

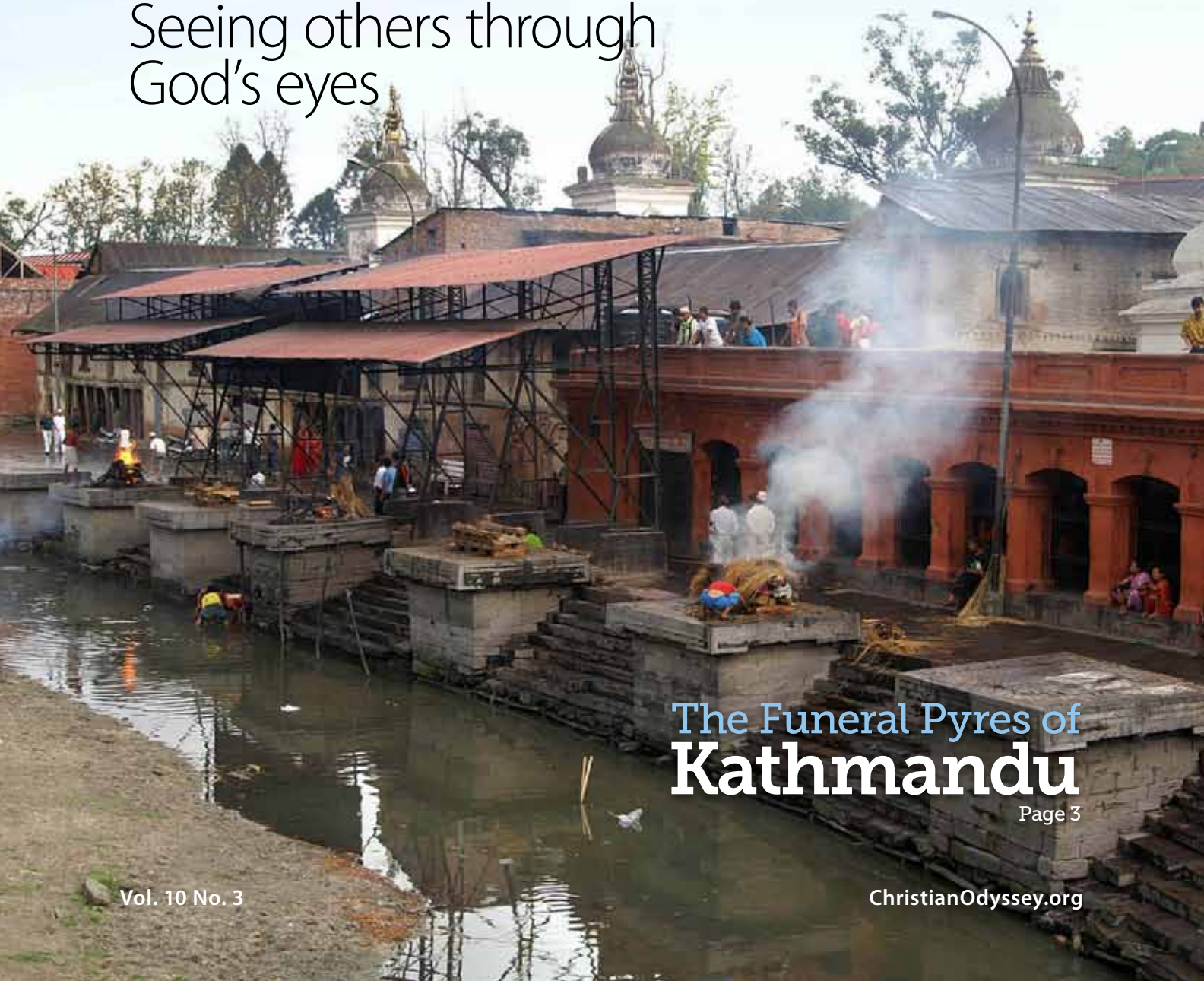
# CHRISTIAN Odyssey

Fall 2013

Growing Together in Life & Faith

## Christian Worldview:

Seeing others through  
God's eyes



The Funeral Pyres of  
**Kathmandu**

Page 3



When I walked out of the airport in Dhaka, Bangladesh and headed toward our taxi, I was overwhelmed by the sheer number of cars, bicycles, trucks, rickshaws, three-wheeled taxis and people everywhere. My thoughts turned to Mark 6:34: “When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.”

When we arrived at our hotel, we were told to get inside quickly and not leave without a Bangladeshi escort. Evidently the hotel was in a high crime area with pickpockets working as teams. One of the first things I noticed was the large number of people looking for handouts. A few were crippled, some had small children with them and some didn't look any different from anyone else on the street. It was difficult to determine the difference between those really in need and those begging as a profession. We had been forewarned not to give money to anyone, because it could cause problems on the street. But it was unsettling to see so many in need and to realize I could do nothing for these beloved children of God.

Yes—that's how I saw them. They were God's beloved children who needed to know their Abba/Father and his love for them. I had compassion on them for lives filled with longing, their searching for answers, their pain.

I didn't always view people this way. In times past I've travelled to developing countries and gotten impatient with the locals. I got tired of the incessant begging, of the pollution in the streets, at the rude way I perceived I was being treated, at the rude behavior in lines. (Although usually there were no lines; just a mob crowding forward trying to get to the front.) I'd get frustrated at the local people's inability or unwillingness to be on time.

God has helped me see people as he sees them, which has changed my worldview. I am learning to appreciate cultural differences. I am learning to love and appreciate people as they are. Once my worldview changed, my behavior toward others changed, and I found it easier to build relationships with God's beloved children in different cultures.

You do not have to cross oceans to learn this. We have multiple cultures in our communities, in our restaurants and stores. And it's not just about culture. When we ask God to see others as he sees them, we stop paying such close attention to gender, age, race, ethnicity, lifestyle or religious background. We start to see people as Jesus saw them, and we start to respond as Jesus responded. “He had compassion on them and he began teaching them many things.”

