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Covenant and Laws



Trekking through Scripture, we encounter *covenant* as the central element in biblical religion, the category by which God describes association with His people. The word means something near the modern phrase “personal relationship with the Lord.”

Many covenants, or covenant renewals, dot Scripture: those with Adam and Eve, with Noah, two with Abraham, a big one by Moses, one with David, and the ultimate covenant that came through Christ. Stressing the differences, some students chart a system of seven covenants from Creation through the church era, calling it *dispensationalism*. Claiming to rightly divide the word of truth, it often fragments the Scripture and polarizes its major truths instead.

Less problematic is to grasp the inherent unity among Bible covenants, all given by the God who changes not. Each of them celebrates some great provision or deliverance; each enjoins faithful obedience upon God’s people as the proper response to His call, His mercy, His grace.

In nearly every covenant, God states His standards for those who enter covenant relationship with Him. These regulations are most common in the Mosaic, or Sinaitic, covenant – often called the Law. The Decalogue (Exodus 20), the book of the covenant (20–24), ceremonial laws (Exodus 25–Leviticus), and covenant renewal (Deuteronomy) are all parts of the Law.

As God renews His covenant and updates its provisions from time to time, we discover difference in detail but constancy in concept. In every era God’s people are those who respond by faith to His grace, then submit to His laws in a spirit of loving obedience. Details may change, but the broad strokes of salvation, service, and virtue do not.

Subordinate to covenants, laws accomplish three things, according to the New Testament: 1) They teach us basics of human conduct, something like a child’s ABC’s; 2) They reveal our sin and point us to Jesus for forgiveness and salvation; and 3) They serve as guardrails, protecting us from the dangers and drop-offs along life’s journey.

Covenant is the legal term for this link God’s people have with Him. It is the connection fashioned and offered by our Creator to express His loving-kindness and generous intent toward us. Though most covenants incorporate laws, the covenant is broader, deeper, and longer than any single law-code in Scripture. Let us embrace the loving relation of God’s covenant and not deny His laws.

– Calvin Burrell

TABERNACLE AND CREATION

Making sense of the Levitical system. by Jason Overman

Raise your hand if Leviticus is your favorite book in the Bible. . . . *Anyone?*

My friend Betty once told me that she had decided to read the Bible from cover to cover. A few months later I asked her how she was doing, and she confessed with some frustration that her project had been derailed. What happened? Well, Leviticus happened.

Many succumb to the minutia of Leviticus. Its detail of priestly ritual, service, and sacrifice overwhelms even the best intentioned. So hard to read, much less understand. What hope is there of applying it to our lives?

While we may be tempted to just skip this part of the Bible, we are encouraged to live “by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4). Since the phrase “and the LORD spoke” appears dozens of times in Leviticus, perhaps it is a word worth hearing in the church today.

Holy and priestly

Among the kingdoms and nations of the world, Israel was unique – “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6). What is condensed here in a phrase, Leviticus unpacks in twenty-seven chapters. *Priests* and *holy*, appearing nearly four hundred times, are its heart and soul. The role of priesthood and the nature of holiness is what Leviticus is all about.

Israel must be a holy priesthood because her holy God has declared that He would set His tabernacle among His chosen people and walk among them (Leviticus 26:11, 12). The Creator of the universe desires to live with His people, to restore the intimacy of Eden, to walk among us as He did then. But in a sinful world, only a holy people can receive such a God into their midst and mediate this awesome Presence to the world. “You shall be holy; for I am holy” (11:44) simply names the basic condition of having God as a neighbor.

The key to understanding Leviticus is to recognize that it articulates a vision of life restored to its original order and purpose. As the fourth commandment shows, Israel is familiar with the story of Creation. She celebrates it even as she imitates her Creator by living in accordance with His seven-day rhythm of work and rest. The holiness she pursues is first mentioned and bound up in the beauty and harmony of that lost but longed-for world of Creation and Sabbath (Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Exodus 20:8-11). Leviticus points the way back.

The story of the tabernacle and its priesthood, from construction to function, is divinely directed in two great movements. From Sinai, God summons and Israel builds (Exodus 25–40). Later, from the sanctuary, God calls again and Israel worships (Leviticus 1–27). The patterns and themes of Creation inform it all.



Holy construction

In *The Torah's Vision of Worship*, Samuel Balentine notes the many parallels between the tabernacle and Creation. God calls Moses up the mount; he waits six days, and God speaks the seventh (Exodus 24:16; Genesis 1:1, 2; 3). Then seven speeches outline the construction of the tabernacle, each beginning with the formula "And the LORD said to Moses" (Exodus 25:1; 30:11; 17, 22, 34; 31:1, 12; see also Genesis 1:3–2:3). And the seventh speech ends with a dialogue on the Sabbath (Exodus 31:12-17; Genesis 2:1-3).¹

The Spirit of God that commenced Creation moves again as Israel responds to God's direction (Genesis 1:2; Exodus 35:31). The "Let there be . . . and it was so" of Genesis is paralleled as the tabernacle is raised in seven stages, each ending with the phrase "as the LORD had commanded him [Moses]" (Exodus 40:19-32). The whole process concludes as Moses looks over all the work and blesses

it, just as God did in the beginning (Exodus 40:33; 39:32, 43; Genesis 1:31–2:4).²

Also, this three-tiered tabernacle (most holy, holy, and outer court) is a miniature cosmos (heaven, earth, and seas) that symbolically reenacts Creation itself.

Concerning such patterns, Terence Fretheim writes that with the tabernacle "a new creation comes into being." Here "is one spot in the midst of a world of disorder where God's creative, ordering work is completed according to the divine intention just as it was in the beginning."³

Holy worship

With the tabernacle complete, Leviticus turns from construction to function, outlining both the worship and ethics of a holy people who would sustain this new creation. It begins "Now the LORD called to Moses . . . Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When any one of you brings an offering to the LORD,

you shall bring your offering of the livestock . . .'" (Leviticus 1:1, 2). The first time the Lord called was after Adam sinned (Genesis 3:9). Now God calls, not to judge but to invite to worship. The "any one" cited here is the Hebrew word *'adam*, and the vehicle of worship is an offering — literally, a gift of food.

The first Adam distorted creation by selfishly taking and eating, but these *'adams* are invited to ritually reenact and reverse that sad event by selflessly giving, not eating. Since food corresponds to life, these gifts represent the givers' total and thankful dedication to God. This commitment is symbolized by the shedding of blood, for "the life . . . is in the blood." When freely presented, these unblemished lives are a "sweet aroma" to the Lord (Leviticus 17:11; 1:3-9).

Five offerings outline Israel's sacrificial worship: burnt, grain, peace, sin, and guilt. The first three are voluntary and express joy, thanksgiving, and fellowship; they ritually *sustain* communion



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between creation and Creator. The last two offerings are required and address sin, atonement, and forgiveness; they ritually *restore* communion between creation and Creator. Together, these sacrifices specify the worship necessary to participate in the life of God. Only sacrificial lives can uphold and advance this new creation.

Again, patterns of seven emerge frequently in priestly ritual. The entire sacrificial system unfolds in seven speeches (Leviticus 1–7). The ritual for animal sacrifice calls for seven acts (1:3-9). Priestly ordination follows seven steps over seven days (8:1-36). Blood is sprinkled

seven times to effect atonement and purification (4:6; 16:14). And Israel’s sacred and agricultural calendars contain cycles of seven festivals (two of them seven days long) and seven holy convocations over seven months (23:1-44; ch. 25).

Reflecting on the overall message of the tabernacle and its priesthood, Balentine writes:

. . . the Torah conceives the community of faith as empowered to create a ritual world of space, time, and status that mirrors God’s cosmic designs. . . . It is not just that the tabernacle and its rituals correspond to God’s created order. The Torah also understands Israel’s ritual world to

have the capacity to sustain and, if necessary, to restore God’s design for creation.⁴

Holy living

Beyond its ritual world (Leviticus 1–16), the priesthood also promotes an ethical world (17–27). The great command “you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (19:18) is a familiar example and a good summary of the priesthood’s unrelenting commitment to pursuing justice and mercy in the community of faith. The Ten Commandments are all reiterated in chapter 19 as well.

A central duty of the priesthood is teaching Israel how to “distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean” (10:10). Dividing and separating — establishing boundaries — is characteristic of Creator and creation (Genesis 1). Israel is called to discern and honor divine distinctions in every aspect of life. The theological rationale for this holiness is simply expressed in the words “for I am the LORD” (over forty-five times between chapters 11 and 27).

The words *holy* and *unclean* are polar opposites. Uncleanliness signifies anything that contradicts God’s holy nature. It comprehends both physical and moral conditions that reflect disorder or defilement of His original creation. For instance, a man with leprosy (13:3) and a man who has committed adultery (18:20) are both unclean (defiled) but for obviously different reasons: One is the victim of sickness, the other has willfully sinned.

Physical uncleanliness (chapters 11-15) relates to issues of disease, suffering, and death. These

distortions of Eden's intentions — evidence of the curse — are to be diagnosed and handled with caution. Moral uncleanness (18–20), relating to issues of deviant sexuality and worship, is much more serious. It is to be abhorred and fully rejected.

Whether sin or sickness, the priesthood is concerned to confront and contain anything that would trespass divine boundaries of creational order. While sickness and sin are addressed in different ways, they are fundamentally connected, both attesting to the fallen human condition. While sin is always condemned in a way that sickness is not, the priesthood and its ritual world seeks to remedy both, when possible, through atonement (chs. 5 and 16).

Christ and Christian

We cannot truly appreciate the life and work of Jesus or the church He created without recourse to the patterns and language of Leviticus. Every aspect of our journey through the tabernacle and its priesthood is taken up in His life. The New Testament is emphatic: Jesus embodies the ritual and ethical worlds that Leviticus discloses. The Word spoken so often there is made flesh in Christ, and that Word shapes the church:

- Jesus is the holy high priest and the tabernacle of God among men (Hebrews 7:26; John 1:14; 2:21), and His people are a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, called with Israel to “Be holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 2:9; 1:16).

- Jesus is the Lord of creation and Sabbath who worked and finished to restore the world to

We cannot truly appreciate the life and work of Jesus or the church He created without recourse to the patterns and language of Leviticus.

its intended glory (Colossians 1:16-20; Mark 2:28; John 5:17; 19:30; Galatians 6:15), and the Spirit of God is building us into a holy tabernacle that reflects this new creation to all (1 Corinthians 3:17; Ephesians 2:19-22).


- Jesus is the last Adam, the unblemished lamb, an offering of sweet aroma, the atonement and sacrifice for sin, the sprinkled blood (1 Corinthians 15:45; 1 Peter 1:19; Ephesians 5:2; Romans 5:6-11; Hebrews 10:10-22). In Him we become a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices, with bodies willingly presented as holy sacrifices (1 Peter 2:5; Romans 12:1).

- Jesus is the teacher who directs us to love the neighbor, to discern the holy from the unclean (Matthew 5–7; 23:23; Galatians 5:14; 1 Thessalonians 4:7). We share the good news of Him who reconciles sick and sinner alike, for in Christ the leper is cleansed and the adulterer is forgiven (Mark 2:17; Luke 5:12-24; John 8:4-11).

