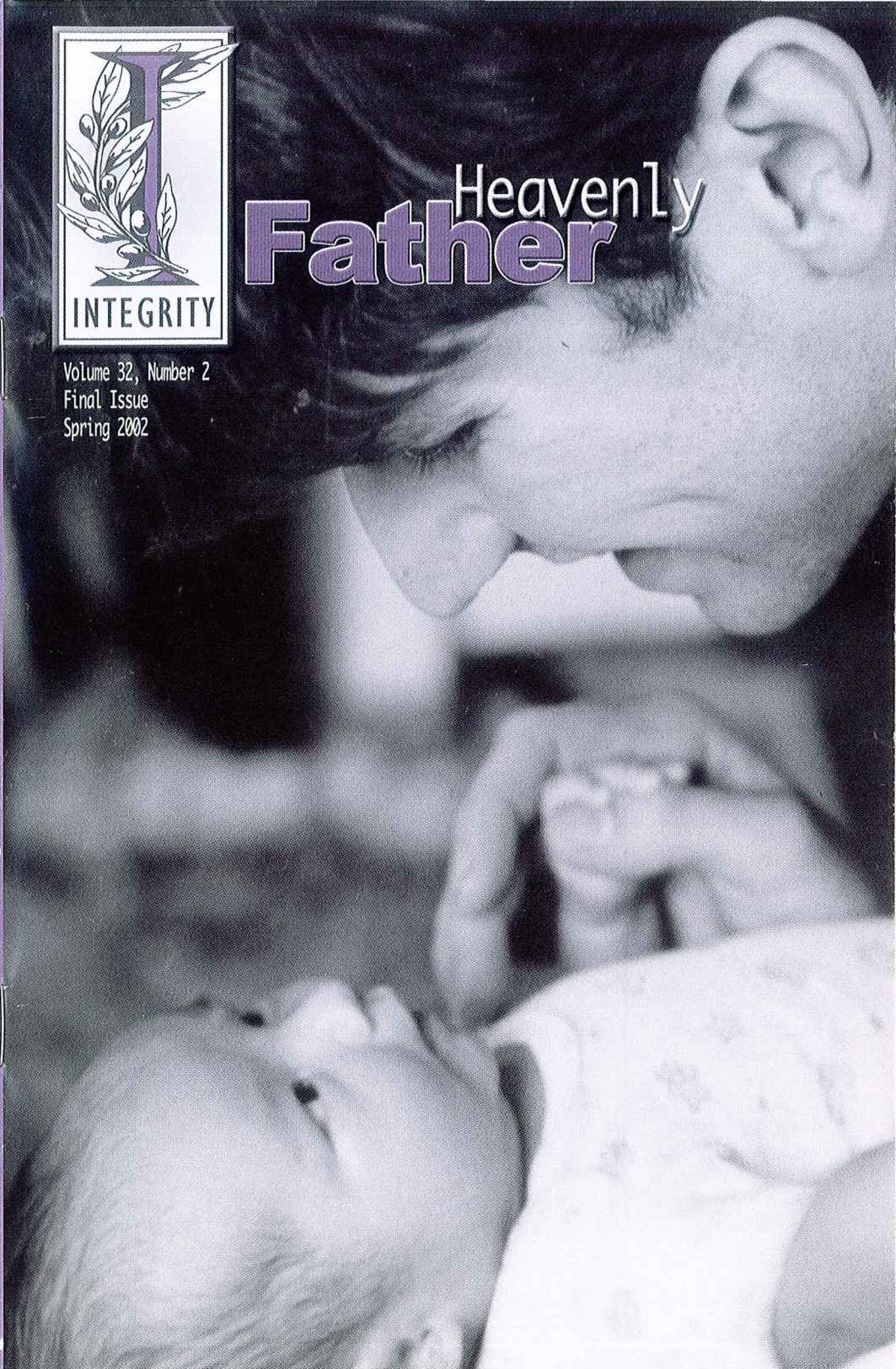




Heavenly Father

Volume 32, Number 2
Final Issue
Spring 2002



On the cover:
New father
Taylor Shepherd
delights in his baby daughter,
Nitawe Elizabeth Shannaquat Shepherd



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ALL ABOUT INTEGRITY

Integrity is a quarterly journal dedicated to stimulating personal and public thought, prayer, and discussion about living the Christian life. Its roots are in Restoration Movement Christianity, encompassing Churches of Christ, Churches of Christ/Christian Churches, and the Disciples of Christ, but Integrity strives for unity among all Christians. Published by a nonprofit corporation, Integrity is intended to be a ministry of reconciliation which utilizes the varied talents of a large community of believers. These believers, united in faith but divergent in opinions, seek to accurately reveal God to both the church and the world so that all may become one as He is one. Accordingly, it should not be assumed that the views expressed by individual authors necessarily represent the opinions of either the editors or of the Board as a whole.

