

# CHRISTIAN Odyssey

April–May 2011

Growing Together in Life & Faith

**Where  
Was God?**

Vol. 8 No. 2

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# A Very Good Friday!

A magazine like this is not a newspaper. We need to work well in advance. We had planned in this issue to bring you news from the flooded areas of Australia. As I was putting the finishing touches to the content, we got news of the earthquake in Christchurch, New Zealand. I was able to squeeze in a short feature about that.

Then, with the issue well and truly in the final stages of preparation for the printer, northeastern Japan was devastated by an earthquake that was 8000 times stronger than New Zealand's, followed by a tsunami that, although not as extensive as the Australian floods, was far more destructive. And just this morning, news of another quake in Myanmar. We were, once again, able to make some last-minute adjustments. I hope and pray

no longer unusual, at least in developed countries. My doctor says I am in pretty good shape, so I am not quite ready to ask the family to gather, or prepare some famous last words.

I used to think to be 70 was really old. I can remember when I thought 40 was quite venerable. Now my children are that age, and they still seem like my "kids." Nevertheless, to reach 70 puts life into a sober new perspective. According to the Bible, on April 22 I officially arrive in the departure lounge, even if it looks like the flight has been delayed.

But it was not until I looked at my 2011 diary that I noticed with some surprise that my 70<sup>th</sup> birthday coincides with Good Friday, the day when most Christians commemorate the death of Jesus. The coincidence was both interesting and reassuring. Jesus' death and resurrection, of course, altered everything. For one thing, it completely redefined death. Death can still take us, but it can no longer hold onto us, because the Son of God took death into himself and destroyed it, 1 Timothy 1:10 tells us, making it the pathway into his resurrection and life.

The words, "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that *whoever* believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" take on a fresh significance when your 70<sup>th</sup> birthday coincides with Good Friday, just as announcements in the departure lounge hold the attention of those waiting for the plane.

Interestingly, April 22 is also Earth Day.<sup>1</sup> Earth Day is intended to inspire awareness and appreciation for the Earth's natural environment. For Christians, it is a reminder that we are stewards of creation, commanded by God to take care of the things around us. We haven't done a very good job, and the environment is showing signs of our mismanagement. But once again God has not abandoned us. It is fitting that Earth Day and Good Friday should coincide. "For God was

**I know death is part of life, but times like these really make us think about all its implications.**

that nothing else will happen between now and when you receive this issue to make it seem out of date. 2011 has given us enough to worry about already, and it is only mid-March.

I always knew that this year would bring a sobering reminder of my own mortality—that's because I turn 70 on April 22. But I didn't anticipate so much disaster in so many places to underscore it. Like all of us, I know death is part of life, but at times like these, it really makes us think about death and all its implications.

To reach the age of 70 is sobering in itself. The 90th psalm reminds us that "we live for seventy years or so," adding that "with luck we might make it to eighty" (Psalm 90:10-11, *Message Bible*). For most of human history you needed luck, a lot of it, to even get to 70. Today, getting to 80 is

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pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (Colossians 1:19-20).

One way or another, April 22, 2011, is a reminder that there even amid death and destruction there is good news, not just for this newbie septuagenarian, but for everyone and everything. [co](#)

<sup>1</sup> According to Wikipedia, "Earth Day was founded by United States Senator Gaylord Nelson as an environmental teach-in first held on April 22, 1970."





# Is This It?

By Joseph Tkach

**D**evastating earthquakes. Tsunamis and volcanic eruptions. Political turmoil across the Middle East and northern Africa. A worldwide economic crisis. No wonder many Christians are asking themselves whether we are entering what Jesus called “the end of the age.”

Our church had a history of preoccupation with predicting and watching for the end time, until we came to our senses about 20 years ago. It would be understandable if some of us who have been around that long might begin to lapse back into some of the old ways of thinking, fearing that the “great tribulation” has finally caught up with us. So let’s take stock of the situation calmly, in the light of what the Bible *really* says.

There are three key factors that we need to keep in mind.

First is that Jesus and Paul said no one, including the church, would know when Christ would return (Matthew 24:36). We are told instead to be always ready, for the express reason that we would *not* know (v. 44).

Second, the events Jesus described to the disciples in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 were not about our time, but about *their* time—“this generation shall not pass until all these things be fulfilled,” he said (Matthew 24:34). And those things, preserved in highly symbolic apocalyptic writing, did take place in their generation when the Romans sacked Jerusalem and leveled the temple.

Third, we must remember that the Bible, including the book of Revelation, is not there for us to use or interpret in just any way we please. Second Timothy 3:15 tells us that the Scriptures are “able to make us wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.” Verse 16 says that “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.”

According to the Bible’s own witness, that is what it is for.

And that is how we should use it. Its purpose is to teach us about Jesus Christ—who his Father is, who he is, and who we are in him—and the implications of that. It is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, not for predicting the end of the age or for condemning people who don’t yet know Christ.

Despite the fact that the Bible tells us what it is and what it should be used for, it is still probably the most misused book in the world. Some seem to think they can find the answer to any question imaginable somewhere within its pages. They regard it as the final authority on matters of diet, what to wear, what entertainment is allowable, what hobbies to have, and so on. And of course, some claim they can use it to calculate exactly when the “end time” will be.

Such predictions are always wrong, of course, but that does

**The Bible is for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, not for predicting the end of the age.**

not deter determined wannabe prophets. They simply plunge back in, searching the Scriptures carefully until they come up with yet another creative interpretation. Such obsession is born of many things, but among them is a craving to be special, to know secret things that others don’t know. It is also born of fear. We seem to believe that if we can figure out when a calamity will happen, we can be less terrified about it.

But why should believers ever get nervous at the idea of Christ returning? They get that way for one reason: they have wrong ideas about God. They have been led to think that God is some kind of outraged Judge who is on the prowl to wreak terri-

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# Where Was God?