It is a long way from Leviticus to Christ, but perhaps not so far as we have thought. As we make the journey back, traversing the foreign landscape, we find that Jesus has preceded us. He has been there all along, speaking,

creating, and leading us back, and on, to Eden.

My friend Betty, 51, just died of cancer. I don't know if she ever finished Leviticus, but I do know that she embodied its hope. Despite her sin and sickness, she never failed to believe that her life was redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, that a new creation awaited her, and that her faithful high priest would present her holy and blameless before God her maker on that final day (Colossians 1:19-22).

Yes, in Jesus Christ, the ancient priesthood is everlasting after all! 

References

1. Samuel E. Balentine, *The Torah's Vision of Worship*, p. 138
2. *Ibid.*, p. 139
3. Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, p. 271
4. Balentine, p. 64

Jason Overman serves the congregation in Jasper, AR.



Questions & Answers

Q In the final judgment, why are we judged by our works?

A This question introduces the issue of biblical paradox. It occurs when two sides of an issue both present spiritual truth, yet appear to contradict each other.

The New Testament gospel (not essentially different from the Old Testament gospel) declares that salvation and eternal life come only by God's grace in Jesus Christ and are received in human experience by the response of faith — not by our good deeds, obedience, or efforts to be a "good person." Fully illuminated in Romans and Galatians, this is taught in essence from Genesis to Revelation. Because it is true, we have great hope in Christ and much gratitude to God.

Justification by grace through faith is a core Bible truth, but not the whole gospel. In many places (Matt. 16:27; Rom. 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Peter 1:17; Rev. 20:12; 22:12, for example) the Bible also says we must appear in divine judgment to receive according to our works — rewards to those who do well and punishment for those who do evil. Because the doctrine of judgment by works is also true, we are further motivated to live in loving obedience to God and sacrificial service to others. This will be to our everlasting benefit!

Your question implies that you accept the truth of justification by faith without works. The truth of judgment by works doesn't seem to fit with the former truth, so you ask why to the latter. The Bible suggests a few reasons that Christians saved by grace through faith will be judged according to their works:

1. Because justification by faith is not without effect. We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone. If there are no good works to accompany our profession of faith, we should

ask ourselves, *Have I really believed?* Tell what you truly believe, and you say a lot about your lifestyle. Biblical faith is powerful stuff; it changes us! We are not saved by faith *and* works but by a faith *that* works. If good is absent, faith is dead (James 2:14-26).

2. Because there is a difference between inheritance and reward. Since we are born into God's family by the Holy Spirit and inheritance is passed freely from parents, then we inherit eternal life simply by being His beloved children. Rewards, on the other hand, come from conduct, not inheritance. The future accounting of our works may be used to determine what roles, responsibilities, and even rewards are given to God's redeemed children in eternity. We do not clearly understand how this will work, but the principle is established in Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 12:47, 48; and 1 Corinthians 3:10-15.

3. Because the effectual working of God's grace in believers must eventually be acknowledged by everyone. The final judgment by works will demonstrate God's righteousness, showing that He was both loving and holy in justifying the ungodly.

If the final judgment could reveal the opposite — that redeemed souls persist in all the iniquities of unbelievers — then we could say that God's plan had failed by putting no difference between good and evil. But there *is* a difference, and it will be shown in the light of judgment. Then the whole universe will see the loving holiness of God on display in His saints — those who were justified by faith in Christ (Rom. 8:19; Eph. 2:7; Phil. 2:11). Then, and only then, will every knee bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father!

— Elders Calvin Burrell and Melvin Sweet

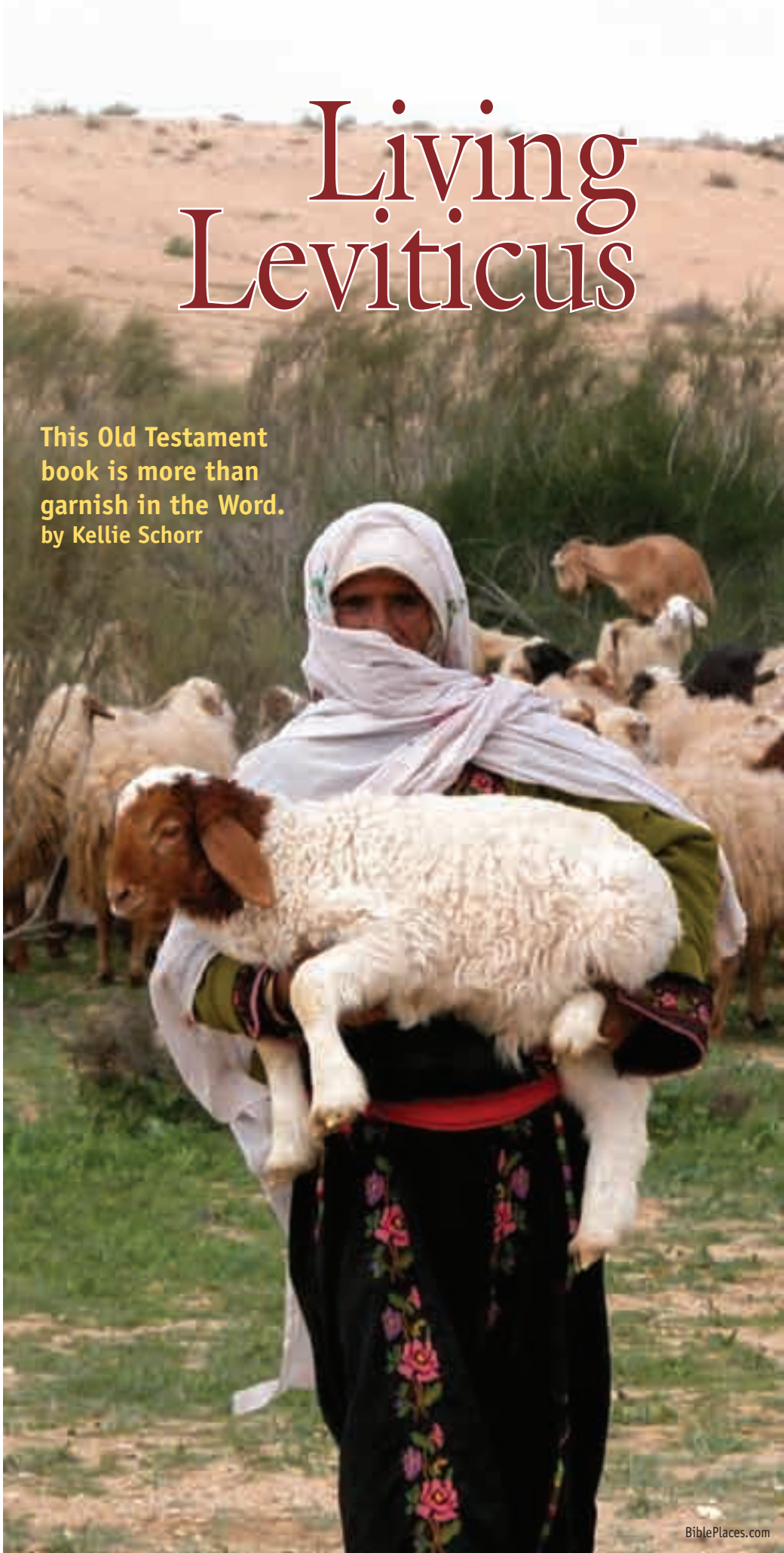
Like many life-long preachers, Pastor Duane had certain favorite phrases and would repeat them frequently with the same enthusiasm as if it were the first time the words had ever been spoken. Leading me to a relationship with Christ, he said, "There's not a hair on your head that God doesn't know about and not a word in the Bible that God doesn't mean."

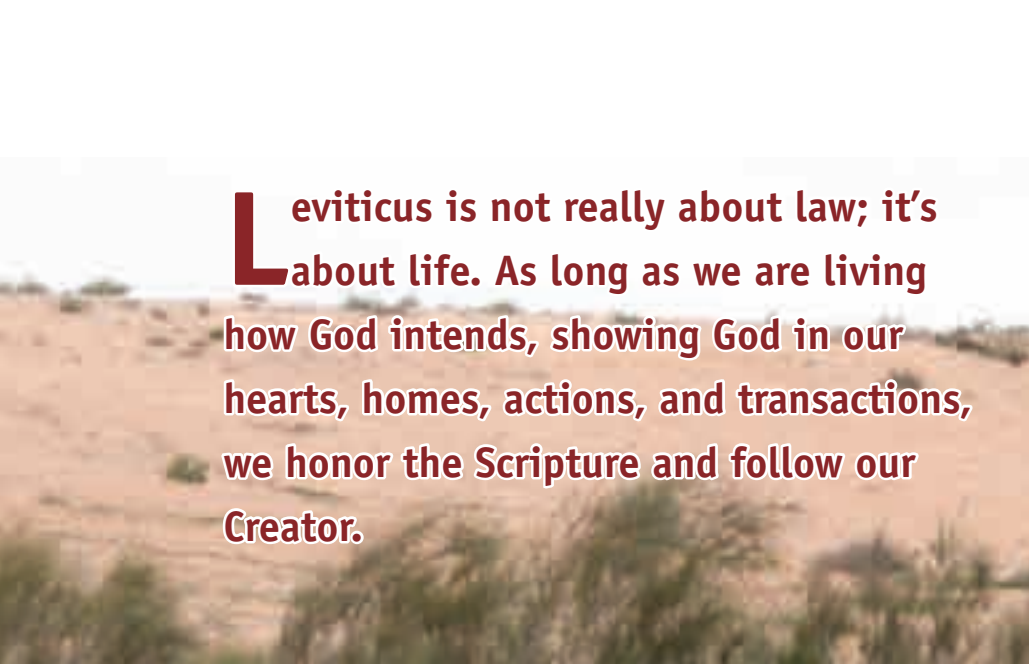
That expression comforted me deeply on the path of my salvation but troubled me greatly when I began to walk that journey with my Bible in hand. It brought out the question all people of faith ask at some point: If the Bible is the Word of God for us to follow, then what do we do with Leviticus?

We see it, we learn it, and we know how to pronounce it, but we never consider living it. We routinely pass Leviticus by like parsley on a gourmet dish. Pretty to look at, but not to eat. Most Christians don't follow the kosher dietary laws of Leviticus 11, nor do we offer up doves, grain, or sheep when we are guilty. Leviticus 13 is full of laws about mildew, but how many of us really call our pastor to examine our belongings to see if our moldy gym socks should be washed or burned? Leviticus 19:19 warns us not to wear clothing made of two kinds of material. Then what are we doing with poly-cotton blended shirts on our backs? Should Wal-Mart offer up some doves just for selling them to us? Laws about shellfish, haircutting, and that one week a month when everything a woman touches is unclean go without regard in modern Christian life. It's understandable, but is it OK?

Living Leviticus

This Old Testament book is more than garnish in the Word.
by Kellie Schorr





Leviticus is not really about law; it's about life. As long as we are living how God intends, showing God in our hearts, homes, actions, and transactions, we honor the Scripture and follow our Creator.

