

HOOKERS FOR JESUS

WHAT IS GRACE?

UGANDA

THE DAILY AUDIO BIBLE

God in focus. World in scope.

new identity

Fall 2009

MAGAZINE

Faith A La Carte

THE PITFALLS OF TAKING
WHAT YOU LIKE FROM THE
BIBLE AND LEAVING THE REST

What is Prayer?

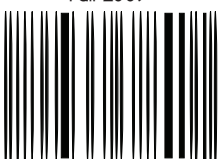
The Rights of Animals?

GOD, ETHICS AND ANIMALS

Alternative Medicine

BEING WISE IN WHERE YOU
LOOK FOR HEALING

Fall 2009



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www.newidentitymagazine.com



A few years ago, the pastors at my church opened a coffeehouse. Their concept was to create a place for the community and have a building that the church could use. I joined the barista team part-time to help out the initial launch of the business. Even though the coffeehouse was not labeled as a "Christian" coffeehouse, people soon found out that it was run by two pastors and that they had a church that met there. Those who

have worked in a coffeehouse know that you see a variety of people come through the door, as with any public service job, I'm sure. One morning, a few months after opening, a gentleman approached me at the counter. He didn't order coffee, but instead asked if I knew of a Christian hairdresser in the area because the one that used to do his hair had retired. I was taken aback and puzzled. What was wrong with a non-Christian hairdresser? There was even a hairdresser in the building next to us. To be honest, as a Christian, I was hurt by his question and hurt for all the non-Christian hairdressers of the world. Followers of Christ had opened this coffeehouse to bless everyone, not just Christians, to have it be a place that would intermingle faith with the world, not separate it. In a way, I was offended.

Christians have somehow been able to unintentionally alienate the rest of the population with actions and perceptions such as this. There is a somewhat exclusive community that is built around Christian businesses, organizations, institutions—and even people. This exclusiveness that is created by Christians is both wonderful and terrible. It's wonderful in that people feel safe and comfortable around people who share their same beliefs, creating a strong community that can withstand much. But what's terrible is that it makes everyone else feel like they're not part of the group and unwelcome. Though unintended, this behavior has become a type of segregation. It's true that salvation is the initiation into God's eternal family, but God loves everyone, and individuals won't find salvation without hearing about it from Christians. I'm not saying someone who unconsciously practices this type of disassociation is less Christian than another, only that our comfort as Christians can become a thorn to those who don't know the man behind the name. Loving God and loving people are not mutually exclusive.

New Identity Magazine's core values are to help you not only understand different biblical and Christian perspectives, but to help you feel included in the global Christian community and be more open to sharing your lives with those who might be curious about God. We also want to bring to life the many causes and passions of God's heart—through His people, you, and your identity in Christ. The Christian call to action is towards causes that God cares about, regardless of whether they were started by Christians or not.

God needs people that love Him to be everywhere, loving everyone, taking up causes that love Him and serve Him all over the world. We highlight a few fascinating organizations, companies and ministries in this issue (see Rosa Loves, pg. 30) and will continue to showcase a variety of outlets. Some are labeled Christian or faith-based, others are not, but they all contain important Biblical truths at the core: sharing faith, serving the poor, or coming to the aid of a neighbor. Through loving God and loving others we can all do incredible things and be transformed into amazing people in Christ's image.

Cailin

CAILIN BRIODY HENSON
Editor-in-Chief

The Elements of New Identity Magazine:

Why we do consider four main departments essential for a new identity in Christ? They represent important aspects of God's plan for his people in creation and redemption.

COMMUNITY

God really wants us in community, helping each other, sharing life together. Acts 2:44-47 (AMP) says, "And all who believed (who adhered to and trusted in and relied on Jesus Christ) were united and [together] they had everything in common; And they sold their possessions (both their landed property and their movable goods) and distributed the price among all, according as any had need. And day after day they regularly assembled in the temple with united purpose, and in their homes they broke bread [including the Lord's Supper]. They partook of their food with gladness and simplicity and generous hearts, constantly praising God and being in favor and goodwill with all the people; and the Lord kept adding [to their number] daily those who were being saved [from spiritual death]."

CULTURE

Everyone has a different culture. Whether it's how you were raised, what ethnicity you're a part of or what country you're from, culturally, we're all different—but God stays the same. By highlighting cultural differences, we can better understand the diversity of the body of Christ, and we can learn to see from within that diversity the foundational similarities and commonality that we all have through Christ. Romans 15:7 (NIV) encourages us to "accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God."

WORLD

God is global. His love and compassion are far-reaching, extending to every corner of the globe and every people on earth. We want to represent the reality of the diversity of God's people. Acts 10:34-36 (The Message) says, "Peter fairly exploded with his good news: 'It's God's own truth, nothing could be plainer: God plays no favorites! It makes no difference who you are or where you're from—if you want God and are ready to do as he says, the door is open. The Message he sent to the children of Israel—that through Jesus Christ everything is being put together again—well, he's doing it everywhere, among everyone.'"

ENVIRONMENT

God wants us to enjoy, take care of and be a part of our environment. Activities like outdoor recreation, nature appreciation and sustainability, help us value our Creator and His creation. Genesis 1:26-27 (The Message) says, "God spoke: 'Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature so they can be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle. And, yes, Earth itself, and every animal that moves on the face of Earth.' God created human beings; he created them godlike, reflecting God's nature. He created them male and female."

WRITE TO US:

What are your thoughts on each issue? What topics or perspectives do you want to read about or hear from? We love getting feedback. Send your message via e-mail or letter and please include your name, address and daytime phone number. *New Identity Magazine*, P.O. Box 375, Torrance, CA 90508. Phone: (310) 947-8707; feedback@newidentitymagazine.com



Photo: www.lovezim.org

WORLD AWARE

Love Your Neighbor

Love Zim was launched on Valentine's Day 2009 as a campaign coalition of British churches and organizations who give support to and work in Zimbabwe. It began as a focused month of prayer and fasting for the country of Zimbabwe, its newly instated Unity Government, and for the people of Zimbabwe, as a hope for God to move more deeply in the economic and humanitarian issues of the country. From what started as a call from the Archbishop of York and Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu to pray for Zimbabwe and their future, the UK coalition hopes to develop "a vision of how they and their church can be actively involved in bringing hope to Zimbabwe." For more information on their campaign, visit www.lovezim.org. You might even pick up some ideas of how to start your own campaign to bring hope to another nation.

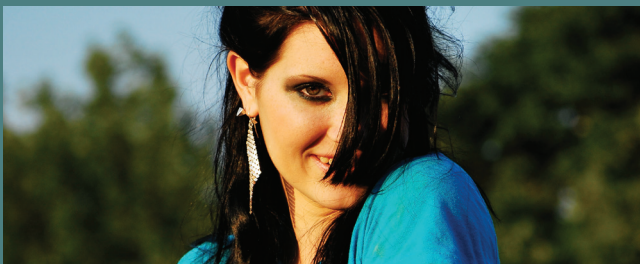


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FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Model4Jesus

Mayra Gomez is a professional model, hosting Salsa Mania, a secular Latin music video program. She is also the founder of Model4Jesus. Gomez started her relationship with God in 1999 after many years working in the modeling industry. Seeing the reality of her profession's obsession of showing skin more than clothes, she launched a fashion show ministry in 2005 out of her passion for women and modeling. Her goal is to see "women transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit through revelation of what God thinks about beauty, as revealed in His Word," according to her mission statement. The fashion show ministry is "for women and teenage girls [and it] uses fashion shows as a tool to reach today's generation, demonstrating that a woman does not need to conform to the world's concept of beauty." For more information on the fashion shows or how you get involved, visit www.model4jesus.com

TRANSPORTATION

Wheels4Life

Wheels4Life is a nonprofit charity that works with individuals, organizations and other groups to provide free bicycles for people in need of transportation in Third World countries. For these people, "sometimes the closest school, doctor or workplace might be 10 or 20 miles away" and their remote, non-industrial locations have no public transportation. Wheels4Life believes that "the gift of mobility, in the form of bicycles, can do miracles." We think so, too. For more information on how you can change someone's life through transportation, visit www.wheels4life.org



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TRADE IN GREEN

Scoodi

Similar to Freecycle, Scoodi is an online community of people who buy, sell, give, or trade on a local level. Through this system, items people no longer have use for don't end up in the trash, but instead go to someone else who wants the item. Scoodi provides the service free for the global community and continually keeps an inventory of the items listed, never deleting anything, saying, "when you've finished with something, you can easily put it back into the community." They also offer tools to help you find a specific item that you need at the right time. To sign up and start saving your stuff from the landfill, please visit www.scoodi.com



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God in focus. World in scope.

new identity

MAGAZINE

Fall 2009

VOLUME 1 NUMBER 4

For new believers and those that are interested in who Christians are and what Christians think about the world we live in.

God in focus. World in Scope.

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MAGAZINE

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MISSION STATEMENT

New Identity Magazine's mission as a publication is to help people find their new identity in Christ by representing interesting topics, issues and ideas from multiple Christian perspectives. New Identity Magazine plans to generate the communication and understanding to unite people that hail from different ends of the spectrum and encourage thought provoking discussion and commonality through Christ. By using scriptures of the Holy Bible as the source, the Word that binds Christians together, and highlighting different insights into their intention and application, New Identity Magazine will help readers live a more stimulating, inclusive, and passionate life with God. In addition, New Identity Magazine will be a publication that encourages learning, wisdom, creative expression, and showcases the cultural and world aspects of life and following God.

Our goal is to represent true-to-life followers of Christ that have questions, wonder, ponder, dream and have a willingness to learn about varying viewpoints. We desire to dissolve the rules, categories and stereotypes placed on Christians and non-Christians, shed God's light into the areas that may be forgotten or rarely talked about but are vital in many people's lives, and provide coverage of topics often overlooked by the mainstream media or in religious circles.

REFERENCING THE BIBLE:

There are many Bible translations out there. Just a few are the New International Version, The Message, and the New Living Translation. You'll see these referenced as NIV, NLT, The Message etc. When we reference a Bible verse, such as John 3:16, 'John' is the book in the Bible, there are 66 books total. 3 is the chapter in the book and 16 is the verse in the chapter.

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Small Can Be Big

Small Can Be Big hopes to build stronger community throughout Massachusetts by allowing people to come together to make something happen for a neighbor in need.



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As the downturn in the economy began to take its toll in late 2008, the homeless situation in Massachusetts worsened. With good jobs and reasonable rent becoming more wishful thinking than reality, the organization Small Can Be Big stepped in to facilitate much-needed financial support towards the many cash-strapped families of Massachusetts on the verge of homelessness. Boston Mayor Thomas Menino's belief in "finding innovative solutions to community problems" inspired the Boathouse Group, Inc., a Massachusetts-based advertising agency, to launch Small Can Be Big in 2009. Deuteronomy 15:10-11 says about the poor, "Give generously to the poor, not grudgingly, for the Lord your God will bless you in everything you do. There will always be some in the land who are poor. That is why I am commanding you to share freely with the poor and with other Israelites in need." (NLT) Small Can Be Big has found an innovative way to come together as a community and come to the aid of "their land" at a local level.

What makes Small Can Be Big different is that a donation can go to a specific family with a specific need. Reputable Massachusetts charities each select a family in dire need of a one-time charitable donation, such as a rent check, a mortgage payment, an electric or water bill, an unexpected hospital fee or

other vital expense. Small Can Be Big allows donors in Massachusetts and elsewhere to make direct aid, through the Internet, to the families in need. Each family's story is shared, with names protected, so donors can know to whom their money is going and for what specific need. The donations can be as small as \$1, and 100% of the donations go directly towards the family's needed expenses. Alongside each family's description is a chart

of the needed expenses and the money raised to date, giving a clear picture of how much is still needed to fill their need. With the families' stories put in categories such as Fending Off Eviction, Facing Unexpected Emergencies, Keeping The Power On, and Escaping Domestic Violence, donors can choose which need is closest to their hearts. Small Can Be Big says they "harness the power of small, direct donations" and "tax-deductible gifts that go straight to a landlord, utility company or hospital awaiting payment."

Small Can Be Big hopes to build stronger community throughout

Massachusetts by allowing people to come together to make something happen for a neighbor in need in the harsh economic climate and sharing the reality that together, something small can become something big.

For information about the current families in need visit www.smallcanbebig.org –Cailin Henson 

Small Can Be Big has found
an innovative way to come
together as a community
and come to the aid of "their
land" at a local level.

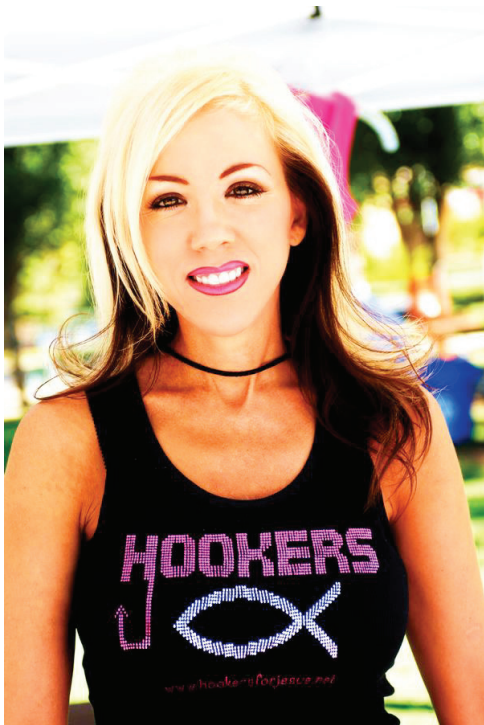


Photo of Annie Lobért from Wikipedia | GNU

Annie Lobért

Saving Sin City

Hookers for Jesus. Yes, you read the name correctly. Hookers for Jesus: a bold name, rivaling only the boldness of its endeavors and its fearless founder. Annie Lobért began the international, faith-based organization in January 2005 to address the realities of sex trafficking, sexual violence, and exploitation linked to pornography and the sex industry, “fishing” and “hooking” men, women and youth out of the industry and helping them find peace in God. She knows the abuses of the industry firsthand, working as a prostitute, stripper and escort for eleven years. After feeling unloved and lonely in her younger years, Lobért tried to fill that void through the industry. “I was always chasing just to belong, hungry for acceptance, just to be loved. When I gave myself sexually to men, for that brief moment, I felt ‘wanted’ and ‘loved,’” she explains in her personal testimony. While the money, glitz and glamour satisfied her for a while, the dark side and abuse quickly emerged. Lobért remembers being beaten, raped, kidnapped and gagged; having guns pointed at her; and even being stalked by crazy men. When she finally left the sex industry, her past still haunted her. Sixty-nine percent of former sex workers experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder after leaving the industry. “One night, I was just so desperate. I was telling God that I hated

[Lobért] knows the abuses of the [sex] industry firsthand, working as a prostitute, stripper and escort for eleven years. After feeling unloved and lonely in her younger years, Lobért tried to fill that void through the industry.

him, ‘I hate you. Look at what you did to my life.’ And I actually overdosed on cocaine. I was living in my car, at just the lowest point in my entire life. I had hit rock bottom. I took a hit of it; I didn’t mean to commit suicide, it just kind of happened. I had a heart attack and I just remember everything turning black, just completely fading to black, and just this total emptiness and there was nobody there. And I said, ‘Jesus please help me. I’m alone. Please help me,’” Lobért recalls in an interview on Nightline News. This was the definitive experience of her life. After the near-death experience, she began seeking the truth through God, and over time found clarity, hope, forgiveness, restoration and love in Him.

