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Death is Over

Rubel Shelly

November – December, 1999

“And death? Where is it?” He searched for his accustomed fear of death and could not find it. Where was death? What death? There was no fear because there was no death. Instead of death there was light. “So that’s it!” he exclaimed. “What bliss.” All this happened in a single moment, but the significance of that moment was lasting. For those present, his agony continued for another two hours. Something rattled in his chest; his emaciated body twitched. Then the rattling and wheezing gradually diminished. “It is all over,” said someone standing beside him. He heard these words and repeated them in his soul. “Death is over,” he said to himself. “There is no more death.” He drew in a breath, broke off in the middle of it, stretched himself out, and died.

-Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*

Along with my mother and two brothers, I sat with my father as he died. I was holding his hand and monitoring his pulse. His heart gave one last, definitive beat – a giant beat against the slight ones of the last hour or two. We looked at each other through tearful eyes and affirmed that a victory had taken place. “My daddy has seen angels now!” was my first thought.

Only a week to ten days earlier, my father had told me, “I’ll miss mother and you boys, but everything I have to look forward to now is on the other side.” He was right. Pancreatic cancer shows no mercy. God does.

Now my brothers and I are standing by helplessly as our mother is being taken away by Alzheimer’s Disease. It is more cruel than cancer in some ways, for it leaves a physical shell that functions without intention or awareness. As I write these lines, she has not recognized me for fully five months.

By the time you read these lines early in the year 2000, perhaps she will have died. Oh, I hope she will have died – and pray every night now for her not to wake up the following day. She cannot be helped by medicine or tender care. Only God can heal her, and her healing requires that she die and go to be with him. As with our father, the three children who will likely survive her (though life for anyone is fragile!) will grieve – but not as those who do not have hope.

We believe, you see, that death is over. It is not a terror. It cannot have the last word. Is there something inherent to the human heart that tells us there is life beyond mortal flesh, disease, and the grave? Perhaps an “eschatological impulse”? Maybe.

But the proof of immortality is not in our desire to believe it or in some proclivity to believe in it. After all, my desire to believe that I have \$10 million on deposit in my bank account does not make my check good. Even a penchant for thinking it so based on poor data or careless reasoning adds nothing to my account.

Whatever else you have heard about the good or evil of post-modernism, it is a distancing from what we call “modernity.” Modernity assumed that we humans were masters of our own fate and that we could rely on science and technology to teach us the source, meaning, and right conduct of human life. Reason would triumph! Postmodernism embraces a humility far more appropriate to our true place in the cosmos. We are not sovereign and reason is not ultimate. Our arrogance has not only failed to define our essential humanity but has frequently demeaned it.

Postmodernism says that whatever is most essentially human about our identities lies outside ourselves. So people are unabashedly on a spiritual quest in this generation. And strong affirmations of faith that are grounded in history and capable of reaching into eternity with confidence will receive a hearing by this generation.

The reason I know death is finished is that Jesus Christ died, was buried, and was raised up on a Sunday morning – on or about April 9 in the year A.D. 30. He appeared to Simon Peter, then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than 500 persons at one time. And there were other witnesses as well.

It was not wishful thinking, mere eschatological impulse, or delusion. It was history. It was Easter. And it is the basis for all our hope for victory over death, addictions, debilitating pain, and whatever else would make us hopeless.

Easter is a fact that can only be traced to supernatural activity. It is the fact that defines all else in time and eternity.

Because Jesus is alive, the darkness has yielded to the light. There is no more death. Death, thank God, is over!

Dead or Alive: It Makes a Big Difference

Mike Cope

November – December, 1999

“It makes a big difference whether we think someone is dead or alive,” writes Luke Timothy Johnson in his new book, *Living Jesus: Learning the Heart of the Gospel*. “The most important question concerning Jesus, then, is simply this: Do we think he is dead or alive?”

Johnson is right. It’s that simple. What we believe about that question makes all the difference in the world.

Growing up I always knew the sermon on Easter morning was going to be a warning against celebrating Easter. While I don’t agree with that conclusion, I have a growing respect for the main reason that was usually given: that we should be celebrating the resurrection of Christ every day of the year. For if Jesus is dead, then our faith and our lives are in vain (I Corinthians 15:17).

Having said that, however, I now appreciate the wisdom of the people of God through the years as they have celebrated the resurrection of Jesus on the first Sunday after Passover — the day he was actually raised by his Father from the grave.

This is the sixth year that we’ll gather at a West Texas cemetery early on Easter morning. The “We” is my wife and I, our two sons, and friends who helped care for our daughter as she was dying in 1994.

We’ll do what we always do: tell a few stories about Megan and how she impacted our lives, read I Corinthians 15, listen to Sandi Patty’s “Was It a Morning Like This?” and pray. Then we’ll join our church family at Highland to remember that Jesus is our living Lord who is present among us through the Spirit and who is coming again.

Our family desperately needs Easter this year. We need the hope it so boldly proclaims. For as Diane and I go to our daughter’s cemetery in West Texas, my brother and his wife will be going to a grave in Southwest Missouri where their son, Jantsen Barrett Cope, was buried last summer after he died suddenly at the age of fifteen of a heart malfunction.

No one could have imagined it ... not when my little brother stood next to me as my best man ... not when I stood before him to perform his wedding ceremony ... certainly not when we shared a room together growing up in Missouri. No one could have imagined that we would be united in grief like this.

He sent me a note recently that said: “Some folks want to be buried with a special piece of jewelry or some other memento that meant something to them. I want to be buried with a fattened calf.” I understood immediately. The father in Luke 15 killed the fattened calf because

he was overwhelmed with joy to see his son again. He wanted me to know that when he dies, he'll be celebrating to see Jantsen again.

I wish there was some way to shield people I love from grief and loss. But there just isn't. As Joy Gresham says to C.S. Lewis in *Shadowlands*, "The pain is part of the happiness. That's the deal."

And the death of a child, while traumatic, certainly isn't the only kind of loss people in the community of faith suffer. We experience the loss of youth, the loss of love, the loss of dreams, the loss of health, and the loss of relationships. We grieve for mothers who have miscarried and for marriages that have failed; for people who have lost their jobs and for teens who have lost their bearings.

But thanks to the resurrection of Jesus, we can search for meaning in the midst of our losses. We relearn how to be in the world. We reinterpret our personal stories, taking into account the losses we've suffered. Ironically, these very losses often make life (and what matters in life!) much clearer. David Wolpe is right on target when he writes:

My deepest prayer to God used to be to spare me from the pains of life that I so dreaded. Now I see that that is the prayer of a child. As a man I do not pray for a life without pain. Instead I pray: "Dear God, I know that there will be pain in my life, and sadness, and loss. Please give me the strength to create a life, together with those whom I love, where loss will not be empty, where pain will not be purposeless. Help me find the faith to make loss matter. Amen."

In our losses, we cry, lament, groan, question, and wait. But there's one thing we won't do: despair. For we live in hope. We are the people of Easter: those who have already believed in and experienced the Resurrected One. We long for his power to be completely manifest and for every tear to be wiped away. So we pray, "Marana Tha ... Come, O Lord."

Power, Patriarchy and Abusive Marriages – Part 1

Cynthia Ezell

November – December, 1999

(A licensed marriage and family therapist at the Center for the Family, Cynthia is chair of the Nashville Psychotherapy Institute. A certified Imago Relationship Therapist, she authors a monthly column on parenting in Nashville Parenting *magazine*. Her specialties include treatment of depression and eating disorders and marital therapy. This article and the one to follow are her contribution to *Healing the Hurting: Giving Hope & Help to Abused Women*, edited by Catherine Clark Kroeger and James R. Beck (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998).

A young pastor receives into his office for a counseling session an attractive young woman from his congregation. She is married to a man who also attends this pastor's church. The young woman has bruises on her face and on her arm, but the young pastor decides not to mention them for fear of embarrassing her. He waits for her to tell him that her husband caused the bruises. He asks her, "Why did he hit you? Is he jealous?" He then counsels the young woman to curtail her social and career activities so as not to give her husband an opportunity to become jealous. He suggests that she try to praise her husband more frequently so that he will feel more confident that she loves and admires him (Wicks, Parsons & Capps, 1985).

This story reflects both the theology and the sex-role beliefs of the pastor. This is not an extreme example. Another account of a similar counseling session is presented by Carole R. Bohn: "While our children were still small and I was being battered, I went to our pastor for counseling. I realized that he meant well, but he laid a heavier burden of guilt on me. His advice was to 'pray harder, have more faith, and be grateful for your six fine children' " (1989, p. 107).

Both of these stories highlight some of the elements that make patriarchal thinking so dangerous for women, especially married women. In the first story, the pastor hesitates to name the abuse, and then, in his ignorance, he looks to the woman to provide an answer as to why the abuse occurred. In neither story did the pastor address the woman's safety. Both women were expected to control the abuse by being more attentive and subservient and by taking responsibility for the abuse. Patriarchal beliefs about marital relationships make women vulnerable to abuse and powerless to protect themselves once abuse occurs.

This chapter will explore the ways, both subtle and overt, that patriarchal attitudes founded in religious beliefs contribute to the abuse and subjugation of women within marital relationships.

A brief look at the history of religious ideology concerning the place of women in families will shed light on the foundations of patriarchal sex-role beliefs. Factors that contribute to the victimization of women that are maintained by patriarchal beliefs will be discussed, and alternate ways of relating and an egalitarian model for marriage will be suggested. Implications for therapists, ministers, and lay counselors will also be discussed.

The Burden of Inequality

In 1980, a United Nations report cited the burden of inequality for women. While women make up half the world's population, they do two-thirds of the world's work, earn one-tenth of the world's income, and own one-hundredth of the world's property. Despite the fall of repressive governments and the growing representation by women in corporations, the 1993 United Nations Human Development Report found that in no country are women treated as well as men. In spite of the progress of democracy worldwide, the UN still reports a "global epidemic of violence against women" (MacFarquhar, Seter, Lawrence, Knight & Schrof, 1994, p. 44).

Over the last twenty years, the feminist movement has dramatically influenced sex roles for men and women in America. While feminist ideology has certainly made an impact on women in the context of family and church, its effects have been muted by traditional religious teaching. Religious teachings that support the primacy of males, still a dominant thread in the fabric of our society, are woven into the beliefs we have about marital relationships. At their worst, such teachings have served not only to keep women silent but also to keep them vulnerable. A survey of third world women's groups conducted in the 1980s found violence to be the chief concern for women. Feminists are beginning to realize that addressing abortion rights is less important to the average woman than the issue of violence against women ...

For Christian women, the influence of religion in defining their role in the family has not been a positive one. Several authors discuss the fact that adherence to traditional religious beliefs about sex roles contributes to the depression, suppression, and victimization of women in families (Neuger, 1993; Shupe, Stacey & Hazlewood, 1987; Stoudenmire, 1976).

The term patriarchy has been defined as a type of social organization in which the father is the head of the family. The husband is the final authority, and wives and children are legally dependent upon him (Russell, 1990; Suassy, 1991). Patriarchy has also been described as a social system of male domination structured by racism, sexism, classism, and colonialism (Freedman, 1993). One of the tasks of feminism has been to point out the ways that patriarchy permeates our culture and limits the options of women in defining themselves and their roles. When religious teachings support and even prescribe those patriarchal beliefs, then those beliefs can be even more limiting for women and their partners.

History of Patriarchy

The interplay of religion, myth, and tradition in shaping our cultural beliefs about men and women is complicated (Lerner, 1986). Separating religion from culture is impossible. Admittedly, the biblical texts that are used either to support or to refute asymmetrical sex roles are bound up in the culture of that time. The exclusion of women from certain roles in ancient Israel cannot be equated with the exclusion of women from those roles in our society. Taking those ancient injunctions, lifting them out of their time-bound culture, and applying them to present-day marriage roles is risky and ridiculous. The church, however, has traditionally used the biblical text to serve and support its purposes, whether political or religious. The church fathers have used the biblical text to maintain a hierarchical model of marriage where in woman is subservient to man.