Wrong responses

I've heard many answers to that question — all unsatisfactory. "That's the Old Testament, and we are a New Testament people" is the most common. However, committing to the Ten Commandments, understanding Adam and Eve's sin, and honoring the Messianic prophecies of Isaiah reflect that the Old Testament is the root of our tree and meant to be retained, not disputed. We know in our hearts the whole Bible was meant for us, and should avoid an answer of mere convenience.

"Jesus fulfilled those laws so we don't have to" is another popular answer. However, all people growing in grace must understand that Christian living isn't only about what Jesus did; it's about what we do too. This is an answer that satisfies, but it sounds as unlikely as credit companies practicing the Levitical year of Jubilee (ch. 25) and wiping out all our debt (wouldn't that be nice!).

What should we do with Leviticus? Live its meaning day by day.

Original message

In scriptural study it's helpful to understand every Bible passage has two writers and two readers. One writer is the person or people who wrote the text, and one reader is the person or people to whom it was written. The other writer is, of course, God. And the other reader? You. When you read a passage, you should ask two questions: "What is the writer (Moses) telling the reader (the people of Israel)?" and "What is God telling me?" Sometimes the answer to both questions will be the same, and sometimes it won't.

Leviticus is a book of religious tenets written to the first monotheistic culture. Its laws and rules were designed to keep the people who were carrying the truth of the one God alive and distinguish them from polytheistic cults that practiced human sacrifice and blood rituals. Kosher laws, with their requirements of cooking food and abstaining from blood and fat, are healthy and a great way to sustain a culture.


The laws about meat being cooked were novel at that time and, as we know now, certainly

more hygienic. Other laws about clothing, rituals (such as hand-washing), and behavior distinguished the Israelites from other religious climates in a way that spoke volumes about who God is and what God wants. The message to the people of Israel was "Live in such a way that people can see God through you."

Modern message

Now that we see what Moses was telling Israel, what is God telling us? In this case, it's the same message. In our modern context, God is not telling us to consult our pastor every time we have a blemish on our skin or mildew in the bathtub, but God is repeating in our hearts the central truth "Live in such a way that people can see God through you." Let your faithfulness to God speak to others, by example, of the truth of the one God. Be clean in your habits and your thoughts. Show through your health, your legal transactions, and your relationships that loving God has made a difference in your life."

What we discover, adding both comfort and inspiration to the answer to our question, is that Leviticus is not really about law; it's about life. As long as we are living how God intends, showing God in our hearts, homes, actions, and transactions, we honor the Scripture and follow our Creator.

Leviticus is so much more than an old book; it is a new hope. Read it. Learn it. Live it in Christ — today. 

Kellie Schorr writes from Quinton, VA.

People often say, "You don't need to go to church to be a Christian." An ounce of truth is in this statement, but it is mixed with a pound of lie. The Scriptures say much to those who have the opportunity but fail to assemble with other Christians.

One of the strongest admonitions to be with fellow believers is in 1 Corinthians 12:20-22. Here Paul likens our individual roles in the church to those of body parts. Just as each part depends on the others, so each Christian depends on others in the body of Christ. The eye can't say to the hand, "I don't need you." If the eye can see a luscious watermelon, it's no good if there is no hand to prepare the fruit and bring it to the mouth. Even worse, what if there were no mouth?

The many believers who isolate themselves from fellow believers are like eyes without hands, mouths, teeth, stomachs, hearts, and — dare I say it — brains. Unattached body parts are vulnerable and don't last long. This is why all believers should seek out a healthy church body. Chances are they won't find one in perfect health, but perhaps the church near them is ailing partly because they are missing from it.

The Bible offers other serious admonitions to fellowship. John writes, "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death" (1 John 3:14). It's difficult to love someone if we spend little or no time with him. Therefore, we should be concerned about spending time with Christians and doing so reg-

Why Go to Church?

by David Kidd

ularly — more than once a week, if possible.

There are many other advantages of meeting regularly with fellow believers. Though praise and worship on our own can be pleasant, Psalm 133:1 says, "How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"

If we stop dwelling on our negative experiences with the church and remember the positive ones, we'll see that the heights of united praise and worship are often higher than what we do on our own.

Another important reason for fellowshiping with believers is to gain wisdom and balance. Isolated Christians tend to look out for themselves, to not help with the physical or spiritual needs of others, and to focus on their own doctrinal perspectives. They can go off on tangents and multiply biblical error. Proverbs 24:6 says, "In a multitude of counselors there is safety."

Think of Christians as soldiers in addition to body parts. What soldier goes to war on his own? Only a foolish one. If we were the only soldier against a great foe, we would avoid the battlefield, fearing defeat. With the support of other Christians, we are strengthened in our love and service of the Lord.

You might feel like the prophet Elijah, who pleaded:

"LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left" The divine response, however, was "I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace (Romans 11:3-5).

This is also true today. Therefore, I urge those who feel there is no church or anyone for them to fellowship with to not give up. Keep searching for believers you can grow and serve with. Then make allowance for differences in their understanding, because your own knowledge is likely to have some flaws as well.

Let all believers keep in mind what the author of Hebrews wrote:

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching (10:24, 25). ■■

David and Angela Kidd serve in leadership with the Adelaide church in South Australia.

WWJZ



What would Jesus do about the Torah story: ancient Abraham and his seed, Israel's exodus from Egypt, the old covenant at Sinai, and wilderness wanderings to the promised land?

Jesus was an Israelite of Judah's tribe. Raised in a devout home, He would early learn the Genesis accounts of Creation, Flood, and the patriarchs. Stories of Moses in Egypt, plagues and Passover, through the Red Sea to Canaan, were more than familiar to Him; they were life itself. This is implicit in a one-verse report of Jesus, ages 2-12 (Luke 2:40).

The report follows of twelve-year-old Jesus teaching and being taught in the temple. This incident encompasses the Jewish bar mitzvah — the coming-of-age event for a "son of the law," or Torah. By then Christ would be mastering central elements of

Hebrew faith: the *shema* (Deut. 6:4, 5), the Decalogue (Ex. 20:1-17), the Psalms, and others. His growth the next eighteen years is also summed in a single verse: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52).

Any young person who wholly embraces Christian faith today will find parallels with these doings of Jesus. Regardless of age, we may give ourselves to learning the foundations of our faith from the Hebrew Scriptures and putting their principles fully into practice. We may be sure that Jesus would do this, because that's exactly what He did!

Some concern may be raised about Christ's example in this because He, as a faithful Jew, would have observed details of the Torah no longer practiced by Christians. This problem is met in the Gospel record, as we read that Jesus the Messiah both anticipated and announced reforms to the faith of His fathers, and prepped His Jewish disciples for them (see "Jesus and Change").

Jesus' religious reforms were not like some suppose. They were not against the law or the prophets. They were not at variance with His Father — Abraham's God — or against

Moses. They did not require cancellation of Hebrew Scriptures.

In summary, Jesus' practice and teaching did not aim to change the Torah or Pentateuch, as much as to rescue the ancient faith of Abraham and Moses from Talmudic traditions that had accrued for over a millennium. The New Testament does not set Jesus against Moses but against the first century religion of Pharisee and Sadducee, which had become a distortion of the old covenant's spirit and intent (see "Jesus and Permanence").

Jesus and Change

- New commandments: "You have heard that it was said to those of old . . . but I say to you . . ." (Matt. 5:21, 27, 33, 38, 43; see also 28:20).
- New garments, new wine, new wineskins (Mark 2:21, 22); new bread (John 6); new nation (8:33-58); new way to treat sinners (vv. 1-12); new kingdom (18:36).
- Old passing away: the Jewish temple and city (Matt. 12:6; 23:37, 38; Luke 21:20-24)

Jesus and Permanence

- **Torah faith.** "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled" (Matt. 5:17, 18).
- **Mosaic scripture.** "If you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?" (John 5:46, 47).

P*ilgrim's Progress*, by John Bunyan, tells the journey of our faith through an allegory. At the start, Christian's burden (guilt) rolls off his back and disappears through a wicket. From then on Christian has many trials, like the Slough of Despond, and some blessings, like Delectable Mountains. Finally, he comes to the gates of the celestial city and enters his eternal home.

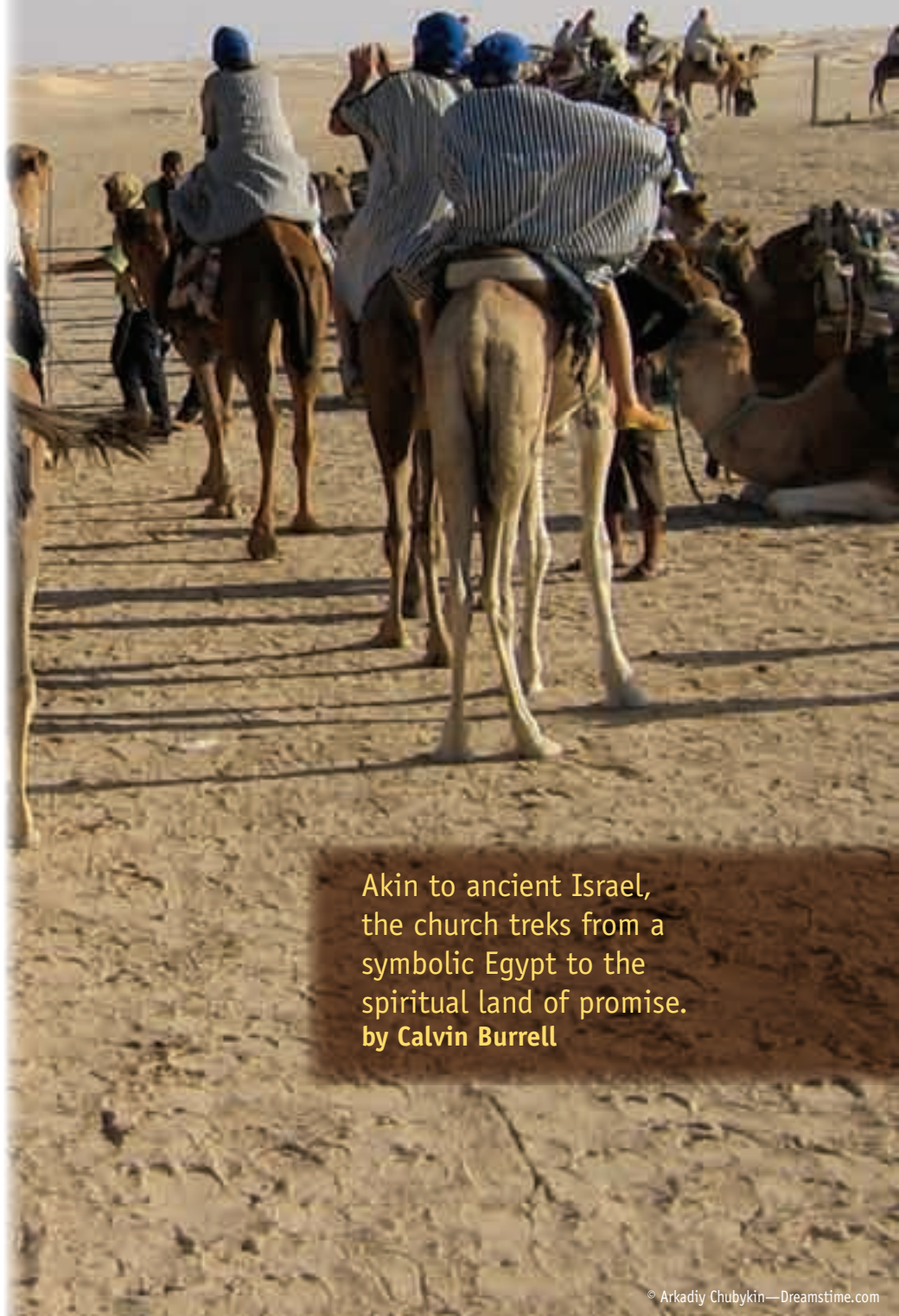
From Exodus through Numbers, the Bible walks us through a true story much like Bunyan's tale. This saga of the dramatic deliverance of ancient Israel and her adventure toward an ultimate goal becomes, in the New Scriptures, an extended parable of our pilgrimage with Jesus. Let's figure, if we can, our location on the old path Israel took out of Egypt, through the wilderness, and into Canaan.