By J. Michael Fezell

**I**f God loves people, why does he wipe them out? We can't help but ask that after a disaster such as the devastating earthquake and tsunami that hit northern Japan. What kind of God would kill so many thousands of people and ruin the lives of millions of others in a single stroke?

Where is God when thousands, tens of thousands, or sometimes hundreds of thousands are being crushed, maimed and trapped in a massive earthquake or drowned when tidal waves swallow coastal towns and cities? If God is all-powerful, surely he could stop such things. So why doesn't he?

## Who's to blame?

"God didn't do it; he just allowed it," some say. Maybe they think that's a good defense. I don't, and I doubt you do. Allowing something that you could stop is not much better than doing it yourself.

When something bad happens, we want someone to blame. When the bad thing is a natural disaster, there's no one left to blame but God. Earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, tidal waves, lightning strikes. The insurance companies call them "acts of God." Nobody is to blame—nobody except God, that is.

The Japanese earthquake and tsunami, the recent wildfires and floods in Australia, the earthquakes in Haiti and New Zealand, and the horrific Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 that killed more than 200,000 are just recent examples in a long line of history's mind-numbing natural disasters. Looking back, at least one million died in the North Korean floods and famine of 1995-98. More than 900,000 died in the Ethiopian famine of 1984. Two hundred forty-two thousand died in the Tangshan, China, earthquake of 1976. The Ethiopian famine of 1974 claimed 200,000.

The Bangladesh sea flood of 1970 took 200,000-500,000. China's famine of 1960 took 20 million. One million died in the flu pandemic of 1957, and up to 100 million died in the flu pandemic of 1918. Earthquakes in Nansan, China, in 1927 and in Gansu, China, in 1933 killed 200,000 each. Up to one million died in Huayan Kou, China, in the Yangtse Kiang flooding of 1887.

The French smallpox epidemic in 1870-71 killed 500,000. One million died from the Irish famine of 1845. The Iran earthquake of 1780 killed 200,000. Ten million died in the Bengal, India, famine of 1769. The Shensi, China, earthquake

of 1556 claimed 800,000. And the black plague of Europe and Asia in 1346-42 took 25 million lives.

People ask, why does a loving God let such astounding mayhem happen?

I have another question. Why does God let *anyone* die?

Not long ago, I attended the funeral of a woman who was celebrated for her many personal ministries of love. She died of cancer, and her suffering was nothing short of horrible. A friend's teenage daughter died in a fiery car crash on slick winter roads. She was on break from a Christian college, and her suffering and the grief of her parents, relatives and friends was every bit as real as the suffering and grief of any individual who died in a tornado, a tsunami or an earthquake.

Why did God let Grandma die? "She was old," someone might say. "It's the natural way of things. We grow old and die."

Yes, it is the natural way of things. Bodies wear out. Plaque builds up in arteries, and if enough builds up, it cuts off the blood flow and causes strokes or heart attacks. Sometimes cells get mixed up and go crazy, becoming cancer cells and disrupting the tissues and organs around them. Over time bones lose their density and an accidental fall can break a hip. Joints lose their elasticity. Eyes lose their sharpness.

The ground erodes too, and the earth's crust shifts. Water evaporates. Rain falls. Rivers rise. Winds blow. Even healthy people and young people can get hit by falling rocks or flying debris. People get caught in flash floods, mudslides and collapsed mineshafts.

People fall off roofs, out of windows and off scaffoldings. Sometimes it happens when they are doing humanitarian work, trying to help or save someone else. And God, far, far more often than not, sits by and watches it happen without lifting a finger to stop it.

When someone we love grows old and dies of "natural causes" we accept it as the way God has designed the creation—there's a time to be born and a time to die.

But when someone we love dies before growing old, we ask, "Why would God allow this to happen?"

## Not an automaton creation

No doubt, God could have made the universe in such a way that nothing ever went wrong. But he didn't. He created a world that is free to be itself—and to express its identity in continually fresh and creative ways. For some reason, he thinks that is good.

Maybe that's because it takes such a world, a wild and free world, to be the breeding ground for things God values in human beings—things like courage, devotion, loyalty, self-sacrifice, kindness, generosity, hope, trust. By anybody's reckoning these are a few of the noblest features of humanity. Would such qualities exist in a world without risk, danger, calamity—and death?

And where would love be in such a world? Love isn't just a matter of getting along. Love is made real in the crucible of suffering, of self-sacrifice, of loyalty and devotion against the odds.

"Oh really," someone might say. "If God thinks that is so great, why doesn't he just come down here and go through what we go through in his so-called good creation?" Well, that's just what Christians believe he did. And just like death happens to every one of us, he died. But Christians believe that his death changed death itself. He made death a pathway to resurrection, to new life, to a new creation in which "there is no more death or mourning or crying or pain."

As much as we hate to admit it and hate to talk about it and throw stones at those who do, we all die. We all die of something. Whether we die of "natural causes" or of "natural disasters" makes little difference in the end. Either way, we die, and nothing will stop it, regardless of how kind we are or how mean we are or how smart, careful or wise we are. But the good news is, regardless of how or when we die, Jesus resurrects the dead.

God could stop all natural movement of earth, air and water. He could stop humans from making mistakes, making unwise decisions, being selfish, or stubborn or rude. God could have made a "Stepford Wives" style creation in which everything worked automatically. But he didn't. God created a world in which something far more valuable than long physical life could exist. He made a world in which love can exist and grow. In love, humans pull together and respond to suffering and calamity. In love, humans forgive one another, help one another, encourage one another and stand by one another.

### God suffers with us

God is not a stranger to human suffering. Christians believe that God became a man, suffered as a human and died as a human, and because of that, humanity itself has been taken up into God's own being. In Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, humanity's cause is now God's cause. When we suffer, God suffers with us.