Instead of hiding away, Lobért began using her experiences to reach out to those in the sex industry; those living the lifestyle she once found herself trapped in. “There’s a lot of shame associated with being a prostitute. You feel really dirty,” she says. “You feel like somebody’s going to find out. I kept my lifestyle very secretive, I never let my family know, my friends know.” But through the organization, she no longer hides the past, using “Anything we hide has power over us” as a common mantra found on the organization’s website. As a sex industry missionary, she hopes to provide healing and restoration to those affected by sexual abuse and trauma. Shockingly, over 400 children were found working as prostitutes in Las Vegas in 2007 alone. From her base ministry in Las Vegas, she works with other like-minded organizations to reach those involved in the sex industry, either as professionals or as consumers. In league with the Church of South Las Vegas and its pastor, Benny Perez, Hookers for Jesus ministers to incarcerated women at the Clark County Detention Center, as

well as the Juvenile Public Defender’s Office and Family Court.

A few of the many services the organization provides are private visitations, mentorship, cultural events, and Bible studies. Hookers for Jesus also opened the Destiny Center Home for Women, which provides a protected transitional home for female sex workers who would like to reestablish themselves outside of their old careers. The organization has also

established a financial support network to meet the needs of men and women nationwide who are transitioning out of the sex industry. Hookers for Jesus builds awareness within various communities through workshops, seminars, keynote speaking, roundtable discussion, and producing literature on the issue. Lobért herself will soon be releasing her autobiography *Hooker for Jesus* and is working on a joint media project called “Saving Sin City.”

“[Prostitutes] are still daughters. They’re still sisters. They’re human. They’re real. They’re not some rejected tramp or rejected leper that can’t be loved,” says Lobért. “Knowing what you’ve done doesn’t define the rest of your life.”


For more information about Annie Lobért and her ministry, visit www.hookersforjesus.net —Leila Evangelista 



Photo: Eniti Marta (pmartike) | Stock-xchange

God Always Has A Purpose

by Joshua Mumphrey

This is a story of a woman's salvation. Even having strayed from God, and in the midst of her darkness and despair, she was never alone. God was her ever-present protector, guiding her back into His gracious arms.

Net, a strong, independent woman on the outside, was physically and emotionally battered on the inside. She grew up in a lower income area of Dallas, Texas, where a brighter future and a better education were frequently a distant possibility. She remembers playing on the front porch as a child, catching butterflies, before hearing screams and looking through the screen door to see her mother being beaten. This was the first of many abusive father figures that she watched beat her mother.

As a young girl, Net and her family moved from the city to a smaller town called Terrell. As the years passed, it seemed that the broken pieces of her life were beginning to mend. She found support from a local pastor, whose encouragement pushed her to pursue a career in primary education. Since she had no emotional support at home, the pastor and his wife decided to take her in as their own daughter.

They began to teach her the ways of Jesus Christ and how to maintain a clean and sinless lifestyle. She attended every Bible study and Sunday service, and later joined the church choir, discovering a singing gift she didn't know she had. It seemed that life had reached some semblance of normalcy, but what would happen next, shook the foundation of the family she thought she had.

Net was alone one evening when the pastor, who had also become her godfather and role model, sexually abused her. She had been betrayed by the very person who had sworn to protect her. After the assault, she began to wonder who she

could really trust. She decided to reveal the sins of her pastor to his congregation. After doing so, the pastor and his wife, who had once considered her their daughter, asked her to leave their church and never return. Net was hurt that no one else seemed to care, nor wanted to believe the truth that she had been sexually abused.

After receiving yet another emotional scar, Net abandoned her dreams, along with her faith in Christ. She felt helpless and hopeless. She had sustained her deepest wounds from within the church walls, wounds she still seeks closure from.

Net's spirit was broken in such a way that nothing seemed to fill the void, until a man named Bobby entered her life.

He believed in taking care of her, providing emotional and physical support. Bobby and Net soon married, bought a home, and began building a life together. Within a couple years, they were expecting their first child.

During the middle of her pregnancy, something went terribly wrong. She went into early labor, which led to a miscarriage. They were devastated, but still determined to have a child and family. She became pregnant again but tragically suffered another miscarriage. Net felt that God had left her side. After the second miscarriage, she lost hope and decided to stop trying to get pregnant. The loss of another child would have torn her apart.

Bobby and Net began taking measures to prevent pregnancy, but to their surprise, Net was once again pregnant a year later. They had mixed feelings; on the one hand, they were happy to finally be having a child, but on the other, they were extremely concerned for the baby's well-being. At one of Net's monthly appointments, the doctor noted that her pregnancy seemed to be advancing as expected, and Net felt instant relief after so much worry and doubt.

Net was hurt
that no one else
seemed to care,
nor wanted to
believe the truth
that she had been
sexually abused.


With the help of Jesus Christ, Net overcame the abuse, abandonment, and life threatening illness that marked her life.

Although her first five months of pregnancy went by normally, Net's worst nightmare came true in her sixth month. She went into early labor and was rushed to the hospital. Her family, including her mother Mary, hurried to be at her side. Although Mary had never really been a part of Net's life, she had recently become a Christian and had assisted Net through prayer and emotional support.

After several hours, doctors explained Net's situation to her family. She had developed toxemia, a condition brought on by bacterial toxins that were causing stress on her and her unborn child. Net was too ill to continue fighting much longer, and her family was given the heartbreaking choice to save her or her child. With much difficulty, they decided to save the child.

But, God had another plan for Net's life. Despite the odds, both survived the delivery, and Net's son was born at two pounds, one ounce. One more hurdle needed to be cleared. Net's son had been born three months premature, and doctors explained that if he recovered, he would likely be blind and possibly be mentally challenged. He had also been born with an underdeveloped lung and had to remain on a respirator, under doctors' care, for more than the first year of his life.

Net prayed for hours, asking God to spare his life and to create for him a plan and a purpose. Net's son eventually won the battle, later finding the road to Christ himself. With the help of Jesus Christ, Net overcame the abuse, abandonment, and life threatening illness that marked her life. Her son, who was expected to be blind and mentally challenged, has become a passionate writer and is able to see and functions normally in society.

I am that little boy who lived, and I am evidence that God can reach beyond death and create for you a purpose, allowing others to be inspired or drawn to Him. Through it all, God is the author and finisher of our faith and because of Him, my mom and I are here today. 

Cellist
Surfer
Comic
Cyclist
Vegetarian
Composer
Teacher
Poet
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The Instability of Faith *A La Carte*



Hors D'oeuvres

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Psalms 144:15 \$4.50 Galatians 5:22 \$6.25
John 16:33 \$3.50

Soups

Luke 6:10 I John 5:14
James 2:17 Philippians 4:19
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Eggs and Omelettes

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Psalms 45:7 \$10.75 I Timothy 3:5 \$11.95
Romans 5:8 \$17.50
I Thessalonians 4:8 \$9.50
Romans 13:9 \$24.95

From the Grill

Mark 11:23 \$6.50 John 5:24 \$4.00
John 11:26 Matthew 14:29
Luke 22:42 John 4:53

Meat

Romans 5:1 \$10.75 Proverbs 3:2 \$11.50
Isaiah 9:6 \$8.50 I Timothy 6:6 \$8.75
Matthew 5:9 \$9.00
Colossians 3:15 \$10.75
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Vegetables

Romans 3:17 \$6.25 John 20:19 \$4.95
Colossians 1:20 \$5.50
Galatians 5:22 \$6.75
John 14:27 \$7.50 John 16:33 \$4.95

Salads

Ephesians 6:11 \$3.00 Psalms 18:1 \$4.50
Ruth 1:16 \$3.95 Ephesians 4:16 \$2.50

Sandwiches

Galatians 5:22 \$7.00 Psalms 27:5 \$6.50
Ephesians 4:16 \$7.50 Isaiah 41:10 \$6.75
Proverbs 10:12 \$8.00

Ice Cream and Sweets

Psalms 18:1 \$6.50
I Corinthians 13:4 \$4.50
Ruth 1:16 \$5.75 Numbers 12:1 \$4.95

Cheese

I Kings 13:3 \$3.00 Exodus 23:4 \$3.35
Genesis 33:4 \$2.50

Tea, Coffee, Etc.

Exodus 23:4 \$2.00 Numbers 12:4 \$1.50
Luke 17:4 \$3.00 I Kings 13:5 \$2.50

The Pitfalls of Taking What You Like from the Bible and Leaving The Rest
by Tom Koel

Being a Christian can be tough work. It should be, really. We are all incredibly flawed human beings, so fixing anything *that* broken should take a herculean amount of effort. If it was easy, I'd say something was wrong. Luckily though, we don't do it alone. Christ is available to us in every way. The goal, the prize—having Christ at the center of our lives, becoming Christ-like as a result and the redemption (being rescued from the repercussions of our sins, allowing us to enjoy eternity) that comes along with it—are easy goals to run toward in presentation, but the Christian walk itself takes a lot of soul searching and hard work. Two steps forward, 1.95 steps back, but it's well worth it.

The notion that there is something to work for can be confusing and even offsetting. Some Christians are fond of saying, “if you're saved, you're saved”, implying that after you've turned towards the direction of God, there's no more you can do nor need to do. So, from a certain perspective, the day you accept Christ is the day the work stops.

But just then, someone hands you a Bible and says, “Read this” or “Explain this to me.” Well, it's not just a pamphlet, is it? It's a big book—and a confusing one, no doubt. Of course, some would say it all depends where you flip to. John 3:16 might be a first stop, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (NIV) In fact, it might be the verse that brought you to God in the first place. That verse seems simple and direct enough. But then you start whipping through some of those really long sections, and it starts getting pretty heavy, with references about eating His flesh, about being the I Am, and about making those who see blind. If that doesn't make you stop and say “What does that mean?” then maybe you're not reading very carefully. You're not the only one.

Then, if you read even further, you come to some Scripture that, though it seems simple enough, is obviously at odds with the culture we're living in. You learn that contrary to popular sayings, love is not blind, and words can kill. You find some pretty direct discourse about key social issues like divorce, adultery, sleeping around, homosexuality, lying, stealing, and pride, just to name a few.

Just a few steps outside the safe confines of the freeing experience of giving your life to the Lord, you run into some hard ground, to say the least. What are you going to do?

To begin with, we all start out just chewing on those bites that we can sink our teeth into, or more accurately using biblical imagery, we start out on milk, like babies. It is really satis-

fying, in those early days of our faith, to meditate on those simple and easy truths in Scripture.

But there is a lot more than milk in the Christian walk. There are phenomenal truths to be dug out of a mature faith. Have you ever been to the gym and seen a poster that says, “If you're not getting stronger, you're getting weaker?” Well, it may be similar with our faith. God knows that we need to keep putting more weight on the bar if we are going to cover the ground that we need to.

Some Christians, though, stop covering that ground. They become content to forever limit the practice of their faith to those bits of Scripture they claim to understand the best and, frankly, like the best. But that temptation to stop is dangerous to our growth in God. As you begin to focus more and more on those bits of Scripture that you like, looking through verses the way we survey the offerings in a buffet, with tongs in hand, you are inclined to grab hold of what might later become merely common words of wisdom and you leave behind much of God, both

His depth of flavor and His feast of knowledge.

The tendency to move toward these common words of wisdom or familiar sayings rather than the fullness of Scripture is not unusual, but leaves us less fulfilled, still wanting—and we end up sometimes forgetting what Christ did on the cross and who He really is. Christ didn't just come to impart words of wisdom, He came to give the world, and all of us in it, a makeover.

When you face an emergency exit map, and the building you are in is ablaze,

you do not want general terms, options, or suggestions; you need a direct route to safety and salvation. Christ is that map and that is why He called Himself The Way, The Truth, and The Life. The directions out of the building, like it or not, are in that big, confusing Bible.

We must take it all: the confusing stuff, the stuff that means we have to change our lives, and the sometimes inconvenient stuff.

I once heard a guy say that he couldn't believe any religion that couldn't be summed up in a page or two of clear and easily understood writing. The full content of any valid faith, for him, must be able to be completely and fully grasped by a child. Now, I do not think that he would have thought the complexities of his own job could be grasped by a child, so it is confusing to me that he would have thought the making and maintaining of all creation and the salvation of humans throughout all time should be graspable by a child. Likewise, God's definitive Word to humanity, embodied in the Bible, contains glimpses of His wisdom that are too great for me to comprehend.

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freeing experience of giving
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What are you going to do?

We must take it all: the confusing stuff, the stuff that means we have to change our lives, and the sometimes inconvenient stuff.

If the Bible is really the Word of the Almighty God, I would expect that the most brilliant people that have ever lived should be able to spend their whole lives studying it and say they feel they have barely scratched its surface. And that is exactly what has been said about the Bible. The fact that parts of the Bible are over my head is actually a comfort to me. Plus, it is exciting to know that by facing the hard stuff of Scripture, with prayer and fellowship (gathering with people who share an interest in Christ), I will get to experience some of that mind-blowing stuff I alluded to above.

Perhaps some Christians worry that if they really dig into all of Scripture, they will be forced to agree with, and behave like, some particular Christian group or people they know of that are not particularly likable. We all know of some Christians that are not very likable, and who wants to be like that? But just look at the Christian church as a whole. Between the Catholic and Protestant churches and all the various denominations across every country of the world, there are a lot of ways to exercise the Christian faith. The whole world can see that the Christian church has a lot of room for personal and cultural differences, preferences, and even room to wrestle with and interpret Scripture.

