

June 2007

BA

BIBLE ADVOCATE

The Maker's match

Uncontrolled appetites (p. 4)

Making sense of sex (p. 8)

Fear factor (p. 20)



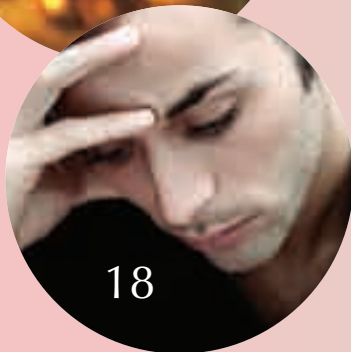
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My Protest

“Life is tough, but God is good.” These seven words have often summarized, for me, the way it is. Now in the spring of ‘07, the first three feel more true than usual, while the last three express my continuing faith, if not my constant feeling.

I’ve been mostly free from life’s severe trials and serious pains, but I’ve always felt that trouble would likely tumble in someday. I’ve preached to others about the “test of a lifetime” — Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac, for example, or Job’s loss and suffering — and often been grateful that the fiery trial hadn’t come my way . . . yet. I’ve never even wanted to file a protest about the way the world was being run — until now.

This melancholy mood relates closely to the deaths of relatives, Church friends, and fruitful workers. Its depth was reached in late March, when my BA colleague and friend, Richard Wiedenheft, passed away (see pp. 22-23). This and other prime-of-life deaths in recent years are inexplicable to me, since they went contrary to the prayers, hopes, and needs of God’s people. Could there not have been one more divine healing for Denis Burrell, for Lynn Taylor, or for Dick Wiedenheft? That would have been easy enough for God! Any effort to explain His silence in this matter has the ring of Job’s miserable comforters to me.

More than just death’s perennial raid adds to my mood today. There’s the well-publicized gains of evil — in Iraq, in Western culture, in earth’s environment, in the attacks on Christ and His people, in the resulting erosion of faith, leaving us more and more discouraged by the state of the world. With so many repugnant headlines, even the small, dark stuff can seem worse than it is. In one church where ‘06 was a banner year, several damaging blows came this March in a matter of days: *Whack! Whack! Whack!*

The current state of affairs in ten thousand places leaves me crying out for God’s intervention to judge the wicked and rescue the righteous. Is He really good? Can He be trusted? Do the world’s tragedies and untimely deaths happen at random, or does He select their times? Where is God when it hurts? The Bible says Christ is touched with the feeling of my infirmities (Hebrews 4:15), but why is His sympathy not

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Conquest and Cravings

Food, sex, and Baal Peor. by Jason Overman

Our bodies are better witnesses than our beliefs alone.

I learned this truth over lunch with three co-workers at Pizza Hut. One was a long-time friend and committed Christian. The other two were fresh on the job and not believers.

Loading our plates at the buffet, I asked the waitress if the admired pizza had pork sausage or hamburger on it. Back at the table I found my friend Todd explaining to the others my custom of eating according to the biblical principle of clean and unclean foods. The conversation turned even more personal when he suddenly added, “If you think that’s strange, Jason was also a virgin when he got married.”

You may imagine what came next. “What? No bacon? No fornication!?!” Despite my initial embarrassment, my personal habits provided the chance to share faith in the God of Israel and in His Son Jesus Christ. Whatever other benefits these habits may incur, on this day I learned that such “strange” practices are acts of worship that witness to a forgetful world of the One who made us and loves us.

That God cares how we eat and love is evident from Scripture. The Bible does not just talk about food and sex a lot; it often links the two. One particular story well illustrates this point.

Remembering Peor

After forty dusty years of wandering in the wilderness, Israel stood on the brink of the Promised Land. As she peered into Canaan, sizing up the giants there, Moses reminded Israel of a sad event years before — one

she dared not repeat: “Your eyes have seen what the LORD did at Baal Peor; for the LORD your God has destroyed from among you all the men who followed Baal of Peor” (Deuteronomy 4:3).

Years later, after her conquest of Canaan, Israel recalled this story and its warning once more: “Is the iniquity of Peor not enough for us, from which we are not cleansed till this day, although there was a plague in the congregation of the LORD . . . ?” (Joshua 22:17).

“Baal Peor” names the story of how Balak, king of Moab, having failed to halt Israel’s desert march by way of curse, took Balaam’s advice and overcame Israel by seducing her with a wide cultural embrace:

Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel (Numbers 25:1-3).

At first only camping, Israel now remained, settling and assimilating into the Moabite culture. Idolatry was the result, and the means to an idol was her unguarded and open indulgence of unsanctioned food and sex. In these moments, worship was betrayed and witness ruined.

The tragic story of Peor is one that Israel never forgot. Beyond the early recollections, her poets and prophets also rehearsed what that first generation simply called “the incident of Peor” (31:16). David writes, “They joined themselves also to Baal of

Peor, and ate sacrifices made to the dead” (Psalm 106:28). And Hosea laments:

I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the firstfruits on the fig tree in its first season. But they went to Baal Peor, and separated themselves to that shame; they became an abomination like the thing they loved (9:10).

The incident is discussed in the New Testament too. Paul tells the Corinthian church, going to extremes over food and sex in the name of liberty, that the ancient Israelites are “our fathers” and that their experiences are “our examples” so that “we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.” He recounts to them the stories of the golden calf and Baal Peor (see 1 Corinthians 10:1-8). Finally, in Revelation the Pergamos church is rebuked for allowing itself to be overtaken in the sin of Peor: eating things sacrificed to idols and committing sexual immorality (2:14-16).

The Baal Peor story is a lingering lesson for God’s people. It demonstrates how easily food and sex can be turned toward idolatrous ends. The lust that Paul warns of, the coveting that seized and enslaved Israel so quickly, is at the heart of idolatry (Colossians 3:5). There is no

need for stone when our cravings create idols of our own bodies. Peor is the sober reminder that the unchecked appetite can exploit even natural desires to our ruin.

Twin appetites

Food and sex are linked from the start. Genesis 1 celebrates them as a part of God’s good creation, inviting Adam and Eve to be “fruitful and multiply,” to eat “every herb . . . every tree” (vv. 28, 29). Chapter 2 adds restriction, as one tree is prohibited for food and sexuality is identified within marriage (vv. 15-25). Then chapter 3 explains how violation of divine limits yields a world where food and sex are subverted from blessing to curse as each is tainted by domination and travail (vv. 16-19).

Like all God’s creatures, humans are subject to powerful drives. Food and sex are among the most basic and speak to our very survival. But there is more to these cravings than physical release. Unlike animals, we do not just *feed*; we *dine*. We do not just *mate*; we *make love*. Food and sex are as much about intimacy, belonging, and delight as about a brutish instinct. Human behavior is not just the reflection of natural need but also of the

Peor is the sober reminder that the unchecked appetite can exploit even natural desires to our ruin.

Within God's design, both food and sex are to be enjoyed to the fullest as good gifts that sustain and enhance life.

Creator's intention for those who bear His image.

Within God's design, both food and sex are to be enjoyed to the fullest as gifts that sustain and enhance life. Beyond these limits, the gift turns into something else — a debt, a demand that cannot be satisfied. When we stray beyond the boundaries, coveting as Adam and Eve did, convinced that freedom means more choices rather than right choices, we are conquered by our cravings and captive to our lusts. The lesser life that follows is not the life God intended.

The Bible explores food and sex and their potential for blessing or curse throughout its pages. In story, in law, in poetry, the pairing of the two — in ways subtle or obvious — admonishes us of their dangers and delights. They warn that we must master our appetite or be mastered by it.

Scriptural examples

In story, for instance, we find Esau governed by his cravings in trading his birthright for stew and choosing a wife from the heathen (Genesis 25:34; 26:34; Hebrews 12:16). In contrast, Sarah and Abraham generously shared their food with strangers and, to their surprise, conceived Isaac in old age (Genesis 18:1-15). Genesis alone is full of mo-

ality tales like these (compare Noah and Lot, 9:21; 19:32-36).

In law there is instruction on how holy people are to cultivate holy appetites. Leviticus 11 and 18 build on the limiting principles of Eden. The first focuses on food and the animals to avoid; the second, on sex and the relations to avoid. The grievous nature of the offenses is evident in that each is deemed "abominable" and "unclean." Both are reiterated in chapter 20, and Israel is invited to be holy as her Lord is holy (vv. 8-26; for similar restrictions on food and sex in relation to blood, see 17:14; 20:18).

In poetry there is much talk of the delights and dangers inherent in food and sex. Proverbs warns those "given to appetite" to beware of the drunkard and glutton, the harlot and seductress (23:1-28). But at the same time, the Song of Solomon celebrates the pleasures of love and of food: "He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love" (2:4).

The same goes for the New Testament, where regular mention is made of food and sex. The apostle's decree, for instance, outlines behavior patterns that apply to both Jew and Gentile: "Abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood" (Acts 15:20; 21:25). All

four of these items pertain to either food or sex, which also find their way often into Paul's vice lists (compare fornication and drunkenness, Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10).

In the imagery of Revelation, Babylon is called a fornicator and unclean animal, a harlot who drinks the blood of saints (17:1-6; 18:1-3). In stark contrast there is the happy news of the marriage supper of the Lamb and His bride (19:7-9).

The Gospels contain stories regarding food and sex as well. The marriage wine at Cana speaks to the joyful character of these good gifts (John 2:1-11), even as the reckless promiscuity of the prodigal son leads to pigpen rations, then home to his father's table again (Luke 15:11-32).

This "home again" is important for those wanting to live within divine limits. While Jesus is the very righteousness of God, He was not exclusionary. Unlike the pious elite of His day, He did not distance Himself from harlots and drunkards but ministered to them instead (7:34-50).