When we start to see others from God's point of view, we see them as brothers and sisters in Christ. In other words—as equals. We see others as having value. We see people that Jesus died for and lives for and loves. We see people Jesus has forgiven, and adopted and reconciled and included—whether they realize it or not. We see many who are confused about who God is, and we love them just as they are. We see some who have no clue that God is real or good or their Abba/Father and they act out accordingly, and we love them anyway. We see some who live lifestyles that frighten us, or that we are personally opposed to, and we love them anyway because they are God's children.

When we ask God to help us see others as he sees them, I believe he gives us the ability to love people regardless of who they are, what they believe or what they do. And we desire to somehow, some way, let them see a bit of who God is through our response to them. Our constant hope and prayer is that God uses us and others to help all know they are loved and they are included.

*Blessings... Rick*

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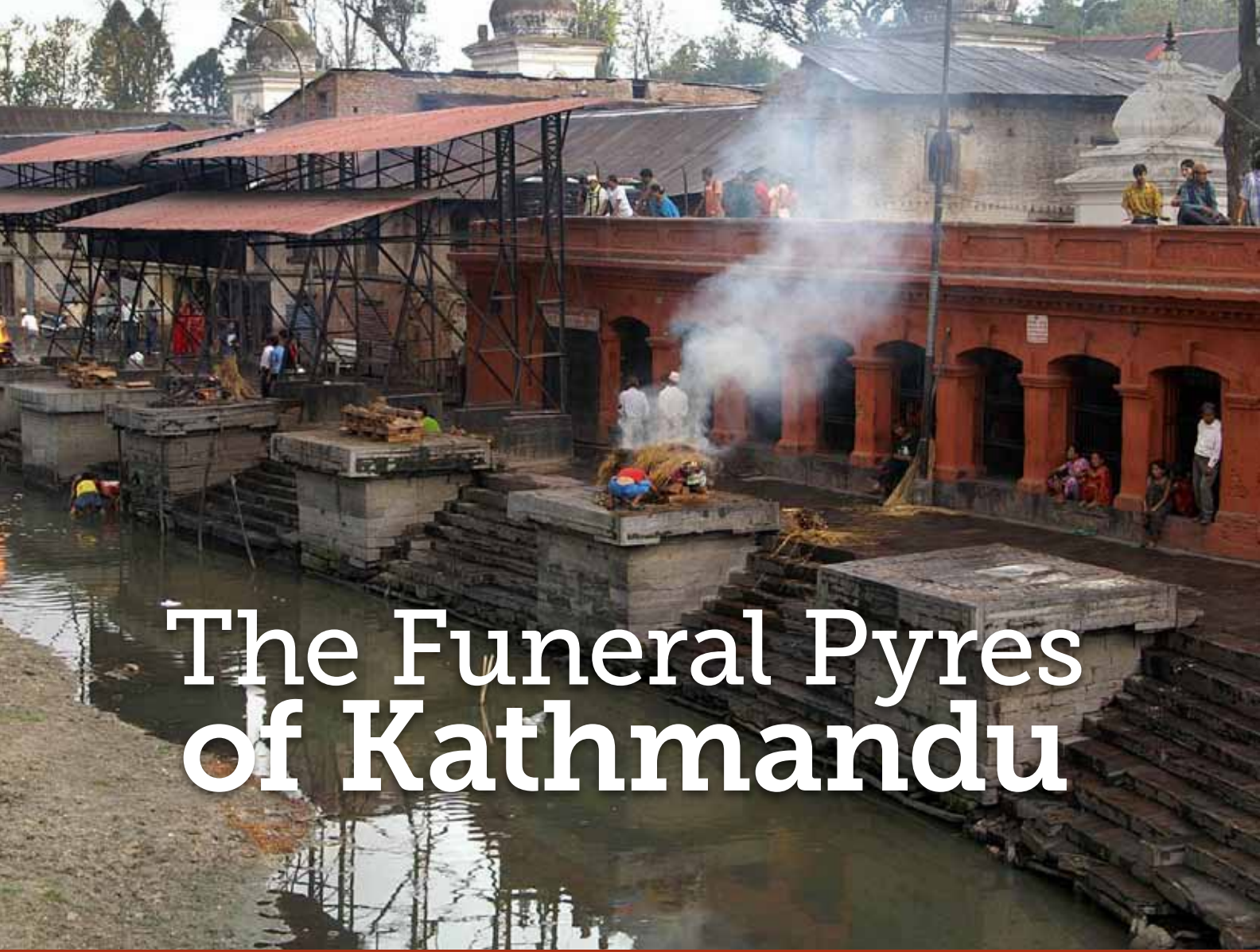
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# The Funeral Pyres of Kathmandu

By Rod Matthews

**S**tanding on the edge of the Bagmati River, I could see the funeral pyres lining the opposite bank. The steps from the walkway to the water's edge were interspersed with concrete platforms, some holding piles of wood awaiting the next cremation, some vacant, and some with the smoke drifting up from the flames consuming the beautifully wrapped but anonymous (to me) persons whose lives had ended. Mourning family members, heads lowered, lingered around each pyre paying their last respects. I wondered what they were thinking. Were they wondering where their beloved had gone as they passed from this life to the unknown one ahead? Were they anxious about whether Shiva would take care of their beloved? Or were they fatalistically resigned that they couldn't know? As they contemplated the flames, perhaps the very mystery and the thought of risking a future sub-human life-cycle briefly inspired them to work harder in this life in the hope of pleasing their gods.

My visit to the world-heritage-listed Pashupatinath Temple,

dedicated to the Hindu god Shiva in Kathmandu, Nepal, left me sobered and sad, with a deep desire to see these people filled with hope and a personal knowledge of the "the God nobody knows," as the apostle Paul called him when enlightening the Greeks centuries ago (Acts 17:16-34 *The Message* throughout except as noted). A Hindu devotee's life is consumed with pleasing gods (and there are thousands of them) who do not clearly explain what is needed to appease him or her sufficiently to warrant a

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Visiting Pashupatinath left me with a deep desire to see these people filled with a knowledge of "the God nobody knows."