The writings of Irenaeus, Tertullian, Augustine, Jerome, Thomas Aquinas, and Martin Luther provide us with information regarding the sources of Christian misogyny (Farley, 1976). “Hopelessly entangled in the sources for Christian misogyny are not only myths of the Fall and Hellenistic dualisms, but also ancient blood taboos and Hebrew connections between nakedness and shame. The notion of woman became theoretically entrenched in theologies of original sin” (1976, p. 165). M. Farley cites these two briefly mentioned sources of sexual inequality in Christian thought: the concept of woman as responsible for sin entering the world and the concept that the fullness of the image of God is found only in males. She states that “neither line of thought is finally compatible with assertions of sexual equality.” Both lines of thought “lead irresistibly to conclusions regarding role definitions that exclude both women and men from important opportunities for reciprocity in a shared Christian life” (p. 165).

One important interface between religion and culture is found in the observance of religious rituals. Rituals are one of humanity’s ways of making and expressing meaning and transmitting those meanings and values through generations (Neville, 1974). Women experience and learn the roles they are to take through community interactions and socially prescribed rituals. Every worship service, Sabbath, or Mass is a mini-ritual reenacted weekly; this ritual confirms to all that women are to be passive, separated, and silent because they are not allowed to pass out the sacraments, lead in prayers, or have contact with the holy vessels.

In contrast to the male-only rituals that permeate much of religious practice, Christianity brought with it the inclusive ritual of baptism. With this ritual, which was available both to men and women, a door was opened for new patterns of relationship. In spite of such texts as 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 3:28, the patriarchal forces of society and the need of males to dominate led to entrenchment in the familiar pattern of seeing man as made in God’s image and seeing woman as made of something other.

Many of the social and religious teachings of Jesus reflect a mindset that was remarkably egalitarian. Jesus stood against the patriarchal leadership of his day and modeled a new way of relating (Bohn, 1989). The New Testament church in some places afforded women more opportunities for leadership than many present-day churches do. There were prophetesses and woman church leaders such as Lydia. The church, however, became more patriarchal as it aged.

Some feminist exegetes want to liberate the Scripture from its patriarchal bias. Some believe the text is irreparable and have serious questions about canon and the extent of biblical authority. Others suggest an acceptance of the text as patriarchal but are willing to overlook that bias in an effort to extract the larger truths. “Christian feminist apologetics asserts that the Bible, correctly understood, does not prohibit but authorizes equal rights” (Fiorenza, 1993, p. 789). Feminist theology is concerned with naming the patriarchal structures of the past and finding new ways of applying and interpreting Scripture that affirm the equality of all persons.

Religious tradition and teachings are relied upon to provide the basis for social structures and laws. In the same way, religious traditions are called upon to provide justification for existing social norms. Bohn refers to this phenomenon as the “chicken-and-egg nature of a theology of ownership” (1989, p. 105). The first laws enacted to regulate family and property issues were

based on the accepted social norms of the time. Often religious teachings and traditions were cited as the basis for those laws.

In Roman law, a woman was considered to be the property of the man on whom she was financially dependent — whether father, husband, or brother-in-law. In the Islamic faith, a husband had, and to some degree still has, almost total control of his wife's activities. In the Middle Ages, a wife who refused to obey her husband or who was considered unruly in a social sense could be flogged, chained, or publicly punished for her disobedience (Hauser, 1982). Marriage laws in western precapitalist Europe maintained a husband's right to batter his wife. The legal and moral codes of the day recognized the family as the domain of the husband. Christian religious tradition provided ideological reinforcement for the continuation of such practices. In England, a husband's absolute power over his wife was abolished in 1829 (Schechter, 1982), but she still could not have real legal and social autonomy. As late as 1874, police in North Carolina who investigated domestic disputes were told not to interfere in a husband's battering of his wife unless the wife was critically injured as a result (Hauser, 1982). Richard J. Gelles and C.P. Cornell (1985) report that in fairly recent history many local criminal justice systems followed an informal "stitch rule," by which a woman could not have her husband arrested for assault unless she was injured severely enough to require a certain number of stitches.

American social norms are the product of the melting pot of immigration. Each ethnic group that immigrated to America brought with it a blend of culturally and religiously-based sex-role expectations and practices. The patriarchal social and relationship norms that we struggle with result from this great stew of cultural and religious beliefs. Historically, marriage has not been a place of equality for women. Often it has not been a place of safety. The patriarchal forms of relationship between men and women have contributed to making marriage a place of violence for many women.

Marital Violence

Marital violence is so serious a problem that it [was] addressed in a significant way by the crime bill proposed by the White House (1994). This bill included \$610 million in expenditures to prevent spousal violence, \$900 million in expenditures to address crimes against women, \$30 million to combat rural domestic violence, and \$600,000 to help educate judges in how to handle gender crimes (Klein, 1994).

Violence in families is underreported. Some couples experience violence on such a regular basis that it becomes a normative experience, hardly worthy of complaint. Generally, the more intimate the victim, the less seriously people consider the assault. This is especially true in the case of marital sexual assault (Finkelhor, 1983). More severe forms of family violence carry social shame and a greater threat that outside forces will move in to disrupt the family, so authorities do not always see the real extent of violence (Straus, 1977-78).

Murray A. Straus's landmark study on marital violence was conducted with two thousand couples who were chosen in such a way that they were representative of American couples. He used a Conflict Resolution Techniques (CRT) scale to see how couples settle conflicts between

themselves. Found within the CRT scale is a Physical Violence Index that contains items defining the behaviors considered abusive: throwing things at someone; pushing, shoving, and grabbing; slapping; kicking, biting, hitting with an object; hitting spouse with an object; threatening spouse with a knife or gun; assaulting spouse with a knife or gun; (Straus, 1977-78).

Studies show that couples reporting physical violence report a median of 2.4 serious assaults per year (Hampton & Coner-Edwards, 1993; Straus, 1977-78). A survey made of admissions at a Yale emergency room during one month showed that 3.4 percent of the women entering for treatment had been injured by their partners. Because incidents of battering are underreported, the actual number was estimated to be as much as ten times higher (Hillard, 1988).

Some of the most significant factors in creating a marital climate in which spousal abuse is likely are provided by Straus (1977-78): social isolation; lower opportunities for employment for women; socialization of women for subordinate roles in marriage; use of violence as a legitimate resource to maintain power; poverty; assumption that the wife is responsible for the success of the marriage and the care of the children; abuse of alcohol.

Violence occurs in families at all socioeconomic levels. Researchers have repeatedly found violent families to be characterized by high levels of social isolation, rigid sex-role stereotyping, poor communication, and extreme inequalities in the distribution of power (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). Unequal social power and sex-role socialization cause many of the problems women face, especially emotional, sexual, and physical abuse (Enns, 1988).

Marital violence often results from the husband's attempt to use physical force to gain control of his wife and her behavior. Husbands are also the victims of physical violence, but because women are usually not as strong as men, the potential for physical harm to men is greatly reduced. Studies suggest that when women batter, it is in self-defense not in an attempt to use physical force to gain power (Rosenbaum & O'Leary, 1981). Evidence shows that the risk of violence in marriage is greater when all the decision making is in the hands of one partner. Violent husbands report that they "need" to hit their wives to show them who is in charge (Gelles & Straus, 1988). "It only takes one such beating to fix the balance of power in a family for many years – or perhaps for a lifetime" (Straus, 1977-78, p. 446).

Most battering incidents between married couples follow a predictable pattern with three phases. In the first phase there is a buildup of tension: the beginning of an argument or the accumulation of alcohol and its effects on the batterer. The second phase is the acute phase, in which the actual emotional and physical assault takes place. The last stage is the stage of loving contrition, wherein the batterer becomes profusely apologetic and begs for forgiveness. Often the woman nurtures the illusion that this will be the last time her husband hits her. She may begin making downward comparisons in this stage to convince herself that the relationship is really not that bad (Walker, 1987).

The Battered Wife

Students and researchers of marital abuse have tried to delineate the personality characteristics of women who remain in battering relationships. This concern with finding the differences between

battered and nonbattered women obscures the issues of power and control that are at the heart of marital abuse. Studies suggesting that battered women are different from women who are not battered are “methodologically indefensible” since much of the literature on spouse abuse is sexist and rife with misogyny (Wardell, Gillespie, & Leffler, 1982, p. 71). Research repudiates the myth that women who are battered are masochistic and feel they deserve it, or that they set themselves up. Women stay in abusive relationships because they have few viable options. They often feel that it is safer to stay than it is to leave (Walker, 1987)

Several authors conducted extensive research to find out how and why women stay with abusive men (Herbert, Silver & Ellard, 1991). They found that women who stay in these marriages are able to make downward comparisons that reframe the relationships in a more positive light. They are able to form and maintain the illusion that the marriage is better than it really is by saying to themselves, “Well, at least he doesn’t drink,” or “At least he doesn’t hit the kids or run around on me.” The greater the verbal abuse, the less able these women were to frame the relationship in a positive light. The psychological damage done by verbal abuse may be ultimately more damaging than the physical abuse (Strube & Barbour, 1984). The ability of these women who were being beaten to deny their own suffering and frame the relationship as better than it is, points to what Valerie Saiving (1979) calls the sins of women. She says the sins of women are rarely about excessive pride or overt abuses of power but are more likely to be sins against the self and others born out of a self-destructive tolerance and self-sacrifice.

The Battering Husband

In a study of men involved in a treatment program for male batterers, researchers developed a profile of men who are violent toward women (Adams, 1989). The violent and controlling behaviors included in the profile range from physical force and violence to frequent, demeaning criticism, possessiveness, restrictiveness, and emotional withholding. Men who physically or sexually abuse their wives typically believe in male superiority over females; believe in traditional sex roles for men and women; either see women as weak, or idealize women; expect women to be caretakers; are intolerant of women’s anger; project responsibility for their own feelings; see their wives as extensions of themselves; have relationships with other men that are superficial and limited; are interested in looking strong to other men.

Men may resort to violence in response to perceived powerlessness (Hampton & Coner-Edwards, 1993). If a man believes he is supposed to be superior to his wife but he makes less money or is not as intelligent as his wife, he may believe that his physical advantages of size, weight, and strength are the most effective ways of letting her know that he is still in control. Unemployed men are twice as likely to batter their wives as men who are employed. Men who have less status in their jobs than their wives have are more likely to batter their wives (Gelles & Cornell, 1985). Men who abuse alcohol are more likely to commit spousal abuse than men who do not drink. In fact, the abuse of alcohol is the most significant factor in marital abuse (Straus & Sweet, 1990). Abuse of alcohol provides a man with an excuse for his behavior, allowing him to displace responsibility for battering his wife.

Men who batter use various defenses to justify their behavior (Adams, 1989): they minimize the seriousness of their violence; they claim their intentions were good (“I just wanted her to

listen.”); they blame the abuse on the fact that they were drinking and therefore not responsible; they claim loss of control; they blame their wives for provoking them.

Greenblat (1983) examines the argument about loss of control that batterers so often use to explain their behavior. She asserts that most people who act violently have on some level at first reflected on the likelihood that they will suffer negative consequences as a result of their behavior. If a man believes that the chances of his being arrested or of his wife leaving him as a result of the abuse are low, then he is less likely to make the judgments necessary to prevent him from acting out his feelings of rage. The rewards of battering her into submission may outweigh the possible costs. “An individual will attempt to obtain a desired outcome or reward at a minimum cost. If a man lacks legitimate power, he can use violence as low cost alternative” (Hauser, 1982, p. 23). The husband who has other resources for validating his superior position over his wife is not likely to use violence (Hauser, 1982). Inherent in these research findings is the cultural and religious concept of a relationship model in which the man is entitled to be in charge.

Our Bodies Are Not Meant for Tombs or Duffel Bags

Greg Taylor

November – December, 1999

“Hello. This is Wako. I called to – hello?” The voice came over the phone.

“Yes, I’m still listening,” I said, rolling my eyes at the tendency for Ugandans to stop and say hello between sentences if they are not getting verbal feedback over the line. My friend, Wako, had called me to say his seven-month-old daughter, Louisa, was very sick. Our friend, Dr. Clifton Ganus, Jr., who visited Wako’s village, Nabikooli, a few months before, had named Wako’s little baby after his own granddaughter.

“I’ll meet you tomorrow at the hospital to see if I can help with advice or give you some money for medicine,” I told Wako on the phone.

“Thank you. I’ll see you tomorrow. We are at the Kamuli Mission Hospital,” Wako said, identifying the hospital that is an hour’s drive from Jinja, Uganda, my hometown.