Baal or YHWH

Our manner of eating and loving will make us *different* from the culture around us, but it should not make us *distant* from it. God wants to sanctify us body and soul (1 Thessalonians 5:23). He desires that our lives be a question in need of an answer, an act of worship, a living witness to those who cannot imagine glorifying God in the ordinary, everyday acts of eating and loving (1 Corinthians 6:20; 10:31).

The story of Baal Peor speaks

continued on page 11

Questions & Answers

Q Why do you write about the same old subjects when there is so much going on in the world and coming into our churches? I heard a young married couple say they can do whatever they want in bed, and a sister is selling sex toys. Other couples watch porn together. Why are anal and oral sex not frowned upon by Christians? I am sure the Bible mentions these things. Other religions study how sex should be in marriage. Why not the Church and the BA?

A You have our attention. We hope to walk the line between being squeamish on one hand, shocking on the other. The Bible is modestly graphic – but not pornographic – with regard to sex in a few texts. Proverbs 5:15-20 and 1 Corinthians 7:1-9 are two examples. The Song of Solomon contains some poetic language of lovemaking between husband and wife – slightly erotic, perhaps, but never lewd or obscene.

God's Word does not give the explicit counsel that you seem to expect about the gamut of sexual versions and perversions popular today. Scripture makes no mention of oral sex or of sex toys – two of your examples. Neither is anal sex, a vice attributed to the biblical city of Sodom, given sacred space. Homosexuality gets negative mention in the Bible, and most Christians object to sodomy because of its unnatural quality.

The Bible extols sexual relations for married men and women but prohibits them outside marriage. This rule of "single and celibate, or married and faithful" is briefly stated in Hebrews 13:4.

Scripture does not identify certain sexual acts within marriage as sinful nor set the limits that some expect. Proverbs and Solomon's Song encourage a young man and woman to celebrate their libido within the context of marriage. Mutual consent is key here; nothing on demand. We should be slow

to label certain activity between married couples as immoral if the Bible does not. Pornography as an outside stimulant to the marriage bed? This is beyond the limit, I'm convinced. It introduces lewd and lascivious images of others, thus compromising purity between husband and wife (Matt. 5:28).

On the other hand, we should resist our society's efforts to push the envelope of sexual practice into more degraded forms. Sex, like fire, is a wonderful friend but a terrible enemy. Abusing the gift creates much human misery, and all society ends up paying the price – physically, emotionally, and financially. What a pleasure, though, for married adults who enjoy sex responsibly and are willing to accept the responsibilities that naturally flow from it, including parenthood.

Among humans, intercourse and other explicit sexual behaviors are reserved for private meetings and may not be publicly performed without public censure. The same sensibilities apply, to a large degree, to public discussions of the same private acts. Most Christians grew up modest in this area, and today's trend of telling all has not altered the sense of reticence that we still appreciate in our mothers and daughters.

Please don't be disappointed with partial explanations here. In a chapter with several allusions to sexual immorality, Paul writes "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret" (Eph. 5:11, 12). Instead of looking for all the answers from a Sabbath sermon or in these family-oriented pages, why not take advantage of some of the excellent targeted resources available in the Christian community? By pointing you to other sources for the details, we hope to strike a proper balance and retain most of our readers in the end.

– Elder Calvin Burrell



Sex: A God's- Eye View

Biblical counsel on satisfying
a God-given appetite.
by **Brian Knowles**

In Hebrew thought, human sexuality is a gift of God to be celebrated within the context of the Torah teachings that apply to it. When God created two genders, He looked at this naked pair, commanded them to reproduce (or have sex), and declared it, along with everything else, “very good” (Genesis 1:28, 31). How, then, did something very good become tainted?

Only after the first couple sinned by disobeying God (that sin had nothing to do with sex, as some suppose) did they become self-conscious about their nakedness and guilt enter the human psyche (2:25; 3:7). The advent of guilt changed Adam and Eve’s relationship to God, as they were cut off from Him.

Driven out of the lush Eden into a world of thorns and thistles, they knew something had gone terribly wrong. Adam might’ve said to Eve on the way out of the garden, “I perceive we are in a time of transition.”

Indeed it was a transition: from innocence to sinfulness, from intimacy to alienation. Adam and Eve, like all their descendants, stood in need of redemption and reconciliation. It is difficult for an unredeemed world to view human sexuality from a divine perspective.

Sex and Scripture

No passages in Scripture view human sexuality as sinful per se, or even as tainted. No one should ever feel guilty about ex-

periencing a sexual appetite; it is hard-wired into every healthy person, like the need to eat, drink, or view beauty. None of the appetites and drives the Creator built into us are in themselves evil, and there is no reason to be ashamed of, or embarrassed by, any of them.

Sarah, Abraham’s wife, associated the act of procreation with pleasure (18:10-12). The Song of Solomon celebrates the joy of romantic love. Sex, very good from the start, was meant for both pleasure and procreation. It was also meant for heterosexually married couples (Genesis 2:22-24).

Like the appetite for food or drink, the desire for sex is a gift from God. Animals fulfill these desires based on need and instinct, but man has a unique quality that calls for managing his appetites. Being created in God’s image demands of us a higher, holier standard of behavior than brute beasts.

Among other things, it is our capacity to think and act morally that reflects in us the image of God. Once the knowledge of good and evil enters our lives, we become aware that sexual desire, like any other appetite, can be directed toward evil ends. Note that Satan tempted Adam and Eve through a combination of ego and appetite (3:6). He has been doing the same with their descendants ever since. Invariably, we all take the bait and sin.

Instructions for holiness

The commandments of God are meant to lift our behavior above the animal level, toward the divine. When kept, they render the fulfillment of human

appetites holy. Keeping them provides us with a dignity that reflects the divine image.

Within heterosexual marriage, Christian couples are free to express their sexuality creatively, but not outside of biblical boundaries. All such expressions of sexuality must be by mutual consent. Some in the Corinthian church, in distress because of persecution, reasoned that it might be better to remain single rather than take on the responsibilities of marriage. Paul's response in 1 Corinthians 7:1-5 begins with the statement "It is good for a man not to marry," which probably reflects their opinion and should be in quotes.

Paul realized that young people with strong sexual desires might struggle to remain chaste. Rather than risk slipping into fornication, Paul instructed them to marry. Once married, both partners should view their bodies as belonging to their mate. Women who withhold sex — use it as a weapon — are violating the instructions here. The man and the woman should meet and satisfy their sexual needs in each other. Paul saw this as a "duty," not merely an option.

Neither Paul nor any other biblical writer provides guidelines for sexual mechanics. Married couples are free to meet each other's needs in sex, as long as it is consensual and private. Neither partner should impose upon the other any act that is repugnant to their mate. At the same time, each partner should do his or her best to accommodate the other's particular needs. If this involves compromises, they must not be of a moral nature, like adultery. Clearly, no parties outside of the marriage should

be involved. Sex is between the husband and wife only, and it is entirely exclusive.

The sexual relationship between a man and his wife is private. A wife should not discuss her husband's sexual idiosyncrasies or inadequacies with others, nor should the husband ever embarrass his wife in front of others. The image of God that we bear implies a certain dignity that must be protected.

The wife should be as "sexy" as her husband wishes in their private times, when no children are present. In public she should be modest, not flirtatious or provocative. A woman's ideal public demeanor is described in Proverbs 31. Her romantic nature is described in Song of Solomon.

Sexual over-stimulation

In our time, sex has been downgraded to merely recreational, like having a snack when you're hungry. Many single adults hook up simply for casual sex, with no commitment.

Sexual over-stimulation is ubiquitous. Sex sells — all over the Web, in magazines, in movies, and in life. The boundaries of Judeo-Christian sexual ethics have been broken down. Now every form of sex, no matter how perverse, is being incrementally legitimized, mainstreamed, and


legalized. Sex in our time has been trivialized, politicized, and exploited to the max. None of this helps.

Light to the world

What is legal is not necessarily moral. What's good for the world is not always good for Christians. It is our duty to march to the beat of the divine drummer. In many Western churches, the culture prevails over the biblical sexual standard. Culture is increasingly defining the church, instead of the church influencing the culture to a higher standard. If the church caves in to the prevailing darkness, its light goes out and it becomes like any club or lodge that caters to people. It ceases to be the church.

We are called to be a light to the world, as was Jesus. Our job is to set the example, to model godly behavior in every aspect of life, including the sexual. When we fail to live up to the standards we espouse, we are viewed as hypocrites. Our moral authority is out the window. Let's heed the admonition in Hebrews 13:4 to keep the marriage bed pure. **13:4**

Brian Knowles writes from Monrovia, CA. Scripture quotations were taken from the *New International Version*.



If the church caves in to the prevailing darkness, its light goes out and it becomes like any club or lodge that caters to people. It ceases to be the church.



Sinners at Church

How to keep from further hurting the hurting.
by Chanin Preece

“You know, they make Prozac for people like her.”
“It’s not like you have herpes or anything like that.”

“They don’t even have to worry about promiscuity. They can just take care of it with an abortion.”

These comments and others like them — sometimes whispered, sometimes exclaimed and accompanied by laughter — can be heard in the hallways, classrooms, and fellowship hall. Yes,

church can be a downright harsh place for a sinner.

In the sanctuary, the pastor is preaching on consequences of sexual promiscuity: unwanted pregnancy, abortion, sexually transmitted diseases, and depression — and the toll on society that ultimately has to take care of all these issues.

A woman who had an abortion years ago slips out in the middle of the sermon to cry in the bathroom.

Another woman with herpes wrinkles her nose and nods in false agreement when the person next to her comments that that’s what they get. She tells herself for the thousandth time that she is worthless and deserves the worst that life can throw at her.