## This life is not part of an endless cycle of unknown futures. It's an introductory passage to a loving relationship with the Creator of the universe.

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promotion to a better life cycle in the next life. There's certainly no personal relationship involved. If I had been born a Hindu in Nepal, I could be standing there watching the flames consume the wood and straw and the remains of my loved one, and I would be wondering whether they had done enough to ensure a better life in the next world. For millions there's no assurance that the future holds anything better than the hardships and deprivation, the arduous labor and rare pleasures of the life just past. All they can have is a weak, personally-generated hope in the face of ignorance and mystery.

None of these hardy Nepalese people from the foothills, valleys and towering mountains of the Himalayas chose where they were born, or what family name or religion or culture they inherited. Neither did we. I wondered how I came to be born where I was—and who I am. I felt a faint guilt for being able to enjoy a wider spectrum of human experiences and pleasures, of being able to travel to see their world when many of them could hardly afford the journey from their home villages to this temple to say farewell to their loved ones in the manner they felt appropriate. I looked at the debris and rubbish along the river bed, the trickling, dirty water, used many times already for every human need, and yet considered part of a sacred river system into which the devoted bathed and then dipped the feet of the deceased before cremation. I was soberly grateful to be there to have an emotional reminder that there is an end to this life for us all, and for many it is sheer relief from hardship and fear of the unknown.

As I stood there sadly contemplating the mourners across the river who stared at the flames, believing in a life process that cares nothing about them personally, I could only marvel at

the compassion and love of another God who left his abode and “moved into the neighborhood” (John 1:14), to embrace as his own our life and hardships, our pain and suffering, our short-lived joys and our discouragements, so as to reveal his all-encompassing love for every person on earth.

Encompassing the mourners, the priests and the devotees at the Pashupatinath Temple, there is a great personal God, known as Father, whose goal has always been to bring his creation back into a harmonious relationship with him, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Through history he's made it known that he was not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9 KJV). As an expression of this total love for us, Jesus Christ, the Creator, entered our world as a human being—was born and lived as one of us, died as we do, then conquered death by rising from the grave and then ascended back to the Father taking with him our humanity in a glorified form. That is why Paul could write that we already “sit with him in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 2:6), if we choose to go where he goes. It's the completion of the reconciliation process. It's the complete revelation of a God who loves and cares and works with personal focus and consummate respect for each individual to bring them back from ignorance, fear, mystery and hopelessness to the secure embrace of an eternal family.

The message is universal, regardless of where we were born and what we might believe now. This life is not part of an endless cycle of unknown futures. It's an introductory passage to a relationship with the Creator of the universe—each in his own time, with an individually tailored journey.

The Pashupatinath mourners are guaranteed a great day ahead when they will come to know they have nothing to fear, no endless life cycles, no ill-defined path in the hope of a better life in the next world. They will learn that their own Creator has done all that is necessary to rescue them and everyone else from this hopelessness and mystery. And while he remains forever our Savior, he does invite us to walk alongside him, personally expressing towards all people his love, compassion, patience and respect, in the process of drawing all people into the family relationship that has eternally existed between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is our wonderful salvation. **co**





# From Comfort to Relationship

My journey from Calvinism to Trinitarian theology

By Fraser Henderson

**H**ow do you think? I have found this question demands more than a cursory consideration as we pursue truth in our faith. How I thought 10 years ago was distinct from and derogatory to my current pattern of thought.

I was 19, in my first year of university and convinced that who I am today in my Christian beliefs would be nothing short of heretical. So why the shift in attitude?

When I began university I decided, as many do, to follow the latest Christian trend at the time. I decided to become a Calvinist. Now, to borrow a phrase from C.S. Lewis, I did not become a Calvinist like some “topsy-turvy turnip” sprouting without particular reasoning. The theology of Calvinism offered something I found wonderfully attractive. It offered absolutes.

I grew up hearing a tale about a footbridge Isaac Newton built over a stream in Cambridge. The story goes that the bridge required no nuts or bolts. Its pieces were assembled just so as to allow the bridge to function using friction alone. In the modern era (read somewhere between the 1800s-1960), a group of eager students decided it would be a lark to take this bridge apart to see how it worked. No sooner had they begun examining it did they learn that they couldn't work out how to reassemble it. And so it had to be reassembled using nuts and bolts to hold it in place.

It seemed me as though Christianity had been disassembled and analyzed and when “they” were done, they had forgotten how to put it back together.

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While the bridge story proved untrue, the concept seemed valid as I observed Christianity. It seemed as though Christianity had been disassembled and analyzed and when “they” were done, they had forgotten how to put it back together. And so people settled on the idea that God himself is relative. “You believe your thing, I’ll believe mine,” became the popular mantra. I balked at this concept and found myself unsettled by the idea that my faith might be open to this kind of relativism.

Calvinism is at its heart a theology of galvanized absolutes. There’s no room for doubt within its understanding of God’s unas-

sailable sovereignty. From before he began his creative work, Calvinist theology holds, God not only foreknew and predetermined who would be the recipients of his grace, he actively worked to create some of mankind for the sole purpose of salvation and some for the sole purpose of damnation—a process in which we human beings have no effective input.

At first this gives the believer many assurances. It establishes that God is in control. It also argues that good is defined by him, so any act he takes in his sovereignty is by his virtue, which is always good. It's an attractive theological position, and you might be asking why I changed.

As I studied theology at the university, I started to find some answers to the question I asked at the beginning. How do I think? The answer is, we primarily think according to our tradition of teaching. One of the primary reasons that Calvin phrased his view of God's sovereignty in such a stark and unrelenting manner is because he was taught to reason that way.

