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**Regrets?
I've had quite a few.**
Facing up to life's unfinished business.



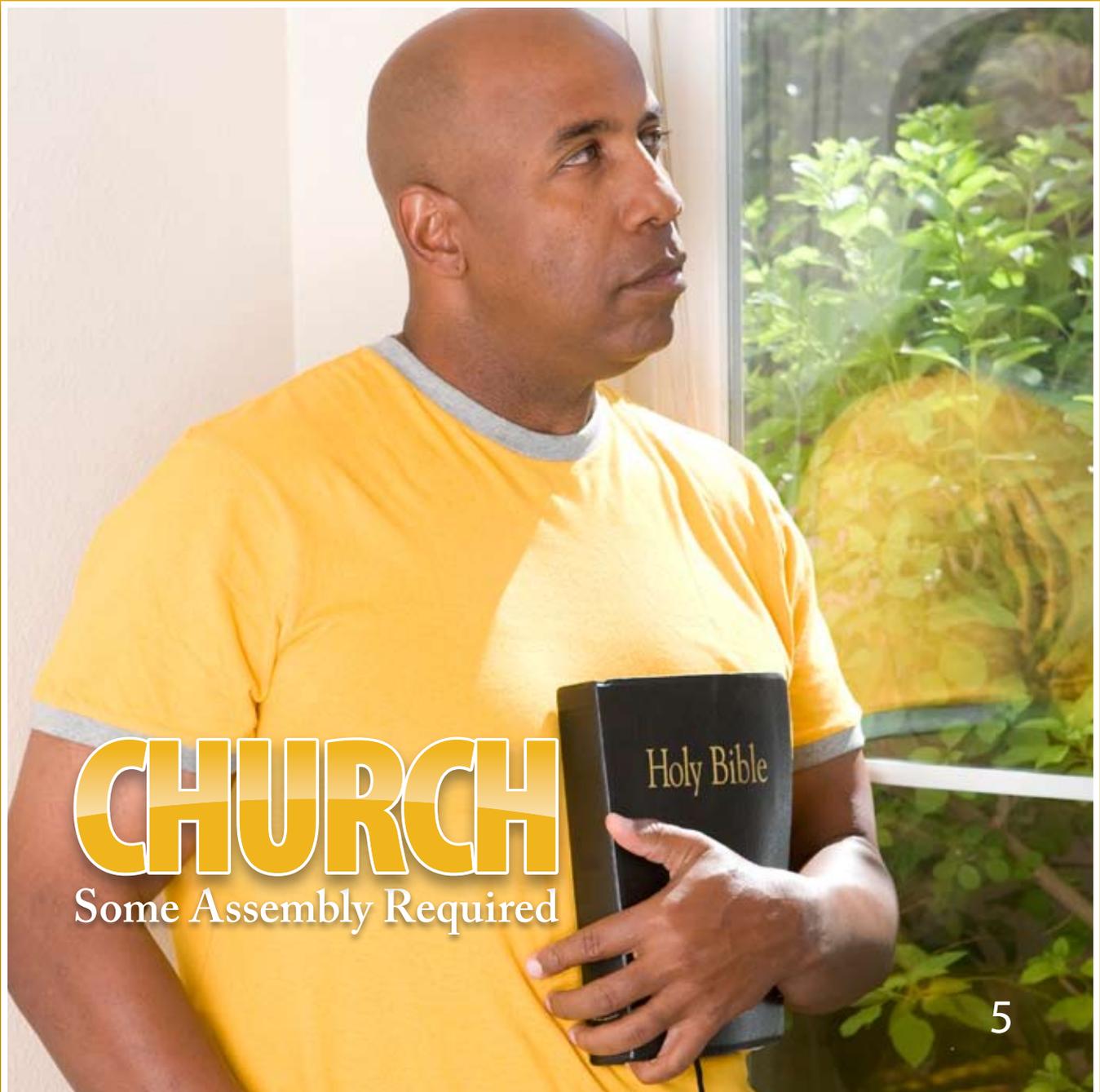
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Vacation or Mission?
Do short-term mission trips
do anyone any good?

CHRISTIAN Odyssey

February-March 2010

Exploring Life and Faith



CHURCH
Some Assembly Required

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Letters to the Editor

I read your article “Where are we in prophecy?” I agree on principle with you that we should be focused on sharing the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ and learning to love our neighbor. However, I was a bit distraught over your exhortation to forget about eschatology and get on with living. We can’t take one verse that Jesus quoted to a generation almost 2,000 years ago and let it put either us or God in a box. For God’s words are far more vast than just the one you referred to. Jesus also said that God would not bring anything upon the land except he reveal it to his servants and prophets. If God did not want the last generation of believers to be drawn to eschatology, then a third of the Bible would not be prophecy. While we are not to study it for the sake of knowing the day or hour of his return, we are to study it to give us more faith and understanding so as not to be asleep at the wheel like so many of today’s pew sitters are. You see, I happen to know what the future of this nation is. But

you don’t seem to care and you don’t think it is necessary information.

DN, email

Michael Fezell responds: *Please allow me to respectfully point out that your assumptions are wrong on nearly every count. Jesus did not say, as you assert, that “God would not bring anything upon the land except he reveal it to his servants and prophets.” That was Amos. He wrote, “Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.” Please note that he did not write, “to his servants and prophets,” but “to his servants the prophets.” Amos was writing to the kingdom of Israel, and what he said would happen did happen in that generation. Hope and consolation in time of distress come from faith in the love and grace of God and his promise of ultimate deliverance, not from claiming to “know what the future of this nation is.”*

The truth is that every Christian who has ever “watched” geopolitics through the

“lens of prophecy” has been both distracted from the gospel and wrong in his or her conclusions. The intent of the article was to shift the focus from minor details to Jesus Christ.

How refreshing Mike Fezell’s article “Mirror, Mirror” was. It is so encouraging when pastors and leaders admit their frailties and weaknesses publicly. It is sad when pastors never share their highs and lows with the members in general prayer or even from the pulpit. We are all sinners needing the ongoing grace of God. That transparency and openness actually endears the pastor to the members. Paul said he shared his very life with the members. That transparency and honesty also makes it so much easier for members to approach the pastor with confidence because the leaders are not placing themselves on a “higher” spiritual level than the members. Thank you Mr. Fezell for a wonderfully open, transparent, humble and encouraging article.

KR, email

I’ve Been Reading

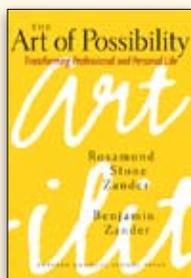
The Art of Possibility

By Rosamund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander | Reviewed by Nan Kuhlman

The *Art of Possibility*, by husband and wife Rosamund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander, entices us and teaches us with its title. Who doesn’t wish for more possibilities in life? At the same time, calling possibility “an art” reveals the important truth that it isn’t something that just comes naturally. It requires us to practice seeing the world around us in a different way.

The Zanders share 12 principles or practices, showing us that this world works best when “we’re all in this together,” than when it’s “every man for himself.” Rosamund Zander, a family therapist and painter, writes from a psychologist’s point-of-view, while her husband, Benjamin Zander, conductor of The Boston Philharmonic, provides illustrations with real-life stories.

One principle is that of viewing yourself as a contribution. This practice encourages you to put forth your best, most passionate effort, seeing yourself as making a difference, however imperfectly, rather than evaluating yourself as a success or failure. When we’re less worried about perfection, we’re more likely to be more



fully engaged with others in accomplishing a goal that will be beneficial to everyone.

Another principle, “Leading from Any Chair,” highlights the value of cooperation. Benjamin relates the story of allowing orchestra members to voice their opinion about how a particular piece should be expressed, even to the extent of allowing them to conduct the orchestra, in an effort to encourage cooperation and learning from each other. He asks, “How much greatness are we willing to grant people?”

The Art of Possibility advocates cooperating with and encouraging others and thinking from a “we” perspective rather than an “I” perspective. “Look for shining eyes,” Benjamin writes, “What am I doing that keeps them from shining?”

While these principles are not necessarily new, they are expressed with balance and in a grace-filled manner. If anything, they remind us of the way that Christ expresses himself through our humanity and in our interactions with others, if we just let him.

Rosamund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander, *The Art of Possibility*, Penguin, 2002.

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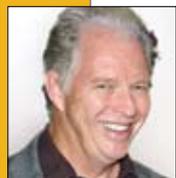


If necessary, use words

By John Halford

I am writing this from northern Thailand, where I was invited to attend the opening of a new school that some Christian friends are launching. Although Thailand is officially a Buddhist nation, the constitution guarantees freedom of religion. Consequently there are many foreign missionaries here. However, they have had very little impact—Thailand is only 2 percent Christian.

