless other conversations with friends.

Surrender is a daily discipline that creates the freedom God calls us to. Is a relationship consuming the first fruit of your time and energy? Does your career or a dream have your first priority? Whatever it is, ask God to reveal what you are holding back and what you need to surrender. My hope is that you may be filled and overflow onto others as he promises in his word: “Oh! May the God of green hope fill you up with joy; fill you up with peace, so that your believing lives, filled with the life-giving energy of the Holy Spirit, will brim over with hope” (Romans 15:13, *The Message*)! **co**



Making a Difference in the Music Industry. Meet James Egbert

By Carrie Smith

James Egbert is a rising star in the music industry. If you haven't heard of him, you may have heard his music, especially if you're a movie fan. Recently, James' remix of the song, "September," was featured in the movie *Last Vegas* and he was privileged to attend the red carpet premier in Las Vegas. I recently had the opportunity to talk to James, and when I asked about the movie, he laughed and said, "Yeah, that definitely has 'Hollywood' written all over it, but it was a cool opportunity."

Hollywood is not what James is about. Throughout the interview, James came across as authentic and real. He is who he is, and he appreciates all he has. James, 25, grew up in a musical family that nurtured the passion he has to do something he loves and would always enjoy doing. James said he is blessed to have his family's support and is especially blessed to have the support, love and encouragement from his wife, Cara.

James is an electronic music composer and DJ and has been producing music professionally for about five years; three years producing under his own name. Of his numerous performance locations, he says the Red Rocks in Colorado and The Gorge in Washington are among his favorite because "both are natural

amphitheaters and are incredibly surreal because of their natural beauty." Just this past summer James played at outdoor festivals in Tomorrowland in Belgium and at Emmaboda Festival in Sweden. While much of what James is known for publicly has been based on disc jockeying, his main focus revolves around the music he personally creates.

When most people talk about success, they talk about the future, setting goals and working to achieve those goals. While James has goals and is working towards fulfilling them, he looks at success a bit differently. "I have found my biggest success to be when I look back on my career, and I can see that I was always me."

As a young boy, James was constantly worried about offending others and being judged by others, and he wondered how this would affect his career. What he found as he met more people in the music business was that people were more accepting than he anticipated; they were willing to get behind someone who is confident and stands up for his or her beliefs. As part of the leadership team at his local church in Denver, this was important to James. The acceptance of others enables James to go to every show and performance knowing where he stands and knowing he won't compromise. This confidence helps James stand firm in what he believes and often leads to opportunities to share those beliefs with fans and other musicians around him.



“People are looking for integrity—be who you are and allow your actions to back that up. Stand as firm as possible.”



James performing in Albuquerque (1), and Paradiso 2013 (2).

When I asked James how he saw himself making a difference in an industry filled with artists giving negative messages, he emphasized his desire is to “pass on good qualities and virtues” and “to be different than other musicians ... especially in the mainstream atmosphere of sex, drugs and rock & roll.” “Life is about pedestals,” James believes, “and we are all given certain ones.” What is important, he emphasized, is how we act on our pedestal. James has chosen to use his pedestal to take extra care of his fans. He wants to have “more than a Facebook connection” with his fans; he enjoys meeting them, hearing their stories and putting faces to internet names.

James and his wife Cara at their wedding in April 2011



Through his music and career, James’ desire is to “simply show the love of God and have them [fans, others in the business] question that” because this gives him the chance to verbalize his beliefs and passion when he speaks with them in person. He is also choosing to counteract the negative messages sent by musicians and artists today without shouting loudly against them. He simply does “what he is made to do” and allows that to speak volumes.

James’ confidence in being who he is has fueled him to be more open with people. He no longer worries about offending others at after-parties and late night hangouts. Instead, James has found he is willing to go deep, knowing that as people come and go in life, you still make an impact in some way.

As we finished our conversation, I asked James if he had any words of wisdom for young people who want to make a difference today. Here is what he shared:

“The amount of pressure by society to ‘live into sex, drugs and rock & roll’ can be a frightening thing, especially when you are unsure of who you are. What I have found most encouraging is people don’t care [about your image] as much as you think they do. They are more excited to see you have a strong stance and backbone. People are looking for integrity and whether you really put your money where your mouth is. Be who you are and allow your actions to back that up. Stand as firm as possible.”

James’ advice echoes the instructions of Paul in 1 Corinthians 16:13-14, “Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in love.” James speaks loudly through his actions, by being who he was made to be and by doing what he believes he was meant to do. We believe his example will continue to encourage and inspire other young artists to do the same.