A woman living with depression, face ablaze, prays no one will discover her secret. Certainly she would never confide in anyone here. These people have it all together. On a good day, she might just put up a wall and declare them all self-righteous snobs. When she hasn’t had decent sleep for days, however, nothing really matters.

None of the three women hear that Jesus loves and forgives them or that their sisters and brothers in Christ love and support them. Nor do they hear that every Christian, without exception, fails the Lord again and again. What they do hear is that “We have little sins, but you have the big ones. There is a difference between us and you: We are not as bad as you.”

I don’t believe that Christians deliberately set out to destroy one another, nor do we intentionally hurt each other’s feelings. Yet when we joke or make judgments about the “big” sins, we assume that no one around us is living with the consequences of those sins. Worse, we ultimately end up modeling the very opposite of Christ’s forgiveness and love to those who are feeling immediate need of it.

Personal story

Should we just ignore the sin? No. Everyone needs to hear and understand that sexual sins reap horrendous consequences. And

those consequences don't go away. Sexual sin affects all areas of life, not just the body.

A thirty-nine-year-old woman who contracted herpes at the age of thirty had this to share:

If I live to be eighty, I will have to cope with this disease for fifty years. The good news is, there is a medication that helps suppress outbreaks. The bad news is, dealing with the physical effects isn't the worst part.

After getting herpes, I was terrified that if anyone found out, they would broadcast it to the world. I imagined my boss and co-workers finding out and my having to pack up my little girl and leave town in the middle of the night.

Another problem is how to enter into a relationship, hoping it will eventually lead to marriage, when you have herpes. I mean, how would you like to tell your fiancé that you contracted herpes from a prior relationship? I found myself dating men that were not good for me, thinking that they might accept the disease, since they always seemed to make poor choices.

Of course, those relationships didn't work out. I finally stepped back and began to focus on what was important: growing [in] my relationship with Christ and being a good role model for my daughter.

Eventually, I began dating a Christian man. It was so scary to think about telling him about the herpes. I put off the discussion for weeks, trying to come up with a decent way to tell him. I finally confided in a friend, who encouraged me to read the Bible, pray, and consider that the man was not prone to judge others or to gossip.

She suggested that even if he couldn't accept the prospect of a spouse with herpes, he wouldn't embarrass me. I followed her advice. Praise God, we were married last fall.

Christ-like character

Every one of us deals with the consequences of our sins. It is not only a hurting world out there; it is a hurting world in here — in my church, in your church. Joking about others' sins may turn them away from the body of Christ. I don't want to face Jesus at the judgment seat and have Him ask me why I turned hurting people away from Him. Now that is a "big" sin.

How can we help the hurting find a place to heal in our churches? Like the woman's friend in the story above, we can work hard at displaying Christ's love, understanding, and forgiveness. After all, without His forgiveness, we would be lost, too. The key is to return to the Word often to fully discover what He has done for us and what He wants us to do for others.

Specifically, we can pray for ourselves to 1) change our reaction to uncomfortable topics from sarcastic to empathetic; 2) let ourselves be vulnerable, take others alongside us, and grow together; and 3) hold our thoughts and tongues captive when tempted. Better yet, let's say and do the right thing, the Jesus thing: Hate the sin but love the sinner. **RA**

Chanin Preece writes from Cheyenne, WY.

Conquest and Cravings

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on. As our world falls ever more captive to its own cravings, we see the mounting personal and social challenges rising from food and sexual abuse. Are the people of God worshiping and witnessing to our Lord despite the cultural pressure? Or are we, like Israel at Peor, being assimilated into a wider culture of gluttony and lust?

Of all the pagan gods Israel encountered, Baal was the one she found hardest to resist, and it remains so to this day. Baal was a god of reckless abandon; YHWH is a God of established limits. Baal indulges without restraint; YHWH blesses within boundaries. Baal exalts the sensuous to the status of worship; YHWH grounds the passions in the spirit of discipline. Baal offers unlimited freedom; YHWH offers the reassuring bonds of covenant. Baal asks for nothing and takes our very life; YHWH asks for our life and gives us His in return.

Baal is no god but rather the collection and projection of our own selfish appetites. I recently saw him on display at the Louvre in Paris. The 3,300-year-old stele bearing his image came from a place and time not far removed from Peor. He looked a lot like me, but I hunger and aspire to a higher "image" than this. **RA**

Jason Overman serves the congregation in Jasper, AR.





The Lies That Blind

Some relationships with the opposite sex can burn you. by R. C. Barry

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I felt a knot in the pit of my stomach. The clock was ticking toward the appointment I had made with my supervisor at work, but I dreaded the meeting.

My supervisor, Daniel,* was a likeable guy and a good businessman. From the time I was hired at the Christian ministry where we both worked, I had admired Daniel and enjoyed the morning devotionals he periodically shared with the staff.

But gradually a “situation” began to develop. One of my co-workers, Sharon, had been happily engaged. Unexpectedly, her fiancé changed his mind about marrying her, broke off the engagement, and even moved

out of state. Sharon was devastated.

Daniel tried to lift Sharon’s rock-bottom self-esteem. In addition to praising her work, he began inviting her along on some family outings. The time I saw all of them together at a restaurant, Daniel jokingly commented that his family had grown: He’d gained “a new daughter,” as he called the ten-year-younger Sharon.

Sharon’s depression didn’t fade quickly. However, in time her smile reappeared, and she regained her bubbly personality. Daniel promoted her, and all of us rejoiced that our friend had overcome her dejection.

Warning signs

However, as more time passed, rather than easing back on his attention to Sharon, Daniel deepened his relationship with her. In the past, he had been a “non-morning person,” but now he began arriving at the office early with donuts and coffee to share with Sharon. She, in turn, took a trip back home to visit her parents and returned with a souvenir from her home state for Daniel, but not for anyone else in Daniel’s family.

As the weeks grew into months, the friendship continued to blossom. Meanwhile, my co-workers and I were becoming concerned. No one wanted to point fingers or gossip, but everyone sensed an increasing uneasiness with the bond. It didn’t look right; it didn’t “feel” right.

On the day that one employee said, “Hey, where’s Sharon?” and another replied, “Probably in the usual place — Daniel’s house,” I knew I had to talk to my boss about his behavior.

Confrontation

When the appointed time arrived, I said a silent prayer and knocked on Daniel’s door.

After a few exchanges of small talk, I got to the point. “I’m not accusing you of anything, but I have to tell you: Your one-on-one relationship with Sharon is going to ruin your testimony. First Thessalonians 5:22 admonishes, ‘Abstain from all appearance of evil.’ This may be just friendship in your mind, but it looks like flirting and romance. People are noticing.”

The smile vanished as Daniel leaned backward and stared at

me straight-faced. He cleared his throat. "I appreciate your concern," he finally said. "I certainly don't mean to start rumors." His tone abruptly hardened. "But a person can choose whatever friends he wants. Maybe we should just tell people to mind their own business!"

Those were not the words I'd hoped to hear.

Hearing his own harshness, Daniel softened again and made a few limp remarks that promised no changes in the future. Later, I shared my concern with a different supervisor. "You're not his employee," I said. "You're his friend. Talk to him. If he's in love with a single woman and won't let go, it can't stay hidden. This could give our entire ministry a black eye."

Within a couple weeks, Daniel confessed his strong attraction to Sharon, but the two refused to stay away from each other. Management asked both to resign, and in a short while Daniel lost his wife, his reputation, and the respect of those who knew him.

Learning from a tragedy

Did God fail Daniel? The truth is, God does not fail; He fulfills all His promises. But Christians who fail to heed crucial warnings in God's Word place themselves in grave spiritual danger. Based on Daniel's fall from faithfulness, here are some biblical principles that can safeguard both male and female believers from such a tragedy.

Submit your heart daily to the Great Physician for a checkup. Humbly pray Psalm 139:23, 24: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any

wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Then if the Lord replies by shining His spotlight on something in your life, obediently surrender that thing to Him. No excuses. No exceptions.

Don't play games. Don't rationalize a "special" relationship with someone of the opposite sex by labeling that person "an adopted daughter," a "kindred spirit," "just a friend," or anything else. No one would play hopscotch on the brink of the Grand Canyon; it's too easy to fall in! So why play games on the brink of sin? Games just provide a smoke-screen for potential trouble. "He who covers his sins will not prosper" (Proverbs 28:13).

Don't trust yourself. Don't assume that you'll never find yourself in a position of romantic temptation. And don't assume you can handle it if you do. Satan is trying his best to make Christians fall. Before the Devil comes knocking, establish limits for what you will and won't do with members of the opposite sex, and stick to them. For instance, as a married man, I personally will not enter into an office or a home with a lone female and close the door. Likewise, I won't go out to eat with a woman other than my wife, not even to discuss business. Whoever looks on a questionable situation and concludes "I can handle it" is demonstrating spiritual immaturity. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately

wicked; who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9).

Be cautious in giving or receiving compassion and personal compliments. Both of these can send another person the signal "I care for you" or "I find you attractive." If a person of the opposite sex truly needs compassion or uplifting, ask your spouse or someone else of the same gender to administer it. "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Remember the number one commandment — the one Jesus said is most important: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). Christians should nurture their love for God so much that any compromise with sin, with even the appearance of evil, nauseates them.

Daniel's catastrophe was avoidable. Clearly, the counsel in many Bible verses, if taken to heart in advance, will protect a man or woman of God from following Daniel's tragic footsteps. But for those verses to be effective, believers must hide them in their hearts and commit to them — before the enticement begins.