Western thought has been predominantly shaped by the thoughts of one admittedly great thinker, Aristotle. Aristotle gave us the language of logic we use today. Before Jesus was born, Aristotle proposed the idea that God, should he exist, must be an "unmoved mover." This being would have to be wholly disconnected from creation, yet creation must be entirely dependent on him. There could be no concept of a personal God in Aristotle's mind because God must be so completely "other" than us.

Included in Aristotle's theology is the idea that God would have to be impassible, i.e. unable to be affected by anything else. It is this concept of God that drives the Calvinist viewpoint, and it was that realization that made me want to re-examine my position.

Does a God who allowed himself to be crucified truly resemble this God that Calvinists worship? I realized that if I were going to accept the good news that Jesus Christ is God, I also had to accept that God was not the impassible, unmoved mover of Aristotle's theology. Or I had to argue that Jesus, though he was flogged, wasn't affected by it, never felt pain? He surely did; Scripture bears witness to it.

In Exodus God famously declared to Moses, "I am who I am," and in so doing he declared that not even our greatest philosopher would be capable of defining him. Yet I had found in the Calvinist position a declaration to God of who he is, not a declaration from God to humanity. So the question I had to ask myself is: what was it that God was declaring to us about himself?

I have come to believe that Scripture reveals to us a God who is not impassible, which is his active choice. God did not just allow himself to be nailed to the cross; it was the manner in which he actively chose to reveal his redeeming love to us. We are told that for "the joy set before him he endured the cross" (Hebrews 12:2).

God did not just allow himself to be nailed to the cross; it was the manner in which he actively chose to reveal his redeeming love to us. We are told that for **"the joy set before him he endured the cross."**

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He is a God who feels, relates, loves—he is Incarnational. Though he could have chosen to be the "unmoved mover," that's not who he is; he chose to be involved in his creation.

So though we would certainly say that before the foundation of the world he knew and chose those who would be saved, we also say that he did this not as the unmoved mover, not as the one distant and arbitrary in his decisions, but rather as one who planned to prepare a method to extend his grace and salvation to all. In his sovereignty he is not constrained by the narrow scope of the Aristotelian and Calvinist God who is apparently limited from the outset by his inability to reconcile a world in which he permits people to freely choose or deny him. Rather he exercises his complete freedom of sovereignty to confer upon humanity the freedom to choose him and participate in who he is.

In the Calvinist, non-Calvinist debate we are given, in my view, two choices. We can choose to define who God is based upon the thoughts of a long dead philosopher. Or, to once more paraphrase C.S. Lewis' words, we can allow the one who is so full of life that he had to borrow death just to die (and even then death couldn't handle him) to define himself. In the one view we stand on the sidelines and observe, and though we might find this comfortable, we are but automatons, devoid of the image of God. In the other, the Great I Am can lead us in the person of his Son who has redeemed the image of God within us and brought us into the loving relationship of his triune nature.

It is there, in the presence of who he is, that we learn who we are to be. **co**





# When “No, Thank You” Is Rude

By Carrie Smith

**I** grew up using the phrases “please,” “thank you,” “yes, sir” and “yes, ma’am.” These were the polite things to say, especially when I wanted to show respect to my elders or those in authority. These lessons are still valuable to me in adulthood, and I have tried to instill them in the children I have had the privilege to work with and mentor along the way.

I was a little surprised, though, when I found myself in a place where some of my ideas about politeness didn't apply. My friend Kayla (Shallenberger) Elliott and I taught school at Young Ambassadors Private Primary School (YAPPS) in Malawi in southeastern Africa, and we found a much different standard of politeness there. The school's Director, Fadrick Nihaka, who is also a church pastor, and his wife did everything in their power to make our stay comfortable. I was not used to such treatment and it felt odd to receive so much attention. Kayla and I both wanted to fit in, to live simply and to not be a burden to anyone, but we didn't initially realize our idea of burden was different from theirs.

One of the first culture shocks was when Dorothy was hired to be our housekeeper and cook. Neither Kayla nor I had ever had someone to help us with housework. We were the domestic staff for our parents; doing chores, keeping our rooms clean, doing our own laundry and helping out around the house. So to have someone take care of these needs for us seemed excessive. What we didn't understand, though, is having a house caretaker is a part of Malawi culture. It is expected, and even our housekeeper had a house girl who helped care for her young son and do housework at Dorothy's home while she was at work.

Our first reaction to Dorothy's service was to say, “No, thank you” and try to do the work ourselves, or at least to help her with various chores. What we didn't realize was that saying, “No, thank you” to Dorothy meant we were rejecting the provisions Pastor Nihaka and his wife made for us. In our attempt to be gracious and polite, we were actually communicating a lack of respect for them and their culture.

I am glad to say that Kayla and I learned quickly and soon began to appreciate Dorothy and all she did for us. We chose to learn from her, asking many questions about her life and culture.

As we learned to accept their gifts, we recognized that **the children felt honored and accepted by us.**

We continued to learn this “new” politeness at church as well. Food and drinks were served after the first church service we attended in Malawi. This is something Kayla and I were used to, so we didn’t think much of it when we left to get our jackets; we wanted to be polite and let others go first. When we came back, though, no one had eaten yet because they were waiting for us, their guests, to go first. Oops.

The hardest place for us to learn not to say, “No, thank you,” though, was at school with the children. Every day students would try to give us part of their lunches, one of their favorite school supplies or some other item that held great value to them. Kayla and I did not want to take food from the children because they didn’t have that much to begin with. What we failed to realize was our “polite” refusal of their gifts was received as rejection. This was the last thing we wanted, yet we knew we could not take their food or limited school supplies from them. So we compromised. If a child tried to give us a package of cookies, we said we would accept only if we could share them. If they wanted to give us a sticker or bracelet, we made sure they had something to match or we would give stickers in return (Kayla was smart and brought a lot of stickers with her).