I drove with two visitors, Don and Mary Riley, from the U.S. to check on Wako, his wife Cathy, and their sick daughter, Louisa.

Cathy, her eyes swollen from weeping, greeted me through quiet sobs.

To our surprise, Wako and Cathy met us at the entrance to the hospital. I wondered if the baby had gotten better. I had come to the hospital to visit Cathy, her husband, Wilson, and their sick baby, Louisa.

“Hello Wako, Cathy. How are you?” I asked them.

“We’re not well,” Wilson said. “Louisa died early this morning.”

“That’s terrible. I’m sorry,” I said. “Where is the baby’s body now? The baby?” I asked.

“In here,” Wako Wilson said. I looked down at what Wako was pointing to: their duffel bag. But the bag was closed. *Not in there!* I thought. *It’s closed, the bag is zipped up. Not in there!* My heart sank.

“She died early this morning,” Wako said. Cathy was silent, her eyes swollen from weeping.

“I’m sorry,” I said. Shocked ... dumbstruck, I couldn’t think of anything else to say. Mary and Donnie were dumbstruck. We all were. The thought of the baby in that green duffel bag sickened us and made tears leap from my eyes. But there was no other way for their family to carry the tiny body. They would have to pay extra money to put the body in the dark, hot morgue of the

run-down hospital. This poor, subsistence-farming family had no more money. The only thing they could do was to put the baby in their bag and carry her home. Home.

And since they had to take the baby to their village in some way, Wilson and Cathy carried their baby's body home, where neighbors would help them build a small wooden box to put Louisa in.

But wait! Babies aren't meant to be put zipped up in duffel bags! But then, neither are bodies really meant for coffins and graves. God made man from dust, not for dust. In dust was life, not death. It was only the curse which would bring death and dust together for the first time.

"Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.

"It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.

"By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken;

"For dust you are and to dust you will return" (Genesis 3:17-19).

How did God feel about Jesus' tomb? I wondered. Did God shudder when he spoke into existence the stony cave that would encapsulate Jesus' tortured body? Did they both see the tomb and think, *Not in there!*

Did God and Jesus exchange a knowing glance when they cursed the ground, knowing the curse would someday be lifted by Jesus spending three days in that cursed ground?

The curse of sin was finished at the cross. But Jesus still had three days in cursed ground. And when Joseph of Arimathea laid Jesus corpse in his own tomb, did God want to shout, "NO! Not in there. My son is not meant for the tomb!"

I wonder if three days were only to show the world that Jesus was really dead and beginning to decay. Did God anguish those three days? He felt profound pain even beyond what Wako and Cathy felt when they put their baby in a suitcase.

How God wanted his son out of those mummy wrappings! How Wilson and Cathy never wanted to wrap their daughter up in cloth and carry her like so much luggage.

"I'll help you with money to go home," I told Wako, and I gave him the equivalent of ten dollars. I watched them board a bus and ask us not to bring extra attention to the duffel, because the driver would charge them double for transporting a dead body. They would make the one-hour bus trip in silence, holding back the tears, pretending, clutching the duffel as if the bag contained mere belongings.

The bag did contain what belonged to them. But now she belonged in God's care. Before Wilson was converted to Christ, he would have simply considered a baby, dead or alive, just another

inconvenient parcel to carry. But now he belonged to Christ and his children were not mere objects that belonged to him. “Before becoming a Christian, I didn’t care about God or anyone around me,” Wilson said.

I thought back to the first time I met Wako Wilson. I dropped a few tracts from my pickup as I drove through a town called Kaliro in the spring of 1996. Wako Wilson was one of the handful of people along the road who scrambled to pick up and read what I had dropped. Getting my address from the tract, Wilson later wrote me a letter, asking me to come and teach him and his ten other friends who, in his words, “want to study the Bible but lack guidelines and your teaching.” I wrote back and asked him to meet me at the post office. My father-in-law, Ray Smiley, and I visited Wako’s family and village and set up a time to return and preach the gospel.

I preached in Wako’s village once a week for about one year. Then Wako Wilson and four others were buried with Christ in a rice paddy, and a new community of faith sprouted as if out of that fertile swamp. Most Americans, at the prospect of being baptized in a rice paddy would say, “Not in there!”

I recently asked Wako Wilson what difference Christ has made in his life. “Before becoming a Christian, I didn’t care about God or anyone around me. Recently I helped a man who was traveling somewhere on his bike. He became sick and stopped near my house. I helped him to rest at my house, went to get him some medicine, and fed him. I wouldn’t have done that before I became a Christian,” Wako said.

“I was like a dead person,” Wilson said. “I had no life in me, no concern for others or for God. I never helped my wife with anything before I became a Christian. I never once bathed our children or took care of them. I thought all the work of the home was my wife’s job, while I hung out with my friends. My wife and I fought constantly and were about to divorce. My wife would go with other women to the witch doctors for medicine before she became a Christian.”

Then Christ changed Wilson’s life. Slowly Wilson’s life began to look different to his family, his neighbors. His mission became to strengthen his family and village church.

“Jesus gave me new life. Now I bathe the children, help with dishes and cooking,” Wilson said. “My wife and I are more balanced now, and we serve one another. My wife had to go work in another village, but I’m staying here to help the church remain strong, and that’s what we both want. But now she only depends on God for healing.”

Christ has also made a difference in Cathy’s life. “When Louisa died Cathy begged God not to take a second child, but she wasn’t tempted to use traditional medicine or charms as she might have before she became a Christian. Now she only depends on God for healing. Louisa was our second child to die.”

Cathy and Wilson have two children now, a boy who is eight and a girl who is six, two others have died, and they are praying for God to give them two more. “We’re praying God will give us two more children,” Wako Wilson said.

“My neighbors wondered at how I helped that man on the road. They know that I am now very different than I used to be,” Wako Wilson said.

At a church service in which I asked God’s blessing on the church Wako is a part of, I read Hebrews 12. Wako mentioned that reading and said, as is typical in Wilson’s Kisoga culture, “Leave things of death at the funeral.” Superstitious, many Kisoga people fear spirits of the dead will go home with them and bring death to their own families.

Adapting this saying to baptism into Christ here in Uganda, we say, “Leave your sin in the lake!” But you come out and live a new life!

Wilson did leave his life of sin in the lake at his baptism. His life and ours were never meant for that tomb of sin and death.

“God has changed me slowly, disciplined me, and I am still learning,” Wilson says with anticipation in his voice. “No good thing comes without hardship first. Like Jesus dying suffering on the cross. He suffered to give us life.”

Wako understands that suffering because he’s experienced firsthand what it’s like to carry his dead child. But he knows someday he will see little Louisa again. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the suffering servant, Wilson discovered life. And while he is himself a servant, Wilson has learned to share that life with others.

Thanks be to God who dramatically re-animated the flesh and bones of Jesus. My son will not stay in that tomb. Not in there!

A Healing Ministry That Makes Sense

Tony Campolo

November – December 1999

I have started to anoint people's heads with oil, lay hands on them and pray for their healing. Unlike the healers I see on television, not much sensational happens. Nevertheless, I do it. During most Sunday morning preaching services, I tell people that if they want me to pray for them for healing, I will give it my best. I tell them that I am not good at this sort of thing and that I don't have any special "gift," as some would claim to possess. But then none of us are really healers. It is God who heals!

And there's just no telling what the answer will be if we ask. "I have tried asking, and I've tried not asking," I say, "And I've found that asking works better." I tell them that I have taken to praying for healing because Jesus told us to, and that I am only trying to be obedient to his command.

What I think have been the most important consequences of this ministry have been the ways that people have been blessed by it all — in spite of the rarity of physical healings. One Sunday, I prayed with a man who had an advanced case of cancer. The following Wednesday his wife called me to tell me he had died. When I told her that apparently my prayers didn't do much good, she answered, "Don't say that! They did a lot of good! Before you prayed with him, he was angry with God and filled with fear. But afterwards a peace came over him. The last three days have been among the happiest we have ever had together. And when he left me, he was holding my hand and he said, 'I'll be waiting for you!'"

In a church out West, a couple of dozen people lingered behind after morning worship to receive the anointing and the laying on of hands. The pastor of the church accompanied me as I went from person to person. Surprisingly, only a couple of them had physical ailments. The rest were people with sicknesses of the soul. There were women who wept over marriages that were coming apart, a man whose life was being consumed by pornography, a teenager who was guilt ridden over an abortion and several men and women who were suffering from depression. I was with them for a couple of hours, because I refuse to rush these things. I want to share in peoples' pain. I want to cry with them. And I want to spend long minutes in silence with my hands on their heads, hoping that the Holy Spirit will flow through me into them.

It seemed like nothing special was happening to them, yet it was obvious that it all meant something very special to them. When I finished this healing ministry to these people, I could see that the pastor was upset. He told me, "I've been at this church for twenty years. I thought I knew these people. But as I listened to them talking to you this morning, I realized that I really don't know them at all."

So often people come to church and go away without even having had the chance to unburden themselves in a passionately personal way. They hunger to be heard, to be touched, to be healed — especially if the healing that they really seek is the healing of their souls.

I don't know why I didn't start ministering in this way before. I wonder why every pastor isn't into it. Perhaps it is because we are afraid of looking bad if nothing physical happens. Maybe it is our modern scientific approach to things keeping us from believing that healing really does happen. I don't know the reasons, but from now on I am going to ask people if they want prayer, and if they do, I will give it a try and leave the results to God. There's just no telling when God will surprise me with the kind of physical healing that the Catholic saints and so many Pentecostal preachers experience normally, and refer to as miracles.

The Crucified God

by Tom Olbricht

November – December, 1999

Mark in his Gospel has the disciples standing on two peaks, though the mountain is one. Just prior to Mark 8:31-38, they arrived at the first. The path was a challenge. Steep inclines required great stamina and boulders stood in the way. But the disciples made it. They stood basking at the summit. Peter uttered the growing conviction, responding to the pointed question of Jesus, “But who do you say that I am?” by declaring, “You are the Messiah” (Mark 8:30). Oh, what a world-shaking confession! But it is a false peak! Is that possible?

In June, 1989 we flew to Anchorage in order to travel three weeks in the interior of Alaska. We spent the second week at Camp Denali where, from the front window of our cabin, we had tremendous views of Mt. McKinley rising 20,000 feet above the surrounding terrain. In the other direction stood what looked to be a ridge which a novice hiker might conquer. Dorothy isn't much into hiking, but she decided she would try it with the rest of the gang. The ascent was deceptive. First we had to walk through thawed tundra. The going was rough. We sank up to our ankles in the muck. We walked a mile in these conditions before reaching a solid path. The way grew steeper, but after an hour we arrived at the peak that we could see from the cabin below. Dorothy was tired, but she exerted that final burst of energy required to reach the top. She was flushed from the climb and the achievement. Breathing hard, she looked back down at the camp and across the valley to take in majestic McKinley. She turned north once again, and she was crestfallen. We hadn't reached the peak at all. This was a false peak. To reach the peak required a climb similar to the one just made. Before us was a plateau, a canyon two or three hundred feet deep, then the ascent to the real peak.

In comments to the disciples (Mark 8:31-38) Jesus made it clear that they had not arrived at the top, simply by making what we have labeled “the great confession.” To attain the summit is more than simply confessing that Jesus is Messiah. The ultimate confession is that Jesus is God crucified. Jesus lived the way of the cross. He died upon the cross. He beckons us to follow him on that same path. “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

The False Peak

None of us are to disdain the feat of mounting the first or false peak. That achievement is only inconsequential if we stop there. Even though not the ultimate destination, the false peak cannot be avoided. That is the only way to arrive at the top. The supreme peak consists of the confession that the Son of God can only be seen for who he really is when he hangs inexplicably on the cross.

As Mark began his account, he wasted no precious time, but immediately declared that Jesus is the “Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1). He himself made this confession only after Jesus had died and arisen. It was only those in a privileged position who announced prior to his death that he is Son. The demons knew him. Three times, in varied language, they declared, “You are the

Son of God” (Mark 1:24; 3:11; 5:7). God, in a voice from heaven, twice affirmed, “You are my Son, the Beloved” (Mark 1:11; 9:7).

