

Wineskins Magazine

Living Fully, Living Again

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And Yet...

Memorial Service for Amy Krazer

*conducted by Mike Cope
January – February, 1998*

Amy Elizabeth Krazer was born on August 12, 1986 and she died at home on June 13, 1997 after a fifteen-month battle with ovarian cancer. She attended Young Children's World here at Highland and was an honor student at Jackson elementary School, where she participated in the ALPS program. She had just completed the fifth grade.

She is survived by her parents and her brother, Adam; her grandparents, Ralph and Anita Krazer of Abilene and Jeaninne Brannon of Ft. Worth; her great grandmother, Mrs. Blanch Brannon of Bowie; and by uncles, aunts, cousins, and many friends.

Those are the sparse facts, the few things you can put in a newspaper. But to really tell you about Amy, you have to tell about people. About Mom, Dad, Adam, Nick. Grandparents. Whitney, Lacy, Lindy, Will, Suzie, and lots of other friends. Her world was a world full of people whom she loved.

You also have to tell about animals: dogs, cats, dolphins, turtles, frogs, snakes, hamsters. And how many of us had no clue what a sugar glider was before Amy? A couple of stories convey this deep love.

First, the time she and Whitney caught frogs at the ranch. They put them in separate containers, but in the morning Whitney's frog was dead. So Amy preached the funeral. How many frogs get that kind of respect?

Second, the time Steve picked up a large rock at the ranch and saw a field mouse. Called to Amy to come see it. Just as she got there, he lost his grip on the rock and it fell – crushing the poor mouse. "Murderer," she muttered. "Murderer."

Someone told me she can just picture Amy in heaven. First, looking around for Hootie (her grandfather who died three years ago). And then she tracked down Noah, the man who got to live on a boat with every animal imaginable. Heaven within heaven.

You also have to tell about flowers, fingernail painting, choreographed songs, swimming, cake-baking, the ranch, the "babbling brook," Golden Fried Chicken, Bush's Cow Meat, trampolines, four-wheelers, go-carts.

You have to tell the wonderful stories. Like when she, Melany, and Mallory were playing basketball and a younger boy across the street came over. After finding him a bit too annoying at the moment, she said, "You make me so mad I could pull my hair off." "You cannot." "Well, I might just pull my hair off then." "Can't do that either." So she peeled her wig right off her head

and squealed with laughter as he went running back across the street, his eyeballs as big as the basketball.

Or maybe the time she and Will broke out of Cook Medical Center to go to Burger King. She was hooked up to Jules (the name she gave the IV pole after a person she knew of who never quit talking), but that didn't stop them. They took the doctors' elevator, snuck out, and crossed the street. That must have been quite a sight: Amy, Will, and Jules on the lam.

Her headstone will have the dates August 12, 1986 and June 13, 1997. You'll always remember those two days. Just don't forget the dash representing all the days in between.

A few months ago I read Elie Wiesel's memories, hoping to learn how this man survived the tragedy of the holocaust, losing nearly everyone close to him in the concentration camps. I think I found what I was looking for when he wrote that his two favorite words in the English language are the words "AND YET." Those two words are a powerful rebuttal to the chirpy, syrupy optimism of people who wear rose-colored glasses. They force us to look deep into the dark hole of suffering. But those two words are also embossed invitations to hope for people so blinded by pain they can't even see. They are courageous, defiant words.

Jesus died a cruel death on the cross one Friday. He was betrayed by one of his followers, denied by one of his best friends, abandoned by many. AND YET, on Sunday God raised him up so that today he is King of kings and Lord of lords.

Today many of us are hurting so badly we can't stand it. We're experiencing the down side of love. For every time we love someone as much as as you loved Amy we become vulnerable. AND YET – wasn't it worth it? Isn't the old saying right – that it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all? The other option isn't too appealing. As Frederick Buechner has said: "The trouble with steeling yourself against the harshness of reality is that the same steel that secures your life against being destroyed secures your life also about being opened up and transformed by the holy power that life itself comes from."

We're also hurting today because Amy's life was so short. She didn't get to become a teenager, go to high school, attend college, or open the first all-girl veterinary clinic in Abilene with Whitney. AND YET maybe we're the fools for measuring life more in length than in depth. Some people could be physically alive as long as Methuselah and not live, really live, as much as Amy did in these ten years. We grieve over how long it will be until we see her. AND YET from heaven's perspective, the eternal perspective she now shares, the difference between ten years and eighty years must be laughably small.

There's also a lot of sadness because we know the world needed Amy; needed her life, her love, her creativity, her directness. She didn't get to do much. AND YET, Scripture tells us that the significant things in the kingdom are quite different than what we count as significant. For example, when the prophets picture the coming of the kingdom, they envision it as a time when the lion and lamb lie down together. A time when earth's chaos is set aside – freed from hatred and violence. In this moving zoo of Amy's life – from dolphin to sugar glider – she was

proclaiming the kingdom of God, a kingdom which broke in through Jesus Christ but will not come fully until he returns.

We're fearful today because we know how difficult the following days will be. We won't be able to soar with wings like eagles or run and not grow weary, as Isaiah promised. AND YET, in the same scripture God promised that when we couldn't soar or run, we could walk and not faint. I can testify that this promise is true. If you feel like crying, then cry a bucket full of tears. If you feel like questioning God, then fill a book with your questions. If some day you think you can't breathe because of grief, let your friends intubate you and breathe for you.

Finally, we're sad today because God didn't answer our prayers. Thousands of people pleaded for Amy's life for fifteen months, and God didn't heal her. I think to myself, if I were God for a day, ten-year-old girls wouldn't have to die. AND YET, if I were God for a day, what a mess this world might be! For I am not God. His ways are beyond my ways and his understanding far exceeds my limited insights.

This much I do know:

First, I know that God cries with you today. Just as you've cried with God over the death of his son, so he cries with you over the death of Amy.

Second, I know that we're not crazy for having questions. Scripture is honest; it is full of cries of lament and questions like "how long, O Lord, how long?" But those outbursts come in Scripture because they come from the lips of believers. Faith and lament often walk hand in hand. For in our pain where else could we possibly turn?

Third, I know that God has healed Amy. Not in the way we had hoped, but in a way that's far better. Who knows what pain he may have delivered her from? We assume the rest of her life would have been wonderful. But what if there was great pain and suffering ahead? She is now fully healed.

In the process of her dying, many of us were changed. We were forced to ask questions about life, death, heaven, and angels. We were made to see how foolish all the human energy spent on careers, reputations, and possessions is. We were confronted by her impending death with the preciousness of each day – each moment!

Unbeknownst to us, Amy became our minister. She was a jar of clay in whom was the treasure of the gospel. She carried around in her body the suffering and dying of Jesus so that we might see the life of Jesus.

Friday when two of her friends saw each other for the first time after her death, as they embraced I heard one of them say tearfully to the other, "She's in a better place."

Amy is gone. AND YET we will see her again.

This Easter Will Be Like the First One

by Rubel Shelly

January – February, 1998

What a weekend it had been for these people. It had been a time of suspense and uncertainty, terror and flight, dashed hopes and despair. Yet Sunday morning had finally come, and little could they know of the difference this day would make.

The Setting

Judas Iscariot had been there Thursday afternoon at sundown. When the disciples had made arrangements to eat the Passover in an upper room in Jerusalem, he was reclining at the table along with the rest of them. Jesus was acting as host and had just finished washing their feet (John 13:17).

Puzzling as that must have been to the group, Jesus then resumed his place at the table and said, “I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill the scripture: ‘He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me’” (John 13:18). John, the beloved disciple who was reclined directly beside and to the right of Jesus, lets us know that the Lord was “troubled in spirit” at that point in the evening. Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me” (John 13:21).

Prompted by Peter to do so, John leaned back against Jesus’ chest and asked, “Lord, who is it?” Jesus responded, “It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish” (John 13:26a). Breaking bread and sharing it from hand to hand was a sign of friendship. It often represented a gesture of reconciliation and an offer of forgiveness. Jesus made that overture to Judas with the cryptic remark: “What you are about to do, do quickly” (John 13:27b).

It is as if he were challenging Judas to make up his mind. “Either accept my friendship, be reconciled, and take forgiveness – or reject my offer and carry out your plan to betray me.” Judas made his choice and went out into the night of his lostness.

Simon Peter had been there on Thursday night, too. He was in the upper room. He had finally consented to let Jesus wash his feet. He had shared in the bread and cup that were distributed after Judas’ departure. He accompanied his Lord to Gethsemane, where he was asked to share in prayer with him. He had dozed off – only to be brought fully awake by the arrival of a band of temple soldiers who arrested Jesus and led him away.

He followed at what he hoped would be a safe distance in order to see what would become of the one he had earlier confessed as “the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” He must have been frightened. He was so afraid for himself that he tried to lose himself in the high priest’s large courtyard. He must have stood with his head bowed, hoping that no one would spot him as a

disciple of the Galilean. But he was not so fortunate. Not once, not twice, but three times, someone spotted him.