The Israelites' flight from the land of the Nile, their forty-year desert trek, and their eventual arrival in the promised place is rich with allegorical data. Each event along that route can be compared with some facet of our Christian walk, though not all possible analogies match, as we shall see.

Moses and the Lamb

Early in Exodus the old story finds God's chosen people doing hard time in a foreign land: Egypt. Remembering His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Lord sends Moses back to Egypt with a message for the Pharaoh: "Let My people go!" After some painful persuasion — ten plagues and a watery grave for his army — Pharaoh relents and releases the newborn na-

Are We There Yet?



Akin to ancient Israel, the church treks from a symbolic Egypt to the spiritual land of promise.
by Calvin Burrell

Romans 8 describes Christian life in terms that echo Israel's progress from the Exodus (justification), to Mount Sinai (sanctification), and on through the desert (testing, suffering) toward the Promised Land (glorification).

vv. 1-3: In Christ, we are no longer condemned by sin; Israel was released from Egyptian bondage.

vv. 4-10: Because we were not subject to God's law in the flesh, we now obey it in the Spirit; Israel, reborn from Egypt, received God's law at Sinai.

vv. 18-31: Present difficulties are great, but greater glory is promised; through much toil and many tears, Israel went from Egypt to Canaan.

As Israel was rescued from Egypt before learning and obeying God's law, so it is with Christians. Through faith in Christ and the new birth of the Spirit, we leave the old world of sin and enter a new land where God's Word and will are revealed and where our greatest desire is to be His loyal subjects. God's law, beginning with the basic principles of the Decalogue, is now written upon Christian hearts as we walk toward the final goal.

— CAB

tion to begin her trip through the Sinai desert to the land God had promised, called Canaan.

Most Christians perceive that Egypt, in this story, represents the bondage of sin we were once held in as slaves to Satan. The sequel, we gladly confess, is that Christ has come to our sinful world; set us free by His life, death, and resurrection; and is leading us toward His kingdom. Jesus is our Moses!

Not only does Moses of old play a role like Christ of the new, so also do the lambs whose blood on the door keeps the death plague away from Hebrew homes. This means that God's people now face the prospect of eternal life, not death, *if* the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God, has been affixed to our hearts and lives. Christ is our Passover, too!

Further analogies rise from this central Old Testament story

of Exodus. In Israel's flight from Egypt through the divided sea, we distinguish a picture of our own repentance and water baptism — double confirmation of a true and living faith in Christ. Such deeper meanings of Israel's physical journey are not mere clever imagination; they reflect precisely how the New Testament sees the story. For the apostle Paul, Jesus is the true Passover lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7), and the Red Sea compares with baptism (10:1, 2). Paul knows the likenesses between the old story and the new: that God's chosen people (Israel) have been rescued from the world of sin (Egypt) and are being led to the land of promise (Canaan) — by Christ (Moses).

Law and grace

Let's follow the ancient allegory of Israel to see what it teaches next. From the Red Sea the He-

brews march to Mount Sinai and a momentous year of camping at its base. Here Jehovah speaks to the nation: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:2, 3). And the commandments continue aloud, until there are ten.

This sacred sequence of law following grace, of rescue before responsibility, meshes well with new covenant theology. Our faith journey begins with justification through Christ and continues with sanctification by the Spirit. First, sins are forgiven by the blood of the Lamb as we depart from "Egypt"; then, the way of obedience as law is written on our hearts — God's Word from the "holy mount." The author of Hebrews knew this progression well and recorded it twice for our learning without omitting either facet (Hebrews 8:8-12; 10:16, 17).

The Bible's truth of grace and law is learned by analogy in Israel's journey. Every earnest Christian has been redeemed from sin (Egypt) by the grace of Christ (the Passover lamb). Now we are called through baptism (Red Sea) to the place where the holy commandments are written upon our hearts (Mount Sinai). Is our trip like true Israel's, or are we on some self-guided tour?

Crisis of faith

Leaving Mount Sinai, the young nation heads toward Canaan and soon arrives at an oasis called Kadesh Barnea. From here, spies go ahead to scout the land of promise, and return with a glowing, ominous report: Canaan is charming and fruitful, they say,

but the human barriers are huge and insurmountable.

Now the Israelites are faced with a pivotal decision: Will they go up and take the land, as Joshua and Caleb urged? Or will they turn back in disbelief? By asking for retreat, most of them adopt the majority report of ten spies and add many unhappy returns before they will reach their goal.

The New Testament amplifies this crucial point for ancient Israel with warnings against rebellion, hardened hearts, and refusal to continue in faith and obedience (Hebrews 3 and 4). Thus we may associate Kadesh Barnea with any critical juncture in which Christians are faced with either going on to follow the Lord or retreating into unbelief. Sadly, the path of Christian progress is littered with spiritual dropouts, just like the wilderness between Egypt and Canaan.

Decoding symbolism

Following the debacle at Kadesh Banea, where Israel chose the badlands of Sinai over the land of milk and honey (Numbers 14 and 15), the Bible hurries over the next thirty-eight years with only a few mostly sad and sordid incidents recorded for our learning:

- Korah's rebellion and the ensuing events (Numbers 16, 17)
- water from a rock; Moses' disobedience; Aaron's death (ch. 20)
- biting serpents and a bronze one; defeat of Sihon and Og (ch. 21)
- King Balak and Balaam the prophet (chs. 22–24)
- harlotry with Midianite women; courage of Phinehas (ch. 25)

What are we to make of these wilderness wanderings? Scarcely can they represent a people experiencing daily victory and success. Most adults who refused to believe the Lord's promise at Kadesh died in those thirty-eight years and did not cross over Jordan to the Promised Land. How are Christians to decode the symbolism of this period?

One view relates Israel's failures in the wilderness directly to the sins of God's people today. Like Israel, Christians are not perfect yet, and defeats of the old nation offer a realistic picture of the church's faults and failures. In this view, those who died in the desert illustrate Jesus' teaching that many who say they know the Lord will never enter His kingdom (Matthew 7:13-23).

A more hopeful view compares Christian life with Canaan, rather than the wilderness. Instead of imitating Israel in the desert, we cross over to engage the enemy by spiritual warfare in Christ, literally done by Israel in Canaan under General Joshua. Trusting and obeying the Lord, in fact, means that Christians have entered by faith and are already "in Christ" — the true holy land. We can possess the land that we've been promised now!

Christian hymnody, also rich in allegorical thought, appears to have it both ways. On one hand, the author of "I Won't Have to

Cross Jordan Alone" believed that Israel's crossing that river into Canaan prefigured death for the Christian. In affirming God's presence when we cross over, by death and resurrection, into our Promised Land, the writer implies his conviction that we who live on earth are still in the desert and haven't reached the Jordan yet.

On the other hand, the author of "Camping in Canaan's Land" understood that Christians have already crossed into the land of promise, though only in tents, not yet in mansions. One verse of his song tells that we have come out of Egypt, crossed the desert sands, and are now "landed safe at home where we will not grow weary." Already we who know Christ are in the Promised Land!

Whichever account we take (see above box), our lives are a journey with Jesus. It began when we were born of water and the Spirit. It reaches its destination the day He returns and we are resurrected, or changed, to immortality and eternal life in the promised kingdom. Only then will the trek be complete, as faith gives way to perfect sight in the light of God's presence. Until then, we're still en route.

Whoever walks with Jesus in the Spirit and the light of God's Word will surely reach a great destination! **BA**

We Ask: So which is it? Have Christians already crossed into the spiritual land of promise? Or do we still wander through wilderness, somewhere between the Red Sea and the Jordan River?

The BA invites your biblical response to this question and may publish it. Replies may be edited. Send yours to the Editor: bibleadvocate@cog7.org.

Road to Redemption

A BA interview with Francine Rivers. **by Sherri Langton**

Can anyone absolve another's sin? No. Redemption is through Jesus Christ alone. But a few 1800s immigrants to America brought with them a strange custom: a sin eater — one of their own who symbolically "ate" others' sins after their deaths. Bestselling author Francine Rivers' book on this theme, *The Last Sin Eater*, was turned into film and released in theaters in February; the DVD version is due in mid-May. Just before the theatrical release, I talked with Francine by phone about this unusual story and her own road to redemption.

How do you feel about the movie? Are you excited?

I am very excited. I was very pleased that they kept the heart of the story: the gospel. When I was initially approached, I was a little leery because Hollywood has a reputation. Then I met [Michael Landon, Jr. and Brian Bird, co-producers], and there was no question that these are two on-fire Christians who want to glorify the Lord.

With its gothic-mystery feel, *The Last Sin Eater* is a complete departure from your other books. Why did you feel the need to change the genre?

I wrote *The Atonement Child* before *The Last Sin Eater*, which had to do with my abortion way back in college days. It was an illegal abortion, and I had dealt with guilt for years. In that book I was exploring how abortion affects everybody — not just the woman but also the husband she marries. When I finished [the book], I thought it was on forgiveness, but God showed me it had to do with sanctification — coming out of the world's thinking to the way God thinks.

I was thinking about the difference between guilt and conviction, how guilt keeps you trapped and conviction sends you running to the Lord. I had heard about a sin eater in a movie, and it intrigued me why anybody would agree to do such a thing. It was one of these ideas I filed away to explore.

So that's where you came across the Welsh custom of the sin eater?