God loved the world so much, John the Gospel writer recorded, that God gave his Son that whoever believes in him would have new life. God sent his Son to save the world, he added, not to condemn it (see John 3:16-17).

Death is part of life, and every person who lives will also die. Even you and even me. But death is not the end of the story of our lives.

God did not make human beings merely for this life of suffering and grief—he made us for his new creation of fulfillment and joy. The lives cut short now, deprived now, stifled

# How We View God



Many view God as an all-powerful Judge who is eager to plague us with disease, disaster and disgrace when we tick him off. A list of dos and don'ts becomes our gauge to measure our success in pleasing him. We think if we don't live up to God's expectations he will zap our lives with a lightning bolt to shock us into obedience.

Others view God as caring and kind. God is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in eternal, loving communion. God has made us one with the Son by sending him to become human with us and for us, and he invites us to participate through the Holy Spirit in the Son's intimate relationship with the Father. We grow daily in trust and confidence as we walk and talk with him. He is the helper of our joy, not a cosmic policeman handing out spiritual tickets (2 Corinthians 1:24).

How we view God is important in building a personal relationship with him. The foundation for this relationship is laid when we first become Christians. If we turn to God because we are afraid he will burn us in a lake of fire if we don't, it would be kind of like marrying someone just because they said they would kill us if we don't. It's not the kind of foundation a loving relationship is built upon. One would live in constant fear that if God is not pleased, he might open the trapdoor to hell.

But still, many people think that if you don't threaten people with an ever-burning hell, they will never come to Christ. How sad!

On the other hand, if, as the gospel teaches, we embrace God because he loves us and sent his only Son to live among us (John 1:14), serve us (Mark 10:42-45), freely die for us (John 3:16, John 10:18), and rise from the grave to give us victory over death (1 Corinthians 15:54-57), then our foundation becomes one of true love, not fear. We enter into the relationship feeling accepted and wanted. As we come to know God more intimately, we realize he has only our best interest in mind. He is for us, not against us.

Is it important to view God as he really is? I think so. How we view God determines our relationship with him. God wants only the best for us. He's there to help us, not harm us. After all, God is *love* (1 John 4:8). **co**

now, cheated now, will find their fulfillment in the life of the new creation. This is the Christian hope, and Christians hold this hope in faith—faith that God who freely took up our human cause as his own, even to the point of dying like a criminal as one of us, is true to his word. Every person who dies will also live.

In this hope and in this love, we extend compassion and help to others. As we do, we experience the deepest riches of true life, riches that are unseen but more real than physical security or safety. Love truly does "make the world go 'round." **co**





# Blessing in Disguise

By John McLean

**L**ate last year, Australia experienced the worst floods in our history, followed by cyclones, while other parts of the country have had devastating bushfires. Property has been destroyed, homes ruined, lives have been lost. We have witnessed surges of water hurling cars as if they were toys, washing some houses away, wrecking others, uprooting trees, destroying roads, railway lines and bridges. It has been tragic, sad, and heartbreaking.

Yet in the midst of it all, we have also seen amazing courage, selflessness, cooperation and service. People standing in the midst of their ruined homes, facing the loss of possessions, valuables and the work of a life-time, have smiled, cried, smiled again, and said that life goes on. They have pitched in to help strangers and communities. Neighbours who had previously had only a nodding acquaintance with one another cleared muck from one another's homes together. The "Mud Army" of volunteers embodied the spirit that rose in response to the challenge presented by this devastating natural calamity.

In a crisis, we know, deep down, that people matter more than things. Indeed, at such times it seems we can be clear and certain that family, friends, mateship, community and helping one another are the things that really matter.

Terry Sweetman, writing in the *Sunday Mail* (January 16, 2011), after describing his own experience with the Brisbane flood, expressed it cogently: "Materially we are briefly impoverished. Spiritually we are enriched—now and forever. In exchange for some trinkets and trash devoured by flood waters, we have found some treasures we have forgotten existed.... My pledge is that we will never again

neglect the garden of friendship from which we have harvested so much kindness."

In the Sermon on the Mount, probably the best known of Jesus' teaching, Jesus makes the observation that life is more than possessions and eating and drinking. He isn't saying that eating and drinking, and our material possessions, are unimportant, just that there is more to life than these things. He isn't condemning working, earning, going into business, saving, building a house. He is saying that there is more to life than these things.

Deep down, we know this to be true. In times of crisis, the distractions and details of everyday life, the tyranny of the urgent and the pressures of the present seem to fall away and we see, just that much more clearly, just how true it is—life is more than things. What really matters are our relationships.

God is a relational Being. He is love. And deep down in the human heart there is a need for friendship, fellowship, relationship—a need for love. We know it. We get so busy we forget it, or so distracted by the teeming trivia of life that we are not conscious of it, but we know it to be true.

The story of the Bible is not about a harsh, judgmental God who can't wait to smite us. It's about a God who reveals himself in Jesus as one who endures all the reality of human life along with us—its ups and downs, pain and celebrations. It's about a God who loves us, and in his grace wants to share his life with us. It's good news in the midst of all the bad news.

Scientists tell us that we are at our happiest when we are helping others. Interesting, isn't it? Not when we are busy accumulating, acquiring, defending, and protecting the "stuff" of life. When Jesus encourages us to seek first his

kingdom and his righteousness, he is talking about our focus, our priorities, in life. And then he says we won't need to worry about all the other stuff—it will be provided.

He is telling us how to simplify the complexities in life—by prioritizing the things that really matter.

If life is truly more than material trinkets and trash, why do we spend so much time and effort dedicated to their pursuit? If the treasure of life is spiritual, relational, why not make that our focus and priority? And at the heart of this is the treasure of a relationship with God. “Your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom,” Jesus said (Luke 12:32).