Mark wants us to know that it took time, and death and resurrection, before the disciples arrived at that conclusion. The nearest they came prior to that stunning achievement was the confession of Peter, “You are the Messiah” (Mark 8:30). According to Mark they did not at that time declare him Son. Whatever Peter had in mind when he confessed Jesus as Messiah, it did not include the cross. When Jesus spoke of being killed and arising, Peter took him aside and rebuked him. James and John did not understand the import of the confession either, for they requested to sit, “one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory” (Mark 10:37). The first human in the Gospel of Mark to make the confession that Jesus is the Son of God, so easy for the demons, and so difficult for the disciples, was the Roman centurion who looked on as Jesus died on the cross. “Truly this mad was God’s Son” (Mark 15:39)!

How did the disciples arrive at the first peak? They were with Jesus. They heard what he said, and perhaps more significantly for Mark, they saw what he did. They ate and slept with him. But these contacts alone did not bring them to confess him as Messiah. Mark identified a number of wonders on the way to the first peak that should have resulted in belief.

The first comment of Mark on how the disciples sized up Jesus is at chapter four, verse forty-one. The disciples and Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee in a boat. A great windstorm arose. The disciples feared for their lives. They awoke Jesus, perturbed at his sleeping. He simply spoke to the storm, “Peace; be still.” A dead calm ensued. Now Mark commented on the reaction of the disciples: “And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?’ ” The abrupt turnabout in the storm was impressive. They perceived Jesus as someone special. But as to just who he was, they seemed to be in a fog.

The second comment is at chapter six, verses fifty-one and fifty-two. Once again they were on the sea. Jesus was not with them. As they struggled, rowing against the wind, they saw to their amazement someone about to pass them, walking on the water. They feared a ghost. But Jesus spoke to them and they “were utterly astounded.” Jesus was incredible. He had just fed 5,000 in the wilderness with no visible food supply. This time Mark observed, “and they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.” Why hardened hearts? Pharaoh’s heart was hardened. What did that mean? It meant that he did not perceive the hand of God in the spectacular events which unfolded before his very eyes. Neither did the disciples.

Now again (chapter eight, verses seventeen through twenty-one) a third time Mark observed the disciples’ perspective. The crowds were again in the wilderness and Jesus had compassion on them because they had nothing to eat. Once more they ate their fill. After it was over the disciples engaged in a dispute regarding Jesus’ charge to beware the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod. Like some of us, they grow in contention, not conviction. Jesus retorted, “Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect? They said to him, ‘Twelve.’

‘And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets did you collect?’ And they said to him, ‘Seven.’ Then he said to them, ‘Do you not yet understand?’”

What should they have understood? I suggest that when he spoke and nature obeyed, and when he walked on water, and nature supported, they should have thought of the God who called worlds into existence by a verbal command. When they observed the multitudes eating in the wilderness without a visible food source they should have recalled a much earlier wilderness in which God fed his people with manna.

In regard to Jesus’ question to the disciples, “Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears and fail to hear?” (Mark 8:18), notice two healings not accidentally located where they are. Jesus opened the ears of a deaf man (Mark 7:35), but the disciples remained deaf (Mark 8:18). Jesus opened the eyes of a blind man (Mark 8:22). As the disciples watched Jesus at work, they began to see vaguely but not yet clearly. Jesus has a way of reaching even the most dense of persons. The ears of the disciples began to open. With their eyes they began to see. Jesus asked the probing question and they reached a conclusion. They ascended the first peak. They confessed, “You are the Messiah.” Now they could relax and enjoy the scenery.

The True Peak

Almost immediately Jesus disabused the disciples of any afterglow from their achievement. He hastened to speak not only of suffering and death, but issued a straight forward challenge, enigmatic to the disciples: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” These declarations in effect announced that there remained another peak up there somewhere. The disciples must outfit for the remainder of the climb.

So where is this true peak? What must the disciple do to surmount it? It is not enough to see God in Christ. Jesus must be envisioned as the right kind of God. He must be seen for who he really is – the crucified God. How is it possible to envision a crucified God?

First, the disciple must stand in the shoes of the centurion facing the cross. Only then can one confess that Jesus is Son of God. Of course, Mark did not pinpoint the centurion as the consummate believer. He was only a forerunner for those who were, that is the disciples. They, like the centurion, ultimately stood face to face with Jesus on the cross. On the way to Jerusalem, the eyes of the blind Bartimaeus were opened (Mark 10:46-52), and the disciples now had Jesus more clearly in focus. But only when they had passed through the excruciating experience of Jesus’ death and resurrection did they make the ultimate confession, “Jesus is God crucified!” Until we realize that the one suffering on the cross, discredited and in anguish, is God in the flesh, we have not understood.

God on the cross was genuine scandal to the nineteenth century American, William Ellery Channing (1780-1884). He envisioned God as above and beyond the fleshly attributes of human existence. God, for him, by no stretch of the imagination involved himself in the dirt and grime of sinful humanity. “William Ellery Channing rejected as ‘idolatry’ the notion that Divinity might have clothed Himself in flesh. The doctrine of the incarnation was a product of a weak and ignorant imagination, lacking the ‘reflecting and purified mind’ to worship God as ‘pure spirit, invisible and unapproachable.’ Trinitarianism represented ‘a relapse into the error of the rudest

and earliest ages, into the worship of a corporeal God,' he asserted in an unusual outburst of invective. 'Its leading feature is the doctrine ... of the Infinite Divinity dying on a cross; a doctrine which in earthiness reminds us of the mythology of the rudest pagans.' The crucifixion of the creator of the universe was altogether too preposterous, messy, and disgusting to be credible for one of Channing's enlightened temperament. Nor could he bear to think that any act so purely physical as the torture of a man nailed to wooden beams could bring salvation to humanity: 'I am astonished and appalled by the gross manner in which "Christ's blood" is often spoken of, as if his outward wounds and bodily sufferings could contribute to our salvation; as if aught else than his spirit, his truth, could redeem us'" (Daniel Walker Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience, Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805-1861* (Middletown, Wesleyan University Press, 1988, p. 42).

Channing stood, however, in company with the Cambridge Platonists and the German idealists such as Schleiermacher and Hegel, rather than with the centurion face to face with Jesus on the cross. Despite Channing's scruples, the witness of the whole Scripture is that God is a God who involves himself in the seamy, sinful life of historical humanity. Channing scrambled up the first peak, and rather than taking it for what it was, a false peak, committed his life to heralding it as the true one.

Second, in order to stand on the true peak and see God as the one crucified, we must read the Old Testament and become sensitive to the manner in which God involved himself with humans in history. It is then that with renewed insight we can retrace with Mark the footprints of Jesus, the Son of the same God, and see that his very life was consistent with his death. It was the way of the cross.

The God of Israel continually involved himself in human history. He had compassion on humans in their plight. He sided with the oppressed and the humble. Physical reality and human existence were not alien to him. He created both. The Psalmist summed it up well: "As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him. For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust" (Psalms 103:13,14). Abraham Heschel, the renowned Jewish scholar, told the story that each morning God gathers the angels around him and asks a single question: "Where does my Creation need mending today?"

The descendants of Jacob resettled in Egypt because of a great drought. They raised their families and prospered. After several generations, a Pharaoh arose who knew not Joseph. He had numerous building projects on the drawing boards and forced the offspring of Jacob into slavery. "The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out. Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God. God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them" (Exodus 2:23, 24). God grappled with human history. He did not hold off persons at arms length. There followed the mighty wonders in Egypt and at the Sea. God did it not just for his own covenant people, but for all persons made in his image, so that his name, therefore his goodness, might "resound through all the heart" (Exodus 9:16).

An Ephraimite woman named Hannah had no children. She was constantly reminded of that fact by her rival, Peninnah. Hannah took the matter up with God. She went to the tabernacle where

“she was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord, and wept bitterly” (1 Samuel 1:10). Soon after, “Elkanah knew his wife Hannah, and the Lord remembered her. In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, ‘I have asked him of the Lord’” (1 Samuel 1:20). God, the father of Jesus, was not above the hurts and desires of his devotees. He himself became a servant on many an occasion, filling human wants.

Hezekiah was a great king. Not only was he an able administrator and astute military strategist, he was resolute in restoring the nation to the true worship of God. After being king for some time, Hezekiah became ill to the point of death. Isaiah the prophet requested an audience and informed Hezekiah that he would not recover. He needed to set his house in order. Hezekiah wept bitterly and implored God. God was not unmoved by Hezekiah’s tears. He sent Isaiah back with the message, “I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; indeed, I will heal you; on the third day you shall go up to the house of the Lord. I will add fifteen years to your life” (2 Kings 20:5, 6). Perhaps success went to Hezekiah’s head. Pride can inflict even a great servant! “But Hezekiah did not respond according to the benefit done to him, for his heart was proud. Therefore wrath came upon him and upon Judah and Jerusalem. Then Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the Lord did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah” (2 Chronicles 32:25, 26).

It is not surprising that God broke into human history enfleshed in the Son. He always has been a God open to the anguish and cries of his people. It is only the disciple who perceives the Father of Jesus as the servant-God, who ascends the true peak. He stands amazed as he looks at the cross, but he is not surprised to find God in the Son dying there, giving his life a ransom for many.

Like father, like son. Jesus was the exact replica of his father. He could most often be found “in the homes of the poor and lowly, serving the Lord.” Had the disciples been observant they would have not been surprised when Jesus declared, “For the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and give his life a ransom for many.” God had always been a serving God.

They were, however, confused as many are now. Once the disciples concluded that God was going to assign Jesus a special role in the administration of humanity, they wanted a piece of the action: “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory” (Mark 10:37). They wanted power and prestige. But they celebrated too soon. They seemed to have no clue that Jesus was already in his glory. The kingdom of God was already present. It was a kingdom of servanthood, not one of acclaim and privilege. Jesus put it bluntly: “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you. But whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all” (Mark 10:42-44).

Retrace with Mark the footprints of Jesus. What did Jesus do? He did not seek the acclaim of his contemporaries so as to enhance fame and fortune. He did not hobnob with the powers that be or with the rich and famous so as to secure privilege through name dropping. He showed up rather, where life was seamy, where people hurt as the result of their illnesses. Jesus went where others feared to tread. He confronted the unclean spirits and cast them out. He went to Peter’s house

when he learned his mother-in-law had a fever. He stopped to heal a leper in a sparsely-settled area. He responded to a paralyzed man let down through a hole in the roof by his friends. He ate with sinners and tax collectors, some of whom in their day and time were wealthy. He healed a man with a withered hand. He stopped at an area people avoided because of a frenzied, destructive man among the tombs and restored him to normalcy. He let people touch him. A woman with a long-standing flow of blood was healed. He responded to hunger. He stopped in the market places where the ill assembled. He even healed the daughter of a Syro-Phoenician woman who was of an alien ethnic group. He responded to the plaintive requests of the deaf and the blind, and of the son who harmed himself when he went into convulsions. He responded warmly to little children, to the rich young ruler, and identified with those who left all behind for the work of the kingdom. He commended the poor widow whose gift amounted to little, but which constituted genuine sacrifice. Jesus never walked away from any variety of illness or iniquity.

The arriving at the true peak involves giving up one's own aspirations in order to assist those who have been pushed aside. We too must be like our father. Jesus put it like this: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." Should we take Jesus seriously, we will be found associating with people at all levels.

My own life has been incredibly enriched by knowing some great servants. One time in a congregation where I preached, the wife in one of our families had mental problems and the husband financial ones. They decided to return to eastern Canada, and needed to borrow six hundred dollars. No one quickly volunteered. One member who lived frugally and had four children said that since he had the money he would be glad to loan it. Later he told me privately that it would not matter if the man never paid it back. A graduate student told me that over spring break he was able to earn a substantial sum of money. When he heard the plight of one of his fellow students he gave it to him, saying he really didn't need it. Whoever heard of a married student with a child who didn't need money? I knew another disciple who had a track scholarship. When his home church decided to help with his college expenses so he could study to be a minister, he persuaded the coach to transfer his track scholarship to a walk-on athlete. I have known persons who visited regularly in slums where conditions and lifestyles were opposite their own, in order to be servants to their fellows. I have known church members who moved to a region of the country far away from relatives and friends, because they wanted to help a small church get on its feet. I have known preachers who were invited to preach for a large, prestigious congregation but turned it down in order to serve a smaller church where they were critically needed. I knew a professor in a faculty where every teacher aspired to teach graduate courses, who, though better prepared than most, continued to teach undergraduates because they too need solid instruction and the ambitious professors appeared to look past them.