In fact, Scripture distinctly says that we will not be the same, but will each exhibit different gifts and passions. The majority of foundational elements between Christians are in agreement, yet the modes of worship and the way services are handled vary greatly across the world's cultures. Furthermore, the individuals in those churches are unique, just as you are unique.

This may seem to add another layer of confusion to the Christian walk, but actually it should be seen as adding clarity and opportunity. God has provided a faith with allowances to emphasize things that connects with us the most. If you connect most with a vibrant modern-music service, you can have that. If you connect most with a service filled with formality and ritual, you can have that too.

Remember those things we tend to gravitate to, as mentioned above? We said that taken alone, those things fail to satisfy and eventually become dangerous. Well, with the informed balance of all Scripture, they become personalized and empowering. If the love of others is something you feel very much moved by, then let the balance of Scripture inform you as to how that should be lived out.

The choice to lean one way or another relies on this: You must be able to defend it with Scripture. Our perspectives, whether liberal or conservative, should be the result of our encounter with God and Scripture. We need God to shape us, not for us to shape Him and make Him fit our lifestyle. You shouldn't

choose different Scriptures, especially those pulled out of context, because it is convenient or because it gives you the most freedom to carry on as you did. You shouldn't choose it just because everyone else around you thinks you should. It should move you, and God should speak to you through it. Your conscience must affirm that your choice was honest and true to what you believe He is asking of you. You cannot guarantee always making the right choice, but you are expected to make an effort by being informed. And you will be required, as will everyone living, to be honest with Him.


As far as our impact on society goes, we have to remember that Christ did not blend in and was not the politicians' favorite. But Christianity is about being set free from the pressures and expectations of the world and society. Our humanity,



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But Christianity is about being set free from the pressures and expectations of the world and society. Our humanity, by contrast, is prone to wanting to be liked, wanting to be powerful, and wanting to have everything just the way we want it – no matter what God thinks.

by contrast, is prone to wanting to be liked, wanting to be powerful, and wanting to have everything just the way we want it – no matter what God thinks. I've never met anyone who wasn't like this, least of all myself. Even amongst the world we live in, as Christians we are given the freedom to oblige God and follow Him, in whichever way that looks for each of us on our individual journeys. A great pastor once said that the full duty of a Christian was to know and to do God's will. To know and to do.

To sum up, we are not free to pick and choose Scripture. But we can be confused. I frequently am. You can struggle with it as you try to get your mind around God's truth. I do. You can wonder if you will ever have the strength to truly change. But keep pushing forward. Through struggle, there is triumph and you will see amazing things in your faith. 

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tom Koel became a Christian at 28, twenty years ago. He says they've been interesting years and that the Lord has done a lot of work on him. Tom has had several careers spanning manufacturing, teaching, preaching, and the motion picture industry and is sure there will be more. Tom has been blessed to have his sweet wife by his side through it all and has two fantastic boys, ages 10 and 5.

EATING A BALANCED DIET

If you are a new Christian needing some direction or an old Christian needing a new start, here are some quick tips:

1

PRAYER

Prayer is your expression towards and communication with God. You need God's help to navigate your day-in, day-out development with God, as well as in your Bible study. Prayer is the first stop on your way to understanding God's character better, God's will for your life, and learning how to recognize how He is working and present in your life. It is in prayer where you will probably feel the closest to God. The bulk of your character development and personal relationship with Him will probably come from your times in prayer. You will feel something spiritual subtly working and growing in you. You will connect with God (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit). When you pray, be real. Be honest in your prayers and take your time. Go to God often with whatever concerns or admirations you may have. God loves to hear from you and interact with you, and He has all the time in the world for you, literally. He will help you understand the Bible more fully.

2

READING THE BIBLE

Go to a Christian bookstore or the Christian section of your local bookstore and spend some time reading the various Bible translations available. The NIV (New International Version), ESV (English Standard Version), and NASB (New American Standard Bible) are a few that plenty of scholars have reviewed and approved. I would recommend starting with reading the Gospels—the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—or starting at the beginning in Genesis.

Eventually, other resources may be useful as well. A popular resource is a study Bible. These Bibles have all kinds of cross referencing and commentary about the Scripture. Sometimes there is more commentary about

the Scripture than Scripture on the page. The best thing about a good study Bible is that it really opens your eyes to how deep and integrated the Bible is. It gets the juices flowing, so to speak. However, you should be cautious as well. I stopped using study Bibles when I found that the one I was using was trying to steer me too much.

As you develop some good study skills, you may find that you refer to commentaries less, seeing others' comments on Scripture as educated opinions rather than fact. That's a good thing. When people get together at a Bible study, they should be sharing what they got out of their study, not trying to force each other to see it as they did. You are required to make up your own mind, and take responsibility for your own view.

For that reason, it will be a good idea to start building a library, maybe just a book at a time, of resource books that you can go to when you want more information about the terms used in Scripture, the context of the various books, and the history of the Bible and the Church. The New Bible Commentary and New Bible Dictionary are great single volume resources, and there are many more.

3

GETTING INVOLVED IN A CHURCH

The Christian life is about prayer, the scripture of the Bible, and God's church of believers. All three of these things work together. If you are on a college campus, there should be representatives from some good Christian organizations, such as Campus Crusade for Christ or The Navigators, close by. They can guide you to a reputable church in the area. Even still, you may have to try out three or four churches. Spend a month of Sundays and see what's out there. But pick one. Don't church hop. God wants you to sit still and settle in; this church is going to become your community. If you're moving around, you will never become integrated into the body, Christ's body, which is His church.

One last word on this: don't be surprised if you find that some Christians rub you the wrong way. But don't be disheartened; the Holy Spirit which is in all of us is far more important than our differences. And, frankly, when you get tuned in to how God works through His church, you will find that those differences are more interesting than annoying.

Don't feel overwhelmed! You cannot fail here as long as you remain truthful and committed to Christ.



Cellist
Surfer
Comic
Cyclist
Vegetarian
Composer
Teacher
Poet
Chef
Golfer
Carpenter
Dancer
Hiker
Actor
Gamer
Parent
Singer
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What is Prayer?

We uncover the fundamentals of prayer, the foundation of a life with God, in this introduction and beginning of our Prayer Series. What is it? Why pray? How do you do it?

by Jena Campion



This year for my twenty-ninth birthday, I learned how to fly an airplane. I flew a single engine Cessna aircraft all around the Los Angeles area and its beautiful beaches. It was the most thrilling, exciting, and terrifying thing I have ever done. Did I mention that flying has been my lifelong phobia?

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3

lying, just the thought of it, had given me anxiety attacks throughout my life. So how in the world did I go from being terrified of flying to becoming a pilot for the best hour of my life? My theory is praying, being patient, and waiting for God's guidance.

I spent numerous months in deep prayer about the details of my adventure. As soon as I felt the inkling of wanting to finally conquer my fear of flying in my heart, I asked God in prayer to take my idea and run with it His way. I asked Him to confirm or deny my flight plans, and I also asked a few friends to help me pray about the idea. Then, I waited patiently for God to answer.

One night, I felt a physical sensation of peace and calmness about flying that I had never felt before. Because of this, I felt like God was saying for me to go ahead with my plans. I checked the weather reports around the weekend of my birthday. It was sunny skies and perfect flying conditions for that weekend. I contacted a friend, who shared the same birthday weekend, and he was available. While dancing around my apartment in total excitement, I made the reservation. I called my friends again to ask to pray for protection during my journey. I was ready for the adventure of a lifetime.

I recently shared my experience with a close friend who just started their personal relationship with God. My friend was very impressed with my courage, the fear God had lifted from me, and how powerful prayer can be. My friend started to ask me question after question about prayer. So what exactly is prayer and how do we do it?

According to Webster's Dictionary, prayer is "an address as a petition to God in a word or thought." Prayer can be fancy, official, and complicated. But prayer can also be as simple as a conversation. Think of it like a casual chat with your best friend. Your best friend knows all your personal history, failures, successes, secrets, and concerns. You are usually very blunt and open with your best friend with your words and emotions. Prayer is just that, a very open blunt conversation with your words and emotions to God.

There are countless reasons why we pray. People can pray when they are sad, happy, afraid, anxious, calm, busy, sick, healthy, bored, or on any other occasion. There are a few technical definitions of some of the types of prayer. A few types that I will be sharing about are Adoration, Thanksgiving, Confession, Petitionary, and Intercessory prayers, but there are others.

Adoration

Adoration is basically giving God all the credit (praise), love, and respect (honor) He deserves. This should be an essential foundation of all prayers. Everything you say when you pray should be done in a manner that shows you love God, but this specifically takes time out to worship God. It can usually be done at the beginning of the prayer. Adoration's primary focus is loving the Lord. This type of prayer doesn't really mention anything about the person who is praying. It's the "I love you" at the beginning of your conversation with God.

Thanksgiving

A thanksgiving prayer isn't for the turkey dinner. It's a "thank you" to God for what He has done. It is also different than adoration. Adoration is just loving God and giving glory for who He is. A thanksgiving prayer's primary focus is to thank God for the gifts and blessings He has bestowed to you and the world around you, whether from the past or present. Since He is the ultimate provider, it's important for us to remember to thank Him as often as we can.

Confession

A confession is not just an admission of a crime done. Simply put, it's an apology to God for whatever sins that have been committed against Him. Its purpose is a real heart-to-heart between you and God. It's an open invitation for God to work in your life and heart, and it puts you in a right relationship with God. Confession isn't just saying we are sorry, but stopping that behavior that got us into trouble with God. When you confess, you first take ownership and responsibility of the sin and recognize the impact that it has on your relationship with God, yourself, and others in your life. The key is then to ask for forgiveness and be willing to change that behavior, thought, or action. You would want to repent, which means having the intent to turn away from that sin and not do it again. Basically it's the willingness to change in order to strengthen your relationship with the Lord.

Petitionary

Petitionary prayer is like an "SOS" to God, like shooting up a flare in the storms of life. It's asking for His help on your behalf. It can be for a big request, like healing for a disease, to a simpler need, like providing change in your pocket for your laundry that night. This prayer is more about the person who is praying. It's a humble request to God that acknowledges you are only human and desperately need Him in your life. Most people feel ashamed and embarrassed to ask for help because it shows weakness. But God wants to show you His strength and faithfulness in this type of prayer. It's allowing God to be your knight in shining armor.

Intercessory

Intercessory prayer is asking for help from God for other people. You are voicing prayer on behalf of this person to God, and Jesus is the intercessor, the bridge between you and the recipient of your prayer. Intercessory prayer can be done in a large group of people, like gathering as a church, or in a small group, like two people praying one-on-one. You are actively seeking help from the Father on behalf of another person or group of people. Once again, this type of prayer is not about the person who is praying. You are focusing your love, energy, and compassion on Jesus in hopes of Him working on behalf of your fellow human. The other person ultimately receives love, energy, and compas-

The typical image of prayer, ingrained in us through pop culture and church tradition, is kneeling on the floor, head bowed, eyes closed, hands folded at the chest, and praying in a whisper. On the other hand, in other parts of the world, prayer is in public, standing up, arms raised above the head, eyes opened, smiling, slightly swaying back and forth, dancing, singing out loud to God or a variety of other expressions.

Think of [prayer] like a casual chat with your best friend. Your best friend knows all your personal history, failures, successes, secrets, and concerns. You are usually very blunt and open with your best friend with your words and emotions. Prayer is just that, a very open, blunt conversation with your words and emotions to God.

sion from Jesus, not you.

We now know what prayer is, some of the types of prayers that are out there, and the reasons why we pray, but there is one important question left. How do we pray? There is no right or wrong answer here; there are many different ways to pray. How to pray depends on the individual's spiritual personality and what environment they are in.

The typical image of prayer, ingrained in us through pop culture and church tradition, is kneeling on the floor, head bowed, eyes closed, hands folded at the chest, and praying in a whisper. On the other hand, in other parts of the world, prayer is in public, standing up, arms raised above the head, eyes opened, smiling, slightly swaying back and forth, dancing, singing out loud to God or a variety of other expressions. Ultimately, prayer posture doesn't matter. What matters is making sure your mind is quiet so you can focus on God. Basically that means having no thoughts of the day at work, your grocery list or if you did your dishes or not. Your thoughts are on God, the prayer itself, and the person you are praying for, whether it's more for yourself or someone else.

When starting to pray for the first time, people often get nervous about how to start and what to say.


Some like to quote the Bible in their prayers, preferring an existing "script" of what to say to God. For example, The Lord's Prayer, Matthew 6:9-13 is often a good way to begin reflecting on God: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen." (NKJV).

Pioneered by John Wimber, the founder of the Vineyard movement of churches, one simple formula I find useful is called the Five Step Prayer Model. This model is used when you are praying for another person, but you can also use the same steps on yourself when you are praying to God on your own. The first step is the "interview." When you approach a person for prayer, you might ask them what you can pray for, listen to them intently, then ask God, "What is the Holy Spirit saying in regards to this person's life?" Then you calm your mind and wait for God to answer, whether impressions, pictures, emotions, verses, or something else comes to you, God will answer how He chooses.

The second step is to ask more questions from the impression you get or feelings you have for what might be deeper under the surface, helping you perhaps get closer to the root of the situation. Then you relay the information to the other person to see if your assessment is on target. In the third step, ask God about the best way to pray for the person. For example, does God want you to pray for action on something or a situation now, instantly, or later in His timing?

The fourth step is the prayer itself. In prayer, don't rush. Be patient and watch what God is doing through you and through the other person. What is the person's emotional state? Is God hitting a nerve somewhere? Ask for feedback during or after your prayer. A good question to ask is "Did God show anything to you?" If the person replies with something, you can continue to pray for that element in their life. The fifth and final step is basically a wrap up by saying "Thank You" to God, making sure the person is all right and possibly to suggest things to help them pursue the change or healing or growth that God had spoken to them about during prayer.

An important thing to remember is that you don't have to know all the answers, but just be open to what God wants to accomplish and offer encouragement.

After the prayer time is done, what is next? Questions like, "What does it mean to wait on God? Why are prayers received well by some, not as well by others? What to do when you hear God's answer? Did you hear correctly? Why are some people healed and others not?" will be discussed in greater detail in upcoming articles in our Prayer Series. 

culture

In the last issue we covered the second perception mentioned in the book *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About*

Christianity And Why It Matters by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons (2007), that details nonbelievers' view of Christians. In the book, Kinnaman and Lyons, with research from the Barna group, highlight the ways Christians are viewed in a negative light, especially among Americans aged 16 to 29. The authors present research indicating that Christians are best known for the things they are against, rather than the things they are for. Six



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ARE CHRISTIANS ANTI-HOMOSEXUAL?

broad themes represent the most common negative perceptions found in their study. These include the views that Christians are hypocritical, too focused on getting converts, anti-homosexual, sheltered, too political, and judgmental. Many of those interviewed in the study were quick to agree that "Christianity is no longer as Jesus intended."