I suspect that one reason for this is that Thais resist the typical aggressive Western approach to evangelizing. My friends here, both of whom are native Thais, have a different approach. They understand the importance of example rather than confrontation. They have established several schools, language institutes and kindergartens, running them on Christian principles and values, without being overtly “evangelistic.” It seems to work—the schools are a success, and several house churches have been quietly established. They are showing the value of St. Francis of Assisi’s famous teaching: “Preach the gospel at all times. If necessary, use words.”



Faced with this situation he was helpless. He wanted to talk. I think St. Francis would have agreed that this was a time to use words.

The guest of honor for the opening was a senior government official (I’ll call him Mr. V) who, although not a Christian, helped us cut through the administrative red tape and open the school on schedule. We were grateful to Mr. V and invited him to come from Bangkok to be the guest of honor. Although influential, he is a humble and sincere man.

The opening went well. The next day was a holiday, and our guest of honor had planned to visit some of his family who live locally. So I was surprised to meet him in the hotel’s lobby when I came down to meet my friends for a late breakfast.

He looked terrible. He was tired and seemed on the verge of tears. What had happened to the sophisticated authority figure of the day before? He told us that he had not slept all night. He had had a serious falling out with a young man whom he had mentored for many years and loved like a son. He had been looking forward to spending the day with him.

Instead the young man had left him after an insulting and angry outburst.

Change of plan

Poor Mr. V was distraught. He was used to being obeyed, but faced with this situation he was helpless. He wanted to talk about it. So talk we did, for several hours. Our plans for the day had to be shelved. I think St. Francis would have agreed that this was a time to use words. We spent a long, long time discussing the best way to attempt a reconciliation—forgiveness, tolerance, mutual respect, and being willing to overlook and forgive. Mr. V found Jesus’ parable of the Prodigal Son especially comforting.

By the end of the day, Mr. V was much relieved. And next day, thankfully, he and the young man were able to meet and reconcile. At dinner that evening Mr. V was his happy self again. He told us later that he was impressed that we, who were really total strangers, had given so willingly of our time and our love. Of course, he didn’t decide on the spot to become a Christian. As with King Agrippa (see Acts 26:28), you can’t expect a high official to make a decision after only a brief exposure to Christianity. We simply showed him how Jesus’ teachings would help him in this situation, and he was impressed.

As we go about God’s work, we often need the favor of this world’s governments. We show respect and deference to people in authority, but relationships with authority figures are usually based on what they can do *for us*. Mr. V allowed us to do something for him. We saw that behind the influential authority persona was a vulnerable human being who was bruised and hurting. He already had our respect and gratitude, but what he needed was love. Love can be hard to come by in the dog-eat-dog arena of power politics. But it is the inexhaustible resource of our kingdom, and we were privileged to share it with Mr. V.

New columnists

With this issue we are introducing two new regular columnists. Rick Shallenberger (page 10) is the pastor of Christ Fellowship Church in Cincinnati. Tammy Tkach (page 19) is married to Grace Communion International’s Pastor General, Joseph Tkach, and a popular writer and conference speaker. **co**

CHURCH

Some Assembly Required

By John Halford

Just across the road from our home there is a beautiful little country church. Many of our neighbors go there on Sunday morning to worship.

My wife's parents were married in that church, and her great grandfather donated the land on which it is built. I like the service. It is dignified and meaningful, and the congregation shares my preference for traditional hymns and music. The pastor is a good friend, and from time to time he has asked me to stand in for him. The people good-naturedly appreciate my clumsy attempts to handle the unfamiliar liturgy, and some have told me they wish I would come more often.

So why, most Sundays, do we make a round trip of about 100 miles to attend "our" church in the big city?

That is the closest congregation of the denomination in which I have membership and am ordained. But it is not just a matter of brand loyalty. I feel more or less at home in most Christian churches, and I believe they are valid places to worship. The styles might be different, but I suspect that we are more concerned about styles than God is. Wherever and whenever Christians gather together in his name, Jesus said he would be there too. Why then, do I feel I should make the effort to drive to my relatively distant congregation instead of just ambling across the road?

Does it matter?

I think about this sometimes as I make the Sunday morning drive. Does it matter where we go? Are we at liberty to just pick a church out of convenience? Or even to go nowhere? Surveys show that many people feel it is quite acceptable simply to watch a church service on television, never committing themselves to regular assembly. Others say that just talking about God and

religion with friends at work or at an informal gathering from time to time is all the "church" they need.

But the Bible does place a high importance on belonging to a congregation. And not just belonging, but supporting and participating in its life and work. One reason is that a congregation provides the opportunity for fellowship and joining in worship and communion. But another reason is that a congregation also requires *accountability*, something that, ironically, is often put forward as an excuse for *withdrawing* from regular congregational worship, and even leaving a church.

We don't like accountability. It implies restriction, discipline, correction and demands on our time and money—things we resist in life and certainly don't want from a church.

**Does it matter where we go?
Are we at liberty to just pick a
church out of convenience? Or
even to go nowhere?**

If we are honest, we must admit that there are often some disagreeable aspects of congregational life. We tend to get ourselves bogged down in distracting details and stir them into the church mix. But the primary thing God is concerned about is our relationships. Jesus taught that lasting, productive relationships, based on mutual love and respect, are the substance of Christian life. Human societies and organizations rarely put the highest priority on this; they have different agendas. But a congregation of fellow believers should be a safe place to nurture, maintain and, if necessary, repair relationships. To

deny ourselves this environment is to miss out on a key aspect of the central dimension of our Christian lives.

I am not suggesting that regular church attendance makes us more righteous, or that to stay away is unfor-givable. My long commute to worship does not make me more acceptable to God. Nevertheless, I think he does want me to have a strong commitment to my not-so-local congregation, and I do not take it lightly. The extra effort is definitely more worth than it is trouble.

The early church

We naturally tend to interpret the scriptures about congregational worship in terms of our modern situation. But those instructions were not written against a backdrop of what has become the world's largest religion with over two billion adherents and a bewildering variety of sects, groups and denominations. We need to see what was written in the context of the first-century church.

How much stronger, more robust and more influential would the Body of Christ be today if we would commit ourselves to working out differences rather than endlessly splitting and dividing?

After the initial surge, the church settled down to a slower growth pattern. The typical congregation in New Testament times seems to have been a relatively small number of people meeting in homes or public places. In some cases certain congregations may have been in contact with one another, and there is evidence of some rudimentary organization and central authority. But most of the time the churches were on their own.

Paul himself seems to have been the linking factor in the churches he founded. Most of his letters have the flavor of a personal, intimate communication to people he knew rather than that of a large, general audience. He never dreamed that his words would be endlessly dissected and analyzed 2,000 years later in churches on continents he did not even know existed. He wrote to people he knew, gathered in little groups around the Mediterranean Sea.

Unlike today, where we have many choices, the early believers were a small minority, struggling to exist in what was often a hostile environment. With enemies, physical and spiritual, waiting to pounce, unity and harmony within the group were vitally important. That is why Paul and the other founding fathers focused

their letters so much on *koinonia*, or community.

God's building

One of Paul's favorite analogies was to see the congregation as a building (1 Corinthians 3:9) that was a work in progress. "God is building a home," he reminded the church at Ephesus. "He's using us all—irrespective of how we got here—in what he is building. He used the apostles and prophets for the foundation. Now he's using you, fitting you in brick by brick, stone by stone, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone that holds all the parts together. We see it taking shape day after day—a holy temple built by God, all of us built into it, a temple in which God is quite at home" (Ephesians 2:19-22, *Message Bible*).

In such a building, every part was needed. "From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work," wrote Paul (Ephesians 4:16). This does not imply an easy-going "come when you feel like it" approach, does it?

These first Christians were, like us, frail and flawed human beings. Like us, they had their politics and quarrels. So how to handle such problems is often discussed. For example, when two long-standing members of the congregation at Philippi fell out, Paul urged them publicly to settle their differences.

"I urge Euodia and Syntyche to iron out their differences and make up. God doesn't want his children holding grudges," he wrote. "And, oh, yes, Syzygus, since you're right there to help them work things out, do your best with them. These women worked for the Message hand in hand with Clement and me, and with the other veterans—worked as hard as any of us. Remember, their names are also in the book of life" (Philippians 4:2-3, *Message Bible*).

Was Syzygus successful? Let's hope so. Paul valued both Euodia and Syntyche, and did not want to lose either of them. So Paul urged them to reconcile quickly, for the good of the whole group.

The early church was taught to see membership in a congregation as a privilege and a responsibility. It was not a "useful option" or an "added benefit" to take advantage of if and when one felt like it. The instructions have the feeling of "this means you, so listen up" rather than "here are some general principles that you might want to think about in your planning meetings." Hebrews 10:25 was an urgent warning to "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together" because of a trend that needed to be nipped in the bud.