A century ago, a German scholar named Wilhelm Wrede introduced into the study of Mark the famous "messianic secret." The question was why Jesus commanded people to keep quiet after he healed them. Much midnight oil has been burned in an effort to unravel the mystery of Jesus' charge to secrecy. I think the answer may be simple, yet profound: Jesus came to serve. He did not wish acclaim to stand in the way of service. The messianic secret was that, not only did Christ die on the cross in behalf of others, but his very life was the way of the cross – giving himself up for others.

We now know that the second peak, the true one, is where Christ hangs suspended on the cross. The disciple finally reaches this peak when he stands at the cross in profound awe of the crucified God. At that point he is empowered to take up the same cross. "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

Modern Day Mary Magdalene

by Marnie C. Ferree

November – December, 1999

No days in all of human history could be any darker than the hour when, behind a massive stone, a shroud covered the body of a lifeless savior. All possibilities were over. All terrors magnified. All hope extinguished. In every way, it was finished. How the heart of Mary Magdalene must have ached as she walked in that burial garden, confused and desolate that apparently even the body of her dear friend was gone. The demons that once had filled her threatened now to return. Where could she go? What would she do? Who could heal her now? In response, the scripture says simply, “Mary wept.” She knew of no other option.

When this woman had reached the bottom of her blackest pit, there the Savior sought her. He saw her broken in the garden, and he went to meet her. Mary didn't comprehend at first the significance of his appearance. She didn't recognize this “gardener” as the risen Lord she was seeking. She was aware only of her powerlessness. Her complete inability to help herself. But at the point of her deepest need, when the pain of continued hoping was so great she could not endure it, Jesus called her name.

“Mary!”

At that moment her eyes were opened to the possibility of a resurrected life. Mary not only claimed hope that morning for herself; she boldly shared with others the good news about the risen Lord.

Two thousand years later our situations really are not substantially different. At some point or another, we all will be faced with the death of our dreams. We will stand broken and weeping in the dark night of the soul. We will have come to the end of ourselves and have no idea about where to turn.

Mary Magdalene was a woman with a shameful past. Most scholars agree she would have been considered wicked by the judges of her day. She likely would have been shunned. Whether because of events and circumstances beyond her control, such as the demons that had possessed her, or because of her own poor choices, Mary had nothing to commend her to the Lord. Yet it was to this kind of fallen woman that the risen Son of God first appeared! Into the darkness of her sinful past, into the confusion of her present, and into the hopelessness of her future, the resurrected Lord flooded the brilliant light of life and grace!

Like Mary, I, too, am a woman with a shameful past. I also have been torn by the demons within. Ones with names like “abuse” and “abandonment” and (worse) “addiction.” I know what it's like to stand weeping in despair without any hope of comfort or rescue. But like Mary Magdalene, I too have encountered a Savior!

A life-giving Lord found me at the dark tomb of my shame. The demons I struggled with were too awful to acknowledge, even to myself. But Jesus knew my need, and he called my name.

Eight years after what I considered my personal “resurrection” experience, I believe that like Mary, my eyes have been opened to the light of some important truths. I know first that God loves me, even when I am overtaken in sin. This knowledge has moved beyond the intellect into the certainty of my heart. Not only do I know I am loved; today I feel the depth of God’s love. That surety has been a marvellous gift. When I was at the lowest point of my addiction and had hidden my face from God, in love he still pursued me.

Second, I see that I am not alone. Countless others secretly weep before the tomb of addiction. Others nightly pray for strength to resist its powerful pull, and find they cannot. Addicts everywhere experience unmanageable lives. To keep the secret of the struggle is to remain buried in bondage. In telling the truth about my pain, I have been set free.

Today I see the Bible isn’t silent when it comes to addiction. Hundreds of verses, particularly in the Psalms, are cries for deliverance from brokenness. I’ve found great comfort as I’ve applied those confessions and pleas to my own pain. Some of the greatest Bible writers, including David and Paul, speak about their struggles. Romans 7 is a passage that clearly is applicable to any addict’s experience:

“I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate, I do.

“For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing.

“Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

“What a wretched man I am!” (Romans 7:15, 18b-20, 24).

Addiction seems to be as little understood now as Mary Magdalene’s demons were in her day. Especially within religious circles, addicts are often viewed simply as moral failures who lack sufficient willpower to do the right thing. Many scoff at the “disease” concept of addiction. While addiction unquestionably involves sinful behavior, to stop with this explanation alone is to miss other critical factors that are involved. Addiction is a multifaceted problem that affects a person in every aspect: physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and interpersonally. Addiction is both a sin and a disease. It’s not an either/or issue.

Addictions can take as many forms as the human experience will allow. There are the readily identifiable addictions to alcohol, drugs, or gambling. More socially accepted kinds include tobacco, caffeine, shopping, exercising, watching TV, or surfing the Net. Addictions sanctioned by the church (and even encouraged) including working and religious service. The common denominator among the various forms is an attempt to alter one’s mood and escape painful feelings by using substances or behaviors in an unhealthy way. No matter the flavor, an addictive behavior is compulsive, obsessive, and continues in spite of adverse consequences. Addictions

usually are also progressive, such that more and more chemical or behavior is required to achieve the same high.

The most shameful of addictions is perhaps sexual addiction. Knowledge and research about sex addiction is relatively new. Indeed, the whole field is probably at the point where alcoholism was 30 or 4 years ago. Yet most experts in addiction believe sex addiction is growing faster than any other kind. Between six and ten percent of the adult U.S. population is thought to be sexually addicted. Of that number, almost half are women. Certainly, Christians are not exempt. In fact, some addictionists insist there is a higher incidence within the church than in the general population.

The power of the Internet has made pornography accessible with only a few simple mouse clicks. Pornography is often the gateway into other sexually addictive behavior, and the Internet is the “crack cocaine” of this drug: easily available, cheap, and highly addictive. One thousand new pornographic sites are launched every day. In addition to pornography and masturbation, many sexual addicts are also involved in other forms of acting out such as affairs, prostitution, massage parlors and strip clubs, anonymous and cybersex, and exhibitionism and voyeurism.

The consequences of sexual addiction are profound. Problems in the areas of health, work, finances, and relationships are typical. Addicts are frequently depressed, and some have seriously considered suicide. The same of their secret sin causes many to avoid seeking a meaningful relationship with God. A black isolation colors the addict’s world.

One of the most surprising truths I see today is that sex addiction isn’t really about sex at all. As one addict cried, “Why is this called ‘sex addiction’? I hate that label! Don’t people understand it’s not about sex? Sex is just what I have to give to get what I really want, which is love and touch and nurture and affirmation.”

Because of the abandonment addicts experienced in their childhoods, whether through divorce or death or the simple lack of nurturing from emotionally healthy parents, sex addicts will do anything to get what feels like human connection. To be abandoned again is an addict’s worst fear. That terror of abandonment is surely some of what Mary Magdalene felt as she wept at Jesus’ tomb.

The vast majority of sex addicts are untreated sexual trauma survivors. Because of the abuse most suffered in their childhoods, addicts formulated some key false beliefs that contribute to their addiction. They believe they are horrible people and deserve blame for what happened to them. They doubt anyone could love them if they were truly known, including all their secrets. Because 81% are incest survivors, addicts are terribly confused about sex and “love.” Childhood and adolescent abuse experiences get played out repeatedly in adult exploitive relationships. Talk about being possessed by demons!

Like Mary Magdalene, for every addict there will come a time when it appears everything is over. A dark despair will stretch across the soul’s horizon, and it will seem doubtful that dawn will ever come. That moment can be the beginning. It can be the time of awakening to one’s utter

powerlessness to overcome addiction. It can be the dawning of a healing journey of surrender, sobriety, and a sanctified life. It can be an encounter with the resurrection power of Rabboni!

The next step is similar to the one Mary Magdalene took that Easter Sunday morning: The addict must connect with other “disciples” who also “have seen the Lord.” He must share his story with other sexaholics who are practicing sobriety. She must ask for support and accountability from other addicts who are farther down the road of recovery. He can seek counseling for his wounds of abuse and abandonment that fuel the addiction. She can learn how to get her needs met in healthier ways. Each must choose to talk in honesty and surrender, one day at a time. Staying in step with the risen Savior is key.

The Bible doesn’t share the rest of the story about Mary Magdalene. But I’m convinced she was forever changed by her encounter with the Lord that resurrection morning. She had experienced the paradox of darkness to light, of death to life. And she had the courage to tell others her story.

In like fashion, addicts today can receive the resurrection power of a renewed life. In the blackness before sunrise, they can call for the Savior. He will answer them and is faithful to provide the help and healing that is needed. There is hope for life after death, including resurrection from the grave of addiction.

I know. It happened to me.

The following books, Web sites, and 12 Step groups may be helpful.

Books:

faithful and True: Sexual Integrity in a Fallen World, Mark Laaser, Zondervan Publishing House, 1996. ISBN 0-310-20836.

Breaking Free: Understanding Sexual Addiction and the Healing Power of Jesus, Russell Willingham, Bob Davies, Intervarsity Press, 1999. ISBN 0830817913.

Addicted to Love, Stephn Arterburn, Servant Publications, 1991. ISBN 0-89283-802-7.

Don’t Call It Love, Patrick Carnes, The Gentle Press, 1991. ISBN 0-553-351-38-9.

Serenity: A Companion for 12 Step Recovery, Robert Hernfelt & Richard Fowler, Thomas Nelson, 1990, ISBN 0-8407-1542-0.

Web sites:

www.casr.org

Christian Alliance for Sexual Recovery

Mark Laaser, Ph.D., Executive Director; workshos for addicts, spouses, couples, adolescents, and families; training for professionals; support group referrals.

(888) HELPHOPE: (888) 435-7467

www.healingforwomen.com

Woodmont Hills Counseling Ministry

Marnie Ferree, M.A., LMFT, Ministry Leader; workshops for female sex addicts.

(615) 269-6220

www.pureintimacy.org

Focus on the Family informational site about pornography and sex addiction.

www.themeadows.org

The Meadows

Patrick Carnes, Ph.D., Director; secular treatment center for addicts, spouses, and families; training for professionals

(800) TheMeadows: (800) 632-3697

www.sierratucson.com

Sierra Tucson

Secular treatment center for addicts, spouses, and families.

(800) 842-4487

12 Step Groups:

Sexaholics Anonymous (SA) P.O. Box 11910 Nashville, TN 37222-1910

(615) 331-6230

www.sa.org

Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA) P.O. Box 70949 Houston, TX 77270

(713) 869-4902

www.sexaa.org

Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous (SLAA) P.O. Box 119 New Town Branch, MA 02258

(617) 332-1845

www.slaafws.org

Alcoholics Anonymous AA World Services, Inc. P.O. Box rt9 New York, NY 10163

www.alcoholics-anonymous.org

Al-Anon Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc.

1600 Corporate Landing Pkwy. Virginia Beach, VA 23454-5617

Easter Sunday, Every Sunday

John Mark Hicks

November – December, 1999

“On the first day of the week we came together to break bread” (Acts 20:7).

The first day of the week. Gathered saints. Breaking bread. Listening to Paul’s teaching. Joy, fellowship, edification. But death invades. A young man named Eutychus falls out the third-story window. The church rushes to him. He is dead. Brokenness, grief, disillusionment.

You have been there too. A phone call in the night reveals that a parent, a spouse, a child, a relative, or a friend has died. Death is an unwelcome intruder who robs our joy. Death generates hopelessness. We are powerless before it. It pervades our existence and we cannot escape its clutches. Death is inevitable. It reigns over us. Consequently, the tyranny of death renders us hopeless, powerless and grasping for anything that might mitigate its finality. We all, even now, wear a death shroud.

Death even invades the Sunday communion of God’s people, as in Acts 20:7-12. We announce the death of friends. We lament their passing, and we mourn our loss.

But the first day of the week brings hope. It remembers the past and it bears witness to the future. It reminds us of the first day, the first of all first days of the week, when God conquered death; it reminds us of Easter Sunday. It also transports us into the future where, by faith, we see death’s final overthrow. There, too, in the future we see Easter Sunday. Further, Easter Sunday is already here. It affirms the alreadiness of God’s transforming power among his people.