Final Issue, 2002
Vol. 32, Number 2

Co-Editors
Curtis McClane
Noreen Bryant

Board of Directors
Bruce Bryant
Noreen Bryant
Ron Cox
Shelly Cox
Elton D. Higgs
Laquita Higgs
Kay Kendall
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Deborah Shepherd
Don Shepherd
Steve Sprague
Jan Van Horn
John Van Horn

Board Member Emeritus
Amos Ponder

Editorial Advisors
Hoy Ledbetter
Joseph F. Jones
Diane G. H. Kilmer
J. Bruce Kilmer

Many volunteers work together to bring you this journal. If you have questions or needs, please check the directory below for the person who can best serve you:

Editorial Address
Noreen Bryant
2931 Vinsetta Blvd.
Royal Oak, MI 48073

Please send any emails to
noreen@integrityjournal.org or
diakonos5@juno.com.

We welcome your letters and comments.

Curtis McClane
800 Trombley
Troy, MI 48084

Web Site

<http://www.integrityjournal.org>

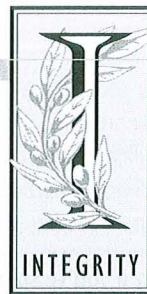
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This is the last issue of *Integrity*. You will be receiving three free issues of *newWineskins*, whom you may contact at the address at left.

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William Palmer
1607 Rockfield
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We have over 25 years' worth of back issues on a wealth of topics. Please write directly to Bill Palmer, and he'll be happy to send you any issues you're interested in. You can also access our web site, which has issues dating back to 1992.



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Ave atque Vale

by Elton and Laquita Higgs
for the entire Board of *Integrity*

Farewells between friends are always a little sad, especially if you've shared a lot together; but it's also good for guests to know when to leave. *Integrity* has been a guest in some of your homes since it began 32 years ago, and we're honored to have been invited, whether it's been for a long or a short stay. But after much prayer and agonized discussion, we have concluded that it is time for our journal to cease publication. This is the last issue. (But see the letter on page 4 for a farewell gift.)

There are practical reasons for our departure from the scene of religious journalism, the most important of which are a lack of finances to continue publishing and health problems and fatigue on the part of key members of our Board. But we choose to emphasize a more positive reason: there is a general feeling that we have finished the job God gave us to do.

Integrity began over thirty years ago as a voice for freedom and openness in the wilderness of narrow legalism. Those committed people who started publishing *Integrity* were opposed and shunned by many members of the Churches of Christ, but for others they brought life-giving fresh air. Many readers felt isolated in their view that the Church of Christ was too narrow and unloving, and they hungrily read the articles which articulated their thinking. As they discovered that there were other like-minded people, hope began to blossom. It has been a long road, but today in the Churches of Christ a number of articulate voices are being raised in an effort to bring us closer to the Spirit of Christ. Those voices are saying things that only Leroy Garrett, Carl Ketcherside, the early writers of *Integrity*, and a few other brave souls dared to say thirty years ago.

YES, STOPPING PUBLICATION IS A BIG CHANGE FOR US, BUT THEN CHANGE HAS ALWAYS BEEN VITAL TO THE WORK OF *INTEGRITY*. WE HOPE WE HAVE DONE OUR SMALL PART IN BRINGING THE FRESH AIR OF GRACE, THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND MORE MEANINGFUL WORSHIP TO THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST.

Yes, stopping publication is a big change for us, but then change has always been vital to the work of *Integrity*. We hope we have done our small part in bringing the fresh air of grace, the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, and more meaningful worship to the Churches of Christ. We believe that what has been said in the pages of our journal has also contributed to enabling our sisters in Christ to realize more of their potential in the work of local congregations.