Breaking up is hard to do

Members who persisted in unacceptable or disruptive conduct might eventually have to be denied

fellowship. But only as a last resort, after all other efforts to reconcile had failed. And even then, it was not done out of revenge or punishment, but as a last-ditch effort to bring the erring member to their senses. To be barred from fellowship was a serious matter. You couldn't just shrug your shoulders and find another church that would have you. There was nowhere else to go.

Does this mean there is never a reason to leave a congregation? No. A church that is controlling and abusive does not deserve your membership, and you are better off out of it. But most congregations are not like that. They are just a group of imperfect believers struggling with the trials of life. Membership in a group like that should not be taken lightly. In our modern world, nearly every relationship is fraying—marriage, family, neighbors, friends. What should be strong committed relationships have become casual and negotiable. And sadly, that includes membership in a congregation.

Here I go

Reasons for leaving a congregation often sound righteous—a disagreement over a doctrine or a change of worship style. But often, the *real* reason is hurt feelings and wounded pride. We draw ourselves up, puff out our feathers and say, “Here I stand, I can do no other.” But what we mean is, “Here I go, I can't stand the others.” The result is that people who were once friends now cross the road rather than pass the time of day.

If we are having difficulty with relationships in our church, it is all the more reason to stay and try to work things out. Jesus and his apostles urged their people to solve problems quickly. They knew that, if left to fester, hurts and grudges could spread to others and eventually destroy the *koinonia*. How much stronger, more robust and more influential would the Body of Christ be today if we would commit ourselves to working out differences rather than endlessly splitting and dividing?

A lesson from persecution

Some years ago I met a man in one of the old Soviet satellite countries who published a small Christian magazine on an underground press in his basement. The ruling regime ruthlessly suppressed Christianity, and this man had endured years of prison and persecution.

As he drove me around his city, he showed me a dramatic account of what life was like under Communism.

We stopped in front of a pile of rubble. “We built a church here, but they bulldozed it,” he told me. We drove on, and after a few minutes, he stopped again and said, “We started a new church here, but they knocked this one down too.” He drove us to another site, and another and another, each time repeating the story.

“Finally,” he said, “once the authorities realized that European Communism was collapsing, they began to re-

lax the restrictions a little.” They summoned the Christian leaders and told them they had permission to meet. There were two conditions. One was that they had to all meet together at a time and a place that the government chose. Secondly, the government would appoint the pastor.

The man selected was not the best speaker and certainly not the most educated. But it did not matter. Catholics, Baptists, Orthodox, Pentecostals and even Jehovah's Witnesses would share a common service. “We were so happy to be able to meet that our differences did not matter.”

Then, when the Communist government finally fell apart, Western evangelists rushed in. Soon the group broke up into the various sects and denominations again. That brief moment of harmony has been replaced with competitive congregations glaring at each other over their “distinctives.”

“Of course, we appreciate the freedom, and we do have our different religious traditions,” explained my friend as he showed me yet another demolished building. “But you know, in some ways we were never happier than when we had no choice but to get along together.”

Obviously no one wants persecution. But today, where we have freedom of worship, many of us use that freedom to reduce our commitment. And we wonder why our witness is not as effective as it could be.

A place of safety

A church should be a safe place where there is genuine interaction—sharing the fun, pain, hope, joy, forgiveness and reconciliation of life. You can't experience that as a lone wolf, any more than you can really experience baseball, basketball or soccer by chasing around balls all by yourself. Real living must be experienced in community and fellowship.

Bryan Leech's popular hymn, “We are God's People” puts it nicely:

We are a temple, the Spirit's dwelling place,
Formed in great weakness, a cup to hold God's grace;
We die alone, for on its own
Each ember loses fire:
Yet joined in one the flame burns on
To give warmth and light, and to inspire.

When it's all said and done, I suppose that's why on most Sunday mornings my wife and I drive out of our little country town and head up Highway 50 to Cincinnati. I'm quite sure we could find rich and meaningful fellowship with any group of believers, but we find that our long-term friendships and shared history outweigh the convenience of proximity. We've been through good times and hard times with our church. We've shared hopes, joys, pains and sorrows, disappointments and successes. We feel a commitment there, and despite the long miles and significant tread wear, we would not have it any other way. ☪

Regrets?

I've Had Quite a Few

By Karl Moore

Over the last couple of years I have read about a number of retiring CEOs who were asked by various newspapers whether they have had any regrets. All of them, every one, said they had none. My initial reaction was to roll my eyes, because I found their wholly positive assessments of their careers a bit much. In my career, I have had many regrets.

I mentioned this to a friend who recently retired from a management post at Standard Life here in Montreal. He too said he had no regrets at the end of his 35-year career. Then I asked another friend, Bob Brown, who retired this month as CEO of CAE, whether he had any regrets, and even he felt he'd had a good and satisfying career—with no regrets.

In forgiving others, we can also learn to forgive ourselves. For the sake of Christ, God has already forgiven all our sins. Our regrets are there to motivate us.

This made me stop and think. I respect both these men too much not to pay attention to what they said. The conclusion I came to was that the difference between the retiring executives and me, and the reason why I feel regrets and they don't, is that I still have a number of years to go before I retire (at least I hope so). They are at the end of the matter, looking back and summarizing their careers. They were all CEOs, so they are an admittedly biased sample. But the point is that they have come to peace with their failures, setbacks and mistakes. They feel that, overall, they provided for their families and did some good in

the world. Their lives had meaning and significance, so they could retire in peace, moving on to the next phase of life.

But I am not there yet. With an 11- and a 13-year-old at home, I still have 15 years or so of career life ahead of me, particularly if our youngest goes on to graduate school. That leaves a lot of room for regrets.

I believe that is a good thing, Frank Sinatra's "My Way" notwithstanding. That's because I still have sufficient runway ahead of me to make up for mistakes. Time to turn things around or to choose a different path. In other words, I can still change. I'm not at the end, but in the middle of it, and that makes all the difference.

Those of us still in the middle of the game, still in the arena, are still willing to see our errors and shortcomings. We still have time do something about them, to rectify at least some of our regrets. Opportunities to improve, to learn, to strive to do better, to be better, still lie ahead. I believe it is healthy for us, those in the middle, to not be content, to not be fully satisfied, to continue to strive for excellence.

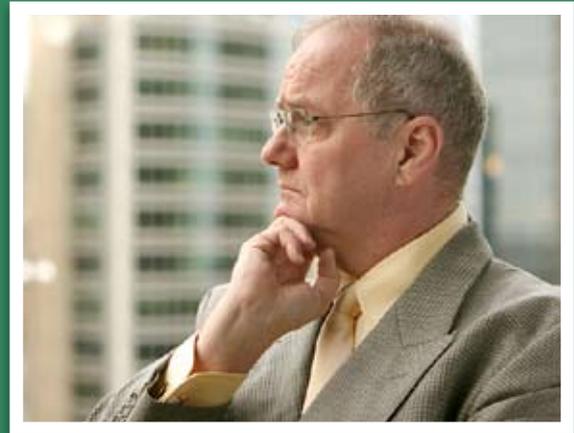
At age 52, President Theodore Roosevelt gave one of the most memorable speeches of the 20th century. He spoke at the Sorbonne, one of the world's great universities. To this august academic audience, he spoke about the "average man, the average woman." Contrasting them to the critic (a frequent and largely appropriate role for academics) he spoke movingly of the "man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood...who errs, comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming." This resonates with me. Evidently Roosevelt was someone all too well acquainted with mistakes, someone who did have a few regrets in his exceptional and productive life!

That is, for better or worse, where I am today. Not at the end. Perhaps, dimly, I can see the end from where I am, but there is of necessity a long haul ahead. Our children look to my wife and me to provide. And God willing, and health allowing, we will.

Each year I can and do have regrets. A sample few

Top 10 List of Possible CEO Regrets

For CEO's still "in the saddle"



of mine from this year: getting overly upset with a colleague in a way that was unfair to that person, turning down an opportunity to write with a colleague (I let the “urgent” crowd out the important), missing an emerging business segment in my consulting activities, traveling too much for too little return and thereby missing out on never-to-occur-again moments with the children, trying to get on big company boards to no avail, not making enough progress on learning French, getting low ratings on an executive program at Duke, not taking a family vacation because of time and money.

Some of these are specific to my life, a mid-level academic; others are more generic, and would resonate with most executives. In the sidebar I have provided, with help of a survey of more than 100 C-Suite executives, a “top 10” list of possible CEO regrets. These are all things I would have done differently and will do differently.