PAST

Our weekly first day of the week is linked with that past, historic first day of the week – Easter itself. We continue the tradition of meeting on the first day of the week because something transforming, something cosmically redemptive, happened on that day. The first day of the week only has meaning because it is grounded in what really happened on a first day of the week in first century Palestine. Easter gives the first day of the week its significance.

This tradition is rooted in history. It is grounded in a mighty act of God. This act did not simply occur in the hearts of the disciples, but it left an empty tomb. God raised Jesus from the dead.

All the Gospels begin their resurrection narratives by calling attention to that first day of the week (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1; John 20:1). That day, that temporal moment in history, was etched into the memory of the disciples. That day, the day they discovered the empty tomb and the day on which Jesus appeared to them, was the day when disappointment turned to hope, tears to joy and fear to boldness. It was a day to remember, and it was a day they remembered weekly as they met together.

This was not a group hallucination. It was not the figment of overworked imaginations. It was neither a pious plot nor a fairy tale. It was the foundational event that transformed the defeated followers of Jesus into courageous disciples. The church did not create the resurrection story, but the resurrection created the church.

The reality of the resurrection is important because only there is death truly transformed into life. Only there is Jesus of Nazareth, the one who bore the curse of the tree, justified. Only there are we given a reason to trust the work of God in Christ. Every first day of the week remember Easter Sunday, and we remember that the story of God in Christ is authentic; it is not fiction. Easter Sunday is God's testimony that he truly is God.

When we break bread on Sunday, we unite with God's mighty Easter act and are assured that our God is God and Jesus is Lord.

FUTURE

Our weekly first day of the week is linked to the future — the future of Easter. Easter Sunday is the last (*eschatos*) day of the cosmos. Easter Sunday, the first day of the week, is not only the first day of a new age, but it is also the last day of this age. Easter Sunday proclaims Jesus as the first and the last, the Alpha and the Omega. He is the Living One who was once dead, but is now alive (Revelation 1:17-18).

The first day of the week remembers the past Easter and it bears witness to the future Easter. It may seem strange to speak of a "future Easter." But Easter itself is a future, eschatological event. It orients us toward the future as we look past death to the eschatological renewal God intends.

Paul describes the resurrection of Jesus as a first fruit (1 Corinthians 15:20). The resurrection of Jesus belongs to the harvest; it is the first part of the harvest. It does not belong to the ebb and flow of history, but rather it is the end of history. It is the last day — the day of resurrection.

His resurrection was unlike any other prior to it. On occasion, throughout the history of God's redemptive work, some had been raised from the dead. But their resurrections were resuscitations. The resurrection of Jesus was a transformation. He was the firstborn from the dead (Revelation 1:5). His "spiritual body" would never die (1 Corinthians 15:42-49). His resurrection was a "last days" event.

But if it is an eschatological event, why did it happen on a specific first day of the week in first century Palestine? If it belongs to the last things, why do we look back to it as the first thing?

The resurrection of Jesus is an event from the future. It is a future moment that entered human history. God has offered us a preview of coming attractions. He has given us this first fruit as a testimony of the coming harvest.

Through the resurrection, God invades the present with hope. In response to the pervasive despair that death brings, God dispels that darkness with light from the future. He grounds our

hope through the resurrection of Jesus. God reveals the end in Jesus so that life and immortality are embraced through the gospel (2 Timothy 1:8-10).

The first day of the week, then, is filled with hope because Easter Sunday, as the last day, has transformed our experience of death. The first day of the week transports us into the future where we revel in the glory of God's coming reign.

When we break bread on Sunday, we live in the future because by his mighty Easter act God revealed the *eschaton*.

PRESENT

Our weekly first day of the week is also our present experience of God through the Holy Spirit — the experience of Easter. The *eschaton* is already present by the Spirit of God who indwells us.

The power of the Spirit, of course, is the power of the resurrection. Just as God raised Jesus by the power of the Spirit (Romans 1:4), so he will raise us by his Spirit as well (Romans 8:11). But this power is not only future, it is present. The power that will transform our vile bodies into the glorious body of Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:21) is the same power that transforms our fallen lives into the likeness of Christ in the present (2 Corinthians 3:18).

This power is not only the power of moral transformation, but it is the experience of Easter itself. It is the present gift, the guarantee, of what is to come (Ephesians 1:13-14; 2 Corinthians 1:22). Even now, on every first day of the week, we experience the glory of Easter. Christians are filled with the Spirit as they sing to the Lord, pray in the Spirit and worship by the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18-19; 6:18; Philippians 3:3). The experience of the Spirit is the experience of Easter itself. The Spirit is the first fruit of our adoption as children of God by whom we cry "Abba" (Romans 8:15, 23). The Spirit is poured out upon God's children because of Easter.

Easter, then, as the ground of the Spirit's out-pouring, empowers our Sunday worship, transforms our lives and calls us in a personal relationship with God through the Spirit's presence. While Easter is both past and future, it is also present when we experience the resurrection power of Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:10).

When we break bread on Sunday, we experience the power of Easter Sunday as we eat with the living host who shares his table with us.

CONCLUSION

Every Sunday, because of Easter Sunday, we go home alive in the Spirit, alive in hope, and greatly comforted. Though we face death all day long, yet we are conquerors through the one who himself conquered death for our sakes by his own resurrection. Even though death surrounds us and too often invades our lives, Easter Sunday brings hope to every first day of the week.

Paul joins the church outside. He sees Eutychus. He is dead. But Paul announces that he lives. Eutychus gets up and returns to the upper room. He talks with Paul. He breaks bread. It is the first day of the week. Eutychus goes home alive.

“The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted.”

It's Lonely At the Top

by Dan Knight

November – December, 1999

It has happened to me personally. I have felt diminished by it, although the perpetrator only inadvertently caused me to suffer. Since the pain afflicted my ego, I could not complain. I grimaced and bore it.

The scenario is simply described: A person came to me with a spiritual question. I am Minister; I am Teacher; I know Everything. So, naturally, I actively listened and confidently responded to her query. She thanked me and I assumed my rejoinder had satisfied her fully. Later, I overheard the same woman asking the same question of someone else. How could she? Doesn't she understand my answer? Is she just verifying it? Or, as I suspect, is she really interested in an answer that will please her rather than in hearing the truth?

Much later I confronted the reality that I didn't want to accept: I could not respond adequately to her spiritual need.

Now I ask you to multiply that scenario: picture a church that prides itself on giving a Bible answer for any question. Picture a church that has successfully resolved all the issues. Picture a group that is the true Israel of God: we have struggled with the controversy and have emerged victorious.

Upon this group of righteous soldiers comes an unsuspecting visitor. He is impressed with their knowledge, their insight, their conclusions, their biblical wisdom. They lead him through the proper steps of salvation. He submits to Christ (and to the pattern) and begins to grow in his faith. Then the fateful day arrives.

He feels stifled. He has interacted with Christians from other folds (beware the Promise Keepers!) and found his own spiritual life only monochromatic when compared to their fully colorized version. So he informs his leaders of the joy of his discovery. Instead of being treated with respect and encouragement, he is shamed and blamed. The Enforcers of Church Doctrine and Purity blast him for his heresies. They attack the inconsistencies of the other group and leave their once "faithful" member a spiritual wreck, a wounded survivor of a doctrinal skirmish.

Why is it so hard for a church to accept the fact that it might be unable to satisfy adequately every person's spiritual need? Here are my answers to that question:

First, the Enforcers have painted their churches into a corner. Pick an issue, any issue. Let's say the role of women in the assembly. The answers are multiple: women can do this, women can't do that. However, the "this" and the "that" vary drastically from interpretation to interpretation. Nonetheless, the Enforcers collectively come to a conclusion and that settles it. They have arrived at the right answer. Any conclusion that does not agree with their choice must therefore be a wrong answer. Subsequently, when someone suggests a different wind of doctrine, the

Enforcers respond strongly. “No! We have studied the matter and there is no room for more than one right conclusion.” So the church is stuck and drives people away.

Secondly, most Enforcers tend to think of their respective churches as the end of the journey. Anyone struggling and searching for biblical clarity need go no further. “We are at the pinnacle. We have reached the correct conclusion on all of the essential matters and agreeing with us is as spiritually mature as a person could ever be. How could there be a higher level? If there were, we would have told you. Moreover, we would have gone there if there were anywhere higher to go.”

But would they? That brings us to answer number three.

The Enforcers’ comfort zone does not allow them to move outside the box of their own interpretations. I was castigated once for offering a different interpretation of Ephesians 1:3. In my inexperienced state of development, I did not know the “standard” understanding. So, I shared what I read and how I read it. I was accused of denying the truth of scripture. Later I realized that what I had denied was the veracity of the Enforcers’ reading of that particular passage.

Finally, there is the energy question. It takes a lot more energy to think outside the box. The Enforcer feels, but may not admit this: “Not only do I find comfort in this position, my longtime inertia here has totally enervated me. I don’t care if this new understanding is turning the world upside down. I like my view from my sovereign cushion of orthodoxy and I’m staying here. Right here where God is.”

Unfortunately, that is not how growth works. Growth comes from turning toward the Son and loving him so much that I’ll do whatever it takes to become more like him. If the body I’m a part of will not allow that growth, I must, by God’s empowering grace, sever my ties and allow myself to be grafted in elsewhere.

We, as God’s leaders, must overcome our fear that giving people freedom will cause us to lose their allegiance. Remember the movie *Miracle on 34th Street*? Kris Kringle was working for Macy’s as their department store Santa Claus. However, he occasionally referred people to rival department stores if he knew they carried a better product. Store leaders were furious until they discovered the wonderful serendipity that followed Kringle’s approach. People appreciated Macy’s integrity! Customer relations were improved, not diminished.

For us, too, it is an integrity issue. If, in all honesty, we will admit that we are still growing spiritually, we must also admit that there may be people, teachers, and groups who have answers that we do not. We may not be the last spiritual step in every person’s spiritual development. When we embrace this truth, we are free. If we will not accept it, we will wither and die in our sinful arrogance.

Faith, Hell and Tinkerbelle

Walking a Theological Tightrope

by Jane Gibson

November – December, 1999

I'm about to spoil a movie for you, if you're the type of person who can't stand to know the ending or the storyline before seeing it. You may not be planning to see this one anyway; I wouldn't have if it hadn't been starring Robert Downey, Jr. It's called *In Dreams*, in which a writer of children's stories (played by Annette Benning) "meets" a killer. She dreams, and then has visions of moments he experiences, literally seeing what he sees as he stalks and kills his prey.

"No thanks, I think I'll skip that one!" you're saying, wondering why any good Christian would bother. So don't bother; let me just tell you about it.

Benning's character has "seen" a person leading a little girl through the woods; it so frightens her that she convinces her husband to go to the police. We eventually realize that she's not seeing what has happened, but rather what's about to happen – to her own little girl. We see the killer leading the child through the woods, away from an outdoor school play, her fairy slippers walking alongside his muddy shoes.

Only moments before, the parents had hugged her and watched her scamper away in a bevy of other little fairies, their golden wings a blur together. The mother suddenly realizes her daughter is not in sight. From child to child she searches, more frantic by the moment. We see lines of people with flashlights and policemen among them, walking and calling, and then a pair of fairy wings caught on a bramble shining in the searchlights. Welcome to Hell, they seem to say; population, you.

They find the small body in a lake, exactly where the mother's nightmares had shown her it would be. It's a man-made lake we recognize from the movie's opening credits, during which we've seen a small town inundated with water, a church, stores, homes awash and in ruins in scenes reminiscent of Titanic-sinking. What we didn't see was the scene, now played before the mother's anguished eyes, of a small boy tied to a bedpost in a room beginning to fill with the deadly waters. It's the killer, of course. We watch him at various times during our heroine's descent into madness; she can finally piece together his story, and understand that he is a murderer calling out to her, via her visions and in dreams, to come to him, to find him, to stop him.

It must have been God who kept me sitting in the theater, mesmerized as I watched a life parallel to mine in so many ways. Like Benning's character, I have a little girl. I have pretensions, at times, of being a writer, and of children's books. I photograph children in angel wings; many of the children of my church and community look back at me from my "angel wall" and my portfolios. Sweet faces wear wreaths and sunglasses and cowboy hats and wings, always wings. I

live near a man-made lake. I looked into Benning's ravaged face and dead eyes and saw myself. Why was I here? To get a vision myself, a vision of grace.