The kingdom is relational—sharing the life of the Father, Son and Spirit. Through Jesus, we share in this life, and in this

righteousness. (It's not a matter of working harder to become more righteous by ourselves—it's participating in the righteousness of Christ.) No wonder Jesus' repeated admonition here is “don't be overly anxious,” or simply, “don't worry.”

If our priorities are spiritual, kingdom-focused, we can get on with life—a life of love and service. Through his incarnation (becoming one of us), Jesus has redeemed all of life, so we can by all means enjoy the physical while we have it, but at the same time we can set our hearts on the imperishable, the permanent, the eternal. Life is more than stuff, possessions. It's about people, grace, kindness and love. It's about enjoying relationship with God and one another.

Why wait for a crisis? [co](#)

## And Also New Zealand



A catastrophic earthquake struck Christchurch, New Zealand, on February 22. This relatively shallow 6.3 magnitude earthquake, the second to rock the city in less than six months, hit near central Christchurch at 12:51 p.m. on a Tuesday when the city's buildings and streets were full of people and traffic.

Half the brick buildings in Christchurch's central business district were irreparably damaged. The death toll neared 200. Stories and video have abounded of tragic loss, near misses, harrowing escapes, and a community of people who have pulled together to help with the recovery.

The Kiwi mindset of “just getting on with it” has meant that police, armed forces, ambulance, fire brigades, and an army of citizen volunteers (including thousands of university students) cordoned off the teetering buildings in the city's core, provided security, fed and housed displaced residents, and shoveled up an estimated 100,000 tons of liquefaction (wet sand and silt forced up to the surface through even the tiniest cracks in pavement).

Support and personnel have poured in from across New Zealand and around the world. Remarkably, there has been minimal looting, and next to no public violence.



Christchurch Cathedral's Dean, Peter Beck, praised the kindness people had shown each other throughout the disaster. He said, “People are reaching out to one another, talking to one another, giving each other food... that's what it's all about. You often see in these worst of times the best in human beings.”

*Phil Baldwin*





# Mateship: *Imago Aussie?*

By Kerry Gubb

**A** few years ago a book was published about Australia, called *The Lucky Country*. Although the term found its way into our self-talk, we haven't been feeling so lucky lately. Earlier this year, in just one month:

- **Flash floods** inundated an area the size of France and Germany combined. Lives were lost, homes and crops destroyed.
- **Cyclone Yasi** ploughed across the Barrier Reef and the Queensland coast, leaving devastation in its wake
- **Raging bushfires** took out homes and property on the edge of Perth.

It was a reminder that Australia is not a passive, easily tamed land. But when it does its worst to us, it seems to bring out the best in us. It also reminds me of why I'm so proud of my people.

"We're Aussies: we stick together" is felt, spoken and lived out every time this unbroken mustang of a land fights back with fire, wind or water. It's a national psyche we call "mateship." Mateship is our word for a phenomenon highly influenced by our land, our accumulated culture, our history and our experiences together. Mateship is the "Aussie spirit." It's the Aussies' self-image: *Imago Aussie*. If you ever visit here, you'll probably find yourself called "mate" by total strangers. Consider it a compliment.

## Uniquely Australian?

I'm as fiercely proud of mateship as anyone. I have to disagree, however, with some who think it's unique to our country. We might be more open about it, but Australians are not the only ones who come together in a crisis and rise to the challenge of a natural disaster. Each nation, each community, neighborhood, family and couple has its own variation on the same broad theme. They might call it something else, and they will display it in ways that reflect their own history, culture and experience. But mateship is common to all who are made in the image of God. Because God—Father, Son, and Spirit—is mateship: relationship, community, communion. God is whatever words we use in our own languages and cultural contexts to convey the concept of "You are in me and I am in you. We stick together. I will never leave you, nor forsake you."<sup>1</sup>

Here's the difference, though. That's how God is all the time. Always has been, always will be. Outgoing love: an orientation that Tom Smail, with the help of Pannenberg, calls "the exocentricity of our humanity"<sup>2</sup> We're not like God all the time. In fact, we're not like him most of the time, are we? That's because in us the image of God (*Imago Dei*) is distorted and hindered by our self-centered, egocentric orientation. Only in rare moments does "the exocentricity that constitutes our humanity" break "through the egocentricity that defies and denies it."<sup>3</sup>



# Up, Down and Content Through It All



On a shelf in my office stands a first-place trophy for bowling. Draped over it is a last-place crying towel. I keep them together to remind me of life's ups and downs. One day you're on top and the next you may be at the bottom.

Paul understood this well. In Philippians 4:11-12 he said: "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want." As you can read in his letters, he experienced many ups and downs, more than most of us ever have or will.

When Paul said he knew what it meant to be in need, he wasn't kidding. While I'm sure he didn't enjoy the times of need, he learned from them and kept going. He learned, and so can we, to be thankful for the times we're flying high (in all things give thanks) but not surprised when things turn sour (think it not strange when fiery trials come). And like Paul, we can learn to be content in every situation.

That is so easy to say, yet so hard to do. But if Paul could do it, can't we? We have the same Holy Spirit to comfort and guide us through the deep valleys. We have the joy of the Lord as our strength. We have the hope of the resurrection and the promise of eternal life. And we have Jesus, who understands everything we're going through.

Jesus experienced his share of life's ups and downs, too. As we read in John 1:1, he enjoyed the glory of the Godhead from eternity. But Philippians 2 explains that he didn't hold on to it, but humbled himself to come to us as a baby, born in humble circumstances. He learned to walk and to talk and to work, building with his dad. He then became a rabbi, a big accomplishment in his society. He was followed by crowds and sought after by the sick and hurting. For a normal human, such things might be cause for celebration. I'm sure Jesus took them in stride. Among his high points must have been the incredible intimacy he enjoyed with his Father.

He also had lows: betrayal, trial, crucifixion and death. A big high followed—the resurrection.