**All individuals' names have been changed.*

R. C. Barry writes from Plainfield, IN.

Christians who fail to heed crucial warnings in God's Word place themselves in grave spiritual danger.

Lost and Found

An obscure Old Testament story has connections to New Testament truth.
by Charles Irwin

One of the Bible's most colorful and complex personalities was Joab, who played a key role for Israel under King David. Joab's brothers, Abishai and Asahel, were, to a lesser extent, tangled in the web of David's turbulent life and the nation's politics.

Joab, Abishai, and Asahel were sons of Zeruiah, David's sister, and nephews of the king. Perhaps none were more loyal to David than these three brothers. Joab especially was fiercely protective of David. As commander-in-chief of Israel's armies, Joab had few equals in the history of the nation. Courage, loyalty, physical prowess, perseverance, cruelty, rashness, envy — an array of contradictory traits made up this complicated man. Depending on the shifting winds of circumstance, Joab played roles of peacemaker, counselor, hero, assassin, self-appointed ex-

ecutioner, and conspirator.

What can we learn from Joab's life and its tragic end that will help us today? Let's begin by looking at some traits that made Joab a good leader.

Daring courage

Confronted by David and his army, the Jebusites mocked and taunted David, saying that the lame and blind could effectively defend their stronghold: present-day Jerusalem (2 Samuel 5:8). Gazing upward at the formidable wall, David realized that the Jebusites had a point, so he contrived a plan. If some of his men could scale the water shaft leading from Gihon Spring into the Jebusite stronghold, they could capture the fortress and the city.

The Jebusites used the forty-foot shaft to draw water in times of siege. At its top a narrow tunnel ascends switchback fashion several more meters until it emerges near the old wall. David proclaimed that the first man to reach the top would be his military commander-in-chief. Joab was first (1 Chronicles 11:4-6). He may have used grappling hooks and footholds to scale the vertical shaft, then crawled

through the narrow, angling tunnel to begin his assault. After a stunning victory, the stronghold was named Zion and the City of David (vv. 4, 5), and the larger site eventually became Jerusalem, David's and Israel's capital.

The daring Joab was also courageous. The sixtieth psalm is a response to his killing of David's enemies in the Valley of Salt. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the psalmist sang: "Who will bring me to the strong city? Who will lead me to Edom? Is it not You, O God, who cast us off?" (vv. 9, 10). God led Joab into the seemingly impenetrable land of Edom, where he hunted down every Edomite male (1 Kings 11:14-16).

Loyalty

Joab was always loyal to David, a trait that sometimes led to rash behavior. When Absalom, David's son, led an insurrection against his father, Joab supported David throughout the national crisis. Unfortunately, Joab marred his meritorious service by an act of insubordination. The king ordered that Absalom be spared, but Joab executed him. Joab may have correctly perceived Absalom as a continuing threat to the king, as well as to the kingdom (2 Samuel 18:10-14).

Joab's loyalty to the king is further illustrated by his determination to insure that David receive the honor for his own successful exploits. Upon the capture of Rabba's waterworks, Joab summoned David to finish the siege so that the king — not his commander — could receive the honor for the city's capture (12:26-29).

Wise counsel

On two occasions, Joab gave the king timely advice — another admirable trait. He rebuked David for grieving over the death of his rebellious son while failing to honor the valorous troops, and David listened (19:5-8).

Later, Joab voiced his objections at David's desire to take a census of the kingdom's men of military age. The sovereign listened again but wasn't to be deterred, so General Joab obeyed the king's order to number the people. Retribution came swiftly and predictably: God punished Israel for David's lack of sound judgment (24:2-17).

Cruelty

But Joab had a grisly downside as well. At the nadir of his life, he executed two high-ranking generals: Abner, Saul's former commander-in-chief, and Amasa, David's appointed replacement as his top general. Joab committed the murder of Abner out of revenge because he killed Asahel, Joab's younger brother in an earlier skirmish. This was especially troubling inasmuch as David and Abner had made peace, a key step in binding the nation's wounds after civil war. One can only imagine David's humiliation and anguish at this ruthless act of revenge (3:27; 19:13; 20:10). Later, Joab assassinated General Amasa out of envy and jealousy. David viewed the two victims as more righteous than Joab.

Many years later, King David, nearing death, pronounced a curse on Joab and his descendants: His clan would be afflicted with debilitating diseases. He

then directed his son Solomon, soon to be king, to execute Joab for his brutal crimes.

Deadly plot

Joab's final blunder occurred about this time. He conspired with Abiathar the priest and others to make Adonijah, another son of David, king of Israel instead of Solomon. Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, alerted David, who then ordered Solomon proclaimed as king. The plot failed, and Solomon placed Abiathar under house arrest until his execution.

Hearing this news and knowing his own fate, Joab fled to the tabernacle and grasped the horns of the altar, where animals were bound before being sacrificed, in a desperate plea for mercy. One can picture the panic-stricken man racing through the streets of the city, dodging vendors, carts, and animals. As expected, King Solomon sent Benaiah, the executioner, to kill Joab.

The right place


And so ended the life of one of Israel's most colorful, courageous, and complex men. A sad ending? No.

We may view it as a good ending because the frantic Joab went to the right place to find peace: the altar of sacrifice, where he met God and found forgiveness for his sins. He had known the law of God and been an exemplary Jew in some respects, observing the feast days and the Sabbath. But he deserved death and he knew it. He was reconciled at that altar to the loving Father he had spurned much of his life. This was the rest he had long sought for.

Joab's clinging to the horns of the altar resembles the pathos of the thief on the cross who asked Jesus to remember him when He came into His kingdom. At that altar, Jesus Christ's crucifixion hundreds of years later was foretold. The altar was a prophetic symbol of the cross of Jesus. The blood of countless sheep and other animals on that altar was like a promissory note, or IOU, to be redeemed by Jesus Christ on the cross. Only by the shedding of His blood and His resurrection from the dead could all sins from the beginning to the end of time be forgiven. Without Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, all would be hopeless, desperate.

Reconciliation

Do you see yourself in Joab? Perhaps you have served your King, yet have failed Him often or brought shame upon His name. You have left your first love and are now insensitive to His Spirit. Or it could be you have never committed your life to Jesus Christ at all. Now you face a dilemma of life-and-death proportions.

Where to go? Not to the altar of the old covenant tabernacle; it no longer exists. Go to the right place: the altar of the new covenant — the cross of our Savior Jesus — where He paid for all sins, failures, guilt, and anguish with His blood. There you will "obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). 

Charles Irwin, a member residing in Quartz Hill, CA, is a semi-retired school teacher. He once attended Spring Vale Academy.



JUNE 2007

YOUTH REACH

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 BA Online or NFYC
Web site for contest
rules.

Entries due by
August 31.

Stay Connected!

by Wayne Hrenyk

Picture this: You're in a car and the DJ on the radio announces a chance to call in and win \$1,000 — if you're the first caller. You frantically grab your cell phone and dial in. After a few seconds, the DJ's voice on the other end says you've won. He asks your name and phone number and is just ready to tell you how to collect the money when . . . you lose your signal. A lousy connection cost you some good money.

Now think about this in your spiritual life. How strong is your connection with God? If you lose your signal with Him, you lose a lot — maybe your reputation, your peace of mind, and many of the blessings He otherwise has for you. You'd think that young people would know this, but many of them don't seem to care. They leave Jesus behind in their high school and college years. They lose connection with Him.

How does that happen? Well, they gradually lose focus on the things that matter to God or sacrifice them when the pressure is on. That's what happened to Samson. He was dedicated to God the minute he was born. He had awesome physical strength and all kinds of power from God's Spirit. He crushed every foe, human or animal! But Samson gave his heart to unhealthy relationships — like women who kept him from being charged up in his spiritual life. He ended up caving in to his wife's constant nagging and allowed her to cut his hair — the source of his strength (Judges 16:16-19).

Guess what happened? Samson lost his connection with God — and didn't even know it (v. 20).

Makes you think, doesn't it? The wrong person can bring you down, like Delilah did to Samson, so you go against what God told you was right. To keep that from happening . . .

Know what is off-limits in God's eyes. Here is where your good training at home, from a teacher, and from church can make the difference. Don't forget the godly things you learned from godly people.

Choose your friends carefully. If you hang with a skeptic or a scoffer and think you won't be affected, think again. Before long, much of the good training in your past will be drowned out by the doubts these friends put in your mind.

Watch yourself around the opposite sex. In Samson's case, this may have been the number one temptation to sin. Nothing much has changed, has it? To keep yourself pure, make your mind up every day that you will honor God in your body and your spirit — both God's. Commit yourself to sexual purity.

Don't end up like Samson; keep your signal strong with God. The messages of His Word and Spirit can give you many victories, but a good connection depends on you!

Convention '07 for Youth

Ever feel like you don't fit in? Like you're an alien in your own world? That's because you are! This year's convention theme "Celebrate the Journey" recognizes that life on earth is only one leg of the journey. Final destination: God's kingdom — eternal life with our Savior and Lord.

All FYCers (ages 13-22) are invited to the July 3-7 youth program in Overland Park, Kansas, where you'll be encouraged and equipped to prepare for finals and to enjoy the journey until then. You can expect . . .

- relationship-building activities
- old and new friends
- dynamic workshops
- door prizes and giveaways
- free T-shirt with registration packet
- Kansas City area outings
- and lots more!

More information about convention youth program is available at <http://nfyc.cog7.org>.

A few of the nearly 400 youth and youth workers who attended the Conroe (TX) youth conference April 7-8. Check out <http://nfyc.cog7.org> for more on what was probably the largest CoG7 youth meeting ever in the United States.