It actually came from England, Scotland, Wales, and then was brought over into pockets of Appalachia. We all carry guilt. We're all sinners, and people who are not saved are looking for a way to find salvation, to be released from their guilt. That's what the story is about — the

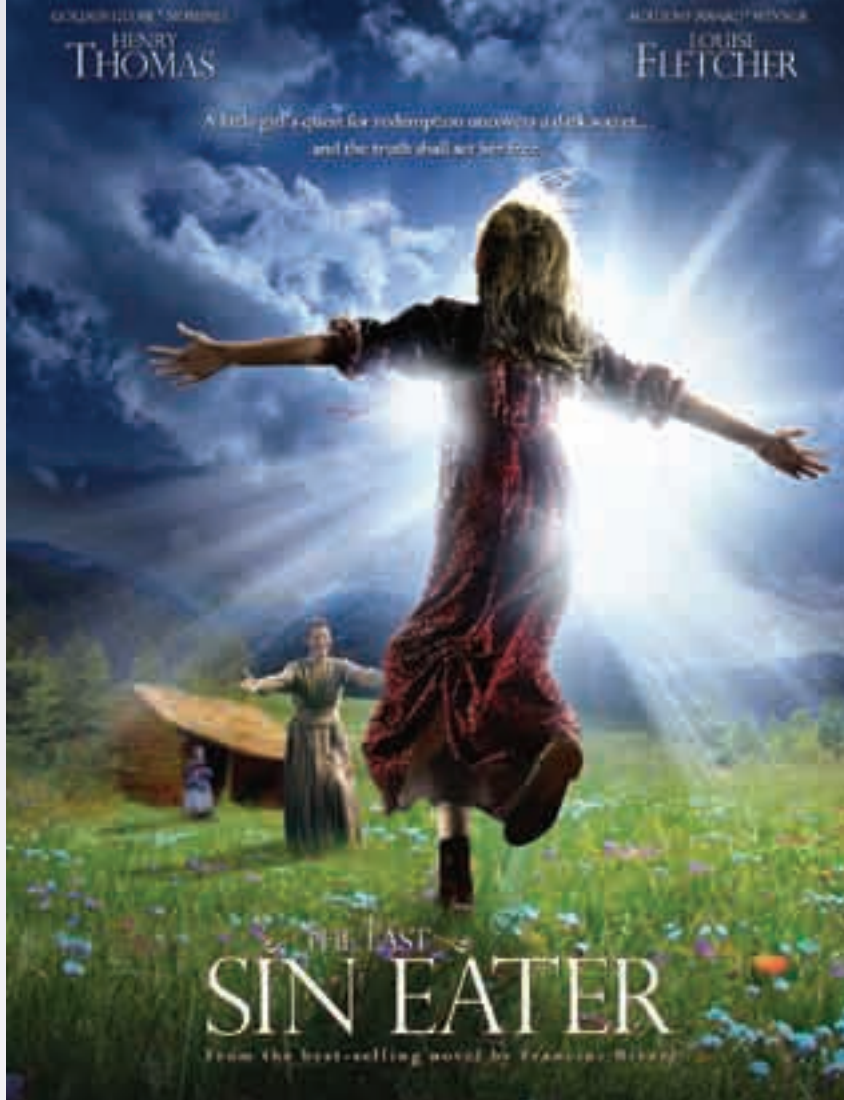
man-made attempt to remove sin, which does not work, and how Christ does remove our sin and makes us new.

So the idea of the sin eater lent itself to a gothic-type story?

Yes. I kept thinking about the connection between the sin eater and the scapegoat — the Old Testament idea of how sins were laid on an animal that was sent into the wilderness to die. The sin eater is like that, but he can't remove sin. I also used the Old Testament lottery system for the way he's selected.

There was not a lot of information about sin eaters, other than many were tricked into taking that role. Somebody would invite somebody in for a meal — a poor person — and then tell him after they'd eaten, "You just ate all the sins of our deceased relative in the next room." The person would become a pariah. The only way they could receive food or support was to take that role. Rather than use that method, I wanted to use the Old Testament imagery of the scapegoat and lottery and how guilt imprisons people.

It took me twenty-five years to deal with my abortion. About eight years after I became a Christian, I knew God had forgiv-



en me. Jesus had taken that sin, but I just couldn't let it go. What I learned in the process of writing [*The Atonement Child*] is that God had forgiven me and forgets our sins, but I hadn't. I needed to put it down at the cross and let it go. It was a process to do that. By the time I finished the book, I was living the forgiveness.

Did guilt prompt you to write *The Last Sin Eater*?

Yes. What prompted me was actually how guilt had held me captive for so many years, and to show the difference between guilt and conviction. Guilt imprisons you; conviction sends you to the Lord to confess and receive forgiveness and experience that freedom through Christ.

Was the little girl, Cadi's, battle with secret sin, then, a reflection of your own struggle?

Yes. But I think everybody has a secret. When [the community is] in that graveyard scene at the end, all their secrets come out. It entrapped every single person in that valley with the guilt of what their grandparents and parents had done and things they'd kept secret. We're all sinners saved by grace, and until we acknowledge Christ and make Him the center of our life, we don't experience that freedom.

What did you learn in writing *The Last Sin Eater*?

To confess your sin, to always be open to that. We're supposed to examine our lives every day.

Examine and align yourself with Christ, confess your sins, and ask Him to change you to be more like Jesus.

How would you describe Christ's work as the Sin Eater in your life?

He took all my sins upon Him. My work is just to believe that the work is accomplished in Him and to let go of things. I think that's where God has been at work telling me, "Let Me love you. Trust Me. Let go of these things; they're already gone. I've forgotten them. Just let them go and let Me live in you." In the writing, that's what I want people to see — less of me and more of Him, that as they read the story, they forget about who wrote it but will see Him in the midst of it and want to be with Him.

What do you hope the film/DVD will accomplish?

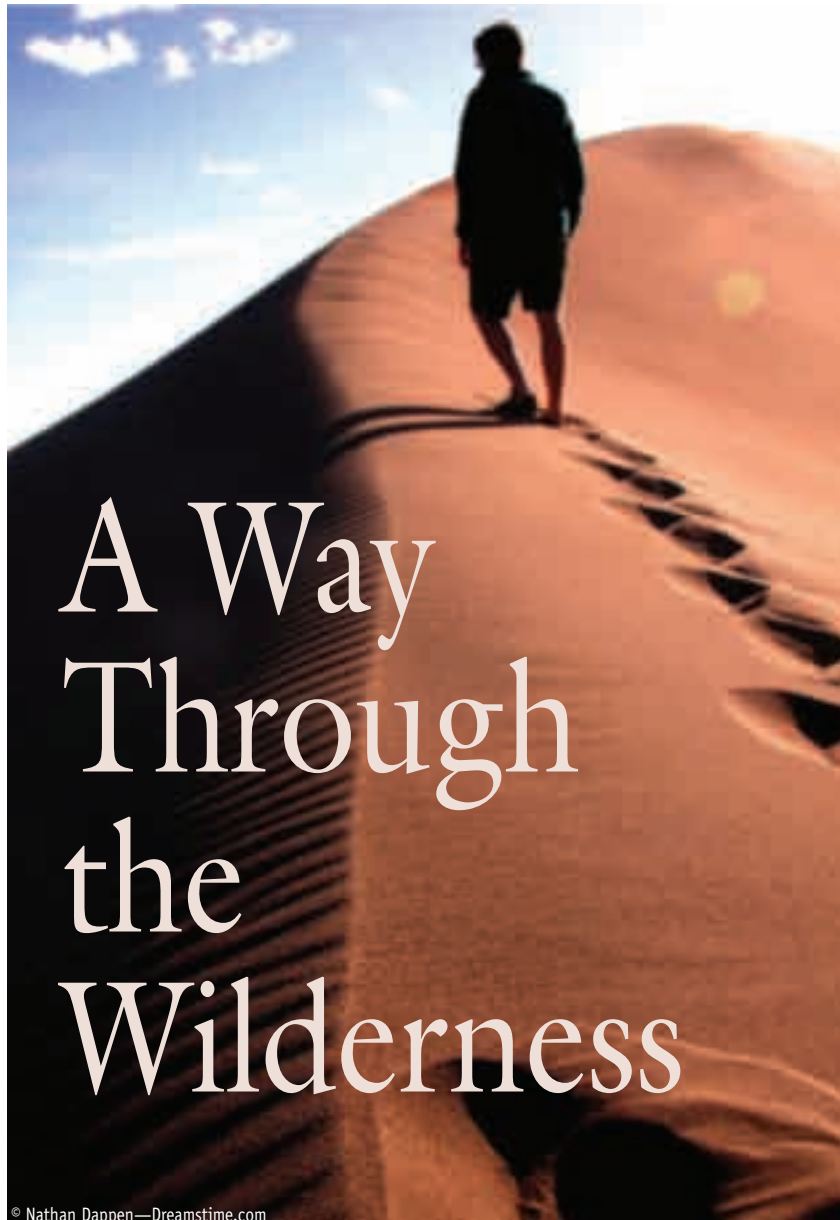
I hope it will be used as a tool, that it will open discussion, and that people will be able to present the gospel to unsaved family and friends. Fiction is supposed to bridge people to Scripture and to help them make a choice and want a relationship with Christ. I hope that churches and people will be able to use this as a tool to get back into Scripture. Move away from the fiction and get to the real thing, folks. That's the main point. 

Read this interview in its entirety in the BA Online.



Francine Rivers





A Way Through the Wilderness

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Are you on a dark and depressing path? Try a better way.
by David Listul

“He just doesn’t get it!” a colleague remarked after a difficult session with a client.

I’ve thought much about this comment, about people who don’t “get it” and are wandering through life. And I wonder who is in worse condition: the lost person who can’t seem to find his way or the naïve person who is lost and doesn’t know it.

Like the nation of Israel wandering in the wilderness, we may

struggle to navigate our way through this life. A wilderness experience can appear at any time and take on many faces. It may come through our own making, through others, or through circumstances.

Let’s look at two “wilderness children” experiencing extraordinary problems in their journey. Their paths may be different than ours, but we share the same goal: finding a way through to ultimate redemption in Christ.

Wilderness war

Billy was an adolescent who had everything figured out. His father taught him to get what he wanted when he wanted it at whatever cost – a strange philosophy for a home that claimed to trust God and follow His Word. God apparently worked too slowly for Billy’s parents and their sense of entitlement, so they chose to eat the bitter root of selfishness rather than feast on manna and be satisfied with God’s provision. They envied those who seemed to be ahead of them on the road and fussed about what they imagined others had done to them. They worried more about what people thought of them than what God thought of them and what He could do through them.

Despite repeated efforts of others to help this family find healthy ways to meet its needs, Billy’s parents became more and more like Korah, who self-destructed in the wilderness (Numbers 16). Apparently, they entered this path of rebellion both by personal choice and by a birthright of sin visited upon the generations of their family (14:18b). Caught up in this

vortex, Billy slowly lost ground in a spiritual struggle between the truth of the Word and the world's lies. In this wilderness war, he needed a "city of refuge" (35:9-15) where he could receive healthy nurture and find his way. Tired of kicking the donkey down the wrong path as Balaam did (22:31), he was blind to the reality of obstacles in his own life.

Eventually, Billy was placed in a foster home that blessed him with loving and godly counsel. He no longer bought the lie that life was his for the taking (2 Thessalonians 2:11). He no longer heard the unfavorable reports (Numbers 13:31, 32) but learned to trust again in a God who promised to never leave or forsake him (Hebrews 13:5).

Sometimes Billy still defies God. He struggles and suffers defeat trying to go where he should not go (Numbers 14:42-45). Yet he regularly returns to the roadmap of true righteousness through the wilderness. God's Word lights his path, helping him avoid desert mirages that lead many astray.

Codependence

Karen, like Billy, was a wilderness child. Because she was born to a privileged family, Karen should have had it made. Yet she continues to struggle with her own desert called *codependence*. Having grown up in a home with secret alcoholism and blurred personal boundaries, Karen suffers from the family's inability or unwillingness to keep out the inhabitants of shame and doubt – much like Israel (Numbers 33:55).