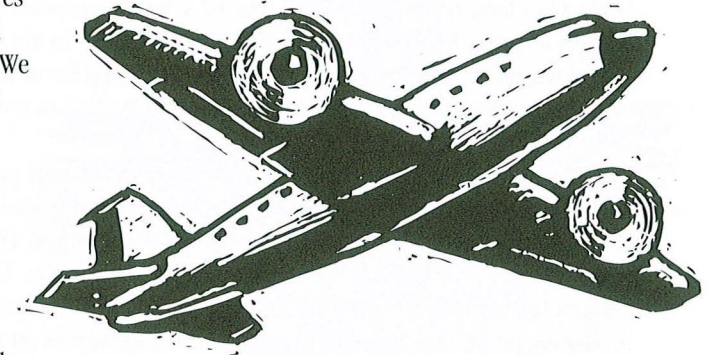
And in a larger way, we trust that *Integrity* has been instrumental in helping churches in our tradition to resolve conflict in the unity and fruitfulness springing from God's love, rather than in the animosity and destructiveness that leads to division. It is gratifying that our recent issue on forgiveness and reconciliation received one of the greatest responses from readers in the history of *Integrity*.

We also believe that another publication, *newWineskins*, shares *Integrity's* goals and can minister to you. We are very pleased that *newWineskins* has agreed to send you three issues of their publication at no charge. After you receive those three issues, you will be asked if you would like to continue to receive *newWineskins* at their subscription price of \$18 per year.

So we wish you farewell and Godspeed, on behalf of all *Integrity* Board members, past and present. May God give us all the grace to grow in integrity.



FOR AT LEAST ANOTHER YEAR, BACK ISSUES OF *INTEGRITY* WILL CONTINUE TO BE AVAILABLE ON LINE AT WWW.INTEGRITYJOURNAL.ORG.



NEW WINESKINS

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Dear Subscribers to *Integrity* Journal,

Our God is absolutely amazing! Linda and I along with Randy and LaJuana Gill have marveled at the astounding journey on which he has taken us all. I have known many on the *Integrity* board most of my life. Bruce and Diane (Hatcher) Kilmer and I grew up in church and youth activities together. We all attended Michigan Christian College in some forgotten decade where I came to love and be mentored by Joe Jones. Bruce and I went on to attend law school together.

Linda and I have received *Integrity* Journal since its inception and honor the work done in its pages to promote reconciliation and honesty in the pursuit of truth. Therefore, this is an incredibly memory-laden moment for us at *new Wineskins* who share these Michigan ties and confidence in the God of reconciliation.

Despite the distance between us our journeys have been very parallel. *Wineskins* magazine first published in 1992 to pursue the issues of spiritual renewal in our churches and in ourselves. The Zoe Group began its work in 1997 to promote worship renewal on the individual and congregational fronts. The two ministries merged last year and Zoe now publishes *new Wineskins* magazine as well as producing praise and worship recordings and conferences on worship renewal across the country. You can visit our websites at www.zoegroup.org and www.wineskins.org to find out more about our activities and interests.

As chairman of the board of the Zoe Group and publisher of *new Wineskins*, I am pleased to introduce you to our magazine with three free issues. Our current issue which you will receive in the next week is dedicated to the theme "Jesus: Our only Benchmark." This issue describes our desire to be non-sectarian pursuers of God's eternal truths. We believe this issue and the two issues to follow on "Justice" and "Consumerism" will demonstrate our commitment to follow in the path set out by

over 30 years of excellent discourse reflected in *Integrity* Journal. Our prayer is that we can continue this journey together and that you will want to subscribe and receive the September/October issue of *new Wineskins* on "Missional Worship."

Thank you for over 30 years of integrity. Help us continue this mission and carry the torch for the next little while.



Larry W. Bridgesmith
Chairman of the Board
The Zoe Group, Inc.
Publisher of *new Wineskins* magazine





REAL-LIFE APPLICATION

Guatemalan Gleanings on the Fatherhood of God

Diane Cowie Quigley, Missionary, Uspantan, El Quiche, Guatemala

“Daddy, I want to jump off of here and I want you to catch me.” Of course my dad caught me. He always did. He also helped me ride a two-wheel bike without training wheels by holding me up and keeping me from falling until I could ride by myself.

Years later, it seemed like a big jump when I went to Guatemala, committed to teaching in a missionary school for ten months. I had learned to trust my earthly father while playing as a child. Now it was time to maintain the childlike trust and transfer it to an adult decision, to trust my Heavenly Father, and head to a foreign country.

When I first went to Guatemala twenty years ago, the country was in a protracted civil war and I found out later that my father had to answer for his decision to let me go to a “dangerous” situation. His reply was something to the effect that “her Heavenly Father will protect her since He is the one who took her there.”