West Canada Family Camp

June 8-10

Pembina River Campsite

Contact: Francisco Chavez, district youth coordinator, 403-590-6976 or fm.chavez@shaw.ca

Michigan Youth Camp

July 15-22

Long Lake Outdoor Center

Theme: "You Can't Handle the Truth"

Contact: Rex Miller, camp director, 616-534-7564 or kingmerex@aol.com Download forms: http://cog7.org/fyc_michigan_youth_camp.htm

SIS-Q Meadows Senior Youth Camp

July 22-29

Cave Junction, OR

Contact: Harold and Vona Ogren, camp directors, 541-689-1387 or hogren@msn.com

SIS-Q Meadows Junior Youth Camp

July 29 - August 5

Cave Junction, OR

Contact: Ben and Joy Sandford, camp directors seekerscampers@yahoo.com

SW District Summer Getaway Retreat

August 16-19

Sandia, TX (Zephyr Baptist Encampment)

Contact: Jason and Rose Rodriguez, district youth coordinators 281-379-3964 or jrande@houston.rr.com



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



Traveling Tips

There's joy in the journey . . . if we run with endurance. by **Stephen J. Kyner**

www.comstock.com

The Christian life is like a journey during which we're constantly on the move. The Bible speaks of walking in the Spirit, running the race, pressing toward the mark, enduring to the end. On this side of Christ's return, we are always in process — "strangers and foreigners" en route to a better country. What will help us on our journey there?

Decide what to leave behind. A trip to Alabama calls for different plans and packing than a shopping trip across the street. On our spiritual journey, we should travel light — that is, limit our entanglements with the world. If not, even our good jobs, business dealings, good entertainment, and other activities can strangle our service to the Lord and to others. Are we too tired from these to have a quiet time with Him, to spend quality

time with our family, or to serve at church? If our reading material and our TV-and-movie time turn us away from the purity of Christ, let's replace that baggage. The writer of Hebrews tells us to "lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us . . ." (12:1).

Decide what to carry along. What shall we take with us? The big three virtues of faith, hope, and love won't add an ounce to our burden. In fact, they'll lighten it and keep us headed down the right path for sure!

Be open to new experiences. Just when we think we have the journey figured out, we'll need to move on to what we can't see over the hill, around

the next bend. Covering familiar ground is not the goal, but moving closer to the goal is. What new things might God want us to learn along the way?

Keep moving ahead — persevere! Many attractive side roads grab for our attention along the way, but they steer us away from our main commitment. Sometimes an apparent short cut can get us completely lost. In my own life, a short cut is just a rough road leading nowhere or in the wrong direction. It takes the discipline of time and effort to move on to spiritual victories. Praying, studying, meditating on God's Word, and fellowshiping with the brethren are proven ways to keep us on track.

When climbing steep hills and overshadowed in the low valleys, we press on even harder. Rest

stops should be only temporary; no permanent camping is allowed. When we stumble along the way, we can take heart that this is only one small piece of the journey, then get back up and keep going.

Keep our eyes on Jesus and the final destination. The rest of that text in Hebrews 12 goes like this: “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith” (v. 2). When traveling, there is no substitute for a fixed landmark, a towering mountain range, or other immovable signpost. On our spiritual journey, that landmark is the Lord Jesus Christ. If we lose sight of Him, we won’t know the right direction nor reach the right destination. Apart from Him who is the Way, we’re lost for eternity.

When we do get off the track of Christ’s grace and truth, we can repair the error. Pull out the compass of faith, look at the map of God’s Word, and follow its signs straight back to Jesus and His example. With Christ leading on, the Holy Spirit will help us make course corrections to arrive safely in that eternal city.

Depend on God and His provisions. During our journey, God is always there to help us and lead us in the “paths of righteousness” (Psalm 23:3). He’s also provided all the saints past and present – “a great cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1) – to cheer us on, as well as others in the church to offer support (see Ephesians 4:11-13). The most precious provision is Jesus’ death on the cross for our sins. By this, God offers forgiveness and salvation, placing us on this journey

with Him in the first place.

God promises to make every provision for our success (Romans 8:28-39). The same grace of God that got us going on Salvation Street at the begin-

ning will see us all the way down Glory Road at the end. ■■■

Pastor Steve Kyner serves churches in Alfred and Devil’s Lake, ND.



I try to walk a few miles every morning at least four days a week, depending on our travel schedule and the weather. My husband and I do most things together, but this is one time I go alone – my time to talk to God.

Each day’s walk seems like a new adventure to me. We are blessed to live in a beautiful area with wide streets, little traffic, and a lovely wooded area to stroll through. I know God walks with me, so I take the opportunity to ask His advice and tell Him about my concerns over family and friends. I also take this time to admire nature. God must have had fun making the many flowers with brilliant colors, as well as the beautiful birds.

As I revel in the beauty or look skyward, I sometimes find myself walking off the path’s edge. And rougher areas of the walk make it easy to lose my footing and fall, if I’m not alert. This reminds me that the Christian walk can be the same: If I allow my attention to drift from God and the way He’s laid out, worldly cares and possessions could easily distract me. Or I can stumble and fall in my spiritual walk. I must always keep my eye on the path laid out before me, both physical and spiritual.

During these daily walks, I never forget to thank God for the many blessings He has given me. I thank Him for my health, for my sight, and for the mobility to take these walks. God has blessed me with a wonderful family and many good friends in my church family. I take each of you with me every time I go on my “walk and talk with God.”

– Jackie Cook
Pflugerville, TX



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Anxiety: Fight It or Feed It

With the right weapons, we can conquer this enemy of peace. **by V. Neil Wyrick**

Have you heard about the man who had a plane to catch at an early hour? Having set his alarm, he sat on the edge of his bed all night to make sure it went off on time.

This man earned his PhD in anxiety; he had worry down to a science. He believed that living one day at a time meant never sleeping so he would always know what time of day it was.

Fear can be a friend when it keeps us from walking on glass, ingesting poison, or running from a pit bull. But foolish anxiety — the kind we feed — runs around wearing holes in our brains, creating ulcers in our stomachs, and making any peace we might have had break up in pieces. Anxiety does exactly what the Greek translation of the New Testament says it does: It strangles the living daylights out of us. It curdles; it crumples; it cripples. We have only so much time and energy,

and it wastes both.

We must fight, not feed, anxiety by wielding spiritual and physical weapons.

A pound of fortitude

So then, where and how can a pound of fortitude be found to control a pound of fear before it becomes a ton of anxiety? Therein lies the rub, because many a fear that was wise can become an anxiety that isn't.

Second Timothy 1:7 offers a weapon and way of weighing worrisome things properly: "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity [fear], but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline" (NIV). Joining hands with David and his words has a winning sound to it: "Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass" (Psalm 37:5).

If there is a truth that should

be written across the sky, it is this: Saying and meaning "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil" (Psalm 23:4) is an affirmation that has the touch of miracle in it. Why? Because when one is not afraid to die, one is not afraid to live.

Proper authorities

A big part of any solution is to seek out proper authorities. Once we have read the first-class authority, Jesus — "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow" (Matthew 6:31) — it makes common sense to find outstanding examples of those who have taken His words to heart.

One is John Wesley. It was said of this founder of the Methodist Church that he arose each morning at four o'clock, preached more than 40,000 times, and traveled more than

250,000 miles on horseback. In the course of all this, Wesley never hurried, never worried, and never let foolish anxieties wear him down.

Connie Mack was a baseball manager, not a preacher, but he early learned a truth that allowed him to perform brilliantly the intricacies of life. He used to say that he forced himself to prepare to win future games rather than waste time and energy worrying about games he had lost. One of Mack's favorite booster phrases: "You can't grind grain with water that has already gone down the creek."

Courage and peace

Today we have Iraq, but remember Y2K not that long ago? Remember Vietnam, the Korean War, WWII? It is hard to picture a time when there has not been some kind of political, economic, or social turmoil. Therefore, when problems come to call, let history be a teacher as you wisely "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and [let Him] strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord!" (Psalm 27:14).

It is good to stand on your own two feet, but some proper propping-up by God certainly isn't out of order: "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You" (Isaiah 26:3). Call it prayer partnership. Call it linking with your Creator. Call it spiritual common sense.

One lady, with ninety years behind her, lived far out in the country, all by herself. When asked if she was ever afraid, she replied, "Why should I be? Faith closes my door at night, and Mercy opens it in the morning."

Cooperate and rekindle

Whatever anxious moments find our doorstep, we must learn to cooperate with the inevitable if we're to accomplish well the art of living. An appointment made, and our watch stops. Gone fishing, and the only thing we catch is a bad cold in a rain-storm.

When such things happen, we don't have to like what is happening. But at least we must learn to learn from a problem. This way, it is not a complete waste of time.

Before we traded our 1986 Dodge several years ago, my wife and I had a car that majored in stalling. It reminded me of 2 Timothy 1:6: "Kindle afresh the gift of God" (NASB). It didn't kindle afresh; it didn't want to go. It was a king of quitters.

Our present, newer car doesn't do that. It starts, never stutters and then stops. Every time we want to go somewhere, it kindles afresh with remarkable enthusiasm. There are dangers all around on the highway, but the car never notices. It is the epitome of confidence.

God with us

Another weapon in our emotional conquest is realizing that the secret of finding the "peace that passes understanding" is to not waste time trying to under-

stand it. Just accept the fact that peace comes from the presence of something rather than the absence of something. And that something is God.

God is with us when twin towers are built and when they waver and fall to the ground in terrible pieces. God is with us long before dawn and long after dusk. On the blackest night or when the brightest moon sweeps away the darkness, God is with us.

Would you stand tall and sun-crowned above the crowd? Think eternity. Think salvation. Think wonderment and awe about the Creator of it all.