Karen is a professed Christian who left her family to find her

way in Christ. Still, she battles demons in her mind, creating a spiritual wilderness where she strains to keep her eyes on the prize. She realizes that unforgiveness keeps her stranded there; carnal and spiritual residents remain like the Edomites to block her path (20:21). Karen now tries to bless those who persecute her (Romans 12:14), understanding that this is much harder when God has to win her heart back before she can work through to forgiving others.

Like Miriam who was afflicted with leprosy after a bout of jealous self-pity (Numbers 12), Karen lived through a brief period of distorted self-pity, believing she wasn't worth loving unless she could control others and meet their needs. When trying to please everyone led to further anger and resentment, she temporarily returned to the path modeled by her parents – and to alcoholism. Through treatment and godly mentoring, Karen has gradually recovered and resumed forward progress through the wilderness. She looks upon recovery as a reminder of her past, a warning symbol like Aaron's staff blossoming with almonds became to the people of God (17:8). We can ask no more of Karen than that she trust daily

in God and the promises in His Word.

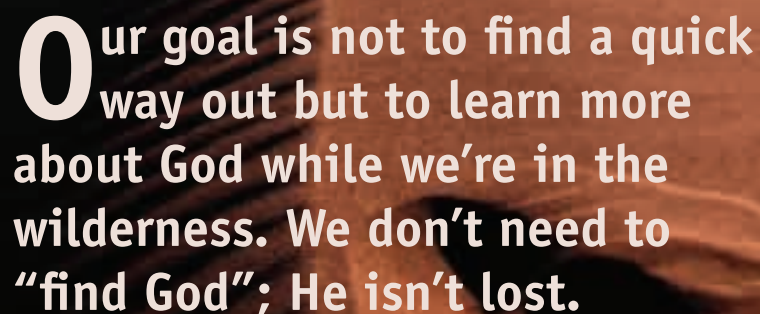
Navigation

Billy and Karen are in good company: We all face spiritual battles as we forge a path through the wilderness. If our particular story were printed here, how would it read? What can we do to successfully navigate through the wilderness?

We can begin by understanding that our goal is not to find a quick way out but to learn more about God while we're in the wilderness. We don't need to "find God"; He isn't lost. We're the ones who become confused and lose our way.

So it's up to us to redirect ourselves back to God. We do this by submitting to Him every day. By going beyond merely knowing the Word to *doing* what it says. By seeking the Lord's wisdom and applying what we've learned to our lives (Colossians 1:9-14; James 1:5-8). If we grow daily in our relationship with God, we won't get stuck in the sand, unable to move forward.

Second, we must realize that we face the same adversary who deceived Billy and Karen – a liar who wants to lead us astray and destroy our lives (1 Peter



Our goal is not to find a quick way out but to learn more about God while we're in the wilderness. We don't need to "find God"; He isn't lost.

Mail Bag



Inspiration to inmates

We here at Idaho State Correctional Institute Interfaith Chapel thank you for the great December '06 BA magazines we received. Our prison population is over 1,400. With constant turnover, our needs for religious materials are challenged. It is ministries like yours that help these men gain and enjoy the Word of God.

L. P.
ISCI Religious Activities Coordinator
Boise, ID

More on 'Q & A'

Regarding hope for those who never heard [Dec. '06, pp. 8, 9], it occurs to me to support your third option: to be resurrected and judged based on their faith, as inferred by your reference to the saints who trusted (Heb. 11). About the centurion, Jesus said, "I have not found so great a faith in Israel" and "many will come from the east and west to sit down" with men who saw Christ by faith, but those of the kingdom would be cast out (Matt. 8:5ff). Do these verses not say that faith in action [excels] the faith of mere knowledge?

P. Y.
Harrison, AR

Do the Scriptures pronounce condemnation on those who refuse to believe on Jesus? Yes. Do they condemn all who never heard about Him? No. Consider Enoch, Noah, Isaac, Jacob, David, and others who never knew of Christ, but Hebrews 11 says they will be perfected with us, not tormented.

God created humanity to offer salvation and eternal life to all. How can He do that if Jesus, the only Savior, didn't come along until two-thirds of the way through history? The solution is that all humans must live again. Revelation 20:1-12 teaches a general resurrection of the dead after the millennium. This passage suggests that mankind will be assembled at the great white throne, where the books of the Bible will be opened and people can accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. Armed with this new knowledge of God's holy laws and the memory of their past sinful lives, many may come to their senses, repent, and enter the fellowship of the saved — a choice they never had.

This scenario is in line with the love of God. Everyone will be able to hear, believe, and be saved. The God of the Bible personifies happiness and joyous success, not fiendish delight in lost souls. Thank you for the invitation for your readers to respond. That doesn't happen often among church magazines.

J. L.
Placerville, CA

Regarding the fate of Holocaust victims, those who never heard of Jesus, etc., I think the answer can be found in Romans 2:13-15.

K. K.
Three Hills, AB

5:8). Therefore, we must resist the Devil and walk wisely in the way the Lord has commanded, while keeping our eyes on Christ. This way, we won't be distracted and lose our way (Deuteronomy 5:32-33; Ephesians 5:15-17; James 4:7, 8).

Third, we must face the future and change what needs to be changed. Some of those who spied out Canaan failed to do this and suffered a paralysis of faith. They were too afraid to peek out of the woods and see what lay ahead. Their minds had become so complacent in misery, they never saw the Promised Land. When we tell God, "I am too afraid to change" or "I can't face what's ahead," we spread a bad report and limit what God can do for us and for others. But we can defeat this fear by constantly *remembering* and *telling* others what God has done for us so far, how He has sustained us on our journey through the wilderness.

Staying the course

Are you one who doesn't "get it"? Are you lost, struggling to find your way, or naive about how lost you really are?

Either way, God stands ready to take your hand and guide you through the barren stretches of wilderness. Commit yourself to the journey, staying close to Him — one step at a time. ■■

Dave Listul is a professional counselor in Jamestown, ND, and attends church in Alfred.



Reading of Israel's journey from Egypt to Canaan, I am amazed by two things. First, God's awesome power is on display repeatedly: the ten plagues, the pillar of fire, parting of the Red Sea, bitter water made sweet, bread from heaven, water from a rock, victory over the Amalekites, and so on — all in the first three months of the Exodus!

The second thing that amazes me is how the Israelites could so easily reject this very God. They complained about the food God provided. They complained when water grew scarce. They even had Aaron build another "god" to lead them back to Egypt!

These were the people God had set apart for Himself — descendants of Abraham. Through them, God had promised that all nations of the earth would be blessed.

Throughout their history, the Israelites found new ways to turn away from God. Hence the familiar phrase, "Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord." The strange thing is that God chose them anyway, knowing beforehand what they would do. Before his death, God said to Moses:

"This people will rise and play the harlot with the gods of the foreigners of the land . . . and they will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them" (Deuteronomy 31:16).

Still, this was the people God wanted. He invited them:

"If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a

I Didn't Have a Chance

by Caleb Noble

holy nation" (Exodus 19:5, 6).

By the time of Christ, things weren't much different. The religious leaders often bickered about Jesus' healings on Sabbath or the disciples eating without washing hands. They plotted to kill Jesus and had Him condemned only a few days after His triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

The flaws in old Israel are obvious: lack of faith, rebellion, fickle attitudes. Funny, isn't it, how God used their fall to bring salvation to us (Romans 11:11ff)! Before Jesus' death and resurrection, Jews had a monopoly on His Word and the best chance of relationship with Him. The Gentiles were considered second class, uncircumcised heathens. Speaking of them, a friend of mine said, "That's me! I didn't have a chance!"

Think about how God, to redeem a world of lost people like me, used a stubborn and rebellious nation like Israel. She turned her back on God and broke His covenant, so He sent Jesus. She rejected Jesus, tortured and killed Him, but God used Christ's death to give us life. God did not choose Israel because she had any great virtue.

Like Pharaoh, Israel was a tool in the Master's hand (Exodus 9:16; Romans 9:17).

I often criticize others, thinking *I would never do that*. But I'm no better. We Gentiles are just like the Jews. We don't have special traits or do anything great that causes God to look on us with mercy. In church I sing the Lord's praises on Sabbath, then turn to some other "god" on Saturday night. I call myself a Christian, then harbor bitterness and contempt toward my brothers. Do you identify with my struggle?

The truth is that none of us has done a thing to earn God's favor. But God foresaw our plight and provided a way through our spiritual forefathers — and through Christ — for us to share in redemption. This moves me to say, "Praise God, because I didn't have a chance!" **R.N.**

Caleb Noble is from Middleville, MI, and is currently a third-year student and intern with LITES Ministries in Stanberry, MO.



As I come to morning prayer, I *could* say:

Dear Lord, I need so many things

More energy for daily tasks

Less pain of joints

More sense of purpose, usefulness

Less fear of what tomorrow brings.

What I *will* say is:

Lord, give me more gratitude

that I can rise from bed and chair

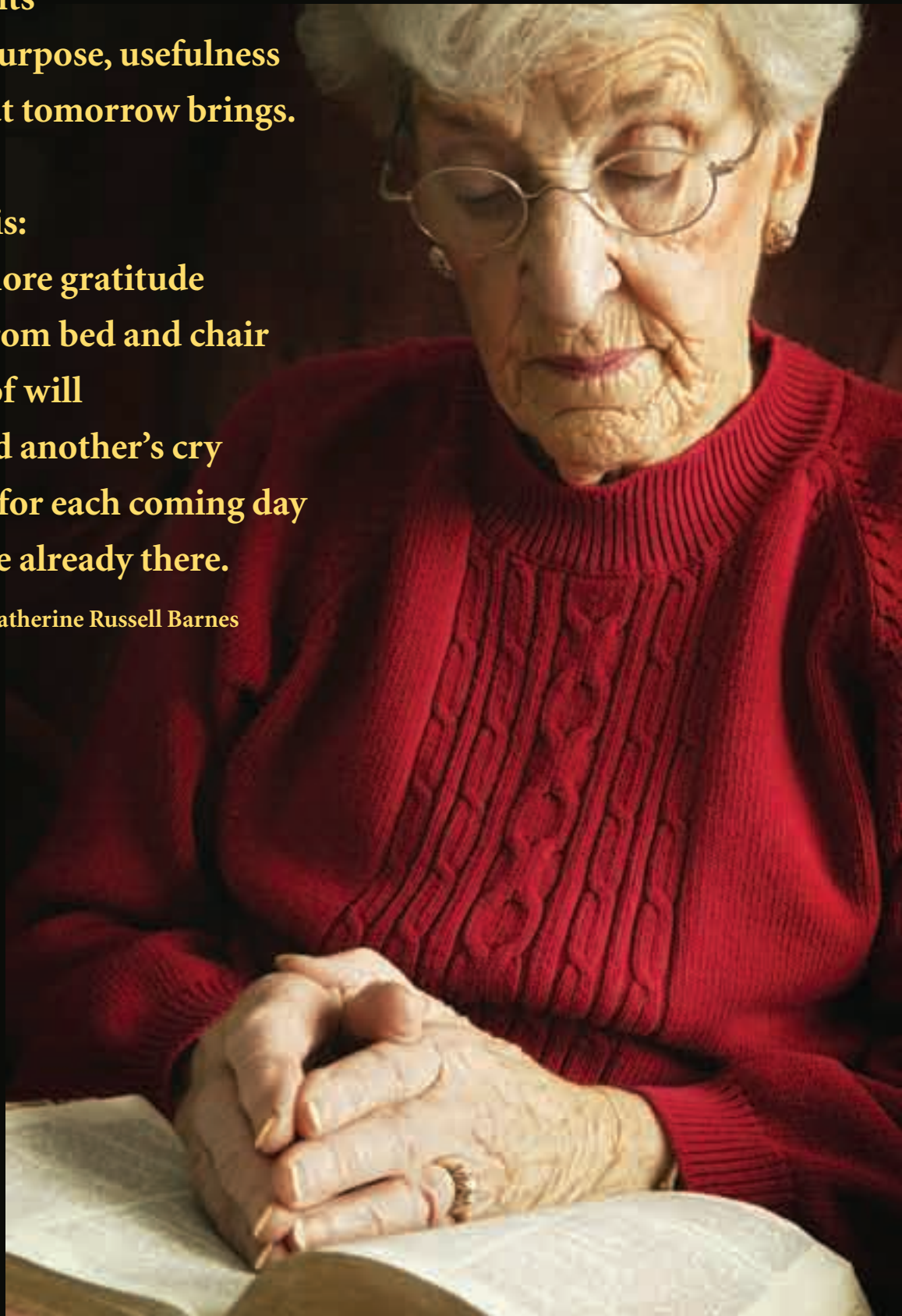
More strength of will

to hear and heed another's cry

More faith that for each coming day

Your care will be already there.