The results of no longer saying, “No, thank you” were incredible. Instead of feeling uncomfortable about being given gifts, we joined in the excitement and joy the children felt when giving. We got to see the beautifully radiant smiles of the children when we accepted a gift, and we began to see them sharing with one another as well. We reciprocated with gifts of hugs and spending time with the children during recess and after school. As we learned to accept their gifts, we began to recognize that the children themselves felt honored and accepted by us. This was important as some of the children rarely felt acceptance, a fact that still breaks my heart. Yet, even in that I praise God because he allowed Kayla and me to participate with him in showing his children they are accepted, valued and dearly loved.

God gave us a glimpse into his heart for his children and the delight he has when we accept his gifts instead of “politely” saying, “No, thank you.” Now, when I am given a gift, I am more mindful of the gift-giver’s heart and identity as a child of God rather than any temporary discomfort I may feel at the moment. I learned that receiving a gift is just as important as giving one. **co**

## The Favor of the King



Like many Americans, I enjoy keeping up with the British royals. The birth of the newest prince in July was exciting, not only because of the happiness of the young parents, but also because of all the history behind that little boy.

As I’ve read about kings and their courts and watched historical television shows and movies, I’ve noticed not only does the head that wears the crown lie uneasy (Henry IV, Shakespeare), but so did the heads of many in close proximity to the king. Anyone could be enjoying his favors one day and be on the chopping block the next. Even those closest to a king weren’t safe. In the days of Henry VIII, heads rolled with alarming frequency.

In times past, kings arbitrarily decided whether or not someone pleased them. They often used people to further their own agendas. The court and sometimes the whole country held their collective breath when a king died, as they didn’t know if they were better off with the tyrant they knew or the one to come.

It’s easy to see why legalism came about and why we confuse God’s nature with characteristics of leaders, fathers and others in authority. To those living under a monarchy, the king was almost on the same level as God. What he said

**When we misunderstand who God is, we might think he also makes arbitrary laws, that we are at the mercy of his wrath**

was law and everyone was at his mercy, even if they thought they were too far away to be noticed.

When we misunderstand who God is, we might think he also makes arbitrary laws, that we are at the mercy of his wrath and if we stay far enough away, we can fly under the radar. After all, he’s probably too busy to worry about everyone. He’s way off in heaven somewhere. Or we think if we can just stay in his good graces, we’ll be safe. For many, it’s all about gaining his favor by being good enough.

But God isn’t like human kings. He rules the universe with love, mercy and grace. He’s not arbitrary in any way and doesn’t play games with our lives. He values and respects us as the children he created. He doesn’t decide who lives and who dies on a whim, but allows us to live out our lives and make our own choices for better or for worse.

None of us, no matter what choices we make, have to worry about whether or not we are in the good graces of our King Jesus. We live in God’s grace—constant, loving and complete. He doesn’t put limits on his grace. He doesn’t give it one day and take it away the next. We don’t have to earn it. Grace is always available, always abundant and unconditional, just like God’s love. Under the love and care of our King, our heads can rest easy on our pillows, for we always live in his good grace. **co**



# Singled Out



By Linda Rex

**"So, how was your day at school today?" I asked the girl from the house next door. "It was okay, I guess," she said as she kicked her sneaker against the bricks in the porch stoop beneath me. "I broke up with my boyfriend." "Oh, I'm sorry. That must be hard for you." I was trying to be understanding and sympathetic—but was she really even old enough to know what a boyfriend was? "Yeah," she answered. "It's no big deal. Means I'm single again, though." She gave the bricks another kick.**

While trying to be sensitive to the 9-year-old's hurt over the loss of the relationship, I found deep down that I was struggling hard not to giggle. Single again? Does she even know what single means?

When I was young, being single meant you were an adult

who was not married. Being single, engaged, or married had something to do with whether or not you, as an adult, had made a commitment to an adult of the opposite gender, bought a ring, exchanged vows in a church or courthouse and signed a marriage license. The line was pretty clear as to whether you were single or not. Nowadays it's not so simple. Our culture is redefining the meaning of "single."

Many singles have good reasons for not getting married, and they hope others will honor their decision and not exert pressure to get involved with someone when they don't want to do so. This is important to remember.

Being single has its advantages. For one thing, you can be pretty sure every senior woman in your church or neighborhood is praying for you to meet and marry that special someone. You learn small room design when you go to the downtown street dance and end up hiding in the bathroom from that would-be partner who gives you the creeps. You also know you never have to worry about cooking something for the community potluck,

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# My New Mission Field

Lynne Botha

**I've been doing missions for years. Short-term, part-time, full-time-in-the-field-missions—you name it, I've done it. And I'm tired. Not just the long-trip-holding-everyone's-hand-on-their-journey kind of tired, or even the Mama-has-three-full-time-jobs-and-a-husband-who-wants-her-attention kind of tired. I'm worn, and my soul is weary. Ministry is costly and I have paid the price.**

About a week before attending Generations Ministry conference, I was sharing with some of my prayer partners about this and some strange things that were happening with me. Normally I have the equivalent of three full-time jobs: pastor's wife, homeschooling parent and missionary; but I had noticed the Lord was suddenly removing tasks and time burdens from my plate. Instead of having sixteen things to do for our two congregations and missions-sending organization each week, I found I only had two. What happened, Lord? Whatever it was, I was grateful. But still tired.

Wrung-out as I was, I went to the conference hoping the Lord would fill me in on the next big thing coming down the pike. In the ministry I was doing for my extended family, for the church, in the community and among my neighbors, I didn't realize how discouraged I had become. He surprised me, as he always does, with just what I needed: hope. During a time of quiet reflection, he told me he wanted to take me up to the proverbial mountaintop. He said I had forgotten to take care of myself in all I was doing for him. He said it was all right for me to focus on my teaching, my family and my health and to rest in

him. Then he showed me something remarkable: my life had become a series of fire alarms. I spent most of my time in a posture of response to external disaster stimuli and had no time to enjoy the view. You know the expression, "Failure to plan on your part does not constitute an emergency on mine"? Obviously whoever said that wasn't in ministry (chuckling to myself here).