Prayer

The last weapon in our fight against anxiety is prayer. An old preacher friend of mine used to counsel me, "If your knees are knocking, kneel on them." Or another way of putting it: "You don't have to worry about running from worry when you are kneeling."

The question must always be, How can a skinny soul deal with the big, fat problems of life? The answer is to stop feeding anxiety and fight it. That's the message of Jesus and of others who have gone before us. ■■■

V. Neil Wyrick writes from Miami, FL.

On the blackest night or
when the brightest moon
sweeps away the darkness,
God is with us.



Farewell, Richard

Richard A. Wiedenheft was born April 15, 1946, in Chicago, Illinois, and died March 23, 2007, at his home near Lake Winola, Pennsylvania. Raised on a farm and in a Lutheran home, he early learned the values of Christian faith and hard work.

Richard graduated from Ambassador College in Pasadena, California, in 1967 and then pastored for the Worldwide Church of God in New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania. In New York City he met and married Darlene Dietz in 1968. They had two children — Dick (married to Anne), a pastor in British Columbia, and Marlene (Mrs. Sam Succaw) — and three grandchildren.

In 1974 Richard launched an independent ministry for scattered brethren through Sabbath services in various northeast locations and through his *Focus on Truth* publication. His articles began to appear in the *Bible Advocate* magazine. During the 1980s, Richard served the Bible Sabbath Association as executive secretary and editor of its *Sabbath Sentinel* magazine. He earned a masters of business administration degree from the University of Scranton (PA). Beyond gospel ministries, he supported his family through home construction work.

From 1990 to 1997 Richard worked as business

manager, director, principal, and teacher at Spring Vale Academy near Owosso, Michigan. From there he returned to the Chicago area to be near his aging parents. He was employed at Albany Molecular Research while continuing to preach and teach. After both parents died, Richard and Darlene returned to their beloved hilltop acreage and home in northeastern Pennsylvania.

From early 2005 until his death, Richard was staff writer for the Bible Advocate Press, a lead instructor for Ministries Training System, and superintendent of the Northeastern District. He and Darlene were away most weekends, visiting the thirty-plus congregations and groups from Michigan to Virginia to Massachusetts. At home, his computer, telephone, and library were busy many hours each day, serving the gospel and the brethren.

Richard was buried near his home, with services for family and nearby friends held on March 30; Bruce Chesney and Calvin Burrell officiated. A second memorial was held April 28 in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania — a church he had often ministered in — with Whaid Rose officiating. Elder Wiedenheft's service in the Church of God (Seventh Day) was appreciated and admired both by colleagues and by those he served.

The Final Journey

Planning his '07 calendar late in '06, Richard Wiedenheft penciled in many activities typical of a busy superintendent. He didn't know then that God would soon change that schedule — drastically. In a December 29 e-mail to Northeast District staff, he admitted, "Man proposes, God disposes!"

Dick wrote many fine articles for the BA over the years, but not a final one, due to his sudden illness. Without knowing it, however, he made available the material for an effective "farewell" through e-mails he sent in his three months of battling cancer. When Dick became too ill to write, he dictated his thoughts to his wife. In tribute to our beloved teacher-writer, the BA offers this short story — in his own words — of Dick's final journey into the arms of Jesus.

January 7— I'm content [to] do what I can, and I'm enjoying having plenty of time for meditating, praying, Bible study, reading, listening to tapes, and

just staring out my bedroom window at the beauty of God's creation.

He is the Great Creator of the human body, and I ask for your prayers for His healing touch on this body. But more importantly, pray that I will learn what He wants me to learn about me, about His work, about Him.

January 14 — God is blessing me in so many ways with this experience. Ice chips [are] the only [things] I'm allowed to have by mouth, and I can't begin to tell you the blessing of this little part of God's creation! A little water on the tip of the tongue takes on new meaning. I'm learning to be dependent on Darlene, and she is such a good caregiver. . . .

This morning ten brothers from the Hispanic churches in the NYC area came to see me. . . . Can you imagine the scene of 10 Hispanic men gathered around the bed of this Anglo, praying in Spanish? I doubt this hospital has ever seen such a scene! I feel so blessed to be so loved with the love of the Lord Jesus.

January 28 — The short version about my health is that I'm still in the hospital, still awaiting test results, anticipating more tests. The most important thing is that we are in the hands of God accepting His will day by day and appreciating small pleasures like hot water flowing over my hands. Ice chips no longer have much appeal to me. The most important blessing we have is knowing that my life is secure in Jesus and I just have to be patient.

February 2 — God has a great plan for all of us. That plan is to be with Him for all eternity. That is our ultimate hope and one that sustains me day by day. But between here and there we endure pain and suffering through which we learn many lessons. I am learning lessons of utter humility, lessons of being completely dependent on God and on other people [and] many lessons that I don't even see yet. I look forward to praising God's name among the congregation of God's people.

February 13 — We have now made the transition to Hospice HealthCare. What a wonderful blessing it is to be home! It is a blessing to have this time of reflection and sharing. The rules of the game are still the same. There are no guarantees beyond the love of the Lord Jesus. I could go very quickly, but

as long as [I] have life and breath, I hope to be able to share encouragement and love and insights that God has given me and Darlene. . . . Let us continue to give glory to our awesome and merciful heavenly Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who always have eternity and our good in mind.

February 27 — I remember visiting with Barry Waybright in mid-December. He was talking about how important it is to trust God with every aspect of our lives — how important it is to recognize that everything in this physical life must be on the rubbish heap before Jesus Christ. Our exclusive focus in ministry in life must be in knowing that we are in the will of God. Little did I realize that in less than three weeks those words would become a dramatic reality and test for Darlene and me. The last week in December I was putting together my calendar for 2007; I was working on the house; I was anticipating upcoming trips to churches and to Denver. The first week in January we were talking to doctors, and on January 12th I was in the emergency room of the hospital. . . . It was hard to even think about praying. All I could think about was "Whatever Your will, God" — submission and survival. . . . My biggest challenge is being very weak.

March 15 — I feel like I am going through a period of decline — less and less energy each day. We know we are in God's hands and we are prepared to glorify Him however He chooses. Pray that we will find joy in doing so. My heart goes out to all those I have labored among as district superintendent and others whom I have labored along side. A few thoughts and some exhortation: Make sure Jesus Christ is always the center of your work. It is all about Him and what He is going to do, not about us and what we do. He can use us mightily. He can use the seemingly insignificant thing. To Him be the glory!

I have noted that prayers on my behalf, in the beginning especially, were full of volume, full of repetition, full of assurance of what God is going to do. Prayers now are shorter, more subdued, more accepting of God as the Sovereign of the universe Please continue to keep me in your prayers. Pray that I will recognize God's will and rejoice in it. I pray that I will have many more opportunities to serve you, but I am only the servant.

God bless you all.

Mail Bag



March musings

Am so delighted by your March '07 magazine, encouraging me to keep going despite so many failures. The story of the person with smoking addiction ["Q & A," p. 7] was inspiring and your response so enlightened. Satan has been trying to return me to his territory, but Christ has more power. My mum has come to like your teachings, too.

S. G.
Kenya

Thoughtful and compelling

I am especially impressed by the sensitive way you handle points of doctrine that are less clear and well-defined. You are willing to admit that the landscape is sometimes fogged, and you seem to understand the meaning of paradox with its implications for our faith and the difficulty the Western mind has comprehending that which often defies logic. This approach lacks intellectual arrogance and is both thoughtful and compelling. You are to be commended for using it. Thanks so much for the magazine.

C. K.
Riverside, IL

My Protest

continued from page 3

more tangible in the dark?

Ancient thinkers and modern believers have written on this classic problem, calling it the "dark night of the soul." Job wrestled with it, as did Jeremiah and Habakkuk, but the most frequent protests about the evil that God permits are in the Psalms. For example:

I remembered God, and was troubled; I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed . . . I am so troubled that I cannot speak. . . Will the Lord cast off forever? And will He be favorable no more? Has His mercy ceased forever? Has His promise failed forevermore? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies? (77:3, 4, 7-9).

Similar sounds of despair are repeated elsewhere in this hymnbook of ancient Israel, including most of Psalms 55, 79, 80, 88, and 94. Today more than ever, I can empathize with the writers of these words. "Thus my heart was grieved, and I was vexed in my mind" (73:21).

I don't mean to bother you with my burdens; each of you has enough of his own. I know the other side to my pain: that God's blessings and mercy are new every morning; I can lose track counting them. I pray that the summer of '07 finds you equally blest, and even more so. I also know that there is something inscrutable and unavoidable about suffering and that God uses it all for His good purposes in us (Romans 8:18, 28).

And I know I am not alone in

hurting. My guess is that you too are shouldering some loads and losses that you simply cannot reconcile with God's sovereignty in the world or with His "wonderful plan for your life." You're a believer; you know something of God's promise. And yet He seems strangely silent, at least in that piece of life that is double-tough for you now, dulled over with pain.