I used to think Jesus understands us simply because he was human. But I think there's more to it. We often don't understand everything behind a trial or even a mountaintop experience. Sometimes that's a good thing. But Jesus, the Son of God incarnate, really did understand. We can rest assured that even though he wasn't a woman, didn't have to go through old age or debilitating disease, or any of the other experiences we sometimes wonder if he can relate to, he understands.

We *will* have our ups and downs. We'll have trials and we'll have high moments. We'll continue to earn first-place trophies and crying towels. Neither should surprise or devastate us. Remember Paul, content in every situation. Remember Jesus, who understands more than we can comprehend. Enjoy the highs and don't worry about the lows. Make the best of them, as one team on my bowling league jokes, and make a quilt out of all those crying towels! [co](#)

So for most of the time, we live egocentrically, giving little thought for community, while doing our own thing, enabled by our egocentric, individualistic, materially-affluent lifestyle and unaware of the family two doors down on our street.

Until there's a flood.

Until there's a cyclone or hurricane.

Until there's a fire.

Disasters are just that. Nobody enjoys them. But they do tend to awaken the smoldering embers of the exocentric image of God in us. That's when we might just think that the family two doors down might need some help. And in the briefest of time, from a street full of proximate but functional strangers, emerges a new entity: a community of friends—mates—lending each other a hand.

There were countless comments from the grateful owners of flooded and wind-ravaged homes about how overwhelmed they were to have people they'd never actually met, helping them clear out the rubble and restore their lives. It was incredibly uplifting to see it. As it was in the wake of Katrina and Ike. As it was after the California wildfires and the Haiti earthquake. As it was after the Boxing Day Tsunami, or as the world held its breath for the trapped Chilean miners.

## Disasters tend to awaken the smoldering embers of the exocentric image of God in us.

I'm fiercely proud of the way my people have responded to the unprecedented natural disasters of the last few months. Why shouldn't I be? I'm an Aussie. I can't help reflecting, though, that such outgoing, "exocentric" community spirit comes not just from the fact that we are cast from an Australian mold, but it is something we share with all humankind. The Son of God didn't just make us<sup>4</sup>—he became one of us, and still is, and it is in him that all of us "live and move and have our being."<sup>5</sup>

Mateship, when all is said and done, may be not so much *Imago Aussie* as it is *Imago Dei*—the fact that we are made in the image of the Triune God himself.

<sup>1</sup> See Hebrews 13:5.

<sup>2</sup> Tom Smail, *Like Father, Like Son: The Trinity Imaged in Our Humanity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005) page 123.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, page 124.

<sup>4</sup> Colossians 1:15-17.

<sup>5</sup> Acts 17:28.

# For All They Are Worth Generations Ministries Camps & Missions 2011

By Anthony Mullins

**E**ven if you know nothing about antiques, the *Antiques Road Show* television program can be fascinating. A group of antiques experts travels to cities around the United States and invites the local people to bring their antiques for appraisal. People will bring in furniture, paintings and all sorts of knick-knacks to have them valued. Some bring a family heirloom, believing it's of great value, only to find out it is a fake or cheap imitation, worth hardly anything. But sometimes—and this is the real attraction of this show—the opposite happens.

Someone shows up almost apologetically with an old item they assume has little value. The expert, perhaps a bit bored after looking at junk all day, suddenly perks up. He puts on white gloves (a sure sign he is getting serious) and examines the item closely. Then he asks the owner, "Where did you get this?" The anticipation builds as viewers sense something special is about to happen. The appraiser turns the item over and shows the now excited owner the signature of a master



craftsman. "I can't tell you how much this item is worth, he says. "There are only a handful of these in the entire world. Your item is priceless!"

I have seen many moments like this. Not because I am an antiques expert. I know nothing about them. My expertise is at the other end of the age spectrum—young people. I am privileged to be the coordinator of a "road show" that helps many people, some who think they are of no value, see how much they really *are* worth. The "road show" I'm talking about is GCI Generations Ministries (GenMin) Camps and Missions. We are about to "hit the road" again with this year's camps and short-term mission programs.

We design our programs to be fun. But it is fun with a purpose. As with antiques, so many of us do not know what our lives are worth. Many young people grow up with an inferiority complex, believing they are of little or no value, doomed to be a failure. Deep down, what young people want—what we *all* want—is to know that we are loved, valued and accepted. That is what our GenMin camps and missions set out to do.

At our "road show," no human life is ever considered valueless or a cheap imitation. Each and every individual is made in God's image, signed by the master crafter, priceless in value and precious to the Owner. We know that, because he paid top price for each one of us—Jesus paid for us with his precious blood. Imagine what a difference it can make in a young per-

## Missions

**G**enMin short-term mission trips are designed for people who are interested in not only sharing good news, but also *being* good news to the world. Activities may include Christian classes for children, worship services for the local village, constructing churches, serving meals, delivering clothes and other usable items and being a personal witness to the love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. GenMin missions are generally one-two weeks in length and prices are reasonable for the experience being offered. Here is a list and websites of the GenMin missions currently offered:

### **Crossing Borders**

Texas and Mexico border mission  
[www.cbmission.org](http://www.cbmission.org)

### **Grace Missions**

South Africa mission  
[www.gracemissions.squarespace.com](http://www.gracemissions.squarespace.com)

### **Great Commission Trips**

Mission trips offered to the Bahamas, India and Zambia  
[www.gctrips.org](http://www.gctrips.org)

### **Word in the Street**

Cincinnati, Ohio, inner-city mission  
[www.wordinthestreet.org](http://www.wordinthestreet.org)



**G**enMin Camps are for teenagers and children and are designed to be fun-filled places where young people experience the joy of acceptance in the natural and beautiful surroundings of God's creation. GenMin Camps are strategically located through the country, and most likely there is one near you. These camps are generally three to seven days in length

and affordably priced for the camper's family. Activities may include indoor and outdoor sports, chapel services, paintball, arts and crafts, canoeing, dance classes and a host of other fun things to do. The volunteer staff is competent and pre-screened, and maintaining a safe environment for your child is a top priority. Here is the current list of GenMin camps:

#### **Base Camp**

Tennessee  
www.basecampn.org

#### **Connections Family Camp**

Washington  
www.connectionsfamilycamp.org

#### **Crosswalk**

Oklahoma  
www.crosswalkcamp.com

#### **Gateway to God**

Illinois  
www.gatewaytogod.org

#### **Heartland SEP**

Illinois  
www.heartlandcamp.org

#### **Heart O'Texas**

Texas  
arnold.clauson@gci.org

#### **Higher Ground**

North Carolina  
www.carolinacamp.com

#### **New Heights**

Connecticut  
www.newheightscamp.com

#### **Northern Light**

Minnesota  
www.northernlightcamp.com

#### **Pathways**

Ohio  
www.pathwayscamp.com

#### **SEP Florida**

Florida  
www.sepflorida.com

#### **SEP Rockies**

Colorado  
www.seprockies.org

#### **SEP So Cal**

California  
www.southerncaliforniacamp.org

#### **Souled Out**

Tennessee  
fjmoore@bellsouth.net

#### **The Mountaintop**

Georgia  
www.mountaintopcamp.org

#### **YES Camp**

Louisiana  
anthony.rice@gci.org



**A**lthough we do our best to make all our camps and mission opportunities affordable, there are always some families who just don't have the resources to go. Often, these are the people who need it most. GCI GenMin Camps and short-term missions deeply appreciate donations to help cover costs, including scholarships for campers and missionaries. Information about how to donate to GenMin is listed at [genmin.gci.org/donate.html](http://genmin.gci.org/donate.html).

# He Ain't Heavy

By Steve Schantz

**H**aving the right piece of plastic has surely changed our lives in the past quarter century. These lightweight, individualized, magnetically charged tokens are almost too conveniently linked to our identity and visibly associated with our social and economic status. No wonder we are reluctant to “leave home without them.”

But what if our money were harder to carry around and exchange? What if our money consisted of really heavy, hard to handle tokens of worth? Would this help change our out-of-control personal and national spending habits?

There have been times in history where carrying money required a small wheelbarrow. Citizens of the Han dynasty in China carried four-pound pieces of bronze around with them. They were called Pu, and resembled giant, badly formed tuning forks. You'd need to really want to buy something before you left home with a Pu.

**It isn't the size or weight of the money that messes with our minds, it's our worry over economic affairs.**

Not all ancient money was so cumbersome. At the same time the Han Chinese were hauling their Pu around, Jesus turned tables on the money changers in the temple in Jerusalem. Any coins that scattered could be grasped in the palm of your hand.

It isn't the size or weight of the money that messes with our minds, is it? It is how we view money, wealth, and financial security in general. More important than “What's in your wallet?” should be our answer to the question, “How important is your wallet?”

The heaviest yoke many are burdened with daily is worry over their economic affairs. Fear of economic failure squeezes the life out of marriages and households and robs wage earners of the joy they should get from productive employment. To make matters worse, misguided televangelists plead with you to “Call now—don't wait! The longer you wait to plant your seed money, the longer God waits to



Bronze Pu, from the Han dynasty. Don't leave home without it.

bless you with a harvest!” That is the formula for an ungodly guilt trip, and worse, a distorted understanding of God and the gospel.

Isn't there a better, purer, *lighter* view of giving than trying to manipulate God into releasing what you need or resigning yourself to poverty and misfortune? Jesus said, “My yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:30). Let's savor these words for a moment with respect to personal giving and Christian stewardship.

I don't think the widow who dropped her mite into the collection boxes as Jesus watched then ran from the temple shouting, “Look out world! It's beggar-to-billionaire day! Go claim your blessing now! If you put it in, God has to pay it out! My ship is comin' in!” I don't think that widow saw God as a winning lottery ticket in the sky. Neither do I see her moping along down the streets of Jerusalem with head hung in shame because her bank account doesn't measure up to her neighbors.

Giving to God is a privilege and a joy. It isn't a get-rich-quick scheme, or a premium on heavenly insurance. Both of these views get really heavy—really fast. Let's lighten up.

God loves the cheerful giver! How heavy is your wallet? [co](#)





# Parable of the Parakeet

By Claire Claude

**The day our little baby parakeet was hatched was indeed a special day! After about three weeks of waiting for the egg to hatch, we very cautiously peeked into mommy parakeet's wooden nesting box and saw a tiny dark pink baby bird at the bottom.**

But there was a problem. Baby parakeets are supposed to begin to venture out of their nest after about four weeks. But six weeks went by, and our little bird was still inside. We could hear him making lots of noise as he attempted to come out, but to no avail. Was he trapped? Parakeets' nests are big boxes about twelve inches high with a small hole in the middle just big enough to let the parents go in and out.

I decided to call for the vet. He recommended that I take the baby bird out of the nesting box. So I lifted him out of his wooden prison. Then I realized why he had not been able to get out by himself. His legs were deformed. At first I thought he was going to die. I called the vet back to explain the situation, and he told me what to do.

Luckily, both his parents had been taking good care of him until the time I removed him from his nest, so Călin, as we named him, which mean "cuddle," was able to eat on his own. I placed him in a separate cage with a pillow on the bottom. I also installed perches and even a little swing.

Now Călin is three months old, and he is a happy little bunch of feathers. He has his own special way to reach the perches and swing, hauling himself up the bars of his cage. He cannot put his two feet on the perch, but he manages to put one of them on, and the other one he uses to hold

himself to the side.

He has made a lot of progress. Though he walks like a little seal, he can fly very well. He can also do something most small parakeets do not do. He imitates our human voices!