Katherine Russell Barnes





APRIL - MAY 2007

YOUTH REACH

Confessions of a Former Bulimic

by Lark Millington

I was bulimic in high school. Then in February 2002 I was miraculously delivered with the help of friends and family at Spring Vale Academy.

While a bulimic, I made three discoveries that might be helpful to others who are in bondage to an eating disorder or know someone who is.

1. Eating disorders are not incurable. I know of instances in which clinicians have told a young patient that he'll never be completely well again. This is false, not only among Christians who believe in a healing God (Psalm 30:2; Exodus 15:26) but also among professionals who report high remission rates for those in a treatment program.

2. A full-blown eating disorder means the behavior is out of control. It actually dominates who a person is. One year in, the disorder had become ingrained in my personality and identity. Bulimia **was** me!

I learned not to think that an eating disorder is simple misbehavior. It's gotten too big and deep, and the power to control it cold-turkey is no longer in the victim's hands. If you offer help to the person and she responds negatively, understand that it's difficult to let go of something you feel is deeply a part of you, even if it's hurting you and might even kill you. Keep supporting the person and trying to reach her.

3. Eating disorders usually involve a deep spiritual struggle. Spiritual problems require a spiritual solution.

As with me, the guilt and self-hatred of eating disorders are barriers that prevent the victim from seeking or embracing God. If you suffer from an eating disorder, remember you might have gotten yourself into the problem, but God doesn't hate you for it. You might not be able to stop right away, but God doesn't hate you for that either.

NFYC & BA

Contest!!

For youth only
(ages 13-22)

Send us your photos,
poetry, or prose!

Do you like to write?
Take pictures? Then
now's your chance to
show us your stuff.
First-place winners
will be published in the
December BA and . . .

receive cash prizes!

First place: \$100
Second place: \$50
Third place: \$15

Go to the BA Online
or NFYC Web site for
contest rules.

Entries due by
August 31. [.org](http://www.nfy.org)

Think of it this way: Becoming entrenched in guilt so deeply that you won't let God close enough to help only blocks His purpose of restoring you to Himself. Let Him love you; it's the only place to start toward loving Him (1 John 4:19). It is God's kindness, after all, that leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4). nfyc.cog7.org

National Youth Week

National Youth Week centers on a missions theme. Each year a different country is chosen to highlight our sister churches around the world. This foreign ministry becomes the focus of Youth Week, using Culture Night, Bible Study Night, Sabbath services, and the 24-hour Hunger Lock-In, stressing the needs of those who don't have the essentials of life. Here is our chance to "taste" life as they know it, to get down and give with our whole lives.

This week also gives opportunity to build local community as you develop a global worldview. Skits,

songs, object lessons, and other activities are included in the program, encouraging youth to serve and lead in your own Sabbath services. Participants will be asked to consider how their contribution — great or small — can affect someone in other parts of the world. It's an excellent way to involve your church in foreign missions . . . without the travel!

Suggested dates are April 18-21, 2007. Download the resource packet at <http://nfyc.cog7.org>. Or contact Kurt or Kristi Lang, NFYC directors: 541-995-8678; nfyc@cog7.org.



What About Church?

How do you think of church? Do you learn anything from attending Sabbath services each week? Does church help your life?

If you're like many American teens today, you might have these feelings:

1. Church is boring.
2. Church is non-stop activity (all games and entertainment, but no substance).
3. Church isn't the biggest influence in my spiritual life or growth.
4. Church just seems like a series of events to me (no purpose).
5. Church may help save my soul, but it won't help me grapple with the real issues of my life.

What would you like to see different in church? Does it help teach you how to live a changed life, build healthy relationships, stay away from ungodly influences, and make right choices? Write us your response at youthreach@cog7.org. We're here to help!

Statistics taken from *The Last Christian Generation*, by Josh McDowell, pp. 58-62.

Young, Gifted, and Called

God is still in the saving business! Not 98, not 99, but 100 percent of our youth have accepted Jesus, and you are looking at them! We are YGCC (young, gifted, and called by Christ), and our pastor is Lawrence "Al" Haynes. It is my privilege and blessing to work with these youth who have accomplished much: two youth days ('03 and '05), a retreat, a camping trip, food distribution for Thanksgiving, fund raisers, dramas, debates, Bible quizzes, and inviting unsaved friends to services. I view them as future pastors, teachers, evangelists, missionaries, singers — even a comedian. These youth are not only talented but also loving, honest, kind, respectful, obedient, willing to help. Most of all, they love the Lord

Pray for us here at Treasure Coast CoG7 in Florida. Our mission is to win souls for the kingdom of the Lord!

— Pencie Payton
Youth Leader

For more events and pictures, visit <http://nfyc.cog7.org>



What's new with . . .

Spring Vale Academy

- Graduation Weekend
May 26-27

National FYC

- National Youth Week
April 18-21 (suggested);
nfyc@cog7.org

Ministries Training System

- Eastern intensive, near
Reading, PA, June 6-10;
training@cog7.org

North American Women's Ministries

- Northeastern Retreat
at Niagara Falls,
Canada; 905-624-9355;
maryling@comcast.net

General Conference Convention

- Overland Park, KS,
July 2-7; [http://
convention.cog7.org](http://convention.cog7.org)

Missions Ministries

Bill Hicks, Director

Did you remember to save your pocket change for



Change for Your World?

There's still plenty of time to make a difference!

Every July, Missions Abroad asks for a special offering to help with our vital world mission project. Because of the growth of our global church, we are asking everyone in the United States and Canada to save their pocket change throughout the year and give it to missions in a special way. Of course, if you want to add some paper money to it, that's OK too! You may send it in any time during the year.

This year these funds will help delegates from around the world to participate in our International Ministerial Congress, held following our General Conference convention in Overland Park, Kansas, July 7-11. At this important meeting, these Church leaders will worship together and discuss how we can better reach the world with the good news of Jesus Christ, the soon-coming king.

God will accomplish wonderful things with your offerings to encourage your brethren all over the globe. You can bring Change for Your World through this annual offering. Please save your change and give generously so that our church can reach even farther with the gospel of Jesus Christ! Contact Bill Hicks: carlylehix@aol.com.

CoG7

Missionaries to America

Editor's note: Missionaries to America seeks those willing to relocate in order to establish a Bible study and fellowship that will one day grow into a church. The Brad and Karol Ciavarella family (photo, right) used this approach in Mitchell, South Dakota. Missions Director Bill Hicks asked about their ministry and received these replies:

When did you start this work?

Our first Sabbath service was in October 2004. We rented a large room at the community center.

Did you grow up in CoG7 or in another church?

Karol grew up in a CoG7 home in the Alfred, North Dakota, church; I grew up Catholic. When we married, I agreed to go to her church, but we moved a lot and drifted spiritually. When we moved to Mitchell in 1999, our oldest son became unhappy in the local schools, so we sent him to Spring Vale Academy. He was baptized there, came home with conviction, and our lives changed dramatically.

As we grew in our faith, our hearts told us to spread the good news here in Mitchell, but we did not feel comfortable inviting others to the church we were attending. Meanwhile, we drove 250 miles every other month to attend Karol's home church in Alfred, and we have attended the G. C. conventions and West Coast conferences since 2001.

How many attend the Bible study and fellowship in Mitchell?

Our family (three children at home), another family of three from a nearby town, and a few others come sporadically. Gerry and Sandra Schlenker come monthly from Sioux Falls to help out, and Sandra plays the piano. Four of us are willing to speak — a great blessing. We are in need of a regular pianist and are thinking of hiring one.



Do you meet weekly? Where?

We meet every Sabbath when we are here. If we expect a small group, we meet at our home. If we have more than two families coming, we rent a historic church that is part of a local museum. After morning service everyone is invited to our home for fellowship lunch, since there is no water at the church. We also hold Bible studies on an advertised topic each Wednesday. Occasionally a new face will show.

How is your family doing with these efforts?

Karol and I are focused on this ministry and feel like something will happen, but we can get discouraged. When things don't seem to be working, we question if we're doing the right thing and ask the Lord for guidance. Our children — 19, 17, and 14 — always attend; but with no other youth, it is challenging for them.

The brethren in Alfred and Fargo, North Dakota, give us much encouragement and also come often to support the efforts.

What advertising have you done, and with what response?

A church ad runs on the weekly church page of the local paper, with 27 others. Advertisements are also placed for the midweek Bible study each Tuesday, and two radio spots with a biblical message have been run for a six-week period. We try to have a special event every four to five months, advertised in the paper and around town. We are trying to get listed in the phone book. There has been some limited response, but no regular attendees have joined yet.



Near the Chinese border, this Assam, India, schoolroom was recently renovated and dedicated with help from Missions Abroad, which also sponsored a visit from brethren in Mizoram and Nepal. These children and others in this remote region benefit from our support of missions reaching into new areas with the gospel of Christ.

IMC in the Heartland

The International Ministerial Congress (IMC) will meet July 7-11 in Overland Park, Kansas. This time and place is a double blessing to North American members as we welcome CoG7 ministers from around the world on the last day of our General Conference convention there July 2-7. On Sabbath, July 7, the combined G. C. and IMC crowd will witness a Parade of Nations and hear a message from IMC President Ramon Ruiz.

On Sunday, July 8, while U.S. and Canadian members return home, IMC delegates will begin four days of business around the theme "Witnesses of His Glory." This will include

- Report of God's work from member countries and applications for membership from other national churches
- "Other Days" – a Bible study about observing non-essential days
- Consideration of amendments to the congress structure and election of its officers

Ministers Recognized

These men have received ministerial licenses and been approved for ordination by the License and Credentials Committee of the North American Ministerial Council:

- Robert Fogarty of Kansas City, Missouri
- Greg Lincoln of Olympia, Washington
- Julio Martinez of Montreal, Quebec



Young adults enjoy praising God at a recent SWORD rally somewhere in Texas. Watch for notices on annual SWORD retreats in Oregon and in the Southwestern District. Visit <http://sword.cog7.org/>.