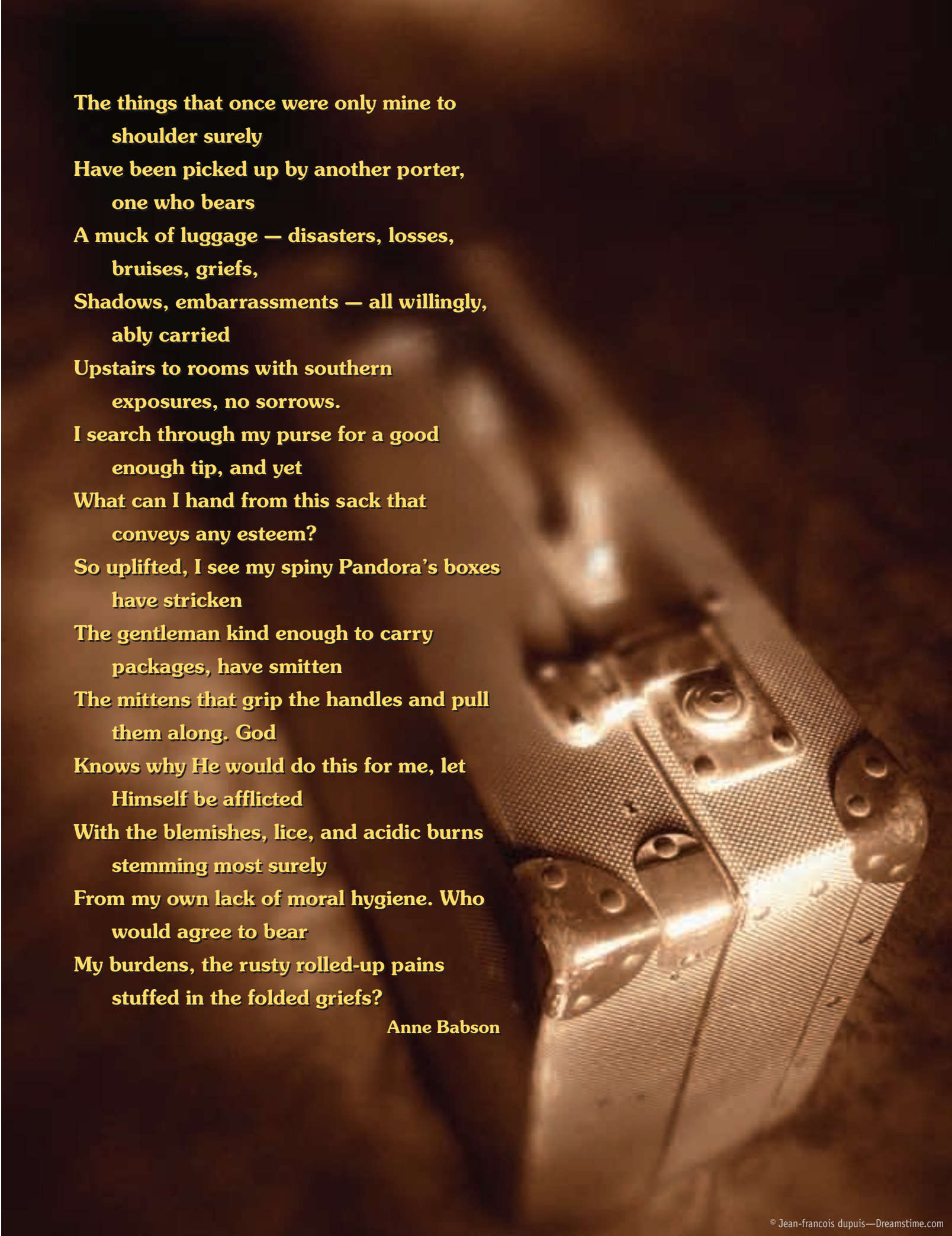
That's where I am today, and it doesn't seem necessary to "stuff it" as if the hurt were not real. My protest, probably, is more against those who've sold us on the hype that life in Christ will be free of such suffering if we just believe the right slant, say the right words, or reach the right relationship. And if it doesn't turn out like we hope and pray, it's our fault. Dear brother and sister, let's disabuse ourselves of this sort of damning programming!

Read all of Scripture, and look all around the world: God doesn't always give His faithful ones the victory, the health, and the wealth that some so glibly name and claim. We ask and trust for His best, and the good we get usually outweighs the bad; but both are a part of life in the here and now. The run of wrong this year seems way too strong, but God will have the final word.

My protest, then, is not *against* our faith but *within* it. I'm not going away. Like Peter under test, I've settled the big issue: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).

Jesus, I come. Protest ended.

— Calvin Burrell



The things that once were only mine to
shoulder surely
Have been picked up by another porter,
one who bears
A muck of luggage — disasters, losses,
bruises, griefs,
Shadows, embarrassments — all willingly,
ably carried
Upstairs to rooms with southern
exposures, no sorrows.
I search through my purse for a good
enough tip, and yet
What can I hand from this sack that
conveys any esteem?
So uplifted, I see my spiny Pandora's boxes
have stricken
The gentleman kind enough to carry
packages, have smitten
The mittens that grip the handles and pull
them along. God
Knows why He would do this for me, let
Himself be afflicted
With the blemishes, lice, and acidic burns
stemming most surely
From my own lack of moral hygiene. Who
would agree to bear
My burdens, the rusty rolled-up pains
stuffed in the folded griefs?

Anne Babson



What's new with . . .

Spring Vale Academy

- Fall enrollment August 7

SWORD

- Camp at Sis-Q Meadows
July 18-22

Ministries Training System

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

North American

Women's Ministries

- National Hispanic
Women's Retreat
August 31 -
September 3, El Paso, TX

National FYC

- See list of youth camps
in *Youth Reach*, p. 17

General Conference Convention

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



MTS classroom, Conroe, TX, April 15, 2007

Ministries Training System

Calvin Burrell, Director

- In 2007 MTS staff plans to complete the naming, numbering, and content outlines of MTS core curriculum — about twenty-five courses. Pastor Alex Ciurana of Houston, Texas, is an adjunct staff to assist in reaching this goal. MTS registrar Raul Lopez assures that all academic records are entered into the MTS database, soon to be student accessible for online review.
- A four-day intensive session for ministerial prospects and lay pastors, planned by Richard Wiedenheft, will proceed as planned near Reading, Pennsylvania, June 6-10. Sabbath activities include reflection on the ministry and teaching of Elder Wiedenheft. For details call 303-452-7973 or e-mail training@cog7.org.
- MTS instructors and classroom coordinators will attend training sessions in Overland Park, Kansas, on Monday afternoon, July 2. They and their spouses will be treated to an appreciation dinner.
- Classroom courses available this summer include Worldviews, by Alex Ciurana; Christian Leadership, by Jose Luis Ramirez; and Conference Sampler, administered by Harv Fischer — all available at convention July 3-7.
- Online courses in Christian Ethics, taught by Pastor Israel Steinmetz, and in the Emerging Culture, taught by Amber Riggs, were completed this spring. For online courses this fall and other MTS info, visit <http://mts.cog7.org>.



Convention '07

From the American heartland, we invite you to celebrate the General Conference convention in Overland Park, Kansas, July 2-7. The stage is set, music prepared, the program ready. All we need to make this event work is you.

Monday, July 2, is Family Day for Overland Park and Kansas City area attractions, including amusement parks, a CoG7 golf tournament, and an evening welcome event with family activity, snacks, booths, and other special things.

Our convention theme "Celebrate the Journey" will be preached by elders Israel Steinmetz, Tim Endecott, Ken Lawson, Whaid Rose, Ramon Ruiz, and Robert Coulter. Attend workshops in English or Spanish and general sessions with Whaid Rose, Bill Hicks, Ken Davis, and Paul Forbes speaking.

What else? Concerts, afterglows, business sessions, MTS courses, events for children and youth, daycare for the very young, and other activities.

Sabbath, July 7, will be a world-class day, with delegates from many nations set to begin their International Ministerial Congress with us. Don't miss this!

To get there, fly, drive, or walk to the Convention Center and Sheraton Hotel, 6000 College Blvd., Overland Park, KS 66211 — where it all happens. Convention registration is required for reduced rate at the Sheraton (800-262-7275).

— Eddie Villalba
Program Committee Chairman

Congratulations

. . . to CoG7 couples celebrating fifty years of marriage in '07:

Mike and Pearl (Dailey) Buchanan, Hemet, CA (August 11)

Bryan and Mary Sue (Grubis) Burrell, Fairview, OK (July 14)

Know others with golden anniversaries this year? Submit names, hometown, and wedding date to the editor please.

Condolences

. . . to the families of these servants of the Church who recently passed away:

Wilma Caswell (71) of Jefferson, Oregon - wife of Elder Nelson Caswell

Haskell Hawkins (78) of Jefferson, Oregon - pastor in Missouri, Oklahoma, Oregon

Felipe Ojeda (86) of San Antonio, Texas - minister in Illinois, New Mexico, Texas

Elmer Schlenker (86) of Stanberry, Missouri - Bible Advocate Press employee

Building Brothers

A non-denominational ministry, Building Brothers serves men in any congregation whose leadership requests it and participates in it. Led by Promise Keepers co-founder Dan Schaeffer, Building Brothers is also served by Ken Moldenhauer. Ken and others work with men's groups in about twenty



Building Brothers group at the Kansas City church (L to R): Jim Van Scoy, Ken Keim, Israel Steinmetz, Jon Smith, Ron Smith, and Bill Bright.



Help to Haiti: The Chicago church (Philadelphia) sends \$75 per month and small packets of school supplies to help disadvantaged children like these in Haiti. Jose A. Hinojosa, pastor.

CoG7 congregations in the United States, Canada, and now England. Early funding for this effort came through the General Conference in Denver.

Pastor Israel Steinmetz of Kansas City church writes this about their experience with Building Brothers:

“Through Building Brothers, a small group of men here are working toward becoming servant leaders who understand the fundamentals of an effective and empowering men’s ministry. We are excited about the road ahead as we continue to be transformed, to build relationships, and to vision-cast about the future of a men’s ministry process in our church that can show men the path from being spiritual children to spiritual fathers.”

LITES Note

August 1 is the due date for applications for fall term, starting September 10. Contact LITES at lites@cog7.org.