And this is healthy, because having faced my regrets, I can then face the next year with lessons learned, mistakes to be apologized for and different approaches to be adopted. To me, this is exciting. I can be better and do better. I can become more like that person who, in Roosevelt’s terms, “actually strives to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause.” Having regrets doesn’t require great angst and feelings of guilt. If we handle them well, regrets are useful management tools.

The apostle Paul wrote some 2000 years ago, “Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you have a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (Colossians 3:13) In forgiving others, we can also learn to forgive ourselves. For the sake of Christ, God has already forgiven all our sins. But in our weakness we still sin, so God 1) reminds us in the Scriptures that we are forgiven, and 2) helps us through the Spirit to get up, dust ourselves off, and get back into the arena of life. In the same way, our regrets are not there to torture us, but to motivate us.

If I do handle my regrets well, perhaps in 15 or so years at my retirement party at the Faculty Club at McGill, as I reflect back on my career, I will feel that I can honestly deserve to finish my career with the rest of Roosevelt’s famous quotation, “who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.” Then I too perhaps can say, “All in all, I have no regrets.” And with that, move on. ☺



Karl Moore is an Associate Professor at the Desautels Faculty of Management, McGill University. He researches and writes on executive leadership and does a weekly video-cast for the *Globe and Mail*, Canada’s National Newspaper, where he interviews leading CEOs. He is co-director with Henry Mintzberg of McGill University’s Advanced Leadership Program.

- I regret that I allowed so much bureaucracy to creep into my company.
- I regret that I did not demand transformation but let inertia reign.
- I regret that at times I did things to impress the board rather than remain true to my authentic self.
- I regret that we pursued so many acquisitions but neglected organic growth, which is harder work.
- I regret that I too often chased after management fads rather than judiciously choosing a select few.
- I regret that I allowed the board to pay me too much relative to the rest of my team.
- I regret that I allowed myself to be treated as a superstar rather than first among equals.
- I regret that I talked too much and listened too little.
- I regret that I didn’t better prepare my successor to replace me.
- What I really regret is that my high need for achievement led me to neglect time with my family, so that they paid a greater price for my ambition than I did.

Black History Month

Interviewed by J. Michael Feazell

J. Michael Feazell interviewed Curtis May, director of the Office of Reconciliation Ministries, an outreach ministry of Grace Communion International, about Black History Month.

JMF: *What is Black History Month?*

CM: Black History Month began in 1926 as Negro History Week. It was established by Carter G. Woodson as a way to bring attention to the positive contributions of black people in American history. In 1976 Negro History Week became Black History Month.

JMF: *Who was Carter G. Woodson?*

CM: Dr. Woodson was a son of former slaves. He worked in the coalmines in Kentucky to put himself through high school. He graduated from Berea College in Kentucky in 1903, and then went on to Harvard for his Ph.D.

It bothered Woodson to find that blacks had hardly been written about in American history books, even though blacks had been part of American history from as far back as colonial times. And when blacks were mentioned, it was not in ways that reflected the positive contributions that they had made.

So he wanted to do something about that. In 1915, he established the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (now called the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History) and then founded the *Journal of Negro History* and *Negro History Bulletin*. Then in 1926 he started promoting the second week of February as Negro History Week.

JMF: *Why February?*

CM: Woodson chose February because the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and abolitionist Frederick Douglass were in that month. These were two men who had a great influence on black Americans.

In addition, several other important events took place in February. For example, the 15th Amendment, which said that the right to vote could not be denied on account of race, was ratified on Feb. 3, 1870.

W.E.B. DuBois, educator and writer, was born in February 1868. The first black U.S. senator, Hiram Revels, took his oath of office in February 1870. The founding of the NAACP in 1909 took place in February, as did the murder of Malcolm X in 1965, and

the Greensboro, North Carolina, sit-in at the Woolworth's lunch counter in 1960.

JMF: *Why is Black History Month important today?*

CM: All young people need positive role models to inspire them and spur them on and to help them know that they, too, have the potential to achieve their dreams and accomplish worthwhile and important things.

Young blacks need to know about the many positive achievements of black men and women throughout history in every field of endeavor. Knowing what others have done inspires confidence in young people to know that they can do worthwhile things too.

Knowing about the achievements of black doctors, scientists, lawyers, economists and journalists provides encouragement and incentive to black young people to strive for excellence themselves. Without such knowledge and encouragement, young people can end up wasting precious time and energy blaming the system and feeling victimized.

JMF: *How would you describe the value of Black History Month for nonblack people?*

CM: Black history is not merely black history; it is American history. By better understanding the positive contributions of another ethnic group, all Americans benefit. When we understand one another better, we are that much closer to having positive relationships with one another.

Many nonblacks, even many blacks, have erroneous stereotypes in their minds about blacks and their history in the United States. These negative ideas and impressions create barriers to good relationships and to the true potential that all Americans have for working together toward our common goals for freedom, peace and achievement.

Black History Month provides a focus on the positive history, achievements and contributions to American ideals that blacks have made throughout history. And that helps to dispel the negative ideas and stereotypes that invariably spring up when the truth is not given the light of day.

The experience of black Americans in our history can be a further inspiration to all Americans that no matter how tough the struggle, no matter what the odds, when we don't give up, when we stand together firmly for the right and the truth, great things can

An Interview with Curtis May



Many nonblacks, even many blacks, have erroneous stereotypes in their minds about blacks and their history in the United States. These negative ideas and impressions create barriers to good relationships.

happen. And there's nothing more truly American than that. It's our collective legacy and heritage.

JMF: *How can Christians benefit from Black History Month?*

CM: The civil rights movement was born in Christian faith and values. The early leaders of the movement were Christian ministers, black and white alike, who saw injustice and worked in nonviolent ways to bring the love of Jesus Christ to bear on a system that reflected neither the gospel itself nor the deepest values of the U.S. Constitution.

As Christians, when we rehearse that struggle and celebrate the positive achievements of Americans who excelled despite having been socially marginalized, we affirm the values and responsibilities of our faith.

JMF: *Can you give me one word that in your mind characterizes Black History Month?*

CM: Well, I think I'd have to say *hope*. It's all about promoting hope—hope for a better tomorrow that springs from the lessons, the tears and the joys of what has gone before. It's a hope that grows from understanding and from truth—and from the power of love.

And I thank Jesus Christ, because he takes all our meager efforts and turns them into a real and true hope that sees past all the challenges of the present and into a future where his love binds all people together, all people of all backgrounds and ethnicities and histories all bound together as one in him. ☪

Letter from a Birmingham Jail: A Call For Reconciliation

In 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was jailed in Birmingham, Alabama, after a nonviolent protest that led to a confrontation with Public Safety Commissioner "Bull" Connor and municipal authorities. While in jail, King was criticized by a group of white clergymen who blamed him for inciting the violence. It was then that he penned his "Letter From a Birmingham Jail."

King ended the letter with these words: "I hope this letter finds you strong in the faith. I also hope that circumstances will soon make it possible for me to meet each of you, not as an integrationist or a civil rights leader but as a fellow clergyman and a Christian brother. Let us all hope that the dark clouds of racial prejudice will soon pass away and the deep fog of misunderstanding will be lifted from our fear-drenched communities, and in some not too distant

tomorrow the radiant stars of love and brotherhood will shine over our great nation with all their scintillating beauty."



When Life Sucks

GOD, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

By J. Michael Feazell

You've probably seen this short prayer displayed on a wall, on a desk or on a plaque in a gift shop. Every member of Alcoholics Anonymous knows it by heart. It's a great prayer, one that speaks to every human heart.

Maybe that's because one of our greatest plagues is that of anxiety, that old fiend that manifests itself in fear, worry, frustration, dread and the like. We fear that we might be victimized by some disastrous turn of events. We worry that things might turn out badly for us. We feel our frustration levels rise when the world and the people in it do not conform to our expectations. We dread the possible outcomes of a future that has shown itself unreliable in its treatment of us.

Jesus trusts God for us even when we are paralyzed with doubt. He's our Intercessor even when we are so hurt that we wish God would get out of our lives.

Resting in Jesus

But we Christians believe that God makes a difference in our world of vulnerability. The Serenity Prayer above draws our attention to the fact that there are many things we cannot change. Bad things do happen to good people. We can spend our time blaming ourselves, or others, or we can learn to trust our lives, with all the tragedies and all the triumphs, to Jesus who loves us.

It's not that Jesus keeps bad things from happening. Sometimes I think he does—maybe even often-times. But there are plenty of times that he doesn't. It's when the bad things happen that we share in the sufferings that Jesus suffered for us. And just as Jesus trusted himself to God in the miscarriage of justice that resulted in his execution, so he stands with us, trusting God for us in the course of our tragedies, injustices and disasters.

Jesus trusts God for us even when we are paralyzed with doubt. He's our Intercessor even when we are so hurt that we wish God would take his intercession, stuff it and get out of our lives.