We decided to get your feedback on the validity of such perceptions and asked you, in the third of this series, are Christians anti-homosexual?

Next we'll take a look at Christians being "sheltered." Write to us and share your own thoughts, opinions and experiences regarding the Christian "sheltered" perception at letters@newidentitymagazine.com

"I am not your typical Christian. I have struggled for years with this issue. I have a heart for gay people. I myself am bisexual. I choose not to act on my feelings for the same sex and have been married twice and have three great kids, one of whom is also bisexual and chooses not to act on those impulses. But we are the lucky ones because we have a choice! I feel that Christians do not have a right to tell non-Christians what to do.

"1 Corinthians 6:9-11 says, 'Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.'

"We can tell gay people until we're blue in the face to turn from their ways, but they absolutely can't without God's help. So why are we so harshly judging them? That harsh judgment is exactly what keeps them from God. They do not feel the love of God. They are spat at and beat up and ostracized for something they absolutely cannot change outside of God's loving embrace. Aren't we putting the cart before the horse? They can abstain, but they cannot change

Christian Perceptions

HYPOCRITICAL

TOO FOCUSED ON
GETTING CONVERTS

ANTIHOMOSEXUAL

SHELTERED

TOO POLITICAL

JUDGMENTAL

their desires until God washes them clean.

"And why do Christians pick and choose those certain sins over others? We all fall short of the glory of God. Even Christians are not perfect, otherwise we wouldn't need Jesus! Gossip, slander and gluttony are sins as well. Why don't we all take up our Bibles and thump fat people or little old lady gossips over the head. Those are just "little white sins". But they are not! Sin is sin. Love the sinner and hate the sin.

"The next time you see some sweet young man who doesn't quite fit the world's view of masculinity, think to yourself, "What do I need prayer for to overcome sin in my life?" instead of "Oh honey, look at him. He isn't in the will of God," because maybe you aren't either. I know that I'm not always doing or saying what I should.

"I am very passionate about this subject because I have helped out many gay teenagers over the years. They are very precious friends and they are loved by God. It breaks my heart when one of them is afraid to tell their parents, or hurt by people that don't even know them. They are my boys and girls no matter what, and I love them and God loves them. But they don't feel like most Christians love them. In fact, they are afraid of most of us.

"But they do know that 'Mom'—which is what they call me—loves them and she just happens to be a Christian. I have taken them to church. I have told them about God and maybe someday they will know His love first hand. That is my prayer."
-Kim

"This is a complicated issue. I think the basis of this question really presents a struggle to a lot of Christians. Homosexuality is such a touchy issue because it deals with the basis of human emotions. Yes, the Old Testament does state, 'You must not have sexual intercourse with a male as one has sexual intercourse with a woman; it is a detestable act.' (Leviticus 18:22) As a Christian, I CANNOT pick and choose what parts of the Bible I want to follow. This would be akin to taking your encyclopedia and ripping out the entire section for the letter 'A' because you don't enjoy writing it. I think too many Christians don't realize this.

"This doesn't mean we should go violently protest or write hate mail. As Christ did during his life, we are called to love and accept others for who they are, homosexual or heterosexual. In my own extended family, there are homosexuals. My aunt has a [life] partner and two adopted children, a girl and a boy who are around ten years old. We openly accept them and love them as we would any one else in the family. But, I think that my cousins miss out on much not having a father. It is especially tough for my male cousin because he lacks a male role model. Just like a divorce, the people who suffer the most in a homosexual relationship are the children." -Amy

"I think Scripture is clear, in both the New and Old Testaments, that the practice of homosexuality is contrary to the will of God. (1 Cor. 6:9-11, Leviticus 18:22, as previously mentioned)

"The practice of homosexuality is contrary to the physical, emotional and spiritual design of men and women laid out by

God. God designed men and women in a particular way to maximize their ability to be in union with Him and each other for their ultimate satisfaction and fulfillment. The practice of homosexuality disregards that divine design and is a sin because, like all sin, it asserts that the created know better than the Creator. However, it is by no means the only sinful practice that falls in that category.

"Homosexuality is generally included in an extensive laundry list of perversions and idolatrous behaviors cited by the apostle Paul in his letters to Timothy and others. Some of those sins our society is remarkably tolerant of, like gossip and slander, and some which we are not! These behaviors will be evidenced in the last days (as in right now!) as society as a whole and individuals in particular reject God to seek their own way and do their own thing. Each one of those sins in their way reflect the exaltation and worship of the created over the Creator and are as worthy as homosexuality is of condemnation. For instance, I think Scripture generally spends more time addressing greed—putting the pursuit of money and power in God's place in our lives—and uncharitable behavior as being more problematic and of greater concern to God than homosexuality.

"I think the church's focus on and obsession with the sin of homosexuality does not reflect God's posture on it, although Paul reminds us that homosexuality, like the other sexual sins, is a 'sin against one's own body' which suggests that sexual sins are, by their nature, in some way more defiling. It's possible that Paul is suggesting that we individuals, as members of the Body of Christ, involve Jesus with our defilement in some profound way when we engage in sexual sin. Historically, the Church's posture has been fear and loathing rather than compassion and drawing near to those who have embraced and been trapped in homosexuality, and that is to our shame.

"I believe homosexual feelings are not sin in and of themselves, but are symptomatic of a particular sort of damage in the human soul. The believer is invited to ask Jesus into that damage in his heart for healing and directing, instead of seeking to satisfy those longings in unhealthy, unholy relationships. Simply because we desire something does not justify engaging in certain behaviors. We are exhorted to be angry but not to sin in that anger. Homosexual feelings are misplaced appetites for something that one legitimately needs and is at its core good. Those feelings can become part of a legitimate quest for the Bread of Life [in Christ] but if one seeks to justify the feelings as right and establish a "lifestyle" around those feelings, the result is a kind of cannibalism, a search for a missing something in you [by seeking it] in another person." -Harry

"We must not deny the emotions of one person who struggles with homosexuality. It's a real feeling. However, we must not let our feelings alone dictate what is right or wrong. God sets standards that are higher than our natural feelings, and we in our own power can't meet those standards. We must surrender ourselves completely over to our Creator and allow Him to do the work within us, knowing that what He has in store for us is far better than what we alone can come up with." -Sandra



IN PERSPECTIVE

Showcasing today's touchy subjects.



Photo: Jorge Vicente (jmvicente) | Shutterstock

The two words “animal rights” bring with them the weight of misconceived motives, extremist assumptions and utter ethical dilemmas. What does it mean for animals to have “rights”, and in what relation to human rights? Uncovering the topic, we find it really comes down more to morality than “rights” in the legal sense. How should animals be treated? What constitutes humane living? What does God say is our responsibility to them? And when do we go too far or not far enough in our place? Some people may accept the medical testing of animals to cure human diseases as just, but what about using animals to test for allergic reactions in a celebrity’s latest signature perfume? Does a cow deserve a life of fresh air and long walks if the beef will cost the budget-conscious consumer more, or does cheaper, more readily available food make the penned-up, antibiotic pumped life of factory farm animals necessary? How far should our God given dominion go? Vegetarian arguments aside (see “Insights From a Christian Vegetarian”, Spring 2009), we’ll look into the Christian perspectives of animal welfare, what it means to be humane, and where animals are in relation to a Christ-guided life. How is our care for animals reflecting who God is to the world, and do our own actions show care for His creation? –*Cailin Henson*

A MATTER OF PRIORITY: HUMAN LIFE VS. ANIMAL LIFE

Is animal life as valuable as human life? There’s an assumption that many advocates of animal rights value animal life and the quality of their existence as equal to or greater than human life. Some Christians consider Ecclesiastes 3:19-21 (NIV) “Man’s fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless. All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return. Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?” as evidence of this equality, but most Christians reject this stance because this Scripture is often taken out of context as Ecclesiastes is difficult to translate and comes from the perspective of someone who seems to have no hope beyond this life. In their depression, the author of Ecclesiastes sees no difference between humans and animals. Some Christians cite Genesis 1:25-27 instead as evidence of a difference between humans and animals.

ANIMAL RIGHTS

“God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”

Animals, though created by God, are not created in His image, setting humankind apart from the animal world. Because of this, the advocacy for humane treatment of animals and the animal rights issue looks more like it stems from ideals of morality rather than equality. To other Christians, it isn't a matter of morality. While they agree that the mistreatment of animals for unnecessary means is wrong, animal rights come down to a matter of priority which dictates how they spend their time on earth. Animal rights and welfare take a backseat to the rights of humans and their well being. It is this matter of priority that governs their commitment to a specific cause, spending their limited resources of time or money on human interests instead of animal interests.

A SOUL WORTH SAVING: ETERNAL SIGNIFICANCE & ANIMALS IN HEAVEN

There is a constant debate whether animals have souls or not. If they do have souls, we can assume their soul is still very different than the human soul, because humans were created in God's image and animals were not. The argument that animals do not have souls lowers the importance of animal rights for many, saying that without souls, animals are not worth saving or at least less pertinent. Ecclesiastes 3:21, referenced earlier as an argument for equality, is also sometimes seen as a reference point for the possibility of animals having souls or at least spirits. Ecclesiastes 3:21 (NIV) says, “Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?” Part of this somewhat pessimistic question by the author implies that animals have spirits, and some accept the theory that from this passage, man's spirit rises to Heaven while the animal's spirit is lost in the earth. But it can't actually be seen nor are there many additional references, so how can it be known for sure? Based on this verse alone, it's difficult to make a solid argument for or against the souls of animals. You can also check out *Eternal*

Life for Animals by Niki Behrikis Shanahan for one perspective on the Biblical evidence for animals having souls.

For other Christians, it comes down to the eternal significance of human and animal life and the difference in humans having free will and animals acting on instinct. Humans don't have eternal life without knowing God but whether animals can have eternal life remains unclear. It is ultimately God's choice. Some Scriptures suggest a heaven with animals involved, while other Scriptures question it. Isaiah 65:17-25 seems to give a picture of what heaven and earth will look like redeemed, and it includes animals:

“Behold, I will create
new heavens and a new earth.
The former things will not be remembered,
nor will they come to mind.

But be glad and rejoice forever
in what I will create,
for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight
and its people a joy.

I will rejoice over Jerusalem
and take delight in my people;
the sound of weeping and of crying
will be heard in it no more.

“Never again will there be in it
an infant who lives but a few days,
or an old man who does not live out his years;
he who dies at a hundred
will be thought a mere youth;
he who fails to reach a hundred
will be considered accursed.

They will build houses and dwell in them;
they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

No longer will they build houses and others live in them,
or plant and others eat.
For as the days of a tree,
so will be the days of my people;
my chosen ones will long enjoy
the works of their hands.
They will not toil in vain
or bear children doomed to misfortune;

If you have men who will exclude any of God's creatures from the shelter of compassion and pity, you will have men who will deal likewise with their fellow men. - Francis of Assisi

for they will be a people blessed by the LORD,
they and their descendants with them.

Before they call I will answer;
while they are still speaking I will hear.

The wolf and the lamb will feed together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox,
but dust will be the serpent's food.
They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,"
says the LORD.



It's apparent here that animals do not need to have eternal life to be in heaven. We do not know whether animals are eternal or not, just that they are in heaven. What is clear is that Christians are at least given a great commandment to love God, and love each other and a great commission to share the Gospel and make disciples throughout the world. Whether animals are in heaven is not entirely the issue for many Christians, it's whether animals rely on people sharing the Gospel to get there. Many think it's this urgency that should dictate the decision of where to spend time or what cause to fight for. In Mark 16:15 however it says, "And He said to them, Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." The reference to "creation" in this Scripture is a general term, so it's hard to say what exactly was meant by it. Saint Francis of Assisi must have interpreted this scripture to include animals in "creation", for he was known fondly for preaching to the natural world and for his advocacy of kindness and compassion towards animals. Could God have meant preaching to insects and trees? It's not likely. Another Scripture, Psalm 104:21 says, "The lions roar for their prey and seek their food from God," making some assume that animals must have a sort of spiritual aspect be able to seek God, but this may be a stretch, seeing as the Psalmists' words are more often interpreted as conveying the fact that God provides for animals, that He is their provider and protector much more than we are, and that their relationship with God is more likely not spiritual in the same way ours is. John Cook, a technical writer from Wisconsin says, "I'm all for the humane treatment of animals and conservation of our planet and its resources, but not as an exalted priority over [our Great Commission and Commandment]. I see treatment of animals and [the] environment as horizontal issues, being responsible for elements that are in our world around us for the moment, and spiritual concerns as vertical issues, being responsible for elements that will persist after our time on this world is over.

Whether all dogs go to heaven isn't my concern. Whether my neighbor does or not is."

CREATURE OVER CREATOR: PETA AND EXTREMISM

PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) and their tactics have, for some people, given the whole idea of animal rights a bitter taste in their mouth. The motives behind the actions may be completely agreeable, but their specific brand of eco-terrorism is often not. Many Christians have a hard time advocating the animal rights cause because of the extremist behavior that's often tied to it, going way too far in demonstrations or to make a point or making a god of their cause. PETA has a negative stigma, but there are other organizations that support a similar cause and aren't always as extreme. Investigating different groups and their types of activities, campaigns and outreaches might give a better sense of who animal activists really look like. Some of these organizations are Animal Legal Defense Fund, Stop-AnimalTests.com, Fur Is Dead, SAFE (Save Animals From Exploitation) of New Zealand, RSPCA (The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) of Britain, Mercy for Animals, ASPCA (The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals), and The Humane Society of the United States.

Some Christians have a hard time fully accepting the animal rights cause because they do not want to be lumped into a group with animal activists—and the negative stereotypes accompanying them. One opinion is that the Christian duty is to care for animals, but not to exalt them. At the same time, many Christians view animal activists' priorities, where unborn eagles can have more rights than unborn babies, as skewed. Instead of simply reexamining stereotypes, either that of Christians or animal activists, we need to take a closer look at how we treat all of God's creation.

"The problem with some of us Christians is as a knee-jerk reaction, we throw the baby out with the bath water," says Tamera Lynn Kraft, a children's pastor from Akron, Ohio. "We become extremist and look like nuts as well. We should care for the environment but balance it with our care for society. We should treat our animals well as stewards of the Earth. Those who abuse animals are usually violent people who also abuse human beings. But people are more important than animals. People are made in the image of God and have a soul that chooses to serve God or not. Animals don't have that same free will. They act on instinct."