A voice said, “You are one of the Nazarene’s band.” Each time he denied it. The third time, he became positively profane in his fear. “He began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them ‘I don’t know this man you’re talking about’ ” (Mark 14:71). Just at that moment, Peter was yanked back to reality: “Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: ‘Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times’ ” (Mark 14:72a).

We understand fear, don’t we? Even now few of us like to be singled out at work or in a crowd of strangers. If the group is drinking too much and making a scene, if your friends are telling smutty stories, if all of you are using vulgar language – is there anything you fear more than someone saying, “Hey, a ‘good church member’ like you probably feels out of place here”? Have you ever gone into a routine designed to prove that you belong, that it’s all right for you to be in that rotten place and crowd? After hearing the rooster crow, Peter was overcome with anguish and “broke down and wept” (Mark 14:72b). But he was still too scared to take back his denials.

Peter’s fear kept him at a distance through the whole proceeding. He never identified himself as a disciple. He did not step forward to be with Jesus. After the death of Jesus on Friday, his fears continued to dominate him. He continued to keep his distance, with all these events swirling in his head. He didn’t know how to feel about Jesus now. He didn’t know how to feel about himself after what he had done. And he must have wondered how Jesus felt about him now.

Jesus’ mother, **Mary**, did not figure in the events of the meal, betrayal, or trial. But she was there on Friday when her son died on a Roman cross. When she and Joseph carried Jesus to the Jerusalem temple when the baby was only forty days old, an old man named Simeon had told her: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too” (Luke 2:35). It isn’t that I believe the words necessarily came back to Mary that day, but what happened was surely their fulfillment.

If Judas was apostate and Peter cringing in fear on that awful crucifixion Friday, Mary must have been awash in confusion. The angel had told her this was the Son of God. He was to save his people from their sins. Yet her son was hanging now on a Roman cross. He had been mocked, spit at, beaten, and paraded through the streets of Jerusalem. How could this be God’s plan to save the world? How could so horrible an event be turned to salvation?

“When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, ‘Dear woman, here is your son,’ and to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother’ ” (John 19:26-27a). She heard him say the words, yet she must have been focusing not on the words but the sight before her. There was so much blood. Along with the slaying of so many lambs at Passover, here was her own son’s life ebbing away with every drop of blood that came from his body.

The Event

Three characters representing three different relationships: Judas, the disciple who had turned his back and rejected Jesus' friendship; Peter, the disciple frozen by his fear and denounced by his own conscience; and Mary, the confused and helpless mother of the Nazarene. One event turned the tables for all of them. One event changed everything, forever.

God raised him up! The promise of Jesus that he would be in the belly of the earth as Jonah had been in the belly of a great fish – only to be liberated from the power holding him, as Jonah had been – was fulfilled. The tomb was empty. Death's Friday afternoon victory had become Sunday morning's triumph of life.

The whole course of the world changed because of that one event. And the lives and fates of the three people whose participation we have traced in that weekend were stood on their heads.

The Result

On Friday, Judas was hailed by the Establishment for his betrayal of Jesus. He had stood with the powerful and was on the winning side in the contest between Jesus and the religionists. In the meanwhile, his despair over what he had done drove him to suicide. He had no share in the victory of Sunday morning, for he had hanged himself (cf. Acts 1:15ff). His Friday apostasy made unalterable by his self-inflicted death made it impossible for him to share in the eternal life Sunday brought.

Had Peter done anything less serious than Judas? If people are justified before God only for their flawless obedience, neither of the two had any hope. On Sunday morning, however, frightened Peter was still wrestling with his fears when word came of an empty tomb. He struck out running, was the first actually to enter the tomb, and "saw and believed" (John 20:8). Fear became hope. The Lord later appeared to him, reinstated him to his ministry, and henceforth used him as a mighty evangelist. Knowing that Jesus still loved and wanted him to be part of his ministry let him move forward with his life after so humiliating a failure.

Mary, the distraught and bewildered mother, was among the women who arrived at the tomb around sunrise, found the tomb empty, and bore the initial witness to the resurrection from the dead. She was henceforth with the apostles in prayer until the Pentecost event of the arrival of the Holy Spirit and the establishment of the church (Acts 1:14).

Conclusion

Jesus arose from the dead on a morning just like this Easter Sunday will be. All around are people like the ones there that first morning.

There are people who have given up on Jesus because he didn't live up to your misguided expectations. There are some who have failed Jesus because of your fear and who feel terrible about what you did. There are others who are simply confused because life has dealt you blows that you can neither understand nor justify.

The one event that changes it all is the resurrection. If you have given up on Jesus, you have given up on all that means anything. If your fear or confusion have paralyzed you, the living Christ takes you and gives you the direction and power to move ahead.

Your life can have fresh meaning because he is alive today – alive forever.

Thy Kingdom Come

by Steve Weathers

January – February, 1998

When I set out for a Florida elementary school in the early '60s, my Flintstones lunch box firmly in hand, I was given two injunctions: one, parental; the other, congregational.

First, in the event of a Cuban missile attack, I was to leave campus immediately – without asking permission (The independence implied in such an act dizzied me.) I was to walk east on Lake Shore Drive. My mother would head west on Lake Shore Drive, I was told, and we would meet. I believed this unreservedly. All around us Western civilization might be in meltdown. Fleeing students (with their less-fortunate lunch boxes) might be vaporized. But my mother would find me, I was certain, and we would be safe.

More important still was the Lord's Prayer. I was not to join in on the phrase "Thy kingdom come," for that would be unscriptural. It was a firm conviction in our local congregation: on the Day of Pentecost, the kingdom *had* come in the form of the New Testament church. So joining in with the other children (benighted souls, in my eyes, from the sectarian world about us) would constitute a denial of this clear biblical teaching. Again, I complied without question.

The Lord's Prayer prohibition didn't strike me as too strange. After all, I was accustomed to being different. I was about the only kid in Monday's lunch line who had not seen Walt Disney's *Wonderful World of Color* the night before. (It came on at 6:00 p.m., of course, the same time as our Sunday evening worship.) One more difference didn't matter much. Refraining from that unscriptural phrase, falling silent while others around me unknowingly mumbled heresy, wasn't too bothersome. Each morning after the Pledge, head bowed and eyes closed, I stood alongside my desk and was discretely orthodox.

My parents – and my childhood church, for that matter – were right about a lot of things. Their record for accuracy continues to grow even to this day. So much so that, in the event of a nuclear shoot-out, I suspect some internal homing device will kick in and I'll strike out in a straight-line trajectory for Lake Shore Drive, regardless of where I may be in the U.S. at the time. I'm almost certain of it.

But I'm not so certain anymore that "Thy kingdom come" must be interpreted solely in the past tense.

I believe, of course, that the kingdom *did* come, as described in Acts 2:1-41, in the form of the New Testament church. I believe the divine counteroffensive to retake a sin-entrenched planet was launched at around nine in the morning, Day of Pentecost, 33 AD (or, more accurately due to a calendar error, 29 AD). I believe the Holy Spirit on that day established a beachhead in the hearts and minds of humanity.

But isn't the divine counteroffensive still going on? Isn't the kingdom still in the process of coming?

In 1944 an excited whisper spread westward across Europe: "The Allies have landed!" It was true. At the cost of great carnage, the Allies had established a slender beachhead on the Continent. But I suspect that for months afterward, French farmers, Italian peasants, Greek fishermen, and Jewish internees continued to pray each night, "May the Allies come."

Just as we continue to pray today, "Thy kingdom come." There's a lot of the planet that has not yet been liberated. Truth be told, there's a lot in my own heart that has not yet been liberated.

Think too, about the elaboration that follows: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." This clause, I'm convinced, is an amplifying echo of the preceding one. When we pray "Thy kingdom come," in other words, we're asking that God's will may be done in the here and now – fully, faithfully, finally – just as it's always being done in heaven by hosts of unfallen angels. It's a tall order. It may take a while. So long, in fact, that there's a sense in which the kingdom will not be fully realized until Christ's final appearing (2 Timothy 4:1). Until that planet-wide submission is an accomplished fact, therefore, the entire prayer remains relevant.

There's actually one problem with praying, "Thy kingdom come." As Alan Redpath has remarked in *Law and Liberty*, "You cannot pray 'Thy kingdom com' until you have prayed 'my kingdom go.' " We first must be willing to abdicate our personal throne, in other words, turning it over to One whose divine right to rule is, after all, more impressive than our own.

I'm afraid the reason the kingdom has not come in all its fiery fullness in my own life – that cheek-turning, tongue-restraining, anger-renouncing, flesh-denying kingdom – is because I've reserved a corner of my personal throne for local autonomy. I pray fervently for the rest of the planet, but my own heart remains disputed territory. This won't do. "To pray 'Thy kingdom come' is searching and demanding," J.I Packer has said in *I Want to Be a Christian*, "for one must be ready to add, 'And start with me.' "

In actuality, this is the frightening phrase I'm tempted to omit. This is the one that bothers me. This is the one where I tend to fall silent: *Start with me.*

He Has Been Raised

by William Willimon

January – February, 1998

As the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone ... His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow ... The angel said to the women, "Do not fear; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. he is not here; for he has been raised ..." (Matthew 28:1-3).