He's our Intercessor even when we put the blame on God for what we know he could have stopped from happening, but didn't. And he's our Intercessor, full of faith on our behalf, even when we are so scared and worried that we've hardly thought of God in weeks or months.

Taking the world as it is

The serenity prayer is actually part of a longer prayer penned by the American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. It goes like this:

GOD, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardship as the pathway to peace. Taking, as he did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it. Trusting that he will make all things right if I surrender to his will; that I may be reasonably happy in this life, and supremely happy with him forever in the next. Amen.

—Reinhold Niebuhr, 1926

The idea of taking this sinful world as it is, rather than how I would have it, is not what I learned as a boy. I learned, like most little boys and girls, to be

Puzzle and Premises

By Barbara Dahlgren

When I was growing up, my family loved to do jigsaw puzzles. We'd start one on a coffee table, card table or sometimes on our kitchen table, and everyone would just sit and work on it a while, then go do other things. With all of us working together, little by little the complete picture would be revealed.

Finding the right piece to fit in the right place was not as easy as it looked. You had to match colors, shapes and sizes. If a puzzle piece didn't fit, you would lay it aside and come back to it later. When you found the right puzzle piece for the right spot, it would go in easily and fit snugly.

When my elderly grandmother came to stay with us, she wanted to join in the fun. However, we soon discovered that working puzzles was not her *forte*. Grandma Maudie would try to squeeze a piece into the wrong spot and sometimes hit it with her fist to make it fit. "I know that goes there," she'd say, but it didn't—and no amount of pounding on it would make it fit any better.

I'm reminded of Grandma Maudie's puzzle pounding when I hear private interpretations of the Bible. Some people believe in their preconceived premise so strongly they squeeze and distort facts to fit what they feel is right. Then

How to tell if you are a premise pounder.

Do I spend more time studying my pet premise than I do studying the main themes of the Bible, such as Jesus Christ and the gospel?

Is my premise more important to me than my relationships with fellow believers?

In conversations, do I feel a compelling need to teach others my findings?

Does it make me uncomfortable to hear anything that doesn't support my pet premise?

Do I seem to always find a way to bring a conversation back to my pet premise?

Because of my intense study on my pet premise, do I consider myself an authority on the topic?

Do I spend most of my Bible time on obscure areas of the Bible that could have many different interpretations?

If you answered yes to two or more of these questions, you may be a premise pounder. Try putting your premise aside and focusing on the main and plain things of the Bible.

When I hear private interpretations of the Bible, I'm reminded of Grandma Maudie's puzzle pounding.

they force-feed their theory again and again to anyone who will listen. They aren't interested in hearing anything that doesn't support what they have already determined is true. Even if their supposition doesn't fit or mesh with the biblical context, they keep trying to pound it into place.

If a premise is sound, it will not need to be forced it into place. I respect people who can just lay a premise aside and focus on the pieces of the puzzle that do fit. If what they believe is true, when other parts of the puzzle are in place, their piece will fit.

We all know there are gray areas of the Bible, but perhaps that is what God intended. It can produce a healthy dialogue and exchange of ideas among Christians. However, the old phrase "the main things are the plain things and the plain things are the main things" still rings true. Any study that takes you away from the main focus of Jesus and his love will not be productive in the end. Some of these speculations are interesting, but may need to be laid aside until more of the picture comes together. God is the only one who knows how all the puzzle pieces fit snugly into place. ☪

good and hope for the best, and then feel betrayed, crushed and either angry or depressed if something worse happened—worse meaning anything I did not want.

But the world is not designed to bend to our hopes and desires. Good things happen, but so do bad things. They happened to Jesus, and they happen to us.

Bad things happened to Paul, too, so bad that he tells us he "despaired of life" (2 Corinthians 1:8-10). But he passed on to us what he learned: When bad things happen, it helps us learn not to rely on ourselves

but on God who raises the dead—the God who raised Jesus, our Intercessor.

The gospel is good news. It does not call us into account, but into rest.

The gospel is not about the snowstorm of things we either should have done or should not have done. It is about trusting God, about throwing all our cares on the one who loves us, about resting in Jesus Christ. In Jesus, we can indeed accept what we cannot change, find the courage to change what we can, and the wisdom to know the difference. ☪

Underlining Life

By Geoffrey Miller

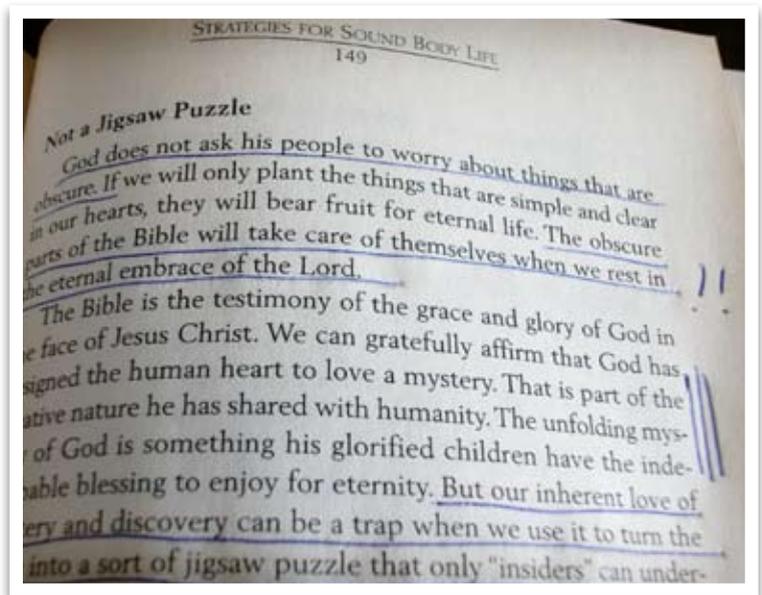
Recently I read a book that challenged me, upset me and tested my attitude in a very unusual way. A friend found the book in a thrift shop where she worked, and having a Christian history similar to mine, she suggested I might enjoy it. It was one of those books that comes along just when you need it most, the kind that releases a cool breeze across your life. It filled in so many gaps that needed filling, but it also frustrated me so much that I could have thrown it into a river and smiled.

The church that I have belonged to for many years was prone to doing a few doctrinal somersaults from time to time. Minor things came and went and came

Time after time my eyes and then my mind were drawn to the heavily underscored text, leading me to places I didn't want to go, to things I didn't want to think about.

again and no one was too fussed. Then one day the church did the equivalent of a doctrinal double reverse pike with twist. Doctrines that I considered ordained by God himself, absolutes that were paramount to the practice of my religious life suddenly became irrelevant. At the time “traumatic” seemed a kind word.

Eventually I came to see what the church leaders were saying. “Jesus is the center of all things. Religious practice cannot compete with him or substitute for him.”



I had no disagreement with that, so I settled down to reshaping my thinking according to the life and teachings of our Savior Jesus Christ in the light of the new covenant. Gradually, over a decade or so, my previous religious practices became less important as I increasingly comprehended the fullness of Christ.

The book that caused me so much unease dealt with those events, the whys and wherefores of it all, from an author who was right there in the moment.

That wasn't what upset me, though.

My problem was that a previous reader had underlined everything he must have thought important with thick black lines (I'm assuming it was a man, though perhaps a woman might have used such an obtrusive pen). Besides his underlining, he had made comments in the margins and inscribed question marks that only he understood. This person obviously had not tasted the emotion of the moment or careered out of control down the roller coaster of “what abouts.” Their underlining was almost detached, the kind of underlining one would do to stress an interesting point of ancient history. It was not the heart of a person who had experienced the joy and the sting of the journey.

Time after time my eyes and then my mind were drawn to the heavily underscored text that sidetracked

Like a Weaned Child

By Tammy Tkach

me into someone else's ideas and opinions, leading me to places I didn't want to go, to things I didn't want to think about. This person was at a different place from me on their spiritual journey, yet they were unknowingly forcing me to go there, even though I felt God wanted me to be somewhere else. Somewhere spiritually healthier for me.

I marveled at this phenomenon. It caused me to think, perhaps I was being shown something bigger than what had come and gone.

Haven't I also been a line-drawer? Haven't I drawn my own lines under events in peoples' lives and in the margins of their personal stories? Indeed, how smugly I've highlighted things that I thought were unusual or not quite right, things I had summed up with a question mark snigger or a disapproving grunt. Have my whispers in the margins drawn another person's attention to a place he or she did not want or need to be?

Then I thought about Christ's words, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it for me" (Matthew 25:31-40). Jesus identifies so closely with every person that how we treat others is how we are treating him. If I draw lines of judgment under someone else's imperfections, real or imagined, I draw lines under his perfect life.