A lovely young lass named Tiffani stood up to share her story and in it, I heard my own. She spoke articulately about a teen raising herself because her parents wouldn't. She spoke about wild siblings, having no direction and suddenly finding herself surrounded by a group of people who were willing to walk beside her.

I remembered my own past: taking care of my disabled parents, my brothers raising several varieties of hell while I tried to go to school and run the home and the people God sent to walk beside me.

**I looked at her and the Lord said,  
"Come to me, and I will give you rest."  
I realize I'm not in her place anymore.  
I'm on the other side.**

Susan W., who taught me a work ethic and that despite having a mom with a martyr complex, no whining is allowed. Francis P., who showed me we mustn't grow weary in well doing and all those hours spent in prayer really do reap an eternal reward. Joyce and Craig C., who became the parents of my heart, showed me what it truly means to love unconditionally. I remembered many more, each a voice repeating the song of the Holy Spirit in



## Singled Out

... From page 9

since everyone figures singles are poor starving folk who can't cook. And you never, never have to worry about running out of things to do—you know you will be volunteered for every worthwhile project that comes along because you have so much free time.

Of course, this is all tongue-in-cheek with a touch of sarcasm on the side. It's just meant to show how singles often are made to feel this intense pressure to get married or to find someone to be connected to. It is as though a single person has no identity or value unless married or with someone. The media is full of the message that unless singles are involved in romantic relationships, life is empty and devoid of meaning. It doesn't require much time listening to a music station or watching music videos before you conclude that life revolves around falling in or out of love and having a life full of passion. It's as though romance, sexual passion and emotional attachment to another human being are as necessary to life as breathing.

True, we are designed for relationship. At the core of our being, we desire to belong, to be loved and cherished. God meant us to live in relationship just as he lives in relationship as Father, Son and Spirit. But he never meant for another human being to be able to completely fill that need. Nobody can be all things to us in the same way God is. It took me many years to understand that until we allow the God who made us to fill that void in our hearts with a personal relationship with him, we will always feel unfulfilled and empty, with a longing no human relationship can resolve. Making such demands for meaning, identity and value on another human being puts incredible stress on the relationship. Turning to God instead to meet those needs provides a freedom that can breathe fresh life into a person's soul.

I understand now that being single opens the door for many opportunities in a person's life. A single person can serve his or her community, family and church in ways married people cannot. As singles, we are responsible to find and develop our gifts and put them to use by participating in God's work in the world.

my ear, all brought to mind and heart by the story of sweet, precious Tiffani. And then came the greatest gift: I looked at her and the Lord said, "Come to me, and I will give you rest." I didn't get it at first, but over the next few hours, I had a chance to talk with Tiffani and just love on her. The words she spoke made me realize I'm not in her place anymore. I'm on the other side.

Someone else—a whole generation of "someone elses"—get to do the heavy lifting now and now my job is to teach them. I can rest and pour into others what the Lord has taught me. Can you smell the clutch as I shift gears?

As our culture redefines the meaning of "single," **we can examine our own hearts** to see how we repond to those who live alone or who raise children by themselves.

When we begin to develop our gifts, grow in our relationship with Jesus Christ and serve others, we begin to move toward wholeness. As we look for our identity in Jesus Christ and find meaning for our life in following him, our perceived need to "find someone" can be replaced by more meaningful pursuits.

Over time I've come to see that it is important to be sensitive to the needs and feelings of single people. Many of us are busy people with a lot of responsibilities—with family, community, church or work commitments. A single mother or father has to do the jobs of two people—raising children, paying bills and doing home care. Many times single people are struggling to make ends meet or are in despair because of trying to work through personal difficulties alone. Singles can use encouragement, prayers and assistance from others who can help.

As our culture continues to redefine the meaning of the word "single," we can examine our own hearts and lives to see how we live in relationship with those who live alone or who raise children by themselves. As the Triune God draws us into his loving embrace and includes us as his children in his divine life, we can reflect this in how we include and care for those who do not have the gift of marriage and family. In doing so, we will find our own horizons broadened and hearts opened to new vistas of love and laughter. We may even find a way to explain singleness to the child next door and invite her to participate in God's love and life in a new way. Or we may just giggle inside and offer her a hug. **co**

So now what's my mission? To rest, obviously, but not on my laurels. To rest in him, to focus my time and energies on my husband and children and on teaching a new generation of God's dearly beloved children what it means to live in Christ, on mission with him.

Generations of missionaries and their lives converged in the Spirit of God and this amazingly loving path is now clearly laid out for me fore and aft. God may have a similar message for you when you are feeling overwhelmed. Have you asked him? Now, excuse me a minute while I do the happy dance. **co**

# Balance: "THE" Financial Worldview



A prudent financial worldview can be summed up best in one word: balance. In other words, as stewards of God's wealth, no matter how great or small our personal wealth may be, operating with

a sense of balance is a best practice.

In the mid-1980s, shortly after entering the wealth management field, I had a bank trust client named Velma whose husband was gravely ill. Sitting on the edge of his bed, I helped guide his signature on a stack of stock powers to fund his trust. He died that evening.

After some time passed, Velma came to my office and proudly showed me the new



**Common sense tells us we need to meet our current obligations before future ones. But if we spend every day focusing on current needs, the future will soon catch up with us. Balance is the best way to manage both.**

diamond tennis bracelet she had just purchased for herself. As we talked, she lamented that her husband was always worried they would need long-term medical care and medical expenses would consume their wealth. She confided that she asked him time and again to splurge a little on a trip or cruise, but his anxiety prevented it. She said, "Now I have all this money and no one to enjoy it with. If you can learn one thing from me, enjoy yourself and don't live with only tomorrow in mind." Her words of experience spoke to me personally and to my students over the years.