Wilson Nascimento of Orlando, Florida
 Francisco Ramirez of Grand Prairie, Texas
 Israel Steinmetz of Kansas City, Missouri
 Larry Zaragoza of Visalia, California
 These licensed ministers, previously ordained, have been elevated to ministerial credentials:
 Allen Crawford of Framingham, Massachusetts
 Jeffrey Endecott of Farmville, North Carolina
 Monico Muffley of Nampa, Idaho
 We thank God for these men who have answered His call to ministry.

Welcome, Rachel!

SWORD Ministries welcomes Rachel Stirn of Spokane, Washington, to represent young adults in the northern portion of the West Coast District.



From Bethel church, near Boston, MA: Mother Pearl Anty and Sister Thannah Beckels braved the chilly waters of baptism on December 23. Elder A. Crawford officiated, Pastor D. L. Gouldbourne led the right hand of fellowship, and the church welcomed them later with an Agape Feast.



Singles Retreat

The Jasper, Arkansas, church campgrounds will host a second annual singles retreat May 4-6 on the theme "Single but For What?" Jason Overman will give the Sabbath message, and Tracy Walker will lead a seminar on "Finding Your Niche." Singles ages 18 and over are invited. Cost is only \$45, due upon arrival. Please RSVP by April 20 to 816-645-6894 or hitracer@yahoo.com. Visit BA Online to read Tracy Walker's reflections on being single.



The Dover, OK, campground will mark its fiftieth year of serving southern and central CoG7 membership with a June 10-16 campmeeting this year. Can you identify anyone from this first-year (1958) photo? Look for more photos and a report of recent improvements at Dover in the June BA.

Would a Buck a Day Change Your Life?

by **Brian Baker**

What changes people's lives? The death of a loved one? A national crisis? An inspiring goal or someone caring deeply for you? Would a dollar a day completely change your life?

A trip changed my life – a visit to India and Kenya in 1996. On a layover in Calcutta, a taxi driver asked us if we'd like to meet Mother Teresa, and fifteen minutes later we were standing in her presence. Her humility and works of mercy inspired me, a non-Catholic.

Later in a Kenyan village, a little guy followed me for two days, scowling. Likely he'd heard of bad white men that made his ancestors slaves, and I was the first *Muzoongu* (white man) he had ever seen. When I stood to preach, he glared at me from the front row. After church, I felt a little hand on my leg and looked down to see white teeth gleaming through a huge smile on the young lad's face. Hearing the grace of God had changed his life as it had mine. Now we were friends.

Among the Masaii tribe, I walked through Serengeti bush toward church, past the chief's house. His two grandchildren lay in the dirt, sick with malaria. Like the priest in Jesus' story, I hurried to my meeting – no time to help. Later I learned that life-saving shots were available for only \$15, and the image of those dying kids returned to me.



In the December 2005 *Bible Advocate* I learned of orphan children, most of whom have lost at least one parent to AIDS, taken in by Church families in southwest Kenya. The South Nyanza District CoG7 women's ministry has taken orphans off the streets for years. Families of five children may live together with no mother or father. The women started bringing these children to church, giving them food, clothing, and

other essentials.

Reading this, I felt this was exactly the kind of ministry I could help with. These were life-changing moments, inspiring and convicting me to act. I began to seek sponsors for these orphans being rescued and evangelized by the Church women in Kenya. At first I found help for fifty-two children. Then they sent me another fifty names to find sponsors for. Each sponsor contributes \$26 a month through CoG7 channels, 100 percent of which goes to the orphan's caregiver or surviving parent, through the Kenyan Conference of the Church. For less than a buck a day, you can change a young child's life in a country where the average income is around \$300 per year. Sponsors in the Kenyan orphan project will receive a photo and short biography of their child, and they may correspond with him/her. The \$26 monthly contribution, which may be forwarded in lump sums for six or twelve months. Send your check to Church of God (Seventh Day), P. O. Box 33677, Denver, CO, with "South Nyanza Orphan Project" noted on it.

I look forward to hearing from you.

— Brian Baker
970-663-9106

E-mail: brianatbakersacres@juno.com

Brian Baker lives in Loveland, CO; attends church in Denver; and serves with Missions Abroad. Testimonial letters he has received follow.

Letters from Kenya

Pastor Abraham Odongo:

"My district in Kenya has a high mortality rate, and the plight of orphans is a major concern. God brought you at the time of these women's greatest need: widowhood, poverty, etc. Through your efforts, these children have experienced improved status and health. I'm happy to say that this project has made us stand tall as a church with true concern. . . ."

Alice Achieng, ministry helper:

"Most of these orphans admit they have a new approach to life since this program began. They show a more vigorous approach to learning and progress in the way they dress, eat, think, and talk. For the first time, they speak of what they would like to be in the future — a joy to our church and to their guardians. Please pass our appreciation to all who have given to make this happen."

David Odhiambo:

"Being hated by many people, including my surviving parent, made me think I was a mistake. I left school and stayed away from anything that could make people hate me more. Then the church sisters came, talked, and took my siblings and me to stay with Mama Sarah [Eunice Akinyi]. These ladies told me not to blame my father but to pray for him. I started to feel love and appreciation in our church. Even grown-ups were not too proud to sit down and talk to me, especially my pastor. My sponsor in America wrote letters assuring me of her love and concern, which inspired me greatly. I work hard in school now so that I have good news for her."

Sixteen-year old Winnie Awuor:

"Some girls are tempted to do wrong sex so boys will give them money to buy clothes, etc. God has made a better way for me; I can't do something wrong to get what I need. Though my biological parents are gone, I have mothers and fathers here who love and care for me. They teach me what my mother did not: how to be a God-fearing woman. I don't know how to say thank you, because words cannot match my feelings. God bless you for filling this gap in my life."





International Tour

Brazil

The Adventist Church of Promise emerged by the will of God to fulfill a special mission in Brazil: to congregate observers of the Lord's holy Sabbath day for rest and spiritual celebration; to teach the second advent of Christ; to believe that the promise of the Spirit is for our day and that God's instructions for healthy living include abstaining from some foods.

The church's founder, Pastor August Joao da Silveira, was trained in an institution that observed the true Christian Sabbath. Advancing in his studies and deeply drawn by the promise in Acts 2, he retreated for three years of obedient service, praying for a spiritual Pentecost in his life. On January 24, 1932, after studying God's Word (as was his custom) and recapitulating Acts 2 for the hundredth time, Pastor da Silveira received the gift he so longed for while praying. With no idea of instituting a church, he gave testimony of his spiritual experience. As it was made known, people began to come, believe, and be sealed with the Holy Spirit. A nucleus of members emerged, and for the past seventy-five years the Adventist Church of the Promise has existed.

The Lord has helped us, and the church has grown in all senses. In more than a thousand

congregations in Brazil and beyond, the faithful come to worship God. Our strategic plan and vision is to "Worship the Lord, proclaim Jesus to the peoples, and promote the welfare of the faithful under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and Sacred Scripture — until Christ returns." Our objective consists of doubling the members in all congregations until September 2009. This project received unanimous approval at the fortieth General Assembly (November 2004).

We are Adventist Christians because we believe in the second coming of Christ with power and great glory. We include "de la Promesa" because of our firm belief in the promise of baptism in the Holy Spirit with the spiritual gifts that follow. Eighteen youths recently completed the two-year Middle Course of Theology and are now practicing

in the field. We also hosted the forty-second General Assembly and Missions Congress, with representatives from many countries. We maintain respectful and fraternal dealings with all other evangelical groups and are glad to be part of that visible and invisible church. Through a holy life, we seek salvation for souls and spiritual growth for the kingdom — all for the glory of God!

The Adventist Church of Promise first contacted the Church of God (Seventh Day) in the 1970s and has been a member of the International Ministerial Congress since 1982. A goal of IMC is that churches of different traditions may come together in the interest of doctrinal unity and preaching the gospel of Jesus.

— Editor



Table Talk

As the Church reflects on our gathering at the Lord's table, I think of when Jesus gathered His disciples around a table and shared from His heart about the meaning of His atonement. We read in Luke 22:14-20:

When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God." After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you" (NIV).

This table was in the upper room; the event was the Passover supper, a memorial of Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage and a prophetic type of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Notice verse 20: Jesus took the cup a second time and commemorated the new covenant. For Christ's followers, the focus is not Israel's experience but on ours, on this side of the Cross. One day later, Jesus went to the cross and died, fulfilling the symbolism of the Passover, making the new covenant a reality.

What did it mean to you to sit at the table of the Lord? Did the bread and the cup, symbols of Jesus' body and blood shed on the cross for you, move you deeply? Did the incredible reality that if you were the only person on the planet, Jesus would have died for your sins anyway, leave you in awe? Or did you have different thoughts at the table this year?

Some focus on the philosophy of it. For them, the supper symbolizes a far-off event with little

meaning or personal impact. Others focus on its doctrinal aspects, including details about the Passover celebration of the nation of Israel more than the present blessings of the body of Christ. Accuracy of the date, the correct order of the supper, washing of feet, and other such issues weighed heavily on some people's minds this season.

These questions can be addressed at an appropriate time and place with answers that satisfy the needs of the head more than those of the heart. The mental component should not be discounted in our walk of faith, for God has not called us to a mindless experience. Rather, He wants us to be fully informed, honoring Him with all our minds.

The truth is, however, that we must also have an engaged heart, not just an informed mind. We live from the heart. That's why Jesus' focus was on twelve men whose hearts were so engaged that they turned their world upside down. Their hearts were engaged by the wonder of the gospel, and the revolution continues two thousand years later.

To engage my heart, I must see Jesus on the cross. I must believe that He hung there for me, and I must be convinced that when He was on the cross, I was on His mind. That He knew me before I was born and still loved (loves) me makes me want to move beyond theology and doctrine to the wonder, love, and praise of what the table is all about. If we all have that attitude of heart, we can celebrate the grace of God year round, and each new Lord's Supper will be like eating it again, as one commercial says, for the first time.

— *Whaid Guscott Rose*
General Conference President



These seniors will graduate May 26, 27:
 Back (L to R): Tyson Fauth, Lucas Fauth, Kevin O'Banion, Matt Miller (first semester only), Charles Patchen, Joseph Cutaia
 Middle: Joshua Davila, Nick Paul, Solomon Adame, Jesse Edwards
 Front: Adamina Adame, Cassie Stucker, Autumn Weekes, Joanna Noble, Angela Noble



Spring Vale Academy



Mark Caswell, Director



Tim Hinds, Campus Pastor

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 came to life at Spring Vale as students and staff shared the times it describes. In this way, we learned to trust God. Blessings awaited around each bend, and we became unafraid to cry with others. Brother-and-sister bonds, forged by the Spirit, are not easily broken. Laughter and good times also imprinted precious memories, to be recalled often. As my senior year ends, I pray that future students will feel the same spiritual satisfaction and fullness I do now.

– Lucas Fauth
 SVA Student Body President



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Read Mark Caswell's letter in the BA Online. [.org](#)

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