Jesus is clearly more interested in relationships than in piety. He is not worried about how well we do religion; he wants us to treat one another with dignity and respect. When we love another, it is Jesus loving through us. When we are loved by someone, it is Jesus in us receiving the love. He is both the giver and the receiver. He is the center of all things. Religious practice cannot compete with him, or substitute for him.

In Jesus we are free from all marginal references, underlining, and other peoples' interpretations of the way our lives should progress. We are also free to let others be themselves and enjoy their journey into Christ, no matter where they might be along the way.

To my church I say, Thank you for having the courage to lay everything on Christ alone and ride out the storms it brought. And to my unknown underlining friend, Thank you for the frustration that caused me to meditate upon the inclusive graciousness of God. I nestled a little deeper into our Savior's loving arms because of you. **co**

Sometimes I skim over verses in the Bible that don't mean anything to me personally without taking time to delve into them. I'd read the Psalms several times and always flew through Psalm 131 without really getting what it meant. I don't remember being weaned and I doubt you do either, since it usually happens before a child reaches the age of 2. So what exactly does a weaned child do? Or feel? Or think?

At my first silent retreat, I spent a whole day praying, reading the Bible, writing in my journal and reflecting on my relationship with God. Toward late afternoon, I curled up in a chair by the window in my room. The warm sun and the muffled sounds of a gentle breeze and distant traffic lulled me to sleep. When I awoke, I felt incredibly refreshed and content. Psalm 131:2 popped into my mind. It was an "aha" moment. I suddenly knew what the psalmist meant when he said, "I have calmed myself and quieted my ambitions. I am like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child I am content."

In that first moment after waking, I had felt utterly at peace, with no sense of need or worry and no thoughts. A contented sigh was all that came out of me. I felt so full of God I could agree with Horatio Spafford that all was indeed well with my soul.

If you are having trouble relating, perhaps you are too busy. Life is full of stress, and it's not often we can say with the psalmist that our souls are still and quiet. It's usually the opposite, isn't it? Our souls are usually troubled and anxious, and our problems do seem like the sea billowing over us with no life raft in sight. I don't believe life is meant to be lived that way. Our minds and bodies aren't made to be in a constant state of anxiety with adrenaline rushes one after the other.

Archibald Hart, professor of psychology at Fuller Theological Seminary, likens our nerves to a giant rubber band. When we live under constant stress, our rubber-band nerves get stretched over and over—and finally they give out.

Is your rubber band near the breaking point? Have your nerves had it? You might not have time for a three-day silent retreat, but you can still lessen the stress in your daily routine. Yes, I know, you've heard this before. But who knows, maybe this is the time you'll finally do something about it.

Make sure you get enough sleep. Many people don't. Lack of sleep makes any situation worse. Eat breakfast. Your brain and your body need something to run on. Practice being grateful. Instead of complaining, thank God and others for every little blessing and grace. You'll stay calmer if your focus is on gratitude rather than difficulties.

Finally, take time to talk with God. Make him part of your waking thoughts, your waiting thoughts (make standing in line a time of prayer), your whispering thoughts (turn self-talk into a time of prayer) and your waning thoughts (you could call this pillow talk with God).

Clichéd and worn out advice? Maybe. But the basics always work, and they just may help your worn out, over-stretched nerves get back in shape. You might even find yourself quoting Psalm 131:2 and humming, "It is well with my soul." **co**

Vacation or Mission

Do short-term mission trips do anyone any good?

By Janet Morrison

Each year, American Christians spend more than a billion dollars on short-term mission trips. Some go to impoverished areas of North America. Some go to more exotic places—irreligious nations, Christian nations, or places where only a few citizens have heard the gospel. Some stay for a few months, but some of the trips are only a few days long.

As with most anything else that churches do, some of this activity is a waste of time and money. Some of it does more harm than good, and some of it is very helpful. Let's look at the value a short-term trip can have.

Value in unexpected ways

Mission trips are supposed to help people in other places. Often, they do. But just as often, the greatest benefit comes to the people who go. In a mission trip, you can make a huge difference in at least one person's life—your own.

Melinda has experienced eight mission trips. She writes: "Mission trips are great to show you what you're good at, what you're passionate about, and what you love, but they can also show you what you struggle with and what you can't stand. You learn so

much about yourself through mission trips, meet new people, travel, and have unique experiences. You're also helping people, physically or spiritually, and that's the best part."

Deanna, another veteran, says: "Going on short-term missions has definitely changed me. I see my whole life as a mission field. I see my school as a mission field in which I have the opportunity to make the kingdom visible to my friends and classmates. We all have opportunities like this. The question is, do we dare to take them? Short-term missions are like a training ground to live the gospel everywhere in our lives."

After her first trip, **Megan** said: "Surprisingly, I think what I liked most about the mission trip was that many times I was pushed out of my comfort zone and had to do things that I wouldn't normally enjoy or be comfortable doing. This brought me closer to God because I had to rely on him to give me the courage and strength to do those things."

The wrong kind of trip

No one is successful all the time, no matter whether we are trying to do a favor for a neighbor, explain the gospel to a friend who asks, or even when we put on our shoes. So it is no surprise that some mission trips are better than others. When we go



away from home and out of our culture, there are many opportunities for things to go wrong. When we try to do something useful in another culture, there are even more ways for our efforts to go wrong.

Mission trips can go wrong in a couple of ways. At one extreme is the vacation: Wealthy Americans take an air-conditioned bus trip through a slum and tell each other how blessed they are. They go to a fancy restaurant, decide to send money to help paint a church building, and congratulate themselves for doing something great for God.

Then there is the mission trip based on the book of Acts: the people get lynched, shipwrecked, thrown in jail, and come down with malaria, not necessarily in that order.

As the apostle Paul could tell you, there are a few things that can go wrong. And if you are a full-time missionary, you may accept the risks. But if you are a short-term missionary, you can do a lot to avoid the problems.

Here are some things to look for:

Does the trip look like tourism, or work? Where is the focus?

Is the trip advertised with hype, as if two dozen strangers can change an entire city in two weeks?

Are the travelers doing most of the work, or are they watching others do the work? (It's not wrong to watch, as long as you are *aware* that you are a spectator.)

Do your homework: What are the political, safety, and health risks involved in that nation? Consult travel.state.gov/travel and wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/list.aspx (There is no "." after www).

Are the organizers aware of, and doing something about, the risks involved in travel to that nation?

Continued on page 18



Carmel's Story

One of the things I will never forget about the Bahamas is bonding with the Haitian girls in my group. When I first met them, they were all so quiet. Then as the week went on, they started opening up to me. There was one 15-year-old who could barely speak any English. During lunch we would all sit together and she would teach me Haitian Creole. She enjoyed doing it so much that she would teach me so fast that I couldn't keep up.



Hearing about the hardships these children have to face every day was heartbreaking. But when I got to hear them laugh and see them smile it gave me hope to know that Jesus is a good and loving God who is taking care of them even when the world seems like it's crashing down all around them.

The last day of the camp was difficult for me because as this girl was leaving, she was crying and saying to me, "*Mm re mo*" which means, "I love you." Being in the Bahamas was definitely no vacation, but it was an experience I would never want to trade for anything else.

—Carmel

You're Included



Cherith Fee Nordling, of Antioch Leadership Network in Grand Rapids, Michigan



Dr. Gary Deddo, Senior Editor of Academic Publications at InterVarsity Press



Dr. Andrew Root, Assistant Professor of Youth and Family Ministry at Luther Seminary

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Are the mission activities done in cooperation with local churches? Native ministries are needed to locate meaningful ministry situations, to guide the work so that it is most appropriate for that culture, and to follow up after the travelers go home.

Is there adequate supervision, especially if minors are involved?

The right trip

With careful planning and spiritually sensitive participation, a mission trip can be a highlight in the life of a disadvantaged community, and in the lives of those who go. Challenge yourself! Be adventurous! Be willing to learn new skills, meet new people, and learn from them that life is not measured by the amount of souvenirs we collect, but by what we give to others.

Melinda advises: "To choose a trip, think of the kinds of things you enjoy, or are good at. Who do you enjoy working with: children, teenagers, orphans, adults, students, men, women, elderly, etc.? What do you like doing: building relationships, construction, sharing the gospel, drama, music, playing with kids, prayer, teaching in classrooms, VBS, medical help, etc.?"

"Where do you want to go, or feel more of a calling to? Do you want to go to a place where you speak the language? Do you want to go to a place where Christianity is already fairly common, or where most people have never heard the name of Jesus? Also think about things like price and difficulty level."