Călin lives up to his name, because he loves to be taken in the hands and cuddled. He needs a bit more time and effort than our other birds. But he was worth saving. He may be a little freak and extra small, about 35 grams, but those are 35 grams of pure joy and love. It really doesn't matter if he can't walk very well, because he can fly. When he is in the air, he is not disabled.

Little disabled Călin has taught me a valuable lesson. When I see him on the ground I wonder how that clumsy little creature could ever fly. But when he takes off, he is in his real element.

Sometimes when we look at ourselves, or each other, we focus on the problems. In this life we stumble around making mistakes. But God sees beyond our present condition. He sees us as he has made us to be, and as someday, when we meet Christ, we will finally see ourselves. He loves us and encourages us, and always will, and sometimes he even cuddles us. He knows we are worth saving.

"Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). [co](#)

Claire and her husband Gerard pastor GCI congregations in France and Belgium.

## Hurting for the Hurting in Japan



Horror was the first emotion that went through my mind when I saw pictures of the earthquake and tsunami in Japan. This was quickly followed by a deep heartache for all the families affected. Some family members will never be found.

As I read the news and thought sadly about what the families were going through, I received an e-mail stating that this earthquake and tsunami were proof we were at the end time.

It didn't take long for prophecy buffs to jump on this disaster and declare that God is punishing Japan for its sins, and all of us need to take it as a warning. The end is near!

I went from horrified and heartsick to angry. There was no mention in the e-mail about praying for or doing something to help the thousands of injured and the untold numbers who have suddenly lost friends and family members. There was no hint of concern about the economic aftermath that will impact huge numbers of God's beloved children who are suddenly without homes and jobs on top of everything else they are going through.

I thought about the plethora of false ideas about God that prevent his children from seeing him as the God of love that he is. God didn't cause that earthquake; rather he was there with his children during the earthquake and the following tsunami.

My anger turned to pity. I started feeling sorry for those who only see God as a vengeful Enforcer who is punishing people for their sins. I realized that this view of God prevents people from knowing God, from being in a close, positive relationship with the Father through Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit.

"God is love," 1 John 4:8 says. That is a simple but profound description. The reason God sent his Son was that he loves the whole world—everyone (John 3:16-17). God loves every person who lost his or her life in Japan. God loves every person who is grieving. And he even loves those who are using a tragedy to promote their own misguided view of him.

My pity turned to resolve. This disaster isn't about deciphering prophecies. Like all disasters, it's a call to care, to pray, and to do what we can to help others in need, sharing God's love with them. The end will come when the end will come, but it's not our job to worry about that. Our job is to be, as we are able and by the power of the Holy Spirit, the collective hands, feet and heart of Jesus Christ in the world until that day—and beyond. May it be so. [co](#)

## Is this it?

... From page 3

ble vengeance on every sinner. In the back of their minds is the angry, hateful God of the so-called "Great Awakening" preached by such influential personalities as Jonathan Edwards.

But God is not like that. He is exactly who the Bible says he is: Father, Son and Holy Spirit—the Father who loves the world so much that he sent the Son into the world not to condemn it, but to save it (John 3:16-17); the Son who became one of us by the Father's will so that we, being made pure and sinless in him, could share in his eternal relationship of love with the Father; and the Holy Spirit, whom the Father and the Son send to us to lead us into all truth and to transform us into the image of Christ from the inside out.

Earthquakes are not God's punishment on sinners. The God revealed in Jesus Christ sends his *grace* to undeserving sinners, not plagues.

Earthquakes are earthquakes. They're a fact of nature. They are not the result of God unleashing his fury upon unbelievers. They are the result of natural shifts in the earth's crust. We prepare for them by learning how to avoid being struck or trapped by falling debris and keeping an "earthquake kit" that contains emergency supplies to last for a few days. We don't prepare for them by manufacturing unbiblical notions about the end of the age and whom God loves and hates.

God loves the whole world, which is why he sent his Son to save it. And Jesus commanded us to love even our enemies, just as he loves his enemies (which we all once were) and gave himself for them (Romans 5:8, 10).

The apostle Paul wrote that we should always be ready for the end of the age, not by feeding our prediction addiction, but by "putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet," knowing that "God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:8-9).

We have no need to panic. Rather, as the beloved children of the Father, we can bring God's love to bear on the suffering of others until that great day of his appearing, when at last every eye will see and every knee will bow before Jesus, who loves the whole world and gave himself to save it. [co](#)

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# Right Words, But the Wrong Reason

A Study of John 12:12-19



Each year, one week before Easter, Christian churches observe Palm Sunday, commemorating the day Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey while the people waved palm branches and shouted praise. The people were right to praise Jesus, but they were doing it for the wrong reason.

## Praise to the king!

John tells us that Jesus was in Bethany six days before the Passover (John 12:1). The next day, Jesus started walking to Jerusalem, and many people found out about it. “The great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting,

“Hosanna!” [a Hebrew word meaning “save!”]

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Blessed is the king of Israel!” (John 12:13, quoting Psalm 118:25-26).

This is the way people in the first century greeted a visiting king—they would go out to meet him, praise him, and escort him into the city. These people were welcoming Jesus as a king. They were eager for Judea to have its own king, independent of Rome.

But the Romans did not want anyone to be king over Israel without their permission, and this parade for Jesus implied disloyalty to Rome. When the people waved palms, they were waving a Jewish national symbol. When Judea eventually did rebel against Rome, they put images of date palms on the coins. Palm trees represented a free and independent Judea.

Jesus knew that he was coming into the city toward his death, and that this same crowd would soon call for his crucifixion. Right now, the crowds cheered because they thought that Jesus would be a military hero, but he was not; they were badly

mistaken about who Jesus was—and yet correct in their praise.

## Seated on a donkey

Jesus did something else that may have added to the crowd’s excitement: He “found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written: ‘Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey’s colt’” (John 12:14-15, quoting Zechariah 9:9).