I spent 14 years serving on the adjunct faculty of two small universities, teaching finance, investments and other related business courses. In my investment and personal finance courses I usually began by asking, "What is your 'financial philosophy'?" In other words, what is your financial worldview, or the lens through which you make financial decisions?

I gave my students three options: a) He who dies with the most toys wins; b) A penny saved is a penny earned; c) Make a lot, give a lot away. Depending on the worldview/philosophy, two individuals beginning with the same financial resources can end up in very different places.

Velma lived a life of "a penny saved" and lamented that she and her husband could have afforded to enjoy a few toys, but didn't. Years later I counseled a client who had the opposite view. He wanted to retire within five years, but he owed so much money on the toys he had purchased that he couldn't. He wouldn't be able to enjoy the freedom of an unstructured lifestyle as soon as he hoped because of debt.

Common sense tells us we need to meet our current obligations before future ones. However, if we spend every day focusing on current needs, the future will soon catch up with us. Balance is the best way to manage both.

We may not find ourselves in the same circumstances as Velma or the spendthrift executive, but we all have been given a share of

God's wealth to steward appropriately. When we begin with balance, we can end up where we want to be while enjoying the ride along the way. **co**

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**Next issue:** From Balance to Balance Sheets and Budgets.



# How to Reach the Younger Generation



In my travels as a regional pastor I see a wide variety of churches. An alarming trend is the rapid aging of the American church. With each passing week more young people are absent from the gathering of the church. What can we do?

The church has tried various programs and gimmicks to reach out to the youth, so let's start by stating three ideologies that have not worked.

- If we build it they will come

You can add drums and guitars to your worship team, sing songs from the 1980's and 90's and call it contemporary worship (which is not exactly contemporary), and instead of seeing young people stream into your service, you put off the older members.

You can furnish your meeting space with pool tables, ping-pong tables and foosball tables in hope of gaining young people, and you typically end up with a room full of dusty, unused tables.

- All young adults are the same

To clearly define and target the younger generation is impossible. We live in an incredibly diverse world with young people's likes all across the spectrum. There is no such thing as a "typical teen." I grew up in a generation that wore Levi jeans, Sperry topsiders and listened to the Eagles, but not all in my generation liked those things. Take a field trip to Starbucks and be amazed at the nonconformity.

- We need young adults for our church to survive

If the main goal of reaching young adults is self-preservation, we've missed the mark. The main goal of reaching young people is for them to come alive in Christ and actively participate with Jesus in what he has called and shaped them to be and do. This will be the only true catalyst for the church to experience broad and expansive renewal.

I believe many of our churches will look and operate quite differently in the years ahead. Are church leaders willing to allow the next generation to put their fingerprints on what church will become? (See box where Generations Ministry Director, Anthony Mullins, shares three points on participation.)

A senior pastor with many years of experience voiced a new and brave idea. The pastor's congregation is made up of people aged 60 to 90 and he said it would not be fair or appropriate to ask a younger pastor in their 20s or 30s to come in as his replacement. His alternative plan was to move forward and bring in a younger leader, but instead of attempting to add young people to the existing group, why not start an entirely new group where the young leader could concentrate

on working with new people based on their generational needs and styles.

This bold plan reminded me of a powerful teaching of Jesus in John 12:23-25. "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life."

It is obvious in this passage that Jesus is using an analogy from the vegetable kingdom to refer to his impending death and resurrection. I think it is also appropriate to infer that laying down our lives (or collective lives as a church community) is a Christ-like behavior that is fitting. It is in our loving surrender and diminishing that new life can be birthed. John the Baptist said it a different way, "He must become greater; I must become less." Will the existing church be able to lovingly surrender so that the new church of the next generation can spring to life? Time will tell.

This is Greg Williams reporting from the field! **co**

## Participation in Three Simple Steps

By Anthony Mullins

Healthy churches embrace both old and young people. They celebrate what God has done and intentionally prepare for what's ahead. To prepare for what's ahead, be intentional with young disciples in meaningful ways.

Believe in them. They deeply desire authentic community, so offer them tangible ways to experience the Triune life in your church. Like all of us, they want to be known and to know others in real relationships, and my experience tells me they won't settle for anything less.

Share life with the younger ones among you. Often this means being "incarnational" or going to their turf. A simple way to do this is attending their sports games, showing up at their birthday parties, listening to their recitals and performances or sharing meals at their favorite hang-out restaurants.

Listen to their passions and fears. It's often time-consuming and messy work, but it's *good* work as you participate in the life and ministry of Jesus!

# The Story of God's Relationship with His People In the Books of Moses



In the second century, a Christian leader named Marcion suggested we get rid of the Old Testament. He created his own version of the New Testament in which he had only Luke's Gospel and several of Paul's letters, but he removed all the quotes from the Old Testament, saying that the Old Testament God was inferior, simply the tribal god of the Jews.

Marcion was excommunicated for spreading this idea, and the early Christian church started to form its own canon of Scripture, including four Gospels and all the letters of Paul, including the quotes from the Old Testament. The Christian church still keeps the Old Testament as part of the Bible, believing the Old Testament gives us a context that helps us understand who Jesus was and what he did for our salvation.

Still, the Old Testament is confusing to many—so different from the New Testament. All that history and all those wars don't seem to have much to do with Jesus or with Christian life today. There are laws and regulations on one hand, and on the other there are Jesus and Paul, who seem to be talking about something quite different. We have ancient Judaism on one hand and Christianity on the other.

Some Christians emphasize the Old Testament more than others, keeping the seventh-day Sabbath, the dietary laws of the Israelites and even some Jewish annual festivals. Other Christians are more like Marcion—they never read the Old Testament. A few are even anti-Jewish. In Nazi Germany, prejudice against Jews was unfortunately supported by the church and went along with a dislike for the Old Testament.