Photo: Mateusz Atroszko (atroszko) | Stock.xchng

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITY: STEWARDSHIP & CARE OF ALL CREATION

Some Christians consider animal mistreatment as a direct disrespect of God's creation, citing stewardship as a call to take the cause against animal cruelty to heart. Genesis 1:28 says, "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'" This relationship requires both respect and responsibility. Ultimately, God is the owner and controller of His creation, but we're given use of it and are trusted to use it responsibly and act wisely. Many agree that we can be stewards of the earth while completing the Great Commission. The two ideas aren't mutually exclusive.

Job 12:7-10 says,

"But ask the animals, and they will teach you,
or the birds of the air, and they will tell you;
or speak to the earth, and it will teach you,
or let the fish of the sea inform you.
Which of all these does not know
that the hand of the LORD has done this?
In his hand is the life of every creature
and the breath of all mankind. (NIV)



Some Christians take issue with the term "animal rights" because it creates confusion with what it means for animals to have "rights" in the first place. Are animals' rights comparable to humans' rights, like the freedom of speech, or the right to vote? This also implies that to have rights, you must also be responsible for those rights and not misuse them. Some argue that animals have no moral compass of their own; they live to survive, thus having 'rights' of their own is irrelevant. Perhaps it is the human 'right' of dominion of God's plants and animals established in Genesis 1:28, that needs to be examined.

Some aren't sure whether any biblical text really presents a true framework for what is today called animal rights, and it's even debatable to what extent of inherent human rights are defined. Some argue that the Bible gives mandates and responsibilities but not necessarily rights in the way we understand them today. It's more likely that rights are based on society's interpretation of mandates and responsibilities from the Bible and other sources, rather than clearly stated rights outlined in Scripture.

It is through the assumption that our responsibilities, commandments, and mandates as they exist in the Bible correspond directly to inherent rights that has led to the construction of what people claim as "God-given" rights. A similar argument can be made for animals. While nearly all agree animals should not be mistreated, there is a wide spectrum of opinions on the lengths to which society should go to protect animals.

COMPASSION AND CHRIST GOING HAND IN HAND

"A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal, but the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel." - Proverbs 12:10

Compassion is something Christ had for all creation. It follows that as Christians, becoming Christ-like would also include becoming compassionate. With this perspective, the humane treatment of animals is part of our calling to become more like Christ. In Jonah 4:10-11, God has mercy and compassion for the Ninevites as well as their cattle and tells Jonah, "You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?" (ESV)

In Deuteronomy 25:4, God also orders against animal cruelty and not over-working or harming the animals under our care saying, "You shall not muzzle the ox when he treads out the grain." (AB) In addition, Deuteronomy 5:14 outlines the Sabbath and includes the rest of animals as well:

"No working on the Sabbath; keep it holy just as God, your God, commanded you. Work six days, doing everything you have to do, but the seventh day is a Sabbath, a Rest Day—no work: not you, your son, your daughter, your servant, your maid, your ox, your donkey (or any of your animals), and not even the foreigner visiting your town. That way your servants and maids will get the same rest as you. Don't ever forget that you were slaves in Egypt and God, your God, got you out of there in a powerful show of strength. That's why God, your God, commands you to observe the day of Sabbath rest." (The Message).

These biblical examples all advocate careful use of animals, rather than abuse or mistreatment, making the animal rights cause from this perspective—a worthy one. 🐾

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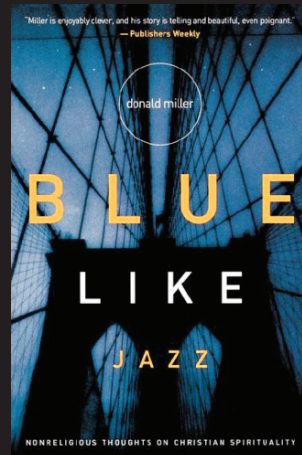
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—Caillin Henson

BOOKS TO BRIDGE THE GAP

BLUE LIKE JAZZ: NONRELIGIOUS THOUGHTS ON CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY BY DONALD MILLER



Like soulful improvisations and syncopated rhythms that waft through the crisp night air, Donald Miller's words float off the pages of his semi-autobiographical book *Blue Like Jazz*. His essays document a reflective process of reconciling his thoughts, love for God, the postmodern world, and humanity. There is a certain abandon of rationality, theology, and even self preservation in his writing, attempting to capture his feelings and experience of being Christian rather than to defend it. Miller's

essays have an easy, conversational style that can be appreciated by nonbelievers, but also breaks down experiences in rich philosophical morsels to read and reread in thoughtful reflection. He is honest about his discomfort with religion and institutions, but his genuine desires to be Christ-like and to love God highlight the beauty of his artistic expression.

"...jazz music was invented by the first generation out of slavery. I thought that was beautiful because, while it is music, it is very hard to put on paper; it is so much more a language of the soul. It is as if the soul is saying something, something about freedom. I think Christian spirituality is like jazz music. I think loving Jesus is something you feel. I think it is something very difficult to get on paper. But it is no less real, no less meaningful, no less beautiful." (p.239) —Leila Evangelista



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JARGON GRACE

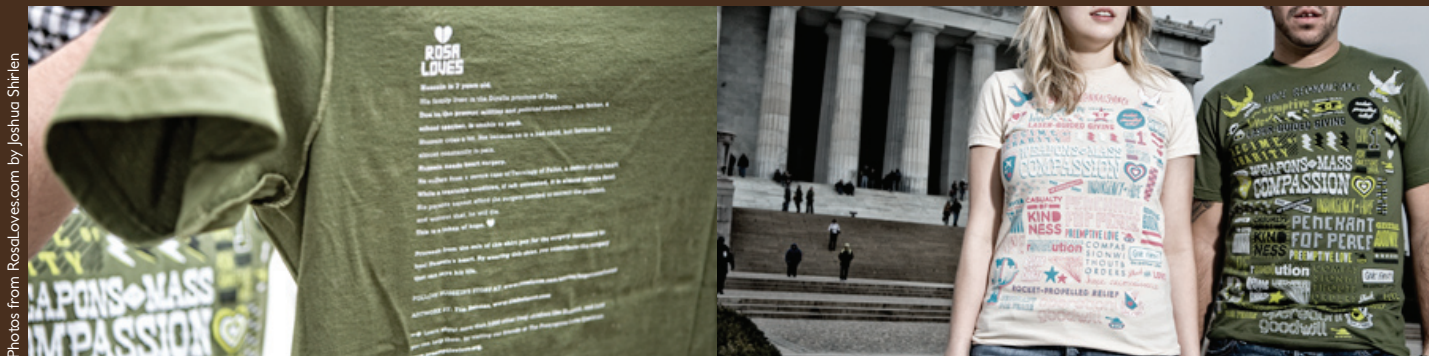
DICTIONARY OF CHRISTIAN JARGON FOR THE ORDINARY PERSON

"Grace be with you" is a phrase we hear a lot. But what exactly is grace? Grace is kindness that we do not deserve. It is unmerited favor, never earned but simply given. It's a hand that holds you up whenever you are falling and God's empowerment to do good works that you would otherwise not be capable of doing. When we look out at the world and see the crime and poverty, the chaos and sadness, the perversion of our inner being and the marring of creation, our hearts can lead us to think that we are in for an inevitable fall that rings with finality. But then we see the beauty of a sunset or the crisp green blades of grass in the park and know that this world is doing more than just falling into an abyss of destruction. The taste of orange juice as it swishes in our mouth before we go out for a morning jog is a rebellious goodness in the face of every pain that we have suffered. The good news of a baby being born far outweighs last night's bad news of killing and treachery. That's the reality of grace. We do not deserve it, but it is every good gift from the hand of God.

The thing about grace is that it is unmerited favor that we receive not just as a one time thing. It is a constant in our lives because we are constantly falling. At our highest moments there is always the downward descent of decay and destruction that life inevitably brings. Even when our lives are filled with constant pain, there is grace in that we do not even control our own existence and that is a gift. Without grace, we would not be here. On a deeper level, followers of Christ believe that the truest and purest form of grace is in the person of Jesus Christ. It is through Him and His death, burial, and resurrection that all of the goodness of God has become actualized. Every bad thing in life can bring us down and make us fall—including death. Grace is the hand that stops that fall. —Ramon Mayo

LOVE TO A TEE

Rosa Loves: Designs for Good by Leila Evangelista



Photos from Rosaloves.com by Joshua Shirlen

The protagonist from a recent film was told, “Halston, Lagerfeld, de la Renta...what they did, what they created was greater than art because you live your life in it.” It was at this moment that she finally began to see the deeper beauty of working for a fashion magazine. The film was the 2006 hit *The Devil Wears Prada*, and the names dropped are famous fashion designers. While the film poked fun at the fashion industry, it also brought light to the value of fashion: lived-in, interactive, breathing art. Push this to social science and it becomes an anthropological study.

By default, we deduce the personality of someone based on what they wear. Our clothing gives a context of time and place and of the wearer’s financial means and occupation. After that, clothes go further to reveal a person’s personality and creativity. In films, costume designers tell entire stories through wardrobe, creating a whole person, their history, and their development through the outfits they wear. We wake up in the morning and put something on that, whether deliberately or not, says something to people. It tells a story about us. The brain-trust behind the organization Rosa Loves knows just that.

Mike Fretto, Chris Lewis and Jeremy Dean founded Rosa

Loves with many stories on their mind. They knew of the many concerns and abundant needs of people in their own communities and around the world. They hatched an idea that would allow people to help those in need—and to do it with style. The three friends decided to design and sell T-shirts for specific causes, that would not only raise funds, but to build awareness about issues affecting the community. The T-shirts sold by Rosa Loves allow ordinary people to come together in providing financial support and raising awareness for shared stories with the clothes on their

backs. The organization hopes to use art and creativity to “foster hope and encouragement through the aid of apparel.”

Rosa Loves begins with a submitted story about a family or individual in need. The organization makes sure that there is a reliable connection to the specific cause to ensure financial support can be given directly. Instead of funneling money to larger charitable organizations that already have funding vehicles in place, Rosa Loves

focuses on intimate causes with tangible stories. The company then artistically translates the story into a T-shirt design. These designs are then printed on sweatshop free T-shirts and sold to the public through the website. In addition to the print on the outside of the shirt, the text of the original story that inspired the design is printed on the inside of the T-shirt as a reminder of the

By default, we deduce the personality of someone based on what they wear. Our clothing gives a context of time and place and of the wearer’s financial means and occupation. After that, clothes go further to reveal a person’s personality and creativity.

underlying purpose. The shirts stay on sale until the fixed amount of money needed for the specific cause is reached. Once the goal is reached, the design is discontinued to make sure other stories are read, and their causes supported, making each shirt a limited edition piece of art. Sixty percent of the profits go directly to the cause, while the other 40 percent is distributed to cover operations and cost of goods.

Rosa Loves was created to nurture projects of love by uniting communities and giving power to people who both need help and who want to help. Their concept elevates the art of apparel design to a dialogue of concern, communicating and propagating love for others—God's second most important commandment to us. Chris Lewis' wife, Erin Lewis, explains that "ROSA LOVES is about the word in that name that is not included...the name after those two little words." Rosa loves...The Musician's Bunkhouse, Hussein, Armenia, you!

For apparel, stories, and for information on giving story ideas, check out www.rosaloves.com.

Here is one story from the Rosa Loves website:



Hope Transfusion

Story & Photography by: The Preemptive Love Coalition
November 21, 2008

I met Hussein with his mother, his father, a local doctor and our physical therapist from the Preemptive Love Coalition today when his family came up from the Diyala province of Iraq. The province is still so dangerous and messed up with militias and political problems that Hussein's father, normally a teacher, is unemployed and thus, unable to help his family with the finances necessary to save his son's life. Right now Hussein, his elder sister and their two parents live with their grandparents because they don't have enough money for their own home.

This of course means that they definitely don't have enough money to pay for an expensive, complicated and life-saving surgery abroad. Even if his dad were teaching, his meager government salary would demand his working for a year and a half, and saving all his wages without any expenses, just to be able to afford the total costs (even at a significant discount).

But Hussein doesn't have time for frugality. He's currently two years old, but he might not live to see three - or even two and a half. He really is racing against the clock.

When I met him, he was not just having "a bad day at

the doctor's office," as many children do. His tears were tears of pain, not tears of shyness or embarrassment. His condition is deteriorating. His hands that day were an eerie shade of blue, a telltale symptom that his heart was losing its strength to get fresh blood throughout his body.

He has a severe case of Tetralogy of Fallot, a coincidence of four significant congenital heart defects, and an alarmingly common condition in northern Iraq. He has holes where there should be walls and blockage where there should be a free flow of blood. Major veins and arteries essential to healthy circulation are all jumbled up, recycling blood back into the body without any fresh oxygen. And the extra labor all this demands on his heart makes it swell up until it just gives out entirely.

Hussein won't grow out of this. In fact, the compounding trauma over time will just make the problem worse. This is a broken heart that can only be mended by love and a surgeon's skillful hands. At some point however, his heart will get so bad that the surgery itself would kill him because his heart won't be strong enough to take it. From that point on, Hussein and his family will just be waiting for him to die.

This is not just hyped-up telethon talk. Earlier this month, two Iraqi infants died on their way to what could have been life-saving surgery. But the few months that it took for them to climb into the top 25 most urgent cases (out of a current backlog of at least 3,000 Kurdish and Arab children) was just too long for their bodies to hold out. Hope couldn't wait another day.

And so I am sitting, looking at Hussein and his blue hands, wondering if there are enough people with enough love to act before it's too late. Can we really pull together a coalition of the willing to make a preemptive strike before TOF becomes yet another weapon of mass destruction and despair unleashed in Iraq? Will there be people who will enlist themselves in a year-long tour of duty, in a campaign of risk and sacrifice on behalf of children like Hussein?

Hussein's medical file doesn't give me much hope, but the people holding his file do. Here were Kurds, long violently oppressed by an Arab nationalist dictator, doing everything they could to save the life of a precious child of an Arab family from one of Iraq's most infamous hotspots: a province threatening to bring the chaos into the Kurds' backyard again. They understand that there are some problems laser-guided munitions can't solve.

But love can.

These Kurdish friends scrambled to find every penny their organization could contribute so they wouldn't have to turn Hussein away. They pled with me to help find the rest of the money this family needs, and now I'm pleading with you.