Some of the people probably knew from Zechariah that the promised Jewish king would ride a donkey. But none of them, not even the disciples, really understood what Jesus was doing. “At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him” (John 12:16).

The disciples were probably thinking just like the crowd. Although Jesus had told his disciples that he was going to be killed, they did not understand it. Perhaps they thought it was a riddle, and they hadn’t yet figured out the hidden meaning. But they understood it later—they understood that Jesus really was a king, and that he fulfilled the messianic prophecies, but that his kingdom was very different from anything they expected; it was “not of this world” (John 18:36).

But at this moment, the crowds and the disciples were excited because they thought Jesus might be the king who would deliver them from Rome (John 12:17-18).

Jesus could have gathered quite a large following if he had wanted to—and this terrified the Jewish leaders. They knew what Rome did to populist uprisings, and they definitely didn’t want that. “So the Pharisees said to one another, ‘See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!’” (verse 19).

They also spoke the right words, but for the wrong reason. **co**

## THE GREEKS HAD A WORD FOR IT

## ευλογέω

We get the English word “eulogy” from the Greek word *eulogeō*; it comes from root words meaning “to speak well of.” In eulogies, we speak well of people; we praise them.

The New Testament uses *eulogeō* 41 times; the Greek Old Testament uses it more than 500 times, usually with the meaning to praise or to bless. James 3:9 says that we eulogize God—we praise or speak well of him.

When Jesus eulogized his disciples (Luke 24:51), he was *giving* a blessing. To bless a per-

son means “to ask God to bestow divine favor on . . . . In a number of languages the closest equivalent of to ‘bless’ is ‘to pray to God on behalf of’ or ‘to ask God to do something good for.’”<sup>1</sup>

In Ephesians 1:3, Paul says that God has already blessed us, already done good to us. When the people called Jesus “blessed” (John 12:13), they were saying that God had already been good to him.

When Jesus blessed bread (for example, Luke

24:30), he was asking God to further his good purpose through that bread. **co**

<sup>1</sup> Johannes Louw and Eugene Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 1: 442.

**Dr. Michael Morrison** teaches classes in the New Testament at Grace Communion Seminary. More information about the seminary can be found at: [gcs.ambassador.edu](http://gcs.ambassador.edu).

## H m m ...

It is impossible to rightly govern a nation without God and the Bible.

**George Washington**

I want it said of me by those who knew me best, that I always plucked a thistle and planted a flower where I thought a flower would grow.

**Abraham Lincoln**

**We could never learn to be brave and patient, if there were only joy in the world!**

**Helen Keller**

**Sit down before a fact as a little child, be prepared to give up every preconceived notion.**

**Thomas Huxley**

"Friendship is born at that moment when one person says to another: "What! You too? I thought I was the only one."

**C.S. Lewis**

**We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.**

**Teilhard de Chardin**

A Christian's story is not about his or her triumphs, but about his or her failures and Christ's supreme victory over them. If told honestly and artfully, that story possesses the power to spur other tales of transformation while fortifying community. But first, that story must be shared.

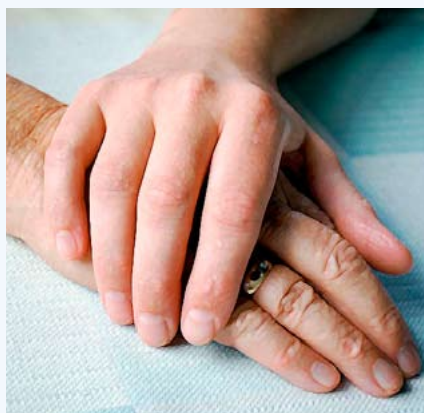
**Kristen Scharold**

**When I despair, I remember that all through history the ways of truth and love have always won. There have been tyrants, and murderers, and for a time they can seem invincible, but in the end they always fall. Think of it—always.**

**Mahatma Gandhi**

**Judging others makes us blind, whereas love is illuminating. By judging others we blind ourselves to our own evil and to the grace which others are just as entitled to as we are.**

**Dietrich Bonhoeffer**



When we're young we usually don't think much about growing old, or about our parents growing old either—not until something forces us to think about it. But it will happen, if they live long enough. So the first thing I'd say to those whose parents are growing older is to be prepared for it, and to accept whatever responsibilities it brings you.

Then be patient with them. They may not be able to do everything they once did, but that doesn't mean they're necessarily helpless or incompetent. And be alert to their needs—including their emotional and spiritual needs. Sometimes they just need to know that you're there, and that you care. Be sensitive also. Occasionally I've seen children become heavy-handed and insensitive when dealing with their aging parents, and it only caused resentment and hard feelings. On the other hand, it may become necessary to step in and insist that they turn over the car keys, or let you handle their finances, or even arrange for them to move to a place where they'll get better care. They may resist, and you need to put yourself in their shoes



## Do you have a moment?

In addition to our full-length interviews, we feature several short, one-to-three-minute programs of special interest. Why not take a moment and check them out?

### **GCI Reflections** ([www.gci.org/gcir](http://www.gci.org/gcir))

GCI members sharing personal stories, lessons and ideas on a wide variety of topics related to the Christian life and experience.

### **One Quick Thought** ([www.gci.org/oqt](http://www.gci.org/oqt))

Brief, interesting excerpts from *You're Included*, featuring prominent theologians and Christian leaders.

### **Speaking of Life** ([www.gci.org/spol](http://www.gci.org/spol))

Dr. Joseph Tkach, President of Grace Communion International, offers a three-minute commentary on issues of interest from a Christian perspective.

**[www.gci.org](http://www.gci.org)**

and realize the turmoil these changes can cause them. But they need to realize that you're doing it because you love them and want what's best for them. And pray for them also, that they will experience God's peace and comfort as they grow older. Some day you'll be there also, and what you do now will be an example to your own children.

**Billy Graham**

**interviewed in *Christianity Today***