Holli says, "Short-term mission trips change your life because they change how you look at people. In theory, it's easy to learn about a group of people who have never heard of Jesus, or people who are really poor, and to an extent you can really care about them. But when you actually go and experience what their life is like, see where they live, meet them, hear them, see them face to face, it makes it not only understandable to your mind, but your heart really becomes attached. It becomes real. I've seen what it's like to live in a different culture, and it's really given me a heart for people that I couldn't have had without the experience." ☪

Janet Morrison has organized six mission trips and is now the director of Great Commission Trips, a ministry affiliated with Grace Communion International. She is organizing a trip to work with Haitian refugee children in the Bahamas this summer and a trip to Zambia next year. For more information see www.greatcommissiontrips.org. She gives special thanks to the GCI churches in the Philippines, the Bahamas and Zambia for their support and help. For work in Mexico, see www.cbmission.org.

The day I fired myself

By Nan Kuhlman

I'm a control freak. I've known this for a long time, but when my patient and long-suffering husband pointed out to me that there is only a one-letter difference between "Nan" and "nag," I finally realized that something had to be done.

So I fired myself.

I fired myself as the manager of the universe. For as long as I can remember, I have confessed Jesus as Lord and Ruler, but I really didn't live as if I believed it. I was quick to say, "God is in control," but I acted as if I was the one responsible for everyone else's happiness, health, welfare, and safety. That's a heavy and exhausting load to bear, but one we control freaks can't seem to resist.

I didn't take the firing gently. I needed to feel needed. At least I thought I did. It took a while for me to realize that what I really needed was to let others have the freedom of choice. I never wanted to see them suffer from their mistakes, so I did everything I could to prevent them from making any.

And what did I do to keep them on the straight and narrow? Nag, of course. Nag, and nag, and nag, and nag. But children don't need nagging, they need to learn how to take responsibility for and accept the consequences of their own actions. They need to feel the pain that comes from small bad choices as a natural deterrent from making bigger ones. And as much as it might seem otherwise, husbands don't need nagging either. A husband needs a wife, not a second mother.

Respect and freedom

After I fired myself from being my husband's keeper, I thought about the way God gives me freedom to make the bad choices and unwise decisions I make every day—even though it pains him to see me make them. God isn't a control freak. He made humans able to participate in and enjoy the same kind of mutual respect and freedom that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit share.

When we start thinking, "He might make a mistake: I have to change him," God wants us to think, "Trust me. Pray for him. He's not your project; he belongs to me."

It's hard to show respect for another person's freedom to choose when we're constantly trying to change them. When we try to absorb them into our own vision of what we think they should be or do, we settle for a façade of control, and miss out on the joy of fellowship that God intended. When I fired myself as manager of my world, I was better able to see what God truly expects of me and holds me responsible for. I could stop taking too much on myself and start resting in him, knowing that the Father, Son and Spirit have everything under control.

If only it were that easy. Don't get me wrong, when I fired myself, I acknowledged that my efforts at doing God's job were resulting in more pain and relationship strain than they were in changing anyone. But old habits die hard. I still have to remind myself often that "it's not my problem," and that I'd been fired as universe manager.

Richard Swenson gave a good summary about letting God be God in his book, *The Overload Syndrome*. He wrote, "Since God is the author and creator of my limits, then it is probably OK with Him that I have limits. He probably does not expect me to be infinite and is a little surprised when I try. It is OK with Him if I am not all things to all people all the time, all by myself.... God is not pacing the throne room anxious and depressed because of the condition of the world. He knows, He is not surprised, and He is sovereign. It is OK if we have limits. He is able" (page 37).

If there's any comfort in this for us control freaks, it's that God has to watch us as we stumble through life, crying with us and helping us pick up the pieces at every wrong turn, yet he doesn't sweat it. He's willing to endure the good, the bad, and the ugly so that we can have the freedom to choose him without nagging or coercion. As the saying goes, "Love is like a butterfly. Let it go, and if it comes back to you, it's yours to keep. If it doesn't, it never was."

So now I'm officially out of a job. I'm thinking about running an ad in the classifieds, something like this: "Ex-nagger, 40-plus years experience. Looking for people to love, respect, and encourage. Expect slight relapses." ☺



Nan Kuhlman lives with her husband Craig, their three children, and three dogs. The Kuhlman family hosts a GCI house church in Defiance, Ohio.

PD & Me

By Sue Berger

It's the weekend and I'm dog-sitting for a friend. PD is a 3-year-old miniature dachshund with more energy than is good for any animal. It's been her mission this weekend to "bury" around the house my elderly dog's no-longer-used chew toys. Dachshunds are scent hounds with bodies built for burrowing, and even though PD will never see a badger in her lifetime, her behavior is true to her genetics.

But PD has a problem. No matter where she hides that chew toy, she can tell where it is. I've watched her stuff it between couch cushions, tuck it behind storage boxes and deposit it under my bed. It may be out of sight, but as she surveys her work she's never satisfied. Her nose tells her where it is, and she assumes the toy is not safely hidden. So off she goes in search of a better location.

As PD searches for the perfect toy burial site in my office, I decide to help her out. I manage to pry the toy away from her and while distracting her with one hand, I slip the toy under an area rug with the other hand. Then I show PD both my hands – empty! Panic ensues. She does a quick circle scanning the room, then looks back to me. I show her my hands again, open and empty. The serious search now begins. PD checks every location she'd considered and tested, occasionally looking at me. Each time I hold out my empty hands and tell her it's gone. But she knows it's got to be somewhere, so she goes back to work. Eventually her scent-hound nose locates the toy under the rug and burrows in to retrieve it. With one last distrustful glance at me, she heads off to another room to re-hide the chew toy.

I'm still chuckling to myself when the light bulb comes on in my head. PD and I are a lot alike. Well, not the boundless energy part. But the hiding part. How much of my precious energy do I expend on hiding my sins?



No matter how or where I hide them, I still know where they are. Occasionally I'll work up the nerve to run into God's office with something I've been hiding. He's happy to take it from me and then shows me his empty nail-scarred hands and tells me it's gone. Panic ensues. I quickly check my hiding places. He assures me it's gone, but I'm not buying it. I search more carefully for any whiff of my fault. The smell lingers. It's here, and if I insist, God will let me snatch it back and run to another room to hide it myself.

I like to think I'm smarter than a dog, but in this case it may take a concerted effort to be so. What an opportunity I have to deposit my junk where it'll be forgiven and forgotten. I gaze now on my own elderly dog, slumbering heavily without a care in the world. She gave up hiding toys long ago and watches PD with a mixture of disdain and weariness. I think I'll take a lesson from her. That of surrender and trust.

The old dog's in a good place, and I think I am too—if I'll just rest there. ☺



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Praying for my enemies

By Rick Shallenberger

A few weeks ago during a winter storm, there was an automobile accident on the freeway entrance ramp that I use almost every day. A local man lost control of his car on the ice and slid into the guardrail. He wasn't hurt, so he decided to call his wife to tell her about the accident and let her know he was fine. Then, while he was inspecting the damage to his car, another driver slid on the same ice and hit him—killing him at the scene. I learned about the accident from my son, who works with the son of the man who was killed.

While driving past the accident site a few days later, I started praying for my son's friend and his family. Then it struck me to pray for the other driver. How was he feeling, knowing he had killed someone? As I drove, I prayed that God would give the man comfort, encouragement and peace.

As I was thinking about the angst this man must be suffering, my mind went back to another accident. This one happened 39 years ago. A drunken driver ran a red light and broadsided our car. Two of my sisters, one 8 and the other 3, were killed. I wondered how that driver felt today. I can't imagine how he has lived with the guilt and pain these past 39 years. But I've never even given a thought to him. So I did something I've never done before. I prayed for the man who killed my sisters. I asked God to relieve his pain and his guilt. I also asked God to give him peace and to heal him.

My prayer surprised me. Why did I think of this man after all these years? Why did I feel compelled to pray for him? Where were these thoughts coming from?

As I continued to drive and wonder, the sermon I had given the previous week came to mind. I was preaching from Luke 6 and had spent a few minutes on verses 27-28, which read, "But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you." I realized I had just forgiven the man who killed my sisters, and I had prayed for my "enemy."

It was an unbelievably freeing moment. I had actually asked God to bless the man who had caused my family and me so much pain. What enabled me to do that? That's when it really hit me. I was able to pray for him because for the first time, I saw this man through Christ's eyes.

Jesus does not look at him as the man who drank too much and caused a deadly accident. Jesus sees a brother, a precious child of God, whose mistake had



My prayer surprised me. Why did I think of this man after all these years? Why did I feel compelled to pray for him?



horrific consequences. This one mistake took two innocent lives and forever changed two families—his and mine. But the mistake did not stop or change this man from being who he is and always will be—God's beloved child. God never stopped loving him or wanting to have a personal relationship with him.

I don't know where this man is today. I have no idea whether he is a believer. All I know is that God inspired me to pray for him and I did. That prayer changed me.