Luminere, who invented motion pictures one hundred years ago this year, said, when he introduced his new invention, this wonder which fixed photographic images forever, motion immortalized on film, he said, "Death has been overcome."

Really?

Traveling in the South of England, our car broke down. While we awaited repairs, I wandered through the yard of the village church. Eventually, I found myself in the cemetery surrounding the church. Over in one corner of the cemetery there was a beautiful, low, brick wall enclosing fifty graves. The grass had nearly choked the plot. A large granite slab, set in the wall, bore the words, "WE SHALL NEVER FORGET YOUR SACRIFICE."

Here were fifty graves of young men from New Zealand. They were all around the ages of 17 to 25 and all from New Zealand. Who were these and why did they die here; in this little English village, so far from home?

There was no clue at the churchyard as to who they were or the circumstances of their deaths. I wandered down into the village. I found the town's museum and inquired there. The attendant at the museum told me, "Strange that you should ask, I have no idea, but given a few days I could certainly find out."

As I was not going to be there for a few days, I asked a couple of other people in town. No one knew. I surmised that they were soldiers who were stationed in this little town during World War I. Victims of the flu epidemic in 1918.

And no one knew. The impressive inscription in granite was a lie. We had forgotten their sacrifice. No one could remember.

We live by what Ernest Becker called, the "vital lie," the life-giving lie that there is immortality to be had in this world. We say it in different ways. Sometimes we say it with war monuments done up in eternal granite or bronze. At other times we say it through endowed chairs at the universities. See? You will not die, will not fade, you (or at least your name) shall live forever.

Elie Wiesel stands and says of the millions of victims of the Nazi Holocaust, “We promise that we will never forget you.”

But we do. We will forget, given enough time, even so great a horror as Auschwitz. We forget. Everything dissolves.

In his last speech, Socrates urged his hearers to ponder only those things which endure. Philosophers must speak eternity, purity, immutability, these the things sought by intelligent Greeks.

And yet this is also a lie. Socrates died and, despite the claims of the Duke Department of Philosophy, he was also fodder for finitude, decay and corruption.

Will you agree with me that one of the sad, frustrating things about grieving over someone you love is that you promise yourself, I will not forget. I will remember her just as she was – those eyes, that touch, the way she laughs, the sound of that voice. But even as you promise, scarcely a week after the funeral, she begins to slip through your hands. Over time, you do forget. Things fade from memory. Even the one that you love very much is unavailable to you. Eternity, purity, immutability are not to be had in this life. To say that they are is a lie, though a lie with enough vitality to sustain millions.

In Pericles’ great funeral oration at the end of the Athenian War, the greatest of all orators has the honesty not to attempt to assuage the grief of those who are mourning the victims of the war by offering them a lie, even a vital one. Rather, Pericles says that those present should pray that they will never have the misfortune to die in battle, as these young men. He tells the grieving parents that some of them are still young enough to have other sons and, if they do, this may provide them some modicum of consolation.

Never does the great Pericles say that dying in battle is good or that such death leads to immortality, or other such lies. And I admire him for that.

This is the biblical view. The person who says, in response to the church’s belief of resurrection, “Well, the way I see it is, when you’re dead, you’re dead,” is really very close to the Christian view. We really do believe that death is death. The ravages of death cannot be assuaged through cheap consolation, a vital lie, no matter how well-meaning or finely crafted the lie.

Jesus was dead. The one in whom there had been such life, now lay in the grip of death. He was not sleeping deeply. He did not “live on in our memories.” He was dead, entombed behind a great stone, guarded by soldiers, now three days, dead. And, despite our lies, vital and otherwise, when you are dead, you are dead. End of story, *finis*.

“Never let me hear that brave blood has been shed in vain,” said Sir Walter Scott. “It sends an imperious challenge down all the generations.” Poor old Romantic fool. Don’t tell Scott, but brave blood is frequently shed in vain. The greatest heroics upon the battlefield, or in a hospital, or a football field win no one immortality.

“Time, like an ever rolling stream, bears all who breathe away; they fly forgotten as a dream dies at the opening day.” We sign it every year at commencement. It’s our university hymn. The grass withers, the flower fades, we are like dust (Psalm 90).

When Dante is led by Virgil to the underworld, and he gazes upon the throngs, the millions of the dead shuffling along in somber procession, he says, “I had not thought death had undone so many,” (Dante, Line 63, *The Inferno*, 55-57). Later, in *The Waste Land*, T.S. Eliot thought of Dante, paraphrasing him when he looked upon the throngs shuffling along London Bridge, shuffling along King William Street, Shuffling along, as are we all, toward death (62-63).

“I will show you fear,” he said, “in a handful of dust” (30). If there be hope for us, hope which is not a lie, then it must be hope not of our own creation, mortal as we are, not the result of wishful thinking, human potential, something outside of us and our finitude, some stunning intrusion, some act of God reversing our shuffle toward the grave, overcoming the final enemy, something which in power defeats death, gives life, some dawn not of our devising, something which shakes our death-dealing world to its foundations, some descent to us, some divine rolling back of the great stone under which we all labor, some light in the dark of death.

As the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone ... His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow ... The angel said to the women, “Do not fear; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. he is not here; for he has been raised ...”

Movie Review: Contact

God and the Bearable Vastness of Being

by Darryl Tippens

January – February, 1998

Who would have guessed that Carl Sagan, the highly successful promoter of the TV *Cosmos* series and debunker of popular religion, would leave such an inspiring and ingenious legacy as *Contact*, a film about humanity's quest to know what lies in the furthest reaches of the universe?

The film offers first-rate entertainment, though it will disappoint viewers who expect sci-fi drama in the tradition of *Star Wars*, *Independence Day*, or *Aliens*. No intergalactic battles, no mannered E.T.-like hominoids, no scary monsters here. Instead, we get something better – an engrossing view of one of the great cultural struggles of the last 400 years, the war between science and religion.

Christians who think they know where Sagan stood on the topic of religion may be surprised by this film; for in this, the scientist's final gaze into the cosmos, one detects a positively friendly attitude towards theism, at least theism of a certain type.

The "war" between science and religion virtually ends in this end-of-the-millennium drama. Though battles are sure to go on, the contest is no longer between authentic faith and scientific rationalism. The battle lines shift. Now, the conflict occurs between the bravely curious and the paranoid fundamentalists, between those who imagine transcendent realities and those who cannot; between those who seek to know at any cost and those who use power and fear to enforce ignorance.

Contact focuses on the life of Ellie (Jodie Foster), a scientist on a quest to know whether there is intelligence in deep space. She joins a multi-national team of scientists who build a machine that catapults her 30,000 light years to Vega, the brightest star in the northern sky. There she meets an advanced form of intelligence that communicates with her in the form of her deceased earthly father.

Ellie's encounter is revelatory and life-changing. yet, once she returns to earth, she possesses no scientific evidence to prove her claims since, in earthly terms, no significant measure of time has elapsed. Christians can identify with Ellie's dilemma since her plight closely matches their own. Did she meet a higher being, or did she suffer a delusion? How does one prove one's "close encounter" with a transcendent reality? *Contact* is an extended discussion of these pivotal questions.

In other words, can religious faith and scientific skepticism be reconciled? Sagan's final answer is: yes. Through Ellie (apparently, the writer's principal "voice" in the movie), Sagan reveals his postmodern leanings in suggesting that scientific method is good, but insufficient, to explain all

of reality. With hamlet, Sagan seems to be conceding, “There are more things in heaven and earth, than are dreamt of in our [scientific] philosophy.”

Contact asks us to feel wonder and humility before the mysteries of a universe, mind-boggling in its dimensions. Like J.B. Phillips who once tried to disturb complacent Christians with the claim, “Your God is too small,” Sagan’s film declares, “Your universe is too small!”

Through provocative conversations between a failed seminary student (played by Matthew McConaughey) and Ellie, the movie presents a parable with a point: Though science and religion may spar regularly, they are not inveterate enemies. In their common pursuit of truth and in their reverence before the unknown, science and religion can be intimate allies.

These allies, science and religion, face a common enemy, however – those fearful fanatics and pushy politicians who love power more than truth; and those prideful, mystery-blind rationalists and reductionists who use politics, science, or religion as a tool to thwart discovery.

Movie-goers should not suppose that Sagan’s film is an endorsement of Christianity. It is not. Closer to New Age than Old Paths, Sagan cannot imagine a deity with special love for just one tiny planet floating among billions. Sagan is loathe to name this superior intelligence “God.” His cosmic intelligence is a bit unfocused and ill-defined, much like the scenes of Ellie’s esoteric experience on Vega.