Benning's character finds the killer, the sweet-faced Downey, at his bewildered and dangerous best. He has captured another little girl to be "daughter"; he wants Benning to be the "mommy" who will finally complete his "family." She escapes with the little girl, but falls with Downey from a high bridge over the lake as police snipers' bullets knock them over. She falls, and falls, and finally plunges into the water below; her unconscious body floats to the top in a beam of light. Suddenly, her own little girl is there under the water with her, saying, "Mommy! Come with me!" Benning's voice whispers, "Where?" the child wraps her arms around her mother's neck and smiles, "Home!" She pulls her mother close in that joyous and hungry way only a child can, and the water through the light seems to envelop them. There is such peace and pleasure in that embrace; suddenly, all is right again. Paradise lost is regained; here is heaven.

We surface into a courtroom, and then a padded cell, where the killer is satisfied to be thrown. His face is finally at peace as well; he says, "Yes, I can live with this." He, too, has been saved. At least for now, at least from himself. Suddenly, a blinding vision of Benning's enraged and contorted face bursts upon him; the white cell walls are suddenly running with blood. The force of his horror at the sight slams him against the wall – and the movie ends.

I was dismayed. "Why did they have to do that? Why did we just have to see revenge, and especially visited on him in the vision of a face already so far away, so far removed into heaven?" I asked my husband. "Wouldn't it have been truly, I mean really and truly horrifying to have seen him fall asleep and be comforted in his dreams by that forgiving mother? Now that would have been truly shocking! But wouldn't it just fit? Wouldn't it be just like our God, and the absolute perfect vision of grace?" I couldn't shake the idea. It stayed with me for days. Wouldn't grace be the most foreign of all alien concepts to thrust upon the post-modern moviegoer? Tim Robbins did it with *Dead Man Walking*. There have been several successful movies with God's grace as at least a plot twist, if not a major theme, such as *Tender Mercies*, *Places in the Heart*, *Babette's Feast*, and of course, the retelling of Hugo's *Les Misérables*. Maybe our popular concept of grace is just another guise for a hybrid humanism that sees grace extended to us because, after all, we're not so bad.

It's easy to sit in a darkened theater and bemoan the fact that my particular vision of what grace means isn't played out on the screen. It's even easy to resolve to be one of those living examples of God's grace which the world so badly needs to see. Doesn't it sound wonderful? To offer our "bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God" as our "spiritual act of worship" (Romans 12:1). How romantic! That means I'll go to church (where people are my friends and love me, forgive me, build me up) and read inspiring books (for only \$12.95 or more per book) and do good deeds that I can fit into my lifestyle and feel great about myself and there we are.

So what did you learn, Dorothy? That I want grace to flood the world with an irresistible vision of Christ's love and forgiveness and sacrificial giving. But I'm not sure I want to be on the crest of the wave. And this, in my life, is the real horror. My spectator mentality, my mediocrity and my comfort in being comfortable. I read the following with horrified eyes, recognizing myself in

the words as surely as if I had recognized my own face as the wild, contorted face of the vengeful mother's ghost:

It is not that our lives are marked by flagrant scandal, or that we are more vicious or selfish than others. It is not that we are less scrupulous than the other fellow. The greatest scandal of our times is that we are like everybody else. In its confused and disorderly indictment the world accuses us of this strange, collective, nameless sin. The world accuses us of worldliness ... [It] knows that we are committed to follow the bloody footsteps of a God who endured a Passion for me; it knows that our flag is a sign of contradiction; it knows that we are scheduled to be counted as fools; and knowing that, it is not surprised that we are guilty of this or that humiliating sin or of some evil which is the consequence of weakness but that we live by the same standards as does the world and that we glory in its prestige (Gustavo Corcao).

Indeed. And so I ask God to forgive me for my timidity, for my insistence on the romance of the resurrection with the cruelty of the cross, for my love affair with pretty words. For my shirking back from the burdens and bonds and boundaries of grace, whatever they may be and however hard I have to work and pray to be shown them. I want to go beyond these words, beyond all words. I want to go beyond talking about grace to meet and wrestle with the true angel of grace. "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power" (1 Corinthians 4:20).

I wonder what kind of day Jean-Paul Sartre had had when he decided that "Hell is other people." Did someone make his coffee too weak or burn his croissants? Or maybe burn his family in a mass grave after a gas chamber shower? That's the trouble with pronouncements and those who pronounce them. They're usually right and wrong at the same time, and very often motivated by what seemed like a good reason at the moment.

Here's a choice we have to make: do we live to please people or God? On the surface of things we immediately say we live to please God. After all, Peter and John were unhesitating in stating their obligation to please God rather than men (Acts 4:19). Paul repeatedly insists that "we are not trying to please men, but God, who tests our hearts" (1 Thessalonians 2:4). But on the other hand, Paul certainly spends a lot of time instructing young Timothy to live "so that everyone may see your progress" (1 Timothy 4) and admonishes both Roman and Corinthian Christians to take their brothers' feelings and beliefs into careful consideration and not become that famous "stumbling block" about which I was carefully warned as a child. In fact, pleasing God seemed to be inextricably tied to pleasing my parents and fellow Christians. I certainly wouldn't hope to please God without also having their approval for everything I did.

I call it the Tinkerbell Syndrome. Remember when Peter Pan begs his fellow Tink-lovers everywhere to applaud so that she will live? Her tiny light glows and dims as we applaud and then stop, and children listening to the book or watching a performance are made to feel immense power, responsibility, and even anxiety over keeping her alive. We Christians are like that, if we're not careful. We're the Tinkerbell whose very survival depends on parents' and fellow believers' approval, glowing when we receive praise and affirmation, sinking into a dull coma of despair when we face the deafening silence of disapproval or even lack of attention when the cheering stops.

If we truly understood grace, there would be no Tinkerbelles in the Body of Christ. And just as important, there would be no children of God clapping from anxiety, trying to keep each other alive by sheer force of our positive interactions. Grace delivers us, doesn't it? It saves us from all that frantic worry that we are somehow not good enough. Of course we're not good enough. No one is. When we finally understand grace, and surrender all pretenses of being worthy of the blessing and love poured on us, we truly begin to live. We feel that flood of relief, that unbelievably wonderful lightness of a crushing weight lifted from our shoulders. It is in response to that relief that we live carefully. Like survivors of some almost-fatal accident, we walk away with a new life, literally. We walk gingerly, reverently, on holy ground. And soon, we begin to dance on that ground, no longer self-conscious and self-condemning. No longer self at all, but "Christ who lives in me." The only applause we hear is God's, and it's the only applause or approval that matters.

My home congregation is a cautiously conservative and lovingly liberal group all at once. When I wanted to make the unleavened bread for our communion in my own kitchen, our elders graciously allowed me to and our pulpit minister presented it to the congregation as a "gift one of our members would like to bestow on us." The Friday before the service, my little girl and I baked bread and sang songs and prayed and when it came time to pierce the soft crusts with fork tines to represent nails, we cried. We laid the loaves on the grill to brown stripes into the golden surface and felt like Romans striking holy flesh with cruel whips. And on that Sunday morning, when the bread was being passed in communion, we cried quiet little tears of wonder again – everyone was eating our bread, what we had brought to Christ's feast to share.

Some loaves were hard to break, too crusty and awkwardly shaped. No one complained, at least not to my face, and several people thanked us. I was loved. I was extended grace. It may sound like a very small thing, but it points to an enormous kind-heartedness, to me. I was hoping to please them, but I wouldn't have been crushed if they had been terribly negative.

No, that's not true. I would have been crushed. I love my brothers and sisters in Christ and have flourished under their gentle and sweet encouragement. I look forward to every single time I get to meet with any of them, no matter how briefly. Sometimes I am Tinkerbelle, beaten down by the world until I'm barely flickering, and it's their applause, their prayers which bring me back to life, life in Christ which they share with me, help the Spirit breathe into me.

So I don't know. I walk in the tightrope of wanting to live a radical grace and just wanting to enjoy its fruits while others do the really hard stuff. All I know is that I share Rich Mullin's prayer, God bless him, every single day:

If I stand, let me stand on the promise that you will pull me through.

And if I fall, let me fall on the grace that first brought me to you.

The Saving Love of God

by Edward Fudge

November – December, 1999

“God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Such a simple sentence cries out for elaboration, which Jesus provides three chapters later in John 6. There, as God fed Israel with manna in the wilderness, so Jesus feeds more than 5,000 people with a little boy’s lunch. He follows this sign with a sermon, the discourse explaining the deed. Presenting himself as the true bread from heaven, Jesus elaborates on God’s love and its results.

“Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst ...

“All that the Father gives me shall come to me; and the one who comes to me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent me. And this is the will of Him who sent me, that of all that He has given me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the Will of my Father, that every one who beholds the Son, and believes in him, may have eternal life; and I myself will raise him up on the last day ...

“No one can come to me, unless the father who sent me, draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, “And they shall all be taught of God.” Every one who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to me ...

“Truly, truly I say to you, he who believes has eternal life ...”

As we reflect on these words, turning them over in our minds, God’s love sparkles like a many-faceted jewel. Look with me at six aspects which Jesus mentions here.

God’s love is passionate. God so loved that he gave his only begotten Son. Even more, God loved us first. Our love to him can never be more than a response (1 John 4:9-10). God is the Great Initiator – we can never get “one up” on him. The most we can ever do is to love God in return. “See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us!” John later writes, challenging our imagination even as he fills our hearts (1 John 3:1).

God’s love is personal. God so loved the world. Not merely Jews – or males – or freemen. Not just the wealthy, or pious, or wise. He loved individual women and men of every tribe and dialect, across every ethnic group and political boundary. Yet Scripture does not teach universalism. Not all sinners will be saved. Nevertheless, we may be quite sure that “the world” will be thoroughly represented in glory.

The marvel is that a love so far-reaching is not diluted in the process. Indeed, God’s love is intensely personal toward all whom it saves. “All that the Father gives me shall come to me,” Jesus promises (John 6:37). “This is the Father’s will,” he continues, “that of all that he has given

me I lose nothing” (6:39; see John 10:14, 26-28; 17:2, 24). We view the larger, corporate picture and proclaim with Paul, “Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Ephesians 5:25). But we freely join the same apostle in making that truth our own: “Christ loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). Jesus did not come to save a faceless mass of sinners. He died to redeem specific human beings, who were already his by divine inheritance (Psalms 2:28; Ephesians 1:18).

There is no reason for controversy here, since the “whosoever wills” and the “elect” are really one and the same. Christians who stress human responsibility view God’s grace in time, while those who emphasize divine sovereignty see it flowing out from eternity. The first group wants to be sure that God is not blamed for the lost. The second group wishes to ensure that God alone is credited for the saved. We may happily rejoice in the both/and on this point, for Scripture certainly makes both points clear. We, too, must make it plain that sinners are truly responsible for the “No” to God’s grace, while their “Yes” is itself evidence that divine grace is at work (Psalms 110:3; Romans 9:16; Philippians 2:13).

God’s love is powerful. Christ’s work will have its intended effect. Because God so loved and gave, whoever believes will have eternal life. “He shall see his offspring,” the messianic prophet foretold; “the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hands” (Isaiah 53:10). And the Father wills that not one of those whom he gave to Jesus will perish (John 6:39).

When he talked about God’s powerful love, Jesus chose superlatives. Unequivocal language. Unqualified words that left no room for exceptions. “All that the Father gives me shall come to me,” Jesus boldly declared (John 6:37). And little wonder, as we keep listening, for God himself will be their teacher, Just as Jeremiah had foretold (John 6:44-45); Jeremiah 31:34). Jesus fearlessly states what no mere man could dare say, making two statements from opposite perspectives, neither allowing room for any exception. “No one can come to me,” the Lord exclaims, “unless the Father who sent me draws him” (John 6:44). But “every one who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me” (John 6:45).

Here is no room for error, for miscalculation, for loss. Jesus drives a peg from both sides, anchoring our hope firmly in the infallible sovereignty of God himself. How we should praise the Father, who loves us so powerfully and effectively!