Can love strike before it's too late? 

world

TAIWAN

A LAND OF ENCHANTMENT

Written by Jena Campion and Caillin Henson

In 1544, a Portuguese ship sailed off the Asian continent and soon came to find the *Isla Formosa*, meaning “beautiful island,” known today as Taiwan. From its rugged mountain ranges to its gently rolling plains, Taiwan is one of Asia’s sweet treats. Seen from space, it has been called a sweet potato because of its shape. Though Taiwan is small, it has heavily influenced the world around it and is one of the leading countries in the manufacturing industry, including bicycle manufacturing, biotechnology, semiconductor device fabrication, laptop computers, and smart phones.

Emily Feng, a 26-year-old Taiwanese-American masters’ student at California State University, Long Beach and part-time social worker shares some insight about Taiwanese culture. “Taiwanese people are in general passionate, direct with regards to communication, friendly, open and down to earth,” she says. Though born in Houston, Texas, Emily spent a total of fourteen years on and off in Taiwan. She now lives in Los Angeles, but returns twice a year to visit her family in Taiwan.

Taiwan has a unique blend of Chinese and Japanese cultures. Both Standard Mandarin and Taiwanese Minnan are spoken. Common cultural behaviors include removing one’s shoes before entering a house and not writing a Chinese name in red ink, which carries connotations of death. The majority of the population follows Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, or a combination of the three. Although only 4.5% of Taiwan is Christian, “it is a pretty safe place to be Christian,” Emily explains. “In fact, most people recognize the faith as a Western faith, therefore the majority of believers are Westernized and highly educated. I feel that the local Taiwanese have a hard time identifying with the Christian faith because of the culture barrier. Buddhism and Taoism’s thoughts and theologies are so ingrained in Taiwanese people’s daily lives that it has become second nature, even for those who do not practice either religion. For example, thinking such things as, ‘I better not run that red light, because if I do bad things, I will have bad karma’ is common. There are so many rituals and laws that people practice that it has become more of a lifestyle. On the flip side, the Christian faith doesn’t emphasize such rituals and laws and allows for more freedom. But it’s hard for Taiwanese people to really relate, especially with the faith not being as culturally ingrained and being stereotyped as a Western faith.”

Taiwan has a deep history, some of it scarred by conflicts

with its Asian neighbors. “My family members were persecuted by the Japanese during World War II. Many of them were killed by the Japanese. My grandparents have a deep, unresolved resentment and prejudice towards the Japanese people,” says Emily. “However, living in America, my brother is married to a Japanese woman, and I have a lot of Japanese friends. Initially, this brought many of my family members discomfort, but slowly, they have begun to accept it.”

Emily has great admiration for her parents’ sacrifice to provide for her. “My parents lived in poverty. Although they were considered to be upper middle class and the more privileged ones, overall, they still experienced a lot of hardship,” shares Emily. “Food like chicken, apples and candy were luxuries. They were expected to study hard, work hard and take care of their family. Stories of my parents’ hardships and what they did to get to where they are now are at times so unbelievable.”

Taiwan’s biggest discussion taboo is politics and govern-

ment. “People are extremely sensitive because Taiwan is divided into two major groups. One group is the Taiwanese, whose ancestors moved to Taiwan from the Fu Jen province of China 300 years ago. Another group is the Mandarin Chinese, who moved to Taiwan with Shang Kai Shek because they lost the war with the Communists. My family is Mandarin Chinese. We are basically pro-China. We hope that one day, our relationship with China will be reconciled and we will be one nation again, of course on our terms of democracy, for example. Many others are Taiwanese and do not identify themselves with China. They believe that China is a huge bully, and that we, as Taiwanese, should stand up for

Taiwan has a deep history, some of it scarred by conflicts with its Asian neighbors. “My family members were persecuted by the Japanese during World War II. Many of them were killed by the Japanese. My grandparents have a deep, unresolved resentment and prejudice towards the Japanese people,” says Emily. “However, living in America, my brother is married to a Japanese woman, and I have a lot of Japanese friends. Initially, this brought many of my family members discomfort, but slowly, they have begun to accept it.”

ourselves and fight for our independence as a country (Taiwan is not officially recognized by the United Nations). This is a very sensitive subject and it often divides friendships and even families. People are very passionate about whichever side they are on, and as a result, people normally do not discuss politics because it gets extremely heated and creates more separation.”

“I consider myself more Chinese than Taiwanese. I know this is a controversial topic. I never studied Taiwanese history, only Chinese history. Although I recognize myself more as Chinese, when I am in Taiwan I am considered ‘Americanized’ because I attended an American school in Taiwan, which has really prevented me from becoming more acculturated into Taiwanese culture as a whole.”

For Emily, being referred to as “Americanized” has its

"I don't like the fact that Christians are considered a Westernized faith because God is a God of all nations," says Emily.

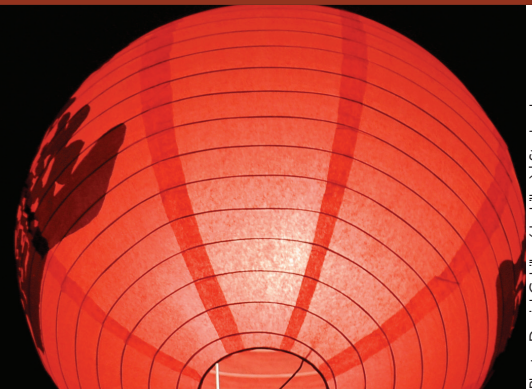


Photo: Daniel Cubillas (dcaubillas) | Stock-xchng

ups and downs. "I think the things that are taught in the Bible are often contrary to American living. I think Asian culture in general likes to be in groups and communities, and you see that emphasized in the Bible. I enjoy being more in group relationships rather than one-on-one relationships. For example, the Taiwanese always hang out in groups while Americans highlight "the best friend", which is a more one-on-one relationship. I can definitely see the difference in church culture when I go back to Taiwan. Being in a community is so much more natural and convenient in Taiwan. People do so without the church. In America, it is often times unnatural for people to travel in groups or live their lives heavily involved with others. The space between people is far greater. Because of this, in many ways it's sad that this world is becoming 'Westernized.' The rest of the world is learning and adopting 'the American way,' which has some pros, but also has some cons, such as the more "lone ranger" culture, as well as materialism and heroism."

Taiwanese culture also stresses strong work ethic. "People work a lot," says Emily. "They work from 8 A.M. to 6 P.M. on average. It is very common to work overtime with little pay. People tend to go in early and leave late from work." However, the long hours are also shared in community. "Taiwanese people like to sing Karaoke or eat dinner with co-workers after work," Emily says. "It's very different from the American work environment where usually you don't hang out with your co-workers too much, and there's more emphasis on professionalism and space between co-workers."


Taiwan has five major holidays that are celebrated as festivals. Rather than Christmas, the most well-known and important holiday is Chinese New Year. "We don't really celebrate Christmas in Taiwan. December 25 is actually Constitution Day for Taiwan. People usually associate Christmas as a party day,

like Americans do with Halloween. It is festive but people don't see it as a family gathering like the Americans do, nor do people celebrate Christ. The big family holiday is definitely the Chinese New Year," says Emily.

"Living in America now, I miss my family the most," shares Emily. "I also have a great church that I attend in Taiwan. I have been attending that church since I was eighteen—before I was even walking with God. God has used that church to really bless my family and me. It is often times a lot more intimate for me to learn about God in my native culture and mother tongue, Taiwanese."

Although Emily always has a great time being with her family when she visits, she notices that her years living in America have put up some new barriers. "My family often perceives my American culture to be too liberal. My individualism is considered to be too opinionated or selfish, especially being a woman, where in Taiwanese culture we are encouraged to be submissive and passive. In American culture, more freedom is given for a woman to speak her mind or to be athletic and I have been culturally integrated into having both these American traits. People in Taiwan are really skinny. I am also considered to be too

tanned and muscular. Muscular legs for women in Taiwan are a big taboo, which is very contrary to American culture."

Regardless of her cultural shifts and past family history, what stays with Emily is her love for God. "I am passionate about Jesus. I would love to use the skills I'm learning from my master's degree to help people have healthy marriages and families. I would love to travel to places where no one wants to go to serve God." Perhaps one day, God may also heal the strife and division among the Taiwanese that still affects the country today. "I don't like the fact that Christians are considered a Westernized faith because God is a God of all nations," says Emily. 

"I think the things that are taught in the Bible are often contrary to American living. I think Asian culture in general likes to be in groups and communities, and you see that emphasized in the Bible. I enjoy being more in group relationships rather than one-on-one relationships."



THE DAILY AUDIO BIBLE

Do you desire to read the Bible in a year, but are having problems staying focused or getting through a difficult book? Nashville record producer Brian Hardin has been working hard over the past few years to help you do just that. It's called the Daily Audio Bible; available as a podcast or streaming audio, and best of all, it's free. Complementing the audio is an interactive online forum, where listeners going through the Bible at the same time, via Brian's audio recordings, can talk, share or give updates. Another supplement is the Windfarm Prayer Initiative, a prayer outreach that allows people to connect with each other through prayer. As part of the prayer initiative, you will become part of a worldwide league of intercessory prayers, uniting to pray in one global voice. The initiative also has monthly virtual gatherings, where members can interact and pray together via the Internet.

A unique feature of the Daily Audio Bible is that it is offered in several other languages, such as Spanish and Hindi, allowing non-English speakers to also benefit from the valuable resource. Each day, Hardin reads from the New Testament, Old Testament and Proverbs, giving a bigger picture of God's overall plan and wisdom throughout the Bible's narrative. To give a more inclusive reading of the Bible, he uses a different Bible translation each week, incorporating variances in translation and allowing for more personal interpretation for the listener.

At the end of each session, Hardin extends an invitation to the listener to be a part of the global community and to create more communication between believers around the world. He ends with a recorded prayer request from another listener, giving the DAB community another opportunity to pray for or connect with each other. You can join the community at www.dailyaudiobible.com —Cailin Henson

world



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UGANDA

Living a lifetime of one life at a time.

by Leila Evangelista

"Everywhere you turned there was something or someone that needed help. Everywhere there was a need," explains Christine Plaza Bermudez. Wrapping one's head around the very apparent needs of so many others at one time can be overwhelming for just one person, especially one who wants to make a difference. This is what Sherry Roberts, co-founder of the Ugandan ministry Loving One By One explained to Bermudez, the 26-year-old structural engineer, when Bermudez was first learning about the organization. Reiterating Sherry's words, Christine continues, "Instead of being overwhelmed, focus on one concern at a time, loving one person at a time. In the end you are able to help more than you thought."

The Ministry

Loving One By One was founded by Ken and Sherry Roberts in January 2005. At their local church, the couple met the First Love singing group from Kampala, Uganda. Since Ken was an experienced sound engineer, he agreed to travel with his wife to Uganda to help set up the first Christian recording studio in the city. During this first trip, the basic needs afflicting many of the people in the country, especially the children, were apparent and staggeringly real.

Uganda remains one of poorest countries in the world, with conditions worsened through conflict. For 23 years, tensions between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Ugandan government resulted in attacks that ripped through the country's social fabric. In 2005, rape, mutilation, slaughter, village raids, looting and structure burning, ousted 1.8 million people from their farms and livelihoods, forcing complete dependency on refugee camps. Within the campsites, these internally displaced persons (IDPs) were still not protected from further LRA attacks. At the end of 2008, a cessation of hostilities agreement was signed by the LRA, allowing almost half of the IDPs to return to their homes. But after two decades of violence and destruction, IDPs were faced with a new set of circumstances and obstacles to rebuilding. Complicating the situation, the 21-year conflict in southern Sudan brought a flood of 170,000 Sudanese refugees to Uganda, where they face similar circumstances to Uganda's IDPs.

Unfortunately, war is not the only issue. An entire generation was fiercely hit by HIV/AIDS, leaving children to care for dying parents, elderly grandparents to care for grandchildren, or even children to care for their siblings. Even with available medical procedures to prevent passing on the disease from parent to child, many children continue to contract the disease due to a lack of prenatal care and overall medical attention. Malaria is another disease that plagues the population. It is a leading cause for miscarriage in pregnant women. The lack of clean water and unsanitary food preparation and storage further deteriorates the health situation. "This little community was in such bad condition that sewage water was flowing in different streams around the area," remembered Bermudez, "people would walk through these streams while some used it to bathe in and most likely used it for

cooking and drinking as well." Eggs from parasitic worms are transmitted through contaminated water into food. After ingestion, worms hatch in the host's intestines, causing infection and death. HIV/AIDS, malaria and worm infestation are the leading causes of death among children in Uganda. Sadly, many of these diseases could be prevented with simple immunizations, antibiotics, and hygiene. For example, the risk of malaria can easily be reduced with mosquito nets or a simple insecticide.

Children in Uganda are often the most vulnerable to these various social, political, and health issues. Witnessing the country's hardships firsthand, the Roberts family decided to drastically change the direction of their lives. The two decided to partner with Sowers International, a mission-minded non-profit organization based in the United States, to create the Loving One By One ministry. Their mission is to meet the physical, spiritual, educational and medical needs of Ugandan children and their families. The ministry's interest in serving children was what brought Christine, who currently resides in Detroit, Michigan, to work with the organization. "I wanted to go where there was something I could do and I really wanted to work with kids. It was the organization's initial connection with kids that drew me in."

Christine's Journey

Levels of poverty exist in every country, and although we hear of the conditions, we are never able to grasp the reality until we see it. "I was able to experience and see for myself the grave situation people continue to live in all over the world. I felt like I was so sheltered," recalls Christine, "In this case seeing was believing." Witnessing the daily hardships of Uganda's people on her short term mission trip was an eye-opening experience. She adds, "It really hit me right then and there that this situation is happening all over the world and so many people don't even realize the reality of it."

Loving One By One's mission team in January 2009, which Sherry led, consisted of eleven participants, including Christine. Before embarking on the two-week mission trip to Kampala, Uganda, Christine had loose ends to tie and motives to evaluate. "In the beginning, I thought of this as just another trip, just another country to travel to," she says. Recalling the various work projects and financial issues during that time period, she says, "When Christmastime came around, I wasn't sure how it was all going to come together. I felt like things were falling apart for me. I started spiritually preparing myself, fasting 24 hours at a time, and praying more about it and asking God 'Is this really where you want me to go?' Doing that gave me a better focus on God. I also started talking to others and getting more inspired." Collecting donations, both monetary and physical (such as clothing), through letter writing to friends and family became an unlikely source of affirmation as well. "I was surprised at the response," Christine recalls. "I was expecting people would give maybe \$20 but some people gave me \$200. People I hadn't spoken with in a long time donated. It was encouraging to see people believe in the cause."