Though his characters do not name the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Sagan deserves some credit for this cinematic parable that occasionally hovers near the spirit of biblical theism. Virtually Pascalian, Sagan suggests the dizzying sense of the numinous as he ponders the microscopic dimensions of humanity pitched against the immensity of the heavens. Like the celebrant of Psalm 8, Sagan even implies that the Artist’s signature is evident in the Creation. Sagan is no simple-minded materialist. He leaves open the door to transcendent realities.

Within the faint noises emanating from deep space, coherent messages of meaning and order can be discerned by searching hearts and curious minds. Through Ellie, Sagan implies that a seeker may encounter a transcendent father in heaven, yet be unable to prove it. Above all, through Ellie’s search for her father, we are led to see the centrality of love (a theme stated movingly in the novel’s final pages): *For small creatures such as we the vastness is bearable only through love.*¹

Not a bad message for a Hollywood movie. By all accounts, Carl Sagan died a skeptic. However, in his artistic imagination, at least, this scientist-turned-moviemaker was not far from the Kingdom of God.

The Message and the Resurrection

By Matthew

After the Sabbath, as the first light of the new week dawned, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to keep vigil at the tomb. Suddenly the earth reeled and rocked under their feet as God's angel came down from heaven, came right up to where they were standing. He rolled back the stone and then sat on it. Shafts of lightning blazed from him. His garments shimmered snow-white. The guards at the tomb were scared to death. They were so frightened, they couldn't move.

The angel spoke to the women: "There is nothing to fear here. I know you're looking for Jesus, the One they nailed to the cross. He is not here. He was raised, just as he said. Come and look at the place where he was placed.

"Now, get on your way quickly and tell his disciples, 'He is risen from the dead. He is going on ahead of you to Galilee. you will see him there.' That's the message."

The women, deep in wonder and full of joy, lost no time in leaving the tomb. They ran to tell the disciples. Then Jesus met them, stopping them in their tracks. "Good morning!" he said. They fell to their knees, embraced his feet, and worshipped him. Jesus said, "You're holding on to me for dear life! Don't be frightened like that. Go tell my brothers that they are to go to Galilee, and that I'll meet them there."

Meanwhile, the guards had scattered, but a few of them went into the city and told the high priests everything that had happened. They called a meeting of the religious leaders and came up with a plan: They took a large sum of money and gave it to the soldiers, bribing them to say, "His disciples came in the night and stole the body while we were sleeping." They assured them, "If the governor hears about your sleeping on duty, we will make sure you don't get blamed. The soldiers took the bribe and did as they were told. That story, cooked up in the Jewish High Council, is still going around.

~ Matthew 28, *The Message*

Threatened By Men?

by Sandra Milholland

January – February, 1998

If you take the development of oral contraception and the publishing of *The Feminine Mystique* (Friedan, 1963); add an unpopular war, thousands of dead young men, and an upheaval in gender role expectations; stir in social and economic unrest, a sprinkling of hedonism, unmet needs, disappointment with life circumstances, and egocentrism; simmer in the heat of racial discrimination, and conditions were ideal for what has come to be known as the “Women’s Movement.” For over 35 years, women have had a Cause. A purpose that attempts to give credibility to a vague, inexpressible dissatisfaction with female roles and social standing.

Women’s demand for equality was a paradigm that compared Past with Present and, energized by each new social trend, propelled us all haphazardly into the Future. The Future is here, but that vague, inexpressible dissatisfaction remains.

While women were spreading their wings, arguing independence, and turning gender roles topsy-turvy, men were doing the same things they had been doing for centuries before. There was no Men’s Movement taking place in concert with their female counterparts except, perhaps, to move out of the way.

They likely had difficulty understanding why a subculture of women would demand equality with men. (Millions of women wondered the same thing!) But, thanks to the vocal female minority, women can have it all. Education, career, husband(s) and children, both or neither; a financial portfolio, community responsibilities, and increased visibility ... stress headaches, sleeplessness, chronic back pain, heart attacks, decreased life expectancy, professional liability insurance. How lucky can a girl ... make that woman ... get? (Or is “female” politically correct this week?)

I know I’m being overly critical of women, but I am one, and I think we’ve earned some bad press. I keep hearing women say they want to be treated equally with men, which tells me we are prepared to take criticism square on the chin and not cry about it. Men are asking, “How do we do ‘relationship’ better?” I hear them saying they want to stand beside their wives and take a more active part in parenting their children. They want to be better husbands, brothers, and friends. They have said they want to use their unique strengths and differences to enhance the well-being of their families, their neighborhoods, and their world to the glory of their God. men are asking what women want from them, and we need to honor them with an answer.

Some people say women want men to be more like women, but that doesn’t make sense to me. Women obviously admire all the things men are else they wouldn’t be dressing like men, working and playing like men, and fighting so desperately for equal status with men.

This article cannot represent every woman's need, but it can be a place to start dialoguing together. This is an extremely important time in history, and as we move through it together, it will help if we are aware of some subtle, yet powerful, social dynamics impacting our progress.

First, let's discuss the topic at hand. The "ideal" man. What women are looking for. One woman's "ideal" will be different from another's depending on her past experience with men, her current situation, her future needs, and, most importantly, how comfortable she is with herself. A Christian woman will look for different qualities in a man than will the woman who has no understanding of *be last so you can be first, die so you can live, be mutually submissive to one another*.

Contrary to popular belief, women don't want a man who will treat them equally; they want one who will live with them equitably. She will respect the man who has power to insist on his own way, but chooses not to. Who acknowledges her talents and skills, and abdicates his control over those areas where she has the superior ability. She cherishes the man who can look her straight in the eye and say, I'm worried; I'm afraid; I need your help; I need your love; Something wonderful happened today, and I couldn't wait to tell you about it, and who allows her to do the same. There is no more beautiful picture than that of a man gently holding a baby, or carefully and lovingly discipling his child. A man who is saddened by the misfortunes of others, who is not threatened by tears, and who can openly enjoy all of God's creation without destroying it is what "real" men are all about.

There is a healthy sense of security one experiences when watching thousands of men lift hands in peaceful prayer, rededicating their hearts and lives to God, and seeking someone to whom they can be accountable. Women of integrity find this recommitment both courageous and appealing.

But Satan never rests. There are some factions of society who seem determined to defeat men's efforts at personal and spiritual renewal. I find the reasons for this both interesting and unfortunate.

To understand it better, we can turn to systems theory and look at how social systems react to change. Change can be a death knell to familiar (that's *familiar*, not necessarily productive) patterns of interaction. For that reason, we can expect some women to have a strong investment in men staying as they were. They know how to fight in the war between the sexes, but are baffled and out-classed by men of compassion. They must, therefore, go to great lengths to sabotage any efforts toward change even though that is precisely what they have been asking for.

This dynamic is quite obvious when you listen to spokespersons from some women's organizations. They don't appear to be very happy people. They need a Cause, like women's rights, to give them purpose. That Cause, to maintain momentum, is dependent upon the male stereotype of power-hungry, unfeeling, irresponsible, clod because this stereotype validates feminist feelings and behaviors.

When a stuck door suddenly opens, it often swings too far too fast, and those pushing hardest land flat on their faces! Some women expend exorbitant amounts of mental and emotional

energy pushing open doors of opportunity trying to find one that satisfies them. And as long as they focus on this quest, they don't have to stop and face a reality that men have known all along – those opportunities are not always as satisfying as they seem.

Men and women need each other. We are more effective together than we can ever be apart. People who deny this deny a most valuable part of themselves. God created men and women to be in relationship with him.

I have experienced all the advantages and disadvantages of the women's movement firsthand. I think most women would agree with me that we find ourselves in positions foisted upon us by other women's agendas, and for years we have struggled to maintain those positions with as much grace and dignity as possible. We are not threatened by men wanting to stand in the gap; we open our arms and welcome them there with us.

A Church That Flies

by Tim Woodroof

January – February, 1998

And for to make a bird or fowl made of wood and metal to fly, it is to be done so as to beat the air with wings as other birds or fowls do; being a reasonable lightness, it may fly. ~ William Bourne, circa 1800s

It did not take the human race long to grow dissatisfied with the limits of gravity. Among the earliest narratives of recorded history – accounts of ancient legends and myths and dreams – are stories of men looking enviously at birds and coveting their ability to fly. It is impossible for those of us raised with airline schedules and moon-shots to appreciate how powerfully the dream of flight captured the imagination of ancient man.

For thousands of years, inventors and dreamers have thought about ways to build a flying machine that could lift man into the heavens with the birds. Most of these dreamers made the assumption that to “fly” meant to soar not just with the birds but like the birds, by flapping some sort of mechanical wings. Historians of flight call such thinkers ornithopterists (“wing-flappers”) for their obsession with achieving the ability to fly by copying the manner in which birds do so.