*For more information about James and his music, you can find him on Facebook (James Egbert), which also provides links to various sites playing his music. In November, James released “Exit Wounds,” the first single from his upcoming album *The Void*. [co](#)

God's Relationship with His People in The Books of History (Joshua-Esther)



Israel's history can be summarized by the word failure.

In the books of Moses, God's relationship with the Israelites is described as a covenant, a relationship in which promises of loyalty are given. However, the Bible describes numerous failures on the part of the people. They did not trust God, and they grumbled about what he was doing. Their pattern of distrust and disobedience is found throughout Israel's history.

The bright spot in Israel's history is the faithfulness of God. This gives us great confidence today. Since God did not reject his people back then, he will not reject us either, even when we have times of failure. We may experience pain and sorrow as the result of bad choices, but we don't ever need to be afraid that God will stop loving us. He is always faithful.

Promise #1: a leader

During the period of the judges, Israel saw the cycle of disobedience—oppression—repentance—deliverance. After each leader died, a new cycle would begin. After several of these cycles, the people asked the prophet Samuel to give them a king, a royal family, so one of his descendants would always be available to lead the next generation. God told Samuel: "They have rejected me as their king. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you" (1 Samuel 8:7-8). God had been their unseen leader, but the people did not trust him. God therefore provided a person to be a mediator, a representative, who could rule the people on God's behalf.

Saul, the first king, was a failure, because he did not trust God. Samuel then anointed David as king. Although he had significant failures in his life, David's overall desire was to worship God. After he had achieved some peace and prosperity, he offered to build a great temple for God in Jerusalem. It would be a symbol of permanence not only for the nation, but also for their worship of the true God.

In a Hebrew play on words, God said, "David, you will not build me a house. It will be the other way around: I will build you a house, the house of David. It will be a royal dynasty that will last forever, and one of your descendants will build the

temple for me" (2 Samuel 7:11-16, my paraphrase). God used the covenant formula: "I will be his father, and he will be my son" (verse 14). He promised that David's dynasty and kingdom would last forever (verse 16).

But not even the temple lasted forever. The dynasty of David fell—religiously and militarily. What had happened to God's promise? The promises given to Israel find their fulfillment in Jesus. He is the focal point of God's relationship with his people. The security the people wanted is found only in a person who is permanent, and permanently faithful. The history of Israel points us to something greater than Israel, yet is also part of Israel's history.

Promise #2: God's presence

While Israel traveled through the wilderness, God had lived in the tabernacle: "I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling" (2 Samuel 7:6). Solomon's temple was built as a new dwelling place for God, and "the glory of the Lord filled the temple of God" (2 Chronicles 5:14; 6:2). This was symbolism, because the people knew that even the heavens were not large enough to contain God (2 Chronicles 6:18).

God promised to live among the Israelites forever, if they obeyed him (1 Kings 6:12-13). But since they did not obey, he decided "to remove them from his presence" (2 Kings 24:3)—that is, to send them into captivity in another land.

But again God was faithful and had not abandoned his people. He promised he would not let their name disappear (2 Kings 14:27). They were able to repent and draw near to him even in a foreign land. God had given them the promise that if they returned to him, he would return them to their land, symbolizing a restoration of the relationship (Deuteronomy 30:1-5; Nehemiah 1:8-9).

Promise #3: a homeland forever

God promised to David, "I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning" (1 Chronicles 17:9).

The promise is surprising, because it comes in a book that was written after Israel had been taken into exile. The history of

We may experience pain and sorrow as the result of bad choices, but we don't ever need to be afraid that God will stop loving us. **He is always faithful.**



Israel points beyond itself—it is a promise awaiting fulfillment. The nation needed a leader who was descended from David, and yet greater than David. They needed the presence of God not just symbolized in a temple, but made real to each person. They needed a land not just with temporary peace and prosperity, but a transformation of the entire world, so there would be no oppression at all.

Israel's history points to a future reality. But there was a reality in ancient Israel, too. God had a covenant with Israel, and he was faithful to it. They were his people, even when they were disobedient. Although many of the people went astray, many others did not. Although they died without seeing the promises fulfilled, they will live again to see the leader, the land, and best of all, eternal life in the presence of their Savior. **co**

From Balance to Balance Sheets



Did you give any thought to your personal financial philosophy from the last article: a) most toys wins; b) a penny saved/earned; c) make a lot/give a lot away? If you are like most, you probably inherited your philosophy from your parents.

I grew up with a “most toys wins” philosophy. When I was young I asked my dad how long a year was and he said, “Twelve payments.” This became very interesting when I married someone who was raised with a different philosophy.