Upon arriving in Uganda, the team was quickly put to work, working at four medical clinics and two additional de-worming stations, visiting the Sanyu (Happy) Babies Home and Mulago Hospital's pediatric ward, and teaching at the New Creation Center. Medical clinics provide proper medical care to families in outlying villages, orphanages, the streets, as well as those in the New Creation Center and Family Home. Antibiotics, medication for common sicknesses, vitamin supplements and basic hygiene education are supplied to communities by Ugandan doctors and short-term medical professionals from the United States. Volunteers administer de-worming tablets and look after children while parents receive medical care. "Another girl on our team and I were put in charge of entertaining the children in a small enclosed brick building," recalls Christine. "The thing that touched me most was when the kids kept singing and were so happy to be in this little room. Their clothes were very worn out and some didn't even have shoes on. But they were still happy and just wanted to play with us."

The New Creation Family Home (NCFH) provides orphans with a warm home and clean environment, along with clothes, food, educational support, and medical attention. At NCFH, children are also taught practical life skills, such as growing food, which equip them to later contribute to their community. The New Creation Center (NCC) offers Northern Ugandan and Sudanese refugee children free education, a school uniform, and a nutritional meal five days a week, nine months a year. The school, which recently received its approval as a non-government organization, serves 63 students with no more than eighteen students per teacher. The mission team frequented these two locations, since they are one of the main points of service for Loving One by One. The NCC provides employment for Ugandan teachers, teachers' assistants, cooks, and maintenance helpers, which "gets locals involved in the process and allows the people to understand that the help they offer only comes from God," says Christine. The children from NCC and NCFH have also become involved in the process, ministering to the patients at Mulago Hospital's pediatric ward.

It was within the NCC and NCFH that Christine was able to connect with individuals among the masses. "I expected more in-depth relationships and to build deeper relationships with the people we served. But we weren't in one place for a long time; we kept moving," she says. "But there was this one kid who was kind of rebellious. He was one of the staff's kids. But after you

got to know him, he was very gentle. Before you go, you don't really think of what individual personalities will be like...but they have the same concerns that we do."

The team also visited Jokalera, a village of about 35 families where many grandparents were caring for their grandchildren due to the loss of the middle generation, in large part to HIV/AIDS. Loving One By One helps support the self-sustained village by creating a program to supply goats and pigs for members of the community. Families can use or sell milk, meat, and animal

offspring, and then use profits towards other needs, including their children's education. The program focuses on helping others by working towards a community that will sustain itself, an important lesson in community development projects and missionary work today. Christine explains, "Mission trips and missionaries are tough work, but very necessary. People definitely can use the help, but helping by just giving them what they need isn't enough. Teaching people to help themselves can be the most helpful."

Despite the evident poverty and poor conditions, there was a constant reminder of God's presence in Uganda. "Everywhere you look in Uganda, 'God' and 'Jesus' and different Christian sayings are written all over the place," Christine recalls. "The country is very well-helped in terms of knowing Jesus. I almost felt like they didn't really need me in that respect."

Final Reflections


In a world of human chaos where there are constant causes to take up, we can easily sit back and think, "I am only one person. What can I really do?" For many, it is not out of apathy that we do nothing, but it is the depth of the issues or our own lack of skills that intimidate us. We never muster the will to answer this question, allowing inadequacy for a problem too big for one to stop us from being a part of the solution. After going on the mission trip, Christine found inspiration in Loving One By One and has begun her quest to effect change. "After going on a mission trip, [you realize] one person can make a difference in the world by making a difference in one person's life. After seeing how those kids light up with joy and their spirits become filled with hope just from the work Sherry was able to accomplish, I was able to see a brighter future for each and every kid and realized that they are the future of their country, and they are the key to improving the situation of their whole country." 



Photo: Lawrence Op | Flickr (CC)

CANADIAN THANKSGIVING

by Cristian Vasquez

Spending time with family and enjoying an elaborately cooked meal are staples of the Thanksgiving holiday. A lesser-known fact is that North America celebrates not only one, but two Thanksgiving holidays. While the two holidays have common practices, subtle differences exist between the Thanksgiving celebrations in the United States and the holiday festivities in Canada.

Unlike American Thanksgiving, which takes place on the fourth Thursday of November, Canadian Thanksgiving is celebrated on the second Monday of October. While the American holiday is linked to the Pilgrims, the nation's earliest settlers, the Canadian holiday is linked to a different historical event. In addition to being a celebration of the end of the harvest season and a successful harvest, Canadian Thanksgiving commemorates the return of explorer Martin Forbisher from his expedition in search of a northern passage to the Pacific Ocean. His safe return allowed him to avoid a fate like that of Henry Hudson and John Franklin, who died at sea searching for a similar passage.

Early celebrations of Thanksgiving in Canada were observed in current-day Newfoundland by European settlers. Since the first holiday in 1879, no official observance date was set, and the date of Thanksgiving ranged between October and November throughout the nation. It would take over 75 years for an official date to be established.

In 1957, the Canadian Parliament officially announced the recognition of Thanksgiving and that it would be "a day of general thanksgiving to almighty God for the bountiful harvest with which Canada has been blessed." Although the official observance is on a Monday, the day families gather for Thanksgiving dinner ranges from the Friday before Thanksgiving through Thanksgiving Day.


Like American Thanksgiving, the Canadian holiday is considered secular, but many take time to attend church or pray in appreciation for all of their blessings. Two holidays to remind us to have grateful hearts for all that God has done and will continue to do for us—now there's something to be thankful for! 



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Canadian Thanksgiving

Tasty Canadian Thanksgiving recipes to try at home.

As in the United States, turkey is the centerpiece of most Canadian Thanksgiving dinner tables. An assortment of stuffings, gravies, fall vegetables and warm pies or other desserts are also popular foods. Canadians are also fond of the cornucopia tradition started by early European farmers, which consists of filling a curved goat's horn or horn-shaped basket with fruits and grains, symbolizing a bountiful harvest. Try some of the following popular Canadian Thanksgiving dishes at your family gathering this year!

Wild Rice & Mushroom Casserole

Yield: 4 Servings

Ingredients:

3/4 cup uncooked wild rice
1/4 tsp dried thyme
1/4 tsp dried basil
1 1/2 cups chicken or vegetable broth
1 pound mushrooms
1/4 cup butter
1 onion, diced
pepper
salt
2 tbsp chopped parsley

Directions:

Combine rice, thyme, basil, broth and 1/2 tsp salt in a medium saucepan. Bring to a boil and cover, then reduce the heat and simmer for about 40 minutes. Preheat the oven to

350° F / 175° C.

Slice mushrooms or cut smaller mushrooms in half. Melt butter in a separate large stove top casserole dish. Saute the onion until golden. Add mushrooms and saute until lightly browned. Add salt and pepper to taste. Add the rice mixture and any remaining broth to the casserole dish, cover and bake for 15 to 20 minutes. Before serving, sprinkle parsley on top to garnish.

Blueberry Pie

1 10-inch Pie

Ingredients:

1/2 cup sugar
1/4 tsp ground cinnamon
1 tbsp all-purpose flour
Unbaked Canadian Pastry (see below)
pinch of salt
2 cups fresh or frozen blueberries
1 1/2 tsp lemon juice
1 tbsp butter

Directions:

Preheat oven to 400° F / 205° C. Combine sugar, cinnamon, salt and flour in a small bowl. Lightly butter or oil the bottom of a pie pan, lay a pie crust on the bottom and sprinkle half the sugar mixture over the bottom pie crust. Fill the crust with blueberries and sprinkle the remaining sugar mixture over them. Sprinkle the pie with lemon juice and dot with butter. Cover with the top crust and bake for 30 minutes.

Canadian Pastry

1 Double Crust 10-inch Pastry

3 cups all-purpose flour
pinch of salt

1/2 cup plus 2 tbsp chilled butter

5 to 7 tbsp cold water

1 egg yolk, beaten

Directions:

In a medium bowl, sift flour and salt. Cut butter and add to bowl. Use pastry blender or fork to cut butter into small pieces until the mixture resembles coarse corn meal. Using a fork, slowly stir in water to form dough. Wrap dough in plastic wrap and refrigerate 15 to 30 minutes.

Tear the dough in half and roll out each half into a thin pastry. Use one to fill a 10-inch pie pan and the other to cover your filling. Before baking, brush the top pastry with egg yolk.

Sweet Potato Poutine

(from Norecipes.com)

This popular fast food dish from Canada is also often eaten during Thanksgiving.

2 large yams or sweet potatoes

2 tbsp canola oil (don't use olive oil)

1/4 lb cheese curds

Gravy:

2 tbsp butter

1 small shallot, minced

1 tbsp flour

1/2 cup chicken or vegetable stock

1 tbsp port wine

1 tsp demi-glace (or other dark gravy, or use Kitchen Bouquet® for a vegetarian substitute)

1/4 tsp chopped fresh thyme

Directions:

Place oven rack in middle position and preheat over to 450° F.

Peel potatoes and cut into 1/4" wedges. Toss in canola oil to coat. Sprinkle with sea salt and lay on a baking sheet in a single layer. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes or until golden brown.

Meanwhile, make the gravy. Over medium heat, add butter to a small saucepan and then add in shallots and saute until soft. Add the flour and stir to coat. Then whisk in the chicken stock and port.

When the gravy begins to thicken, turn the heat down to medium low and add the demi-glace and thyme, stirring with a spatula to dissolve. Cook until the demi-glace is completely dissolved and the gravy is smooth.

To serve, pile up the potatoes on a plate and crumble the cheese curds on top. Pour the gravy over all of it and garnish with minced parsley.

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environment

A ROCHA

*Christian sustainability, restoration and
conservation across the globe.*

by Caillin Henson

"A Rocha USA is engaged in biodiversity conservation worldwide through practical, community-based actions, scientific studies and environmental education. Two of today's major challenges are the worldwide decline of vulnerable species and habitats, and the perceived lack of participation by Christian groups in these issues. A Rocha USA is engaged in actions to meet both of these challenges. A Rocha invests its efforts in local communities, engaging in conservation that benefits both the species and the people who live there, often through effective partnerships with other organizations, and in cross-cultural situations. A Rocha also explains how biblical faith naturally flows into relevant, practical and effective care for all of creation." - A Rocha

Portuguese for "the Rock", A Rocha is a nonprofit Christian nature conservation organization whose reach extends to many areas across the globe, including Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Ghana, India, Kenya, Lebanon, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Peru, Portugal, South Africa, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. They bring not only the love and knowledge of God, but education in conservation to communities around the world. It started as a bird observatory and field study center in Portugal in 1983, A Rocha has become a global group of passionate people desiring to see the natural world preserved and sustainability achieved. Mobilizing the cooperation and strength of the international Christian

community, A Rocha is focused on cross-cultural and community building, bringing together people from all walks of life to join in global efforts of conservation and caring for God's green earth.

Director Peter Harris wrote in the October 2003 edition of *A Rocha International News*, "We describe A Rocha as a CHRISTIAN charity, committed to CONSERVATION, to CAMPAIGNING for the care of God's world, to drawing on the CROSS-CULTURAL strength of the world-wide church, and to each project having a distinctive COMMUNITY emphasis. The yeast in the bread of this Christian conservation movement was the commitment to being a cross-cultural organization, and it is this commitment, more than any other, that has caused A Rocha to grow so fast, and if we can be allowed to say so, to take such unique and innovative directions."

A Rocha provides ecological advice and education that increases environmental awareness and can even help fuel eco-tourism for local communities. Each location of involvement has resident teams working to undo biodiversity loss and reverse the decline of the natural habitat. Not only are their programs rooted in faith, they are also rooted in science. According to their website,

they believe that "good stewardship of God's world requires an adequate understanding of organisms, their interrelationships and environments. A Rocha's scientific programs aim to provide the foundation needed for informed protection and management of examples of the world's most precious natural areas."

In addition to being well-researched, A Rocha takes into account the communities they are involved

in. To maintain ecosystems, it's important to maintain the relationships God values; to nurture the connection of God's love and care of the environment to the love and care of His people. Education is a top priority at A Rocha, and the organization aims to do so through summer camps for kids, training for science teachers and passing on knowledge of environmental conservation.

Director Miranda Harris says on their website, "Many of us agree that we already have a relationship with God, with each other and with the natural world. Part of A Rocha's task, whatever our various starting points, is to work together towards making these relationships reflect more clearly God's love for all creation, human and non-human."

Find out more at www.arocha.org 

A Rocha provides ecological advice and education that increases environmental awareness and can even help fuel eco-tourism for local communities.



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—Colossians 2:2-3

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Sensitivity Towards Alternative Medicine

We take a look at the pros and cons of alternative medicine and what it means for Christians with the help of Dónal O'Mathúna and Walt Larrimore's book *Alternative Medicine: The Christian Handbook*.

by Leila Evangelista



w

When I was younger, I had chronic stomach pains. At one point, the pain lasted for a full week without subsiding, seesawing between a sharp or dull pain. After countless X-rays and tests, doctors could only agree on one diagnosis: inconclusive results. The body is an amazing piece of work, functioning with complexity and beauty, but also mystery. These abdominal pains were a mystery. My parents tried everything—flat soda, tea, hot compresses, Pepto-Bismol, prescription medicines, strange medicinal green cocktails—but nothing worked. One day, my parents decided to take me to the home of a traditional Filipino healer, a hilot. I don't remember much, except that she massaged my stomach with strong smelling, heated oils as she silently prayed, although I wasn't sure exactly what she was saying. I'd been to her home before when I sprained my ankle and again when I sprained my arm. Both visits seemed to alleviate the pains in my joints, but with my stomach, both modern and alternative medicine seemed to fail me. To my surprise, the pain simply went as mysteriously as it came, although my stomach was never the same after that. However, my experience is an example of the effectiveness of alternative medicine, and modern medicine for that matter. Oprah Winfrey frequently highlights alternative treatments on her popular talk show. People all over the world flock to specific locations, from Mount Shasta, California, to Lourdes, France because of the believed presence of mystical or spiritual energy concentrated in these locations.