SVA SOUND & ACTION

The musical and drama teams from Spring Vale Academy will tour churches in the Central and Southwestern districts beginning May 29. Their final program will be at the Dover Family Camp in Oklahoma on Friday, June 15. Check with your local church about a possible concert there, or call 989-725-2391 for concert dates.

Summer Activities

- June 10-16 - Dover Family Camp near Kingfisher, OK; contact 918-695-6036 or 580-227-7403
- July 2-7 - “Celebrate the Journey,” 2007 convention, Overland Park, KS; 303-452-7973 or convention.cog7.org
- July 7-11 - International Ministerial Congress, Overland Park, KS
- July 18-22 - SWORD camp, Sis-Q Meadows, Cave Junction, OR; contact Kim Duncan (541-923-0487, kjduncan@firstam.com) or Rachel Stirn (509-276-1522, 509-434-8985, stirnfam@netzero.com)
- August 17-19 - Iowa family camp at Camp Io-Dis-E-Ca, 3271 Sandy Beach Road NE, Solon (near Cedar Rapids); no charges; towels and bedding provided; contact Jon Harvey at jharvey@idtdna.com or 319-668-9663
- August 24-29 - Senior adult retreat at Sis-Q Meadows, OR; contact Dale Lawson (503-769-6636, marioncg7@juno.com) or Ken Lawson (541-410-3704, KRSNLAWSON@aol.com)
- September 14-16 - Colorado men’s retreat; contact 303-428-6000
- September 18-22 - Central States senior adult retreat at Dover Camp near Kingfisher, OK
- September 21-23 - Missouri women’s retreat, Kamp Kiersey, Amsterdam, MO; theme is “Remember: Living the Legacy,” with scrapbooking session led by Laura Samford; contact ruthmusic@yahoo.com



National Hispanic Women’s Retreat, August 31-September 3 in El Paso, TX; contact Ruth Arroyos (915-755-1389) or Becky Atilano (915-491-8460)

Dover



Fifty years of campmeeting experience

Situated on ten acres of sandy farmland five miles east of Dover, Oklahoma, this campground is twelve miles from motels in Kingfisher, thirty-plus miles from mid-sized Enid, and just fifty miles northwest of the state capital in Oklahoma City. In 2007 Oklahoma is celebrating its one hundredth year of statehood.

The property was purchased in March 1958 by members with vision for a CoG7 camp. The first five acres of school property with two buildings cost \$3,500. Its trustees were Elders O. T. Whitten and Ross Johnston of Oklahoma and George E. Crisp of Texas. Mr. and Mrs. I. D. Wilkes, living a mile away, first recommended the purchase. They provided local care and were among the camp's regular attendees until their deaths. Strong support also came from Mr. and Mrs. James Darland of Kingfisher; Noyle and Dorothy Samford of Iola, Kansas; and others. Small parcels of adjacent land were later added, increasing the site to nearly ten acres.

Dover campmeeting first met in the summer of '58, and '07 will mark its fiftieth year. When flooding prevented a full camp in 1993, several families came anyway, spent their time in mop-up and repair. Elder Wesley Walker preached to them each evening.

In early years, tents for family camping lined much of the property, also ringed by large elm trees that offered welcome shade from the afternoon heat. Tents have mostly given way to campers/trailers now. New dorm facilities added in the past two years have mostly replaced the aging

classroom-dorms that lined either side of the original school auditorium, still serving as the main chapel. Other buildings now on the property include a dining hall and an air-conditioned meeting hall for groups of up to sixty persons.

Dover Camp hosts the annual Central States senior retreats and is available for other Church activities. In 1991 it hosted the national youth camp, during which the FYCers accomplished several improvement projects and called the place Camp Cimarron, for the river that meanders not far south of the grounds.

Improvements notwithstanding, the old-time campmeeting flavor still prevails at Dover. Costs are low and spirits high during camp week, with plenty of good singing, preaching, praying, friendship, and fellowship. The campmeeting experience here has been treasured by young and old alike, and you are invited this year.

Dover will celebrate its fiftieth year of camp June 10-16, 2007. Ministers include Elders Whaid Rose (Sabbath morning sermon) and Calvin Burrell (Tuesday evening); the LITES team (children's ministry); and SVA SOUND (Friday evening service). Its history will be highlighted in an audio-visual presentation during the week.



*Photo from yesteryear:
Elders O. T. Whitten
(now deceased) and
K. C. Walker*



International Tour

Assam, Bangladesh, Myanmar

The Association of the Churches of God (Seventh Day) in India serves the entire Indian sub-continent and includes missions from the Church in Mizoram. This report is from Elder George Hnamte, chairman-overseer of the Hope Lodge conference based in Aizawl, Mizoram and from Deepak Shah Shankar in Nepal. It informs us of developments in this extreme north-eastern India and surrounding countries, and it seeks increase in support from Missions Abroad to address growth in these areas.

The mission vision of this report can be achieved when brethren labor together in one mind for the cause of our Savior and Lord Jesus, the Christ.

Assam region: We have great need for workers in the Assam Circle, stretching from the valley of West Bengal through the hills and valleys of Assam to Arunachal Pradesh, now served by Mr. Olom Tamukh of Rani village, adjacent to the China border. He attended the last conference of Assam Circle at Guriajhar, and our officers recommended the appointment of three full-time CoG7 ministers under Assam



Circle. Recently, a building was completed in Assam and dedicated by George Hnamte and Deepak Shah Shankar. His work in Nepal is in need of support, yet Pastor Deepak found time to serve here as a missionary.

Bangladesh region: The Mizoram Conference appointed three evangelists and three teachers (for the primary schools) in Bangladesh at nominal salaries. Members of Shahjahan village, Bandharban District, Bangladesh have constructed a church-house with the help of Rupees 10,000 from the Mizoram Conference, and they also purchased land at Shahjahan for the establishment of a school. The officers passed a

resolution requesting monthly subsidies for workers in Bangladesh from Missions Abroad.

Myanmar region: A church building was recently completed in Myanmar with funds provided by Missions Abroad. The reorganization of the churches there into a national conference is needed, and the first steps in this reorganization are ready to be taken. Plans are for Pastor Jacob Rao and Elder Hnamte to go to Yangon (Rangoon) and then penetrate farther northward via Tahan/Kalemmyo (upper Myanmar) to meet evangelist C. Zamlova, Pastor Paluaia, and Pastor V. L. Ringa residing in that area. We await the funds available for this proposed mission.



Building dedication in Assam



Deepak Shah with Ms. Malati and Ms. Susan in Assam

Conflict of Soul

“Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24). This honest confession of doubt in the midst of faith reflects the conflict of soul I sometimes feel when faced with life’s unanswered questions. In his book *When God Doesn’t Make Sense*, Dr. James Dobson tells of a young man who, early in life, developed a deep desire to become a medical doctor and serve as a missionary in Africa. But just after graduating from medical school at the top of his class, he was diagnosed with cancer. Despite many prayers for his healing, the young man died within months.

Why do some prayers go unanswered? Why are some believers healed, while others aren’t? Considering the needs of those in Africa, why didn’t God honor the selfless ambition of this medical student? Why do believers who play such vital roles in the work of the kingdom die what seems “untimely deaths,” while others with apparently little or no real purpose live on?

A common response to these questions is that God is sovereign — an important truth and a resting place for my faith at difficult points along my spiritual journey. But at times the fact of God’s sovereignty only raises more questions. If God is sovereign over all and if ultimately God, not cancer, takes our loved ones, should we still pray for their healing?

The recent death of Richard Wiedenheft has evoked this conflict of soul. His brief tenure as a General Conference employee was a breath of fresh air. Focused and gifted, Richard served *par excellence* in both district administration and in G. C. Ministries. No doubt you’ve been inspired by his writings in this magazine. Dick loved the Lord and was committed to His service. He was one answer to prayers for more laborers in God’s harvest.

For these and other reasons, I was convinced that a miracle of healing should be the logical outcome of Dick’s battle with cancer. “There is unfinished business,” I told the Lord. “Plans, hopes,

and dreams yet unrealized. The care and stewardship of our physical bodies is one of Dick’s passions. He doesn’t just preach it; he lives it. So please don’t let this man die.”

But in God’s sovereign will, Dick was taken from us. Since then I have prayed, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” Uttered in the context of a father’s desperate plea for his son’s healing (Mark 9:14-30), these words reflect the conflict of soul we sometimes experience. Like this father, my faith is firmly in place, but I also recognize the imperfections of my faith.

Doubts and questions result from our humanness. Job, the prophets of old, and even Jesus’ disciples experienced it. John the Baptist, after publicly declaring Jesus to be the Savior of the world, sent a message to Jesus from his prison cell: “Are you really the one?” After Jesus’ death, the Emmaus-bound disciples said, “We were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel” (Luke 24:21).

After placing his hand in Jesus’ side, doubting Thomas declared, “My Lord, and my God!” (John 20:28), to which Jesus replied, “Because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (v. 29).

That is faith. We choose to focus, not on the questions we cannot answer but on the answers we cannot escape: God loves us; He is sovereign; there is life after death; and between now and then, we are sustained by His all-sufficient grace.

So now I pray: “Lord, help me to not doubt in the dark what You’ve clearly shown me in the light. And during my conflict of soul, teach me to rest my faith in the confidence of who You are.”

— *Whaid Guscott Rose*
General Conference President



For good reflections later . . .

**summer is the time
to make memories**

- **Camps and retreats in several places (pp. 17, 28)**
- **General Conference convention in Overland Park, Kansas, July 2-7 (p. 27)**
- **International Sabbath and Ministerial Congress, also in Kansas, July 7-11**
- **And family vacations — be sure to worship together each Sabbath!**

**“The living God . . . gives us richly all things to enjoy”
(1 Timothy 6:17b).**