From ancient Greek mythology, there is the story of Icarus who made wings fashioned of wood and feathers, held together by wax. By flapping mightily, Icarus was able to rise into the atmosphere and navigate the skies. Unfortunately, he flew so high and close to the sun that the wax melted and his feathers fell off, plunging Icarus into the Mediterranean where he drowned. You can almost hear generations of mothers repeating this story to their children and warning, “If God had wanted men to fly, he would have given them wings.”

In the fifteenth century, Leonardo Da Vinci – fascinated with birds and the possibility of flight – sketched out a number of flying machines. His designs often betray the same confusion of form and function. In Da Vinci’s mind, flight would become possible by giving man equipment similar to that of birds: large wings, attached to the arms or driven mechanically by pedals and chains, which could be flapped up and down to achieve lift. There is no evidence that Da Vinci ever built and tried one of his designs. If he had, his fate would have been similar to that of Icarus.

More centuries passed, and still the notion that a flying machine would have to look and act like a bird dominated the thinking of inventors. Had the ornithopterists been successful in achieving flight through slavish imitation of the bird’s form, that would have been the end of the story. BUT an embarrassing string of failures and the deaths of numerous “aeronauts” proved that a flying machine – if it was to function – would have to be designed around a different form.

It wasn’t until the last hundred years that inventors were finally able to disconnect function from form, and question whether flight might be possible without mimicking the manner in which birds achieved it. The Wright brothers, among others, decided not to focus on birds but on the

problem of flight itself. Rather than attempting to build a better “flapper,” they build one of the first wind tunnels to study the effects of wind on wings. With the handful of aerodynamic principles which resulted, they designed a machine to take advantage of those principles – whether it came out looking like a bird or not.

The rest, as they say, is history. On December 17, 1902, Wilbur and Orville flew their “Kitty Hawk Special” four times, the longest flight lasting 58 seconds. Their “flying machine” wasn’t covered in feathers. It didn’t have bird-shaped wings. The wings did not flap up and down.

But it flew.

How Do You Make a Church Fly?

In many ways, the history of the Churches of Christ has paralleled the history of flight. For the past one hundred and fifty years, we have looked enviously at New Testament churches and coveted their ability to fly. We gazed longingly at their loving fellowship, life-changing ethic, Spirit-led worship, and evangelistic witness. We noted the fervor of their faith and the courage that led them to the arena and the stake. We watched as a band of twelve grew into a church of three thousand and, then, matured into a movement which turned the world upside down.

Looking up at the early church, we grew dissatisfied with the limits of our own religious experience and yearned to fly with those first Christians. We dreamed of building a contemporary church that recaptured the same dynamic and faithfulness exhibited by the first century exemplar.

Like the ornithopterists of old, we assumed that “function” was inextricably bound to “form” ... that to fly with the first century church required us to fly like it. In our minds, a restoration of the first century spirit and dynamic would only be possible when we gave the modern church the same “equipment” as its ancient counterpart.

Copying first century structures, organizations, patterns and behaviors became for us the best and necessary means for restoring the vitality and performance of the primitive church – if only we could reinstate the forms, function would follow. And so the past 150 years have been spent analyzing the New Testament church for “marks” and “patterns.” Several generations of our ecclesiological ancestors have given their best to reincarnating the primitive model. They poured over the available evidence, both biblical and historical, searching for the most minute clues regarding the behavior of the early church. They dissected and classified and described every detail of early church anatomy. They debated verb tenses and necessary inferences.

Had we been successful in building a functional modern church through slavish imitation of first century forms, that would have been the end of the story and there would be no need for this article. But, as a movement, we have experienced an embarrassing string of failures – divisions, stagnation, a sense of being increasingly marginalized in our culture, a loss of identity, and the spiritual death of people we know and love. We can’t seem to get the contemporary church off the ground – no matter how hard we flap our first century wings. Increasingly, the assumption that function will follow the restoration of correct forms is being called into question. Many of us

are growing frustrated with a modern church that may look like the ancient church in the particulars but fails to function with anything like its power and life-changing dynamic. Some are beginning to ask whether it might be possible to be the church of Christ today without the focus on forms which has become our hallmark.

There is the nagging sense that our focus on the details of early church life has dulled us to “the weightier matters” which animated the spiritual walk of our first-century counterparts. We fear having become a people who major in the minors and minor in what is truly major. We question whether the many issues which have consumed us and dominated our discussions have grown out of all proportion and diverted a movement which, at its inception, addressed higher ideals.

If we are honest, however, the pressing motivation for questioning the way we do church is rooted less in our sensitivity to the spiritually central than in the growing acknowledgment that our movement is no longer able to capture the imagination of a new generation. The issues which served as points of identification and rallying flags for the church through much of this century fail to ignite the passions of those who must carry the church into the next millennium. Increasingly, we find ourselves in the difficult position of holding a debate we do not want in order to secure a future we fear is slipping from us. As has been true of many movements before us, desperation is driving us where theology should but does not.

This article, and the ones to follow, represent a small attempt to construct a spiritual “wind tunnel” – to study how the God who built Abraham’s family and the nation of Israel and the church of Pentecost might be working to build a faithful church today. Central to this endeavor (and no doubt problematic for some readers) is a willingness to disconnect form from function, to assert that function is primary, and to suggest that it is possible to build a contemporary church that pleases God even if it does not look exactly like the church of the first or the nineteenth century.

We want a church that flies. All the gilded models that capture the most intricate details of churches past are of little use to us if they cannot get off the ground. What is required is a church for today that soars with the same power and faith as the church of our first fathers. We don’t need to build a better “flapper” – more accurate, more true to scale, more meticulously detailed. We should rather be concerned to build a church that is sensitive to the same “aerodynamic principles” which lifted the church in the first century world, whether we end up looking like that church or not.

The church that results will not be covered by first century culture and attitudes. It will not meet in catacombs or adopt the worship patterns of the synagogue. It will not insist on recreating every facet of ancient church life and practice.

But maybe, just maybe, it will fly.

Bogged Down in Leviticus

by Scott Brunner

January – February, 1998

I have resolved to read the Bible through this year, cover to cover. This will be the year I make it, from “In the Beginning” to final “Amen,” Genesis to Revelation, page one through page (gulp) 1,339. Why, I may even read the contents page and the index and the table of ancient weights and measures and those nine maps of the Holy Land and Jerusalem, with their mountain ranges in colorful relief and the tribal boundaries that undulate and ripple across five centuries of time.

And after all, even though I gave up on *War & Peace* after a hundred pages (I couldn't keep straight the relationships between all those foreign folks), I did finish *Gone With the Wind*, and it's at least as long as the Bible.

I'd like to tell you that my motives are pure, that I aim to read solely for the edification of it, to expand my mind, maybe even increase my faith. I'm sure I *will* benefit – probably far more than I imagine looking at it from this side of Genesis. But that's not the main reason I want to do it.

See, this isn't the first time I've been so “resolute.” I've been here before, younger, greener, able to talk a good game, but lacking the conviction required to stay the course.

A few years back, on a January day, I glibly announced to anyone in hearing distance that I could read the Good Book through in a year and those who didn't think so could just eat my dust. I imagined myself racing through the patriarchs, the major and minor prophets, then crossing the border into the New Testament and across the four gospels and the epistles and straight on til that Great Gettin' Up Morning in John's Revelation, sometime 12 months hence.

And I burned rubber, too. For a while. At least through Exodus. And then, the cold realities of February and March set in, and I got bogged down in Leviticus.

Guess that explains why I'm much more familiar with the stories of Noah and the flood, of God's promise of a child to octogenarians Abraham and Sarah, of Abraham's faith in sacrificing Isaac, of Jacob's deception of his brother Esau, of the dreams of Joseph, his indenture in Egypt and ultimate rise to power there, of the trials of God's people in Egyptian bondage and the selection of a tongue-tied Moses to lead the Israelites out toward the promised land – more familiar with those than, say, Habbakuk or Hezekiah. Although I *do* know Ruth and David and Gideon and Joshua, the rest of it gets a little blurry for me after the Israelites start wandering in the wilderness. Truth is, I'm not sure I could tell a major prophet from a minor one without a good concordance. And it's all because of the rules and regulations of Leviticus. Bogged down.

Happens to the best of us, I guess. Who among us hasn't, on a crisp January-the-first, resolved, no longer to linger, but to exercise more, eat less, stop smoking, be nice to your mother-in-law,

finish out the attic, learn to play golf, spend more time with the kids, write more letters to Aunt Eva Nell, clean the baseboards or ... whatever. Even read the Bible through in a year.

And how few among us actually stick with it when the going gets tough, when it becomes inconvenient, when the demands on your time get too great and other things entice and February comes and we get bogged down in Leviticus. Let him who is without sin cast the first stone, I say.

January is hopeful, a season of fresh starts and clean slates; it fills and warms our souls with hope. Then February comes with a one-two punch to the belly and knocks the wind out of us. February truly is the cruelest month of all, for it makes us face up to our shortcomings, forces us to decide if our new commitments are really worth relinquishing old habits for.