God’s love is perpetual. The God who gave his only Son will not forsake us halfway to heaven. His plan has always been that the believer “should not perish,” and God always accomplishes what he sets out to do. On this we have Jesus’ own promise: “This is the will of him who sent me, that of all that he has given me, I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day” (John 6:39). The same God who calls us will confirm us to the end (1 Corinthians 1-8-9). He began a good work in us and he will bring it to completion (Philippians 1:6). Because God is faithful, we can be confident. Indeed, God’s faithfulness is the only basis we ever have to be confident of our salvation. The cross shows us God’s deepest heart toward us sinners. And the resurrection shows us God’s final verdict on the saving work Jesus accomplishes there. These gospel facts shine like eternal beacons through the darkness of human weakness and doubt. They remind us, every day, that God will never change his mind about what Jesus has accomplished, and that he will never change his love toward those whom Jesus there purchased for himself.

God's love is profuse. As the overwhelming flood of divine love breaks over us, it washes away every pebble of human ability, sufficiency, or merit. Jesus does not save the deserving, but sinners. He gave himself for the helpless, not the adequate. He died for his enemies, not his associates (Romans 5:6-10). On the cross Jesus removed our sin, made our propitiation, and accomplished our redemption.

Because Jesus fully completed the saving work, in his own perfect doing and dying, nothing we ever perform, experience, or accomplish is any part of the work which sets us right with God. That work was finished almost 2,000 years ago – outside of us, but for us – by the eternal God who, for some 12,000 days, came to dwell among us as one of us. All we can ever do regarding the saving work is to believe it or reject it. By God's grace we can accept it, trust in it, rely on it, and commit ourselves to it – for the rest of our time here and for all eternity.

“Whoever believes” can have eternal life. We might not have any power and we might not have any answers. But the weakest and most unlearned sinner can have salvation and eternal life through trusting the Son of God, as Jesus tells us repeatedly and underscores with his double “Amen” (John 3:16; 6:40, 47). “Surely we must contribute something,” our flesh cries out. But no – this is the work of God, that you believe in him who he has sent” (John 6:28-29). We can bring nothing to God's feast. The table is spread already and the banquet is free for all who will come!

God's love is perilous. Let us make no mistake here. Jesus came to save, not to condemn (John 3:17). Yet, as someone has observed, the purpose of the sun is not to cast shadows – but it does! The wrath of God is the shadow cast by his love. The person who knowingly and persistently rejects God's boundless love in Jesus Christ does not simply miss an opportunity or turn down a good deal. That one despises and insults the supreme sacrifice of infinite love. “This is the condemnation,” John records, “that the light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light” (John 3:19).

This truth flows from the very nature of things. Indeed, “All things came into being” through the Word who became flesh (John 1:2). “In him was life” (John 1:3). “You have no life in yourselves” (John 6:53). It must follow, therefore, as John later reminds his believing community, that “God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. he who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life” (1 John 5:11-12).

What love the Father has shown us sinners! Passionate, yet personal. Powerful and perpetual. But also perilous. At such sayings, many of Jesus' original hearers turned and walked away. May we instead, like peter, have grace to say, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:66).

Hope Network Newsletter: A Letter to our Grandchildren

*by Lynn and Carolyn Anderson
November-December, 1999*

Dear Grandchildren,

The horrible Colorado high school disaster is several months old now. But Columbine seems to have spawned several copycat school violence attempts around the country. Unfortunately, this in turn has also triggered an avalanche of negative generalizations on the heads of American teens. Nevertheless, these unfair and overstated generalizations have warped public perception. In a survey by Public Agenda in early May 1999, 74% of parents described kids as “rude” and “irresponsible” and “wild”; while only 40% of parents polled said today’s teens will grow up to leave America better than they found it. We, your Gran and Pappy, are among those who are tired of hearing today’s teens trashed.

Of course, there is plenty of bad news. We can’t deny that there are some really messed up kids around, and some really mean ones. Probably a few in every school. But, there are lots of mean and messed up adults as well. (After all, we human beings are sinners, part of a fallen race.) However, most kids are neither messed up nor mean. In fact just the opposite appears to be the trend. Here are some hopeful facts: “In 1980, 72% of high school seniors said they had been drinking alcohol recently; by 1998, that figure had dropped to 52%. Drug usage, especially marijuana, is down as well. Teen pregnancy rates have been falling since 1991 and most recently were at the same level as in 1980. Homicides remain historically high among teens, but striking improvements have come in big cities like New York, Boston, and Los Angeles.”

And the improvement is not just in teen behavior; a lot of it is in basic values as well. For example, teens are volunteering in droves for community projects and to work with children. Just since 1995, 100,000 have enlisted in AmeriCorp – more than the Peace Corps (a similar kind of program, which started in the ’60s) had in its first 20 years.

Hey, **Andress, Shaylea, and Caitlin**, your grandparents are very aware that you represent the very best of this good news kind of American teen. On top of that, you are Christ followers, as are millions of teen-aged Americans. And that makes the big good news difference.

At Columbine, only two teens – out of the hundreds in that school – triggered the tragedy. The rest of the students are mostly just plain, normal, good kids. Those who got shot were some of the best. Don’t forget that Cassie Bernall was tracked down because she was a good kid, and when her killers “put a gun to her head while she was praying and asked if she still believed in God, she answered ‘Yes,’ knowing she would die for her answer.”

Actually and factually, if all the teen stories made the headlines, the teen news would be mostly good news. And we want you, our grandchildren, to know that we are proud you are choosing to be part of the good news.

Shaylea, Andress, and Caitlin, you are our three oldest grandchildren – now teenagers – and you provide excellent role models for your younger siblings and cousins. We are so proud that you do not contribute to the American “teen problem,” but to the solution. You are good news. All three of you have given your lives to Jesus, have been united with him baptism – and are serious about following him. You also are so loving and respectful to your parents, your teachers, and to us, your Gran and Pappy. Plus, all three of you run with bunches of wholesome friends, and you think it is silly and dangerous to even experiment with drugs. You love to be involved in community service or in serving the poor or helpless. Yet each of you is beautifully unique.

Andress, we can scarcely believe you are already 16, with a driver’s license. But more importantly, you are a leader among Christian teens at school and church. You were a leader among the kids who turned out of bed early that rainy morning and headed for school before daylight for the first “Meet you at the pole” prayer meeting, with dozens of your schoolmates in San Antonio. You haven’t missed one since. You are excited about being in music and drama presentations at your church. And you proudly wear on your wedding ring finger that “True love waits” covenant ring – a covenant with your Christian peers, with your parents, and with God to be sexually pure until marriage. Beyond this, you are very involved in academics, athletics and other school activities and are well liked. **Andress Lynn Boggs**, your life of worship and witness is definitely a part of the good news.

Shaylea, you are 15 now and a leader in your Christian circles – and have played a big part in musical productions at your Colorado Springs high school and at church. We love the songs of faith and praise that you write and sing to us. You have even helped lead worship. We celebrate your talent for photography too, and one of your most creative pictures hangs on our bedroom wall. And, like your cousin, you also eagerly chose to join a “True Love Waits” covenant. You are so thoughtful of others, especially attentive to people who get left out because they are challenged in some way. Plus, you manage relationships well and have lots of friends. **Shaylea Dawn English**, you are clearly part of the good news.

Caitlin, you are 14 as we write this. You too have long since committed your life to Christ. And we love the way you live it. Again, when you and dozens of your San Antonio classmates gathered “At the pole” for prayer, you were not only there, but had thoughtfully provided doughnuts and juice for everybody. We were so proud of your role in “Esther Goes West,” the drama and music presentation at your church. You are so creative. Since you were little you have written some really neat poetry – lots of it about your faith. And you are so very thoughtful of people, often surprising your parents or relatives by cleaning up the house in their absence, or making something special. You also have loads of friends, and are the life of the party. **Caitlin Cory Boggs**, you too are definitely part of the good news.

Travis, you are 11 – not quite a teen yet. But you are headed in the right direction. Ever since you were little, your heart has been tender toward God. You read Christian books, and, like your sisters and cousins, you listen to Christian music. You even say you want to be a preacher some day. And you have a very strong and sensitive conscience. You are also a talented singer and performer, like your dad – as well as a good athlete. We are amazed at your people skills and your thoughtfulness of those around you. You are a really good big brother to your little sister, **Mariah**, and a great example for her as well. **Travis Hardin English** you too are good news.

Abby, how did you get to be nine already? Although you won't be a teen for a few years, we really like what we see. The poem you wrote in tribute to Rosa Parks is a classic and hangs on our refrigerator. It displays not only your talents but also your heart. And we love the way you are so excited about school. You read so quickly, completing nearly 100 books already this year! And you have loads of friends. You really set an inspiring example for your younger brother **Conner** and your little sister **Ana. Abby Bridges Anderson**, you are destined to be part of the teen-age good news.

Conner Robert Anderson, you are seven and, so far, the only male to carry on the Anderson family name. Already you love good things and are good news. You also say you want to be a preacher. (Of course, Gran and Pappy think it would be wonderful if you and **Travis** become preachers, but what matters much more to us is that you honor Jesus with your whole life, whatever vocations you follow.) **Connor**, with your encouragement and example, **Ana Michelle Anderson** who is now only three is becoming good news as well.

And **Mariah Dee English**, you are nowhere near a teen yet. But at six, you never meet a stranger and love to sing songs about Jesus. So we think you also are good news in the making.

Your Gran and Pappy know that none of you is perfect. Like your parents and grandparents, you never will be. You are each individual persons. So no matter how your parents raise you or what your siblings and cousins turn out to be, what each of you becomes is still your personal choice. No doubt each of you will disappoint yourselves at times. You will always be surrounded – at school and elsewhere – by all sorts of temptations and pressures, and you may mess up now and again. But we don't expect you to give up nor let the peddlers of bad news beat you down, nor do we expect you to be shaped by negative media stereotypes.

Sure, we understand that very likely, not every good choice you make will be a good choice. And we cannot predict the outcome of your lives. But young people like you, and like millions of kids across the country – are good news – very good news. You are doing great and we believe you will keep maturing as people who make a positive difference.

AfterGlow: Resurrection Now

by Phillip Morrison

November – December 1999

It will be the greatest news story of all time, and there won't be anybody to report it. No jumbo headlines, no satellite TV images beamed around the world, no magazine special issues. Yet all the world will be fully aware.

While Jesus' followers were still trying to comprehend the reality of his resurrection, he ascended to the Father and they heard the angelic promise of his return (Acts 1:10-11). Scripture declares that "the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). There will be no need for explanations of the story for we'll be in the story.

Resurrection is not, however, just a future event. Critics of Christianity have often charged that it neglects the problems of here and now and focuses on "pie in the sky by and by." Yes, we look forward to our Lord's return and to our resurrection in immortal, incorruptible, eternal bodies (1 Corinthians 15:52-56). Meanwhile, we witness and experience resurrections from the death and despair of sin's consequences every day.

In my church family there is a woman who has overcome the demons of childhood sexual abuse and adult sexual addiction to build a new life in Christ. In addition to experiencing personal resurrection, she now helps other victims realize that they also can have new life. Of course the worry lines are still in her face and the scars are forever etched on her heart. The Great Physician specializes in healing, not cosmetology.

Our family includes a man who, as a teenager, announced that he was an atheist. More than three decades later, he tearfully reclaimed and declared his faith in God. A brilliant man of science, he'll tell you that nothing he knows is as important as what he believes. He'll also tell you that resurrection is more than anticipation of the future.

And I'm in that family. Committed from childhood to a life of Christian Service, I have faltered and fallen time and again. But each time I have felt the gentle touch of Jesus as he picked me up, gave me new strength, and set my feet once again on the path he pioneered.

The sound of God's trumpet will be heard throughout all the earth, and this time the shout of God's angels will be heard far beyond Bethlehem. What a day that will be!

While we wait for that great resurrection day, we experience smaller resurrections every day. Every one is precious for every one marks a new beginning.

*I wish that there were some wonderful place
Called the Land of Beginning Again,
Where all our mistakes and all our heartaches
An all of our poor selfish grief
Could be dropped like a shabby old coat at the door
And never be put on again.*

There is such a land, Louisa Fletcher, and our Father waits over the way. Meanwhile, he gives us foretastes of glory by loving us, redeeming us, and giving us the new starts life so often requires.