Praying for our enemies frees us from a lot of emotional baggage and enables us to see others as God sees them. Further, it helps us place others in God's hands and trust him to do his work in them just as he does his work in us. Our "enemies" are God's children.

My prayer for the man who killed my sisters inspired me. I believe God was reminding me that in Christ, all my friends and all my "enemies" are forgiven, loved and included. Christ provides the restoration: I know that by his love and power I'll see my sisters again. And he provides the healing and reconciliation: theirs, mine and that of the man who hit us. Jesus is truly our "all in all," the beginning and the end, the full measure of our lives. **co**

Rick Shallenberger is Pastor of Christ Fellowship Church, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Everyone must die!

A study of Mark 8:27–37

By Michael Morrison

Jesus did most of his ministry in the Jewish areas of Galilee and Judea. But on at least one occasion, he traveled north of Galilee. He used the retreat to debrief his disciples, to discuss his mission, and to teach a fundamental lesson about what it means to be a disciple.

Peter identifies Jesus as the Messiah (verses 27-30)

Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. This was about 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee. On the way he asked them, “Who do people say I am?” He already knew what the people thought, but the question led to an important teaching point.

They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” Some people thought that Jesus preached in the style of John; others that he was like Elijah, or some other prophet.



Peter was thinking about the things that ordinary human beings think about. He wanted what his friends and neighbors did: freedom from foreign oppression, safety, security, money, and a reward for the risk and the work.

“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Peter said what the others probably thought but were afraid to say: “You are the Messiah.” They had seen him cast out demons, heal the sick, walk on water, and feed 5,000 people. Peter concluded, You are the man God will use to rescue us.

Peter’s response was correct. But Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him. On several occasions, Jesus wanted his identity kept a secret (Mark 1:25, 34, 44; 3:12; 5:43; 7:36). Large crowds were already a hindrance to his ministry (1:33, 45; 5:24). Further, Jesus did not want the rulers to see him as a political rival.

Jesus wanted his disciples to be quiet about his identity because what *they* meant by the word “Messiah” was quite different from what Jesus actually was. Peter had the right word, but a seriously flawed concept of what the Messiah would do. This is the next thing that Jesus teaches them.

Jesus predicts his death (verses 31-33)

For the first time, Jesus predicted his own death: He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

“The Son of Man” is a reference to Daniel’s vision of “one like a son of man” who was given a kingdom (Daniel 7:13). When the angel interpreted the vision, he said the kingdom would be given to the persecuted *saints* (7:18–27). The “son of man” represented all the saints. Jesus saw himself as this person who represented the persecuted people of God. He would accept the kingdom on their behalf—and be persecuted on their behalf.

Jesus also saw himself as the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy of a servant who would suffer on behalf of his people (Isaiah 53); Isaiah and Daniel were describing the same person.

This was not what most Jews thought—most people assumed that the Messiah would be a victorious king, not a suffering servant. So Jesus taught here that the “son of man” would be rejected by the Jewish authorities, killed on behalf of his people, and then rise again.

In some of his teachings, Jesus spoke in parables that hid part of the meaning (Mark 4:11); this time, however, he spoke plainly about this. But this new revelation was so *contrary* to expectations, that Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

One minute, Peter declares Jesus to be the leader God sent to his people. The next minute, Peter is contradicting his God-appointed leader! This is an emotional reaction. What Jesus said deeply disturbed Peter’s idea of what the Messiah would do—and what he would do for Peter himself.

The disciples expected to receive certain benefits

for following Jesus. They had left family, jobs and homes, and it was natural that they wanted a reward (Matthew 19:27). Some wanted to be the greatest in the kingdom (Mark 10:37). They were thinking that the kingdom of Jesus would be similar to the kingdoms of this world, where the king's closest friends got the most benefits.

Peter was looking forward to being the chief of staff, the secretary of state, or someone important in the new government. But Jesus had just taken his high hopes and smashed them.

Peter had the presence of mind to take Jesus aside and “correct” his teacher privately. Repent of this defeatist attitude! We won't let it happen—we'll take up swords and protect you!

We do not know if the other disciples could hear what Peter and Jesus said. But Jesus' reply was said with them in mind: **But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said.** Jesus calls Peter Satan, the Hebrew word for “adversary.” Peter is opposing God's plan.

You have called me your leader, and I am, Jesus might have said. So get behind me and *follow*—don't try to get in front and lead. You don't even know where you are going. **“You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”**

Peter was thinking about the things that ordinary human beings think about. He wanted what his friends and neighbors did: freedom from foreign oppression, safety, security, money, and a reward for the risk and the work.

But God has something a lot more important in mind than that. He can see an enemy that is stronger than Rome, an enemy that must be conquered by suffering and death, not by replacing Roman overlords with Jewish ones.

Take up the cross (verses 34-37)

The lesson Jesus wanted to teach Peter was needed

by everyone. So Jesus **called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.**

If you want to learn from me, he said, you must put aside your desires for fame and fortune, and be willing to die. You must be willing to follow me into death, if that's where it ends up. I am not looking for people who simply want to benefit themselves. The world already has enough of those people.

And why should people be willing to give up their lives? **For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.** If your priority is on saving your life, you will be a loser, because you *will* die.

But if you are willing to lose your life for Jesus, and die for his kingdom, then you will save your life. Jesus is talking about life *after* you die, and that is the perspective we all need.

If we focus on life in this age, we will lose it. But if we focus on Jesus and his message, we will have a better life in the age to come. The losses are temporary, but the rewards are eternal.

What good is it, Jesus asks, for you to gain the whole world, yet forfeit your soul? No matter whether you are thinking about military conquest or financial gain, what good would it do you, even if you have the maximum success possible? You are still going to die. (The Greek word translated “soul” can refer to life in this age.) There is an enemy here, an oppression that is far worse than Rome.

What can you give in exchange for your soul? Even if you had the whole world, you could not buy your life back. So why struggle for such a temporary victory?

What we need is a Messiah who conquers death itself—and that can be done only by someone who enters death and emerges victorious on the other side. We need a Messiah who dies and returns to life. ☪

The Greeks Had a Word for It

Χριστός

Hebrew had a word for it, and when the Old Testament was translated into Greek, Greek-speaking Jews found a word for it, too.

It starts with the Hebrew word *mashah*, which means to spread a liquid, or anoint with oil. An anointed person was called *mashiach*, an anointed one; it was most often used in reference to Jewish kings, but was also used for Cyrus, a Persian king. When the Jews were in exile and looking forward to the

restoration of the Davidic line of kings, they set their hopes on *the* anointed one, the *mashiach* who would restore the nation.

Similarly, the Greek word starts with *chriō*, meaning to anoint with oil. In secular Greek the adjective *christos* always referred to things that were “rubbed on,” and never to people. But the Jews applied this word to their hopes for a messianic leader, and Christians applied it to Jesus. Jesus is *the* Christ, the Anointed One.

Hmm...

The extraordinary thing is that it is not we who pay the price of costly grace, but the all-loving God who set the stars in their courses, who created us, and dwelt among us. For the love of us, God is the one who pays. What a story!

Madeleine L'Engle
The Rock That Is Higher

The omnipotent One is not He who waves the magic wand to do any bizarre thing; rather, He is the One who can bring His good purposes to fruition whatever the hindrances on the way.

Michael Green,
Evangelism Through the Local Church

Your temptation isn't late-breaking news in heaven. Your sin doesn't surprise God. He saw it coming. Is there any reason to think that the One who received you the first time won't receive you every time?

Max Lucado
God's Open Arms

I don't find in the New Testament any suggestion that the visible church ought to be composed of guaranteed one-hundred-percent soundly converted keen Christians. If it had been, half the epistles would not have been necessary. Yet people are always hankering after a false security, such as you would get from belonging to a church that could be seen to be all right, seen to be "sound"...seen? We walk by faith, not by sight. Any attempt to get a purer church, or Christian life, than we have been promised this side of heaven, runs the risk of attempting to base security, assurance of salvation, on something other than the free grace and love of God. It cannot be done; it must not be done.

Tom Wright
Small Faith—Great God

A father, long estranged from his son, is said to have posted a notice in a Spanish square;

"Son, I have missed you and want you back. Meet me in the square at noon on Friday." On the appointed day 87 young men turned up.

It is human to backslide and wander away from God. There is a longing in every heart to be found. There is no more important message in the whole world than this: God misses us and longs for us to be back in fellowship with him.

Anne Douglas

I have sometimes been wildly, despairingly, acutely miserable, racked with sorrow, but through it all I still know quite certainly that just to be alive is a grand thing.

Agatha Christie

Life is relationships; the rest is just details.

Gary Smalley

Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans.

John Lennon

Let us so live that when we come to die even the undertaker will be sorry.

Mark Twain

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