Seeing that, I've summoned my resolve. Once, I was intoxicated with the mere challenge of it. That was all, and I failed. This time, I aim to read, with the conviction of a believer – because I'm convinced that a person should know all he can about any book on which he would pattern his life.

That, *and* the challenge of it. February's coming. I want to survive it.

But never mind that now. I'm through January, a time of new beginnings, and I'm through Genesis. I'm optimistic! I know, today at least, that I can do it ... if I can just make it through Leviticus.

How God Turns Crucifixions into Resurrections

*by Rick Warren, Founding Pastor,
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January – February, 1998*

Genuine success is often the outgrowth of failure. Examples of this are found everywhere: in God's Word, church history, current events, and even our own lives. If we learn from failure, it becomes a stepping stone to achievement.

The Bible shows us over and over how God loves to turn a person's weakness into a strength. For instance, consider Moses. Moses is the only man in the Bible called "meek," besides the Lord Jesus. Meek literally means "strength under control." But meekness hardly described the first half of Moses' life!

Moses' greatest weakness was his inability to control his anger. He had a hot temper! His uncontrolled anger caused him to murder an Egyptian, throw down the Ten Commandments, and strike the rock when God told him to speak to it instead. It was his uncontrolled anger that kept him out of the Promised Land. But over the years, God mellowed Moses, and his weakness was turned into a strength. With all that Moses had to put up with from the children of Israel as they wandered, Moses certainly wins the award as "Most Patient Leader in the Old Testament."

Another example of weakness turned to strength is Abraham – a man who often reacted to situations with fear. Twice Abraham asked his wife to lie for him in order to protect him. He told Sarah, "Honey, tell these strangers that you're my sister, not my wife, so they won't kill me in order to get you." But God worked on Abraham's weakness, and today we know him as the "Father of Faith."

Gideon was a first-class coward. We see him hiding from the enemy forces. But when the angel greeted Gideon, the angel addressed Gideon as "You mighty man of valor." Evidently God saw something in Gideon that Gideon didn't see in himself. And Gideon's greatest weakness was turned into a strength.

Then there was Peter, to whom Jesus said, "You are a rock!" Pardon me, but Peter was anything but a rock at this point in his life. He was the most impulsive and unstable man in the entire band of disciples. Peter was constantly getting into trouble and putting his foot in his mouth. On the Mount of Transfiguration he blurted out, "This is great! Let's build a tent for everybody and just stay up here!" Peter was the guy who impulsively jumped out of the boat to walk on water and then he began to sink. He's the same guy who bragged, "Oh, I'll never deny you, Lord!" right before he denied Christ three times. Peter had not shown himself to be as stable as a rock, but Jesus knew his potential and changed Peter's weakness into a strength.

Failure: It's Only Human

The truth is that we learn far more from failure than from success. Thomas Edison always insisted, “Don’t ever call any experience a failure. Instead call it an education.”

Because we’re sinners and imperfect human beings, failure is a guaranteed part of life. No one goes through life with an unbroken string of successes.

Many times you’re going to feel like Job: “My days have passed, my plans are shattered, and so are the desires of my heart” (Job 17:11).

We all have failures, and we all make mistakes. What is more interesting is the predictable pattern that our emotions follow whenever we experience failure. First we have a defeat. Next comes disappointment. Along with that comes discouragement. If we wallow in discouragement, it deteriorates into serious depression and eventually despair. Anyone who ministers to others has seen this pattern repeatedly. Since failure is a normal part of life and ministry, we must learn how to deal with it without being devastated by it.

Let’s look at some of the most common causes of failure, the wrong responses to failure, and God’s way to recover from a failure. Fortunately, the book of Proverbs has a great deal to say about failure.

Common Causes of Failure

We don’t plan ahead. Proverbs 27:12 (LB) says, “A sensible man watches for problems ahead and prepares to meet them. The simpleton never looks and suffers the consequences.” If you fail to plan, you’re planning to fail.

We give up too soon. Edison tried more than 200 different elements and compounds before he discovered that tungsten worked best for the light bulb. If at first you don’t succeed, welcome to the human race! You’re normal. Failure helps you discover what doesn’t work. If you keep on keeping on, you get closer to the solution every day. At Saddleback Church we’ve tried far more things that didn’t work than those that did work. I could write a book, *1000 Ways How NOT to Grow a Church!* We simply kept trying, though, and we eventually found the right approach that allowed us to grow from one family to over 14,000 in attendance in 18 years and to baptize over 5,000 new believers in the past five years. Proverbs 13:4 says, “Lazy people want much but gain little while the diligent are prospering.”

We don’t listen to God. Usually we like to make our own plans and then pray, “God bless our plans.” That’s backwards. Instead we ought to pray, “God we know you are doing some great things in the world right now. Please let us in on whatever you are blessing!” The Bible says, “There is a way that seems right to men but it ends in death.”

We are afraid to take risks. Proverbs 29:25 (NIV) says, “The fear of man is a dangerous trap, but to trust in God means safety.” We set ourselves up for failure every time we worry about what other people will think. Never be afraid to go out on a limb for Jesus. That’s where the fruit is!

When we think we've arrived. The Bible says, "Pride goes before destruction and arrogance before a fall." The truth is – you never "arrive." You must always be walking before the Lord in total dependence and humility. You must always be learning and growing. One of the problems of pride is that it makes us unteachable. If you can't learn from other people, you have an ego problem. Did you know that you can learn from anybody if you're willing to ask the right question? You can learn from people older than you, people younger than you, people who are different from you, and people who don't agree with you.

We set ourselves up for failure by fearing it. Job 3:25 says, "What I always feared has happened to me." This is a law of life. The fear of failure sets us up to fail. We tend to get out of life what we expect from it. Many people program themselves for failure by expecting it. Jesus said, "According to your faith it will be done unto you." Why would anyone unconsciously set himself or herself up for failure? Let me suggest a few reasons:

- **Fear of success.** Success means more responsibility and more problems. Success means some people are going to resent you because you're successful. It means some people are going to depend on you.
- **Guilt.** You may be thinking, "I don't deserve to succeed. I'll pay for my sin by being a failure in life." Guilt is often the root cause for a lack of confidence. That's why the starting point for being effective in ministry is receiving grace from God and offering grace to everyone around you.
- **Resentment.** Some people try to get even with people who have hurt them by failing. Kids do this when they don't get the love and attention they want from parents. They say, for example, "If I can't get affection from my family, then I'll get attention in some inappropriate way. I'll just fail and 'blow it' in school!"
- **A warped image of God.** I've met many people who think that God intends for them to fail in life. They believe all success is sinful. Of course, this is a twisted view of what we know about God from his Holy Word. Of course, real success is a far cry from what the world says it is. Success is not a matter of power, wealth, fame, or pleasure. Success is being what God meant you to be! Success is using the gifts God gave you and developing them to the fullest in order to serve others and bring glory to God. Jesus reserved his severest criticism for those people who did not use the talents given to them by God.

Wrong Responses to Failure

While you cannot control all the failures you will experience in life, you can control how you respond to them. That is your choice. Here are three common responses that are self-defeating. They only make matters worse.

Don't clam up! Don't internalize your hurt and anger. Whenever you swallow your emotions, your stomach keeps score. So don't hide your hurt. Let it out. Talk to God and to a good friend. What is past is past. It's over and it can't hurt you anymore unless you let it. Ask God for forgiveness, accept his forgiveness, forgive yourself, and carry on.

Don't blow up! Don't blame other people. Don't make excuses. Don't pass the buck. Whenever we realize we're failing in some area, it's easy to become frustrated and vent our anger on others, but it never solves anything.

Don't give up! Don't withdraw into a shell and become indifferent. You are never a failure until you quit – and it is always too soon to quit. Every situation in life will either make you bitter or better, and the only difference between bitter and better is the letter “I.” It's your choice.

The Right Response to Failure

How should I respond to the inevitable failures in my life? The Bible shows us the way:

Admit it. The Bible says, “A man who refuses to admit his mistakes can never be successful. But if he confesses and forsakes them, he gets another chance” (Proverbs 28:13 LB).

Learn from it. There are some lessons you can't learn any other way except by trial and error. Use failure to reevaluate your life. Ask yourself, “Am I on the right track?” Then get moving again. Even if you're on the right track, you'll be run over if you just sit there!

Listen to God. God speaks to us in our pain. Are you listening? Look at what you have left, not at what you have lost.

Realize that failure is never final. I love Proverbs 24:16 (NIV), “For though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises up again.” Even good guys stumble, but they get up and try again. You know that defeat is often the first step to ultimate victory. Pearl Harbor steeled the nation's resolve to win World War II.

Realize that God loves to take our greatest failures and turn them into our greatest strengths. God is still with you, and his love and purpose for your life remain unchanged. You are a trophy of God's grace!