As the field of medicine continues to evolve, alternative treatments have increasingly become more integrated with modern medicine. Alternative medicine, also referred to as complementary medicine, is a term used in the Western world to encompass a broad range of medical methods and therapies that are outside the practice of modern medicine. Examples include folk medicine, acupuncture, homeopathic remedies, and shaman healing. The term "alternative medicine" is a misleading one, considering much of medicine has been derived from traditional treatments that withstood the test of time, prior to the advent of modern medicine. In other places, alternative treatments are considered to be the norm, while modern medicine is largely mistrusted. These treatments provide a healthy counterpoint against Western medicine, since neither is the final authority for all ailments. Tempering an over-reliance on drugs and high-tech medicines, alternative treatments emphasize stress reduction and a healthy lifestyle which complement modern medical treatments. At the end of the day, most people view medicine as simply good or bad, not modern or alternative. People subscribe to what works.

Despite the growing acceptance of alternative methods, there is still a stigma of quackery in the minds of many skeptics, one that is not entirely unwarranted. There are some treatments backed only by anecdotal evidence or word-of-mouth

confirmations supporting their claims. Rigorous scientific studies have not been done, and some treatments are actually unable to be tested due to the nature of the claims. For example, how could one scientifically test the effectiveness of holy water as a medicinal treatment? Further complicating the situation, many countries that sell herbal remedies have very few regulations. It is possible that the supposed remedies are packaged with missing ingredients, contain added contaminants, or have variations of active ingredients. While many products are advertised to be “all-natural,” this does not necessarily mean that they are beneficial.

Opinions towards alternative medicines within the Christian community can vary greatly. On the one hand, Christian radio stations advertise remedies and nutritional supplements much like secular stations do. “Christian” alternative therapies exist, such as a recipe for manna which claims to protect people from illness, like it protected Israelites in the wilderness. Some proponents of alternative medicine assert that Christ is more like a traditional healer, than a modern medicine man. On the other end of the spectrum, some believe Christianity and alternative medicine to be diametrically opposed to one another. Treatments that either directly involve spiritual and mystical healing, or have origins rooted in them, are viewed with suspicion and caution. To help clear any confusion, several resources about Christianity and alternative medicine have emerged. One example is Dónal O’Mathúna and Walt Larimore’s book *Alternative Medicine: The Christian Handbook* (Zondervan, 2007). The authors, who are also doctors, have collected anecdotal and scientific evidence to break down the claims of various alternative medicines. In addition to taking care of the scientific legwork, they have also analyzed the involvement of mystical properties within different treatments to determine whether they could create tension with the Bible’s teachings. The book covers everything from ginkgo biloba to Tai Chi to Christian prayer. O’Mathúna and Larimore are not the final authorities, but have put together a comprehensive review of the peaks and valleys of alternative medicine.

As Christians, how do we appropriately explore alternative medicine? It is important to take the necessary effort to investigate the treatments we expose our bodies—and our spirits—to. The Bible makes several warnings against the practices of sorcery and divination, such as in Leviticus 20:6: “I will set my face against the person who turns to mediums and spiritists to prostitute himself by following them.” We must evaluate our health care options with an honest heart that is open for discussion. Alternative treatments may be things that we have done for years, things that comfort us and relieve our pain, and have not shown any outward signs of hurting our relationship with God. However, the possibility of involving ourselves in occult practices must also be addressed through sincere investigation, prayer, and discernment. But we also don’t want to be popping modern painkillers without thinking twice, abusing over-the-counter medicines or taking common supplements without the

equally important investigation, prayer and discernment of modern medicine. Here we explore alternative medicine more specifically.

To start off, when dealing with alternative medicine practices, here are some questions to ask.

1. What is the history and philosophy behind the treatment?

Look through literature to check on the history of the treatment and whether it is drawn from mystical or occult concepts. This does not necessarily mean it plays a role in the practice of the treatment, but it is good to know the origins for your own understanding. For example, the practice of Ayurvedic medicine developed with a strong influence of Buddhism and mythology.

2. How is the effect of a method or a remedy explained?


There are usually several explanations of why a remedy works. If the explanation is purely based on a magical or mystical model, further discernment of the method or remedy is suggested.

3. What is the scientific evidence in favor of the method?

This is not intended to place all value in scientific validation, but scientifically proven effectiveness can be used to protect consumers, since alternative medicines and therapies are often not regulated by a larger system.

4. Does the method have elements of New Age concepts, practices or rituals?

This is an important question after evaluating the other questions. When getting a massage, is it to relax the muscles, or is it to transfer mystical energy? Is part of the method opening yourself to energy that will heal you? If the answer to either of these questions is yes, then it is recommended to approach the treatment with caution.

Many defend their practices, even if there are elements of the occult or mysticism present. Common explanations are that their practices are modified versions of the original, in which they meditate on God; or that it is God who heals, even if the practice does not inherently recognize the actions to be God. These are certainly possibilities, as we cannot put limits on the extension of someone’s relationship with God, nor can we doubt the work of God in the least expected circumstances. But we also must consider whether or not we are trying to justify our actions simply to continue with a treatment we believe to work. Since we cannot judge what God has affirmed to individuals, we must personally seek God’s affirmation and truth, as well as accept His rebuke. 

Some popular practices highlighted in “Alternative Medicine: A Christian Handbook” show you some examples of how Mathúna and Larimore break down their analysis of different alternative medicine practices.

YOGA

What is it?

A system of physical and mental exercises originating in India.

Benefits

Proven to help with flexibility and physical fitness, stress reduction, chronic pain, and asthma relief

Cautions

Some reports of physical and spiritual harm. Yoga terms carry religious meanings, some paying homage to Hindu gods. Many Christians who practice yoga go through the movements, but do not get involved in the spiritual side of the practice.

REIKI

What is it?

Based on an idea that a “life force energy” flows through people, reiki is a Japanese technique for relaxation and stress reduction that is administered through touch.

Benefits

Proper studies have not been able to clearly prove purported advantages, and anecdotal evidence is mixed.

Cautions

Communication with spirits is an integral part of the practice.

ACUPUNCTURE

What is it?

An ancient Chinese practice of inserting fine needles into specific points on the body, typically for pain relief.

Benefits

Can be used to treat nausea and vomiting, relieve dental pain, headaches, and chronic back pain.

Cautions

Verify the therapist has adequate training. There are some that may call on spiritual powers, but these practitioners may be avoided by performing a thorough background check.

God in focus. World in scope.

new identity

MAGAZINE

Winter 2008/09

PREMIER
ISSUE

Art To Glorify

How artists reveal their faith through works

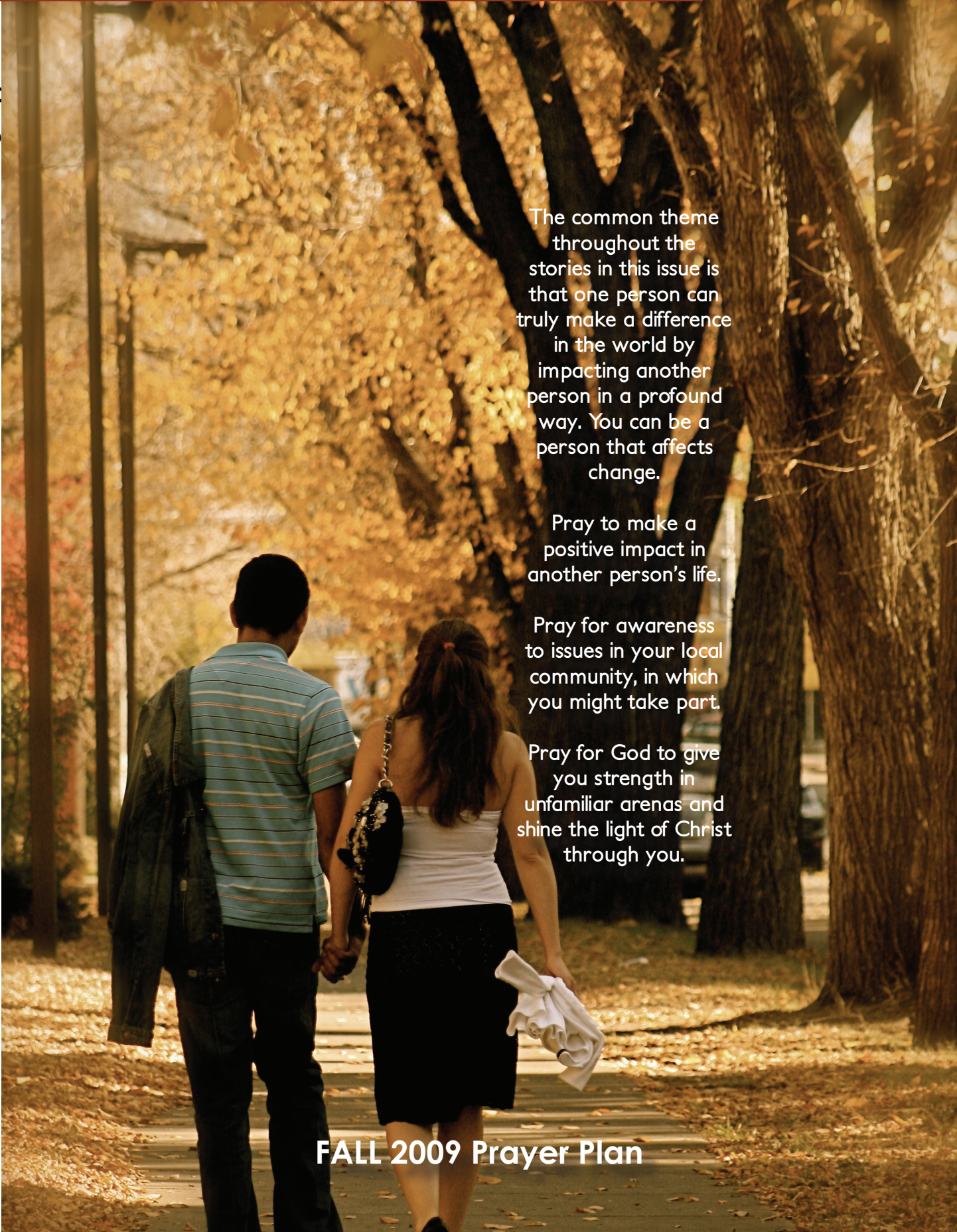


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BRINGING GOD INTO THE NIGHT CLUBS OF SPAIN
REDEEMING THE HEART OF HIP HOP
EARTHBOUND: STEWARDSHIP OF THE PLANET



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A photograph of a man and a woman walking away from the camera down a paved path. The man is on the left, wearing a blue and white striped polo shirt and dark pants, with a jacket slung over his shoulder. The woman is on the right, wearing a white tank top and a black skirt, carrying a black bag and holding a white cloth. They are surrounded by large trees with vibrant yellow and orange autumn leaves. The ground is covered in fallen leaves.

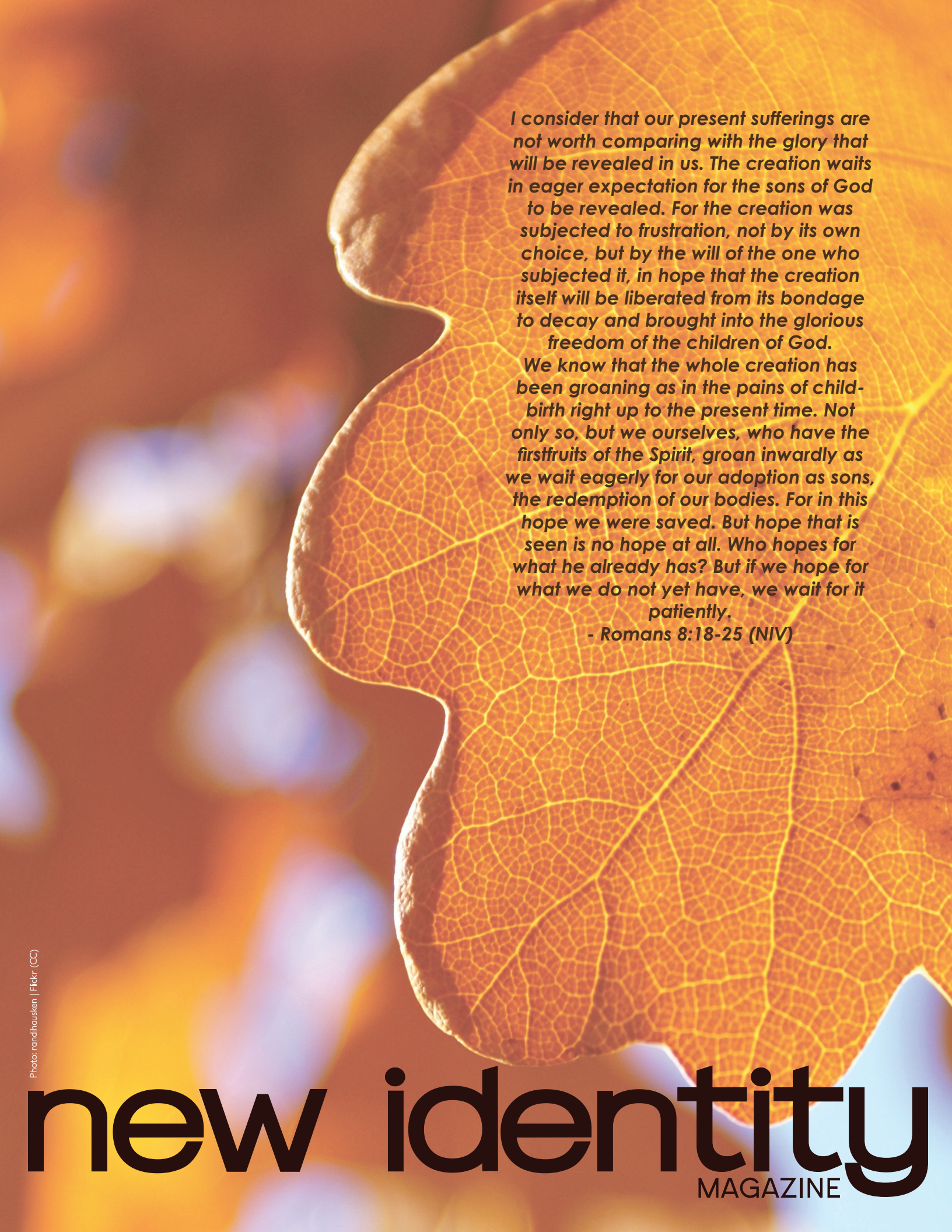
The common theme throughout the stories in this issue is that one person can truly make a difference in the world by impacting another person in a profound way. You can be a person that affects change.

Pray to make a positive impact in another person's life.

Pray for awareness to issues in your local community, in which you might take part.

Pray for God to give you strength in unfamiliar arenas and shine the light of Christ through you.

FALL 2009 Prayer Plan



I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

- Romans 8:18-25 (NIV)