Nan and I dated through our four years of college before we got married. Because I had a full-time job and lived at home while attending college part-time in the evenings, I had plenty of money for dates. Before we dated she never ate popcorn or candy at the movie theater. While we dated I took her out for steak dinners, bought her jewelry and perfume, paid her way to church conventions, etc. She loved it at the time. After we returned from our honeymoon and “blended” balance sheets, she fell into a minor state of shock.

At the time I was making payments on two sports cars. I had over \$6,000 in credit card debt. I had borrowed money from my parents to update my business wardrobe, and to finance our honeymoon in Rio de Janeiro. Nan's dad raised her with a penny-saved perspective and my approach to money wasn't acceptable, notwithstanding the great spendthrift times we had while dating. Adding to her misfortune, shortly after we married I told her I'd like to apply to our church college, quit the great jobs we had, and move to Southern California.

The next year was quite a change. We worked together under a penny-saved austerity program to tighten our budget and prepare for the move. During those twelve months we considered it splurging to simply get an ice cream and designer coffee at the mall. By knuckling down on expenses, saving almost every discretionary dollar, and selling some assets before the move, we managed in twelve months to pay off all the debt and have \$10,000 in reserves for the move.

Most financial mistakes are made by simply focusing on the budget rather than its impact on the balance sheet. The budget is a financial statement that records expected income, expenses, and what is left over. When all income is not spent, it builds the balance sheet (building wealth). The balance sheet is a financial statement that records what is owned (assets), owed (liabilities) and the resulting net worth. When more income is spent than earned, it detracts from the balance sheet by creating a liability (payments on two sports cars, credit card debt, notes to parents, etc.).

The financial mistake comes from thinking I can afford the payment (the impact on the budget) without considering the impact on the balance sheet (going in debt and reducing net worth). Wealth is what is reflected as the bottom line of the balance sheet (net worth).

Managing this dynamic, and the interaction between these two financial statements is a best practice for building wealth. As stewards of God's wealth we need to manage both to be truly effective.

Regardless of the philosophy you were raised with, take heart: it can change over time to meet changing circumstances. **co**

Bridging the Gap



The popular term “generation gap” refers to the chasm separating a younger generation from an older generation and has probably always been there. One can almost hear Adam telling Eve, “These kids don’t know how good they have it. We only had a fig leaf for clothes, but they have the whole forest.”

There must have been some sort of gap, or why would the last verse in the Old Testament refer to fathers turning their hearts towards their children, and vice versa? (Malachi 4:6) Could it be that each generation has some things the other needs – especially in the Christian community?

Older people have a certain amount of wisdom because they’ve lived through many political philosophies, economic depressions, recessions, wars and rumors of wars. Most have experienced financial, health, family, and yea verily, even church problems, yet lived to tell the tale. They’ve seen children born and parents die. Sure they might tire more easily, be unable to do what they once did, and are reluctant to try new ideas, but that’s why they need the younger generation.

Younger people have greater mobility, endurance, and physical strength. To them everything is new and exciting. They have enthusiasm and think of possibilities, potential, and productivity. They aren’t afraid to ask the hard questions and won’t settle for evasive answers. They are the present and the future. Sure they need patience, tend to leap before they look, and lack wisdom that comes from experience, but that’s why they need the older generation.

1 Samuel 3 recounts a generational story. Old Eli was the high priest of Israel who took young Samuel into the temple to tutor him in the ways of God. One night God called to Samuel. But Samuel thought it was Eli, so he ran to him and said, “Here I am.” Eli told Samuel he wasn’t calling him and to go back to bed. When it happened a third time, Eli realized God was calling the boy. He told Samuel to go back and if it happened again to say, “Speak, for your servant is listening.” That’s what he did. Then God revealed to Samuel that Eli and his family would soon suffer. The next day Samuel was reluctant to tell Eli this news, but Eli insisted. To which Eli replied, “He is the Lord.”

Here is what I find interesting about this story. God spoke to Samuel, but Samuel had no idea it was God’s voice. He needed Eli who had experience with God and such matters to explain what was happening. It was Eli who knew it was God’s voice, not Samuel.

Eli and Samuel needed each other. Old Eli needed to pass the ministry cloak on to someone younger. Young Samuel needed Eli to teach him how to use the cloak and perhaps not make the same mistakes he had made.

Christian generations need each other as well, so how can any gaps be bridged? A good start comes from valuing others above ourselves (Philippians 2:3). Value, respect and appreciate each other’s different styles, communication skills, preferences, approaches, and perspectives, and focus on the one major thing in common – Christ. If Christ is the overall focus, he will bridge the gap. **co**

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