As I wrote this article I was reminded of what God has done in the life of one of my staff pastors at Saddleback Church. John Baker was called to ministry at 16, but he ignored the call because he felt unworthy to serve God. Instead he went to college, joined a fraternity, and discovered alcohol. Later as an Air Force pilot, John learned how to abuse alcohol but still perform on the job. One technique was inhaling pure oxygen to cure his hangover. His abuse continued for more than two decades. He was a “functioning alcoholic,” a successful sales and marketing executive who never lost a job nor was ever arrested for drunken driving. But he did lose what was most important to him: his fellowship with the Lord, his family, and his health.

By the time John's wife, Cheryl, gave him an ultimatum, he had stopped going to church. She gave him a choice: counseling or separation. He chose separation. From every viewpoint, John's life was ending in failure. But during the separation, John did some serious reevaluating and his family began attending Saddleback Church. Eventually, they invited him to attend with them. He started listening to God. John recommitted his life to Christ, and then John and Cheryl renewed their wedding vows and joined our church.

Then God gave John the ministry vision to use his failures to help others. He started Celebrate Recovery, a Christ-centered, biblical recovery program for people struggling with all kinds of hurts, habits, and hang-ups. The program steps were based on a series I taught on the Beatitudes. Hundreds of people flocked to the program and began to receive help. The program grew so large that I invited John to join our church staff full-time. Now today, six years later, more than 2,500 people have been through Celebrate Recovery at Saddleback and 200 churches nationwide have adopted the program. John and Cheryl have celebrated their 28th wedding anniversary and serve together in ministry. And John, who ignored God's call as a teenager, is now our pastor of ministries overseeing 150 lay ministries at Saddleback.

God used John's failure, first to get his attention, and then to give him a ministry he was uniquely qualified to lead. If God worked that kind of miracle in John's life, what is he waiting to do in your life? What failure is he ready to turn into success if you will only admit your weakness, learn from it, listen to God, realize that no failure is final, and get up to start again?

When we recall the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are reminded that God specializes in turning crucifixions into resurrections! He takes those painful, ugly events of our lives and brings good out of them when we give him all the pieces. If you've been struggling with the memory of failure, let it go. Get up and get back in the race.

Hope Network Newsletter: I Will Come to You

Reflections on the Living Presence of a Risen Christ

by Lynn Anderson

January – February, 1998

“Tell me, doctor,” asked the despondent patient, “Is life really worth living?” “That,” replied the doctor, “depends on the liver.”

Not at all a new question. Inscribed on the tombstone of an ancient Roman are these words: “I was not. I was. I am not. I care not.” Is this to be the lot of us all? What do we do when hope dies?

At a conference a few years back, I spotted Bob leaning against the wall, alone, though in a crowded room, staring at the floor, his eyes as vacant as last year’s bird’s nest. When I asked what was wrong, it seemed as though it took Bob five minutes to drag his eyes up from the floor till they met mine. Then he spoke for a lot of us, “Lynn, I have lost my dream. What do you do without a dream?”

One Sunday morning, not long after, my good friend Mike steered me to a quiet corner. Then choked out the word that last Friday, at 45 years of age, he had been handed his pink slip. Fired from an executive position in a corporation he served well for over 20 years. “What do you do on Monday when your dreams die on Friday?”

Sometimes it seems that dreams are dying all around us and hope drains out of every pore.

A business we poured everything into for years finally goes south.

A career that claimed the best years of our lives stalls.

The pink slip wipes out a lifetime of security.

A loved one dies, or leaves.

A love affair that filled tomorrow with flavor dies, and it hurts terribly, even when it may be a relationship that needed to be killed.

A mate, who meant more than life, turns cold, then walks out of your life.

The marriage is over, but the remains won’t stay buried.

Or marriage never materialized to begin with. Alone.

What does my heart do when I stand alone in the darkness? With no dreams. And no hope.

It was dark that morning when a few of his best friends headed for his tomb. Insufferably dark. Dark with several kinds of darkness, not merely the physical absence of light. They stood in the abysmal blackness some call “the dark night of the soul.”

Of course, they grieved at the grave of a friend. But their grief ran even deeper than the loss of a loved one. Their very cause for living had died with him. And with it hope died too. From all appearances, their long awaited messiah, for whom they had left everything and burned all bridges, was really no messiah at all. Yes, a beloved friend – but now a dead and self-deluded fool – at best. At worst a betrayer of their deepest affections.

Dawn brought with it daylight. But the darkness that had settled over his devastated friends still persisted.

For me, dawn is a symbol of hope, a new day, a new beginning. This morning, in the gray light just before sun-up I was running down a country road. Between strides I kept glancing to the east as the sky slowly turned soft purple, then pink – and finally a ball of fire burst over the horizon, shooting its arrows of gold at the heart of the darkness.

I stopped running. I tell you. I stopped running and shouted at the dawn. Shouted at the top of my lungs in the soft golden light of the rising sun. Dawn! Hope! Yesterday’s mistakes, the haunting shadows of the night – all flooded out by blinding light – a day of new beginnings.

But dawn did not help the friends of Jesus huddled around his burial place. On the contrary, it only brought to light another day of hopelessness. Dawn seemed actually their enemy that day. At least while it was still dark, a person could imagine – and hope – and not be forced to face the devastating facts. But dawn lit the way to see a tomorrow they could scarcely bear to face. Dawn only led on toward Monday. “And what do you do on Monday, when your dreams die on Friday?” Tell me. Did this morning’s rising sun mean something like this for you?

Nevertheless dawn came. And brought them the surprise of the ages. The rising sun proved anything but enemy. Actually it symbolically lit the way for his friends to see a larger dawning. A bright and glorious dawning. They saw emptiness, yes. But even the word empty totally reversed meanings. The sun’s first rays, like probing fingers, explored the cracks and crannies of his tomb – and found it empty. The tomb was empty!

And the emptiness meant He was alive.

He was not a misguided, dead fool after all.

And for sure, no betrayer who brought dreams crashing down.

[The Dream Is Still Alive](#)

His life went on. Dawn did not show that huddled circle of friends the emptiness of tragic endings and broken dreams. No. Oh, no. Never. Sunrise signaled a day of new beginning.

The dream was still alive – is still alive – in ways that can never be killed.

Their friend still lived. Still lives.

And he continues as a friend still. Not just at Mary's house for an hour. Or on the road for a day, for the few who happened to be near. Our friend is alive. At all places. In all times. For all people. With hope and dreams. For all who seek relationship with him. Always alive!

Yes, of course that tiny band of folks gathered at the tomb that long ago morning could scarcely bear to face tomorrow without him. Nor can I. Nor you. Nor need we.

He is alive. If that is not true, nothing else matters. I have always been prone to depression. Maybe you too. And some mornings we have struggled to think of some good reason to get up and face the day.

But then Jesus makes us smile. And laugh. And shout.

So early in the morning, at dawn I shouted and laughed – at the top of my lungs for a day of new beginnings. Do you feel what this means?

He is really still alive. And he promised: "I will never leave you or forsake you." "I will not leave you orphans." "I will come to you." "Lo, I *am with you.*"

Life is Worth the Living

These are not mere religious facts to tuck away in our brain files. This is present reality. He is here – always. Invisible, yes. In another dimension, yes. But:

Never out of touch. Never deaf to our cries. Never out of reach. Never pre-occupied.

Which means I can have a relationship with him – and that is all in life that really matters. Otherwise, why face tomorrow? Without him, is life really worth the living? But with him I can face tomorrow and life is worth the living, just because he lives.

So listen – we live in the day of his resurrection. And resurrection is a day of new beginnings. The dark past can be totally dispelled, like night shadows vanish under the fresh light of dawn. Did your business go down this month? Jesus would inquire, "Who are you, a business person? Or a person? I came alive to say you are a person. And precious to me!" "You really do matter to me. And I can turn this dark night of failure into the dawning of great opportunity. To begin again." Not necessarily to begin a new business. But a new way of looking at tomorrow. And failure. And success. And dreams.

Your marriage has been hell, for years now. Especially lately, since the affair. Trust seems destroyed. Anger rules the days and the nights. Communication means fighting. Silence does too. But He is alive to say, "You can be forgiven." "Your emotions can heal." "And your marriage. You can feel alive. And begin again. New."

To give love, not demand it. To bring Joy, not consume it. To become a student of your mate's needs, not of his or her faults. To forgive, not remind. To hope rather than resent. Even to surrender, not win. To rekindle love. Even romance. And dreams. He is alive.

God. Church. Prayer. Bible. Faith. They all seem so far away and so long ago. Time has moved like lightning, and I've been away for years now. Life seems mostly about using up the time between now and the day of my funeral. Staying too busy to hush the noisy voices asking questions of my soul. What is hope? The one who is alive forever says the gift of new life is offered fresh every morning.