Yet the Old Testament Scriptures speak of Jesus Christ (John 5:39; Luke 24:27), and it is good for us to hear what they have to say. Further, they share God's larger purpose with humanity, the reason that Jesus came to save us. The Old Testament, as well as the New, tells us that God wants to live with us. From the Garden of Eden to the New Jerusalem, God's goal is that we will live with him in harmony.

## In the Garden

Genesis 1 describes the creation of the universe by a stupendously powerful God, who simply speaks everything into existence. God said, Let this happen, and it did. He gave the

command, and it happened.

In contrast, Genesis 2 describes a God who gets his hands dirty. He enters the creation, forms a human being from dirt, plants trees in the garden, talks with the human, and fashions a companion for the man.

Neither story gives us the full picture, but together they reveal different aspects of the same God. Even though God has the power to create by command, he chose to be personally involved in the creation of humanity. He spoke to the man, brought animals to him, and orchestrated events so the man would take delight in his new companion.

The God who has stupendously divine powers is also a God who is a lot like a human—a being who is both human and divine; from the very beginning that is the way that this God revealed himself to be.

Although Genesis 3 reports a tragic turn of events, it also reveals more about God's desire for humanity. After the first humans sinned, God was walking in the garden just like normal (3:8). The all-powerful God had become like a human, making noise as he walked in the garden. Though he could appear instantly if he wished, he chose instead to meet the man and woman on their level, at their speed. This did not seem to surprise them; God may have walked and talked with them for many days.

They had no fear before this, but now they were afraid, and they hid. Although they were shrinking away from the relationship, God did not. He could have easily left in a huff, but he did not abandon what he had made. There were no lightning bolts or displays of divine anger.

God asked the man and woman what they had done, and they answered. He then told them the consequences they would experience as a result of what they had done. He then lovingly provided clothes for them (3:21) and took steps to ensure that the humans would not live forever in their state of alienation and shame (3:22-23).

Throughout Genesis we see God interacting with Cain, Noah, Abram, Hagar, Abimelek, and others. Of special importance for us is the promise he made to Abraham: "I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant. . .to be your God and the God of your descendants after you" (17:1-8). He promised an ongoing relationship with his people.



The God who has stupendously divine powers is also a God who is a lot like a human—a being who is both human and divine; from the beginning that is the way that this God revealed himself to be.



### Calling a people

Many of us know the basic story of Exodus: God called Moses, brought plagues upon Egypt, brought Israel through the Red Sea to Mt. Sinai, where he gave them the Ten Commandments. But we often overlook why God did these things.

Talking to Moses, God said: “I will take you [plural] as my own people, and I will be your God” (Exodus 6:7). God was seeking a personal relationship. In the personal covenants made in that culture, marriages were formalized with the words, “You will be my wife and I will be your husband.” Adoptions (done usually for inheritance purposes) were made with the words, “You will be my son and I will be your father.”

When Moses talked to Pharaoh he quoted God saying, “Israel is my firstborn son... Let my son go, so he may worship me” (4:22-23). They were his children—his family—with inheritance rights.

God offered a covenant that would give the people direct access to him (19:5-6)—but the people told Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die” (20:19). Like Adam and Eve, they were afraid.

Moses went up the mountain for more instructions from God (24:18). Then come several chapters about the tabernacle, its furniture and the worship. But amidst all this detail, we should not overlook the purpose: “Have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them” (25:8).

From the Garden of Eden, through the promises to Abraham, through the calling of a people out of slavery, and even into eternity, God wants to live with his people. The tabernacle was a place for God to live with his people, to be accessible to them. God told Moses, “I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God... I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them” (29:45-46).

When God passed the baton of leadership to Joshua, he told Moses what to tell him: “The Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you” (Deuteronomy 31:6-8). That is a promise for us today, too (Hebrews 13:5). That is why God created humanity from the very beginning and why he sent Je-

sus to save us: We are his people. He wants to live with us. **co**

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# My World



I hate to admit it, but my world tends to revolve around ME and all things related to ME—my home, my family, my community, my city, my state, my country, my likes, my wants, my needs, my dreams, my passions, my opinions and my thoughts. I am the center of my world, and God loves ME!

Sometimes I forget that although God loves ME, he loves everyone else too. I may be the center of my world, but I am not the center of God's world—and it's his world that counts. So from time to time I have to do a reality check. My world should not revolve around me; it should revolve around God.

When God becomes the center of my world, my worldview or perspective changes. Exclusive concepts focusing on "me, myself, and I" are replaced with inclusive Trinitarian thinking, focusing on "we and us." Neighbors and coworkers are not just acquaintances but children of our Father. A panhandler is not just a beggar but a brother or sister in a different place in life. A homeless person is not an outcast but someone God loves. God loves each of his children, not just me.

Am I jealous that God loves others as much as me? I shouldn't be—not when I fully understand God's capacity for love. God can love all of us and still have a special, intimate relationship with each one as an individual. That's just how great he is!

When we realize how much God loves us and how great he is,

we don't just want him to be part of our world; we want him to be at its core and center. Apart from him we can do nothing (John 15:5). In him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). We want to stay connected through prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17). His thoughts are not our thoughts, so we try to align ourselves to his way of thinking (Isaiah 55:8). We accomplish this by internalizing and writing his words on our hearts (Proverbs 7:1-3). We meditate on Scripture and apply it to our lives (Psalm 119:15).

God knows everything and we don't, so we want his will to supersede ours (Luke 22:42). He has only our best interests in mind, so we adjust to what God wants to do, not what we want to do. Our agendas decrease as his become more manifest. We focus on Christ because that's how we survive. Remember the example of Peter? As long as he stayed focused on Christ, he walked on water. When his attention shifted off Christ, he began to sink (Matthew 14:30).

As our personal lives become more God-centered, we notice our perspectives slowly changing. We start seeing the world around us through God's eyes instead of our own. We realize we were created by God and for him (Colossians 1:16), so we actually start thinking about God more than self.

I must admit, I still struggle with wanting my world to revolve around ME. However, in my heart I know it's not about ME; it's all about God! **co**

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