New Life is Still Available

You can decide to accept that gift today. And come home. Back to full spiritual vitality. Come home to God. Back home to Bible, church, prayers. And hope. Why couldn't I? Why didn't I resist? I don't like where I am going. But bright lights. Then dim lights. Alluring perfume. Sweet wine. Clouded judgment and at least the fleeting feeling of life. Of loving. Of being loved. But I cannot stand the way I live. The way I feel. Going nowhere. But I have sinned so deeply, so shamefully. Again, and again and again ... and

New life came out of the grave and is still available on this day of new beginnings. You can be forgiven. Completely. In one instant. And find the loving arms of Christian brothers and sisters around you. You can feel clean again, and alive and loved, really loved ... again and again and again and again on this day of beginning again.

Divorced. The judge said the word you always hated. Believed it would never happen to you. But it did. And you really didn't want it. And it is ten times the hell you imagined it would be back when you saw it through the eyes of a married person. Now it seems like life is over. And that part of life – that center of life is over. It is gone. The marriage is dead. But the mate is still alive. The funeral past. But the corpse still walks around.

But Jesus lives and life is not finished. He came alive to let you start over. Not necessarily with a new marriage. But with a new center for your life. A real intimate companionship with a living, eternal friend, who said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." No, I never married. I'm single. No, of course I don't want to be. But the years zipped by, and no real opportunities came my way. Oh, people came. But not the kind to spend my life with.

Now, frankly, some days I wish I'd not been so particular. Maybe a mate less than I hoped for would be better than no mate at all. Married friends say, "No mate is ever all we would have dreamed, anyway." But they don't know what I feel. Life is stalled out. I feel partial. No children. Or grandchildren. I have too many years ahead, and no one to really share my life with. Has life passed me by? Why me? Why not someone who does not want these things? I feel dead already – but won't get my funeral for decades.

You Need Never Be Alone

Jesus. Jesus said, “I was dead and I am alive forever more.” “Life is in me. Be willing to leave husband, wife, children – for me. Be satisfied with me alone, and then you will find deep satisfaction.” He is alive and whispering, “I too knew singleness. But I also knew the zest and flavor of my life in the father’s loving will. Today is a day of new beginnings. Not necessarily with a mate. Or even a fiancée, but a new way of looking at personhood and at fulfillment.

“The circumstances of your life may not seem very satisfactory. But I long to be your companion now. My other friends and I will surround you. Always. Even into old age. You need never be alone in my world of new beginnings.”

Unemployed. For the first time in my life, without work. I can’t believe it. Always worked hard. Been honest, loyal. Paid my dues. Everyone said that would pay off. But it hasn’t. Who would have predicted such an economy in my county. So few jobs even for the young and trained, let alone for those past mid-life. Who will hire someone my age in today’s aggressive and competitive marketplace. What will I do? Where will I turn? It looks like the end. And it may be. Could be the end of the kind of life to which I have grown accustomed.

But Jesus is alive in this day of new beginnings. To be our friend. And give us tasks. And to provide. And Jesus has friends all over the world who have never had as much to live on as I do, even when I am without work. In Africa, India, Latin America, Siberia ... Thousands of believers live each day from hand to mouth. And many days the mouth finds nothing in the hand. Yet they live, not like the last day, but like the first day of the rest of their lives.”

Because he is not dead. he is alive and he is present and he awaits conversation with you and wants to give abundant life. To teach a new way of looking at things or the lack thereof. At real life which, says he, “has nothing to do with employment.” “Your life,” he reassures, “is not about the abundance of things possessed. Consider the lilies of the field. He cares for them. Yet, they are unemployed.

Now is a day of beginning again. Yes, often searching for useful work to earn our bread. And to pay the expenses of being a Christian. It is also a day to begin a savings account – in heaven. To begin allowing my helplessness, penniless-ness and poverty become opportunities to put my trust in Him, and to find my joy and satisfaction in him and in His people and in his work and in his presence.

Chasing Dreams

Religion has never been a big deal. For me it was not bad. Only irrelevant. I was challenged by my career. Building up my business. Making money. Enjoying my position. Comfort. Travel. Good food and wine. Chasing dreams. I had friends in high places. And expensive toys. And a prestigious address. Fine clothes. And ... Now I have all those. My whole life has been geared to my goals. Expansion. Achievement. Upward mobility. And now, I have what I had dreamed of, and more. And still reaching

But my life is not better now. And I am no different. Oh yes, I have grown more sophisticated, more cynical. My values and appetites have shifted. And grown. Yet inside – inside I am no different, except maybe less happy. Less fulfilled. In fact, I can't seem to find any lasting satisfaction in my relentless pursuits. I am growing older, and more tired. And I can see the day my family will be grown and gone. And my energy. Maybe tomorrow or the next day. Then what? Mostly, I have lost my dreams. How does a person recover a dream? How do you face life without one? How do you begin again? Of what stuff are dreams built, anyway?

The living Jesus said that life is not meant to gradually grind down and then stop. "I came," he promised, "that you might have life, and have it more abundantly. Lots of life. Full of life. Long or short." "I am alive," he said, "and because I live, you will live also."

Jesus wasn't talking about a new business pursuit, a new hobby, a new commodity or a new career opportunity or a new mate or a new romance or a new energy or a new

He spoke of beginning again from a new perspective. Of finding meaning in service. Joy in relationships. Purpose in giving. Seeking the kingdom first. Forever in God's will.

Begin the Adventure

Oh yes, this day is another day of new beginnings. He invites you and me to begin the adventure of exploring our own minds and hearts, and the heart and mind of God. And the surprises he has in store around the next bend in the road. He beckons us to live several cuts above the culture. He leads on into a joint purpose with him and into a relationship that never dims, but only gets richer with time. And fuller. That becomes "an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade." Not today. Not tomorrow. Not in this world. Nor in the next. They stood in the dark before dawn. Me too. And you. Dark. Without hopeful feelings. With no dreams. Is life worth living? And then

I study and write in a room where I watch birds return. I listen as they sing bright notes, new each new morning. I see pale green leaves pop on awakening limbs, growing larger and more rich-hued each day. Explodes from the sod. A carpet of green. Then bluebonnets, roses, lilies. Swaying in the spring breezes. New life.

He is alive. He is the unseen life-force that fills my world with color and music and surrounds me with the motion of grass growing, birds, flying, breezes stirring. He is here. Alive. And he quietly, powerfully, always at work within me, is well. And within you. And with his presence comes new life. A glad day of new beginnings. Every morning. So we can face all tomorrows – and relish them. Life is worth the living. Just because he lives.

AfterGlow: Whither Resurrection Reality

by Phillip Morrison

January – February, 1998

Shortly after this Easter issue of *Wineskins* appears, the resurrection of Jesus will be the subject of intense interest on the campus of Iowa State University in Ames. On April 8 and 9, 1998, Dr. Rubel Shelly and Dr. Hector Avalos will meet in the Great Hall on the Iowat State campus to debate the question of Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

Avalos is assistant professor of religious studies at Iowa State and executive director of the Committee for the Scientific Examination of Religion. Avalos grew up in northern Mexico where he was a child preacher and faith healer. he later earned his master's degree from Harvard Divinity School and doctoral degree from harvard's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. Avalos has contributed scholarly articles to numerous publications, including the *Oxford Companion to the Bible*.

Shelly is preaching minister for the Woodmont Hills Church of Christ in Nashville and co-editor of *Wineskins* magazine. After earning his undergraduate degree at Harding University, he earned two master's degrees at Harding Graduate School of Religion. He then earned a master's in philosophy at Vanderbilt University and a doctoral degree at Vanderbilt with a major in philosophy and a minor in religious studies. In addition to his church work, Shelly has taught in several colleges and universities and authored numerous books and articles.

This debate on the resurrection of Jesus was arranged after an officer in the local chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union had a letter to the editor published in the Davenport, Iowa *Quad-Cities Times* claiming that there were no eyewitnesses to jesus' ministry and resurrection. Replies from believers were also published, in which the resurrection was affirmed. Then a letter from Dr. Avalos was published, and he later suggested that a more formal exchange be conducted. Tim Hall, minister for the Central Church of Christ in Davenport, contacted Dr. Shelly, and, after lengthy negotiations, the debate was scheduled.

On the first night of the debate, Rubel Shelly will affirm that "The best historical evidence supports the view that Jesus of Nazareth was raised from the dead in space-time history as reported in the New Testament." Avalos will deny that proposition.

On the second night, Hector Avalos will affirm that "The best historical evidence and methods support the view that reports of the resurrection of Jesus in the New Testament probably do not reflect an actual event in normal space-time history," and Shelly will deny.

The format each evening will feature an affirmative construction, a negative response, an affirmative rejoinder, a negative rejoinder, an affirmative summation, and a negative summation. Agreement between the participants allows for the distribution of audio and video recordings as well as a print version of the debate. Information about how to obtain these materials will appear in *Wineskins* and other places.

This discussion will not make questions about the resurrection go away. There will always be believers and there will always be doubters. As Christians, we believe that the Christian life is the best way to live here, and the promise of being raised to live with God forever is an additional blessing. It is fitting that this debate will take place just a few days before the Christian world celebrates Easter, 1998.