Just as caring parents don't give their children matches to play with even though the child wants them, God

has refused us some of our desires. I only served as a school teacher for one year. After that, I (and later, “we,” when I married four years later) had a series of assignments, not always to our liking. One was in a certain part of Guatemala in the opposite end of the country from where our hearts were. We still don't know why we were redirected to a different location, so we have had to trust that God did it for our good.

The biblical image of the Potter and the clay comes to mind when we see neighbors making pots or firing them (dense smoke fills our yard.) We are reminded that God the Father molds us into what He wants us to be. Like kids, we don't see the bigger picture or understand at the time what God is trying to accomplish in us. We don't understand why we have to go through the intense heat.

As we sojourn among Guatemalans, we live with the tension of the cultural differences and struggle to understand their concept of Christianity as well as the suffering caused by a less-than-positive father-child relationship. At a missionary conference about

ten years ago we were challenged to grapple with this issue and enhance our ministry to the hurting. Since I had such a positive experience with my dad, I did not readily relate to those who didn't have that blessing. I had to begin to make mental notes of what goes on around me that would help us minister more effectively in portraying God as Father.

God as Father in Guatemala

After 500 years of Spanish influence, Spanish Catholicism is well incorporated into the cultural subconscious of Guatemala. Mary is called the “mother of God” and is given the prominence of a co-diety with the Father by many Catholics in Guatemala. When a new bishop was installed in Guatemala City in July, a full page newspaper ad admonished the faithful to pray to God and the Virgin Mary for the prelate. Mary gets credit for what the triune God does. She is needed to complete the “Holy Family.” To call on God the Father often takes a back seat to calling on Mary. It is not uncommon to hear an ill person pray to the Most Holy Virgin. It seems like God is regarded as too far away and impersonal to care about the struggles of our daily life, so perhaps Mary is pressed into service to fill in the gap. Then, too, in Guatemala, religion mirrors society instead of transforming it. This difference makes us appreciate our Father who allows us direct access to His throne because of our relationship with His son.

Predating the arrival of the Spanish to Guatemala is the traditional Mayan religion, which is making a comeback under the guise of a revival of Mayan culture. This religion has male and female deities. Their role is to control the forces of nature. At best they are capricious and demanding, and are always feared. They must be placated, along with the ancestors, to prevent crop failure, illness, injury, or economic disaster. That a god could be tender and affectionate does not enter the equation.

Interestingly, Christians in at least two of Guatemala's Mayan ethnic groups have produced a contextualized version of the parable of the Prodigal Son to use as an evangelistic tool in their own communities. The scene with the father seeing his son walking toward him is a gripping scene as the usually stoic Mayans portray the father expressing much emotion. It reminded me of the hymn sung in my youth “Love For All” where one stanza alludes to this parable. “See my Father waiting stands, See, he reaches out his hands, God is love, I know, I see; Love for me, yes, even me.”

The assertion about the concept of God as father being colored by a person's relationship with his father set us to thinking about the Guatemalan families we know. Just recently we read a Guatemalan Christian publication that featured an article on this topic. The writer said that in 1957 he had heard about the man who bitterly responded

“If God is like my father, then I don’t want anything to do with him!”

Adoption

The basis for our relationship with Father God is that He has adopted us as His children. None of us are born His children. We have to give ourselves for adoption, and allow Him to get close to us and become our Father. How well I could picture that type of a relationship! I had gone with my family to the judge’s chambers to finalize my sister’s adoption when I was eleven years old, a solemn occasion. The judge read the adoption paper. There was a note of finality. Dora was forever ours, with our last name, and an heir to my parents’ estate. That was my understanding of the term “adoption.”

What an exciting concept to promote to those of my host country!

Adoption in Guatemala

However, I found that in Guatemala, the term “adoption” is used differently. It is not uncommon for a baby or small child, especially if a girl, to be given up when the mother dies. A prospective home is approached and asked “don’t you need a girl to help you?” The orphan is “adopted” —clothed, fed, and sheltered—in exchange for her labor. This, in contrast to our adoption by our heavenly Father, always leaves her to be a second-class member of the household. Nor will she have any inheritance in the adoptive family and possibly none in the natural family that gave her up.

Psalm 27 is often read in public worship at the church we attend. Verse 10 says: “If my father and mother were to abandon me, you would receive me and console me.” That is the kind of adoption God has in mind.

Fatherless

In the rural town where we live, we’ve been disturbed by the lack of presence of the fathers in the lives of many of the children we know. Sure, many have lost their fathers to death, but in addition, there are the “dead-beat” dads—the alcoholics and the deserters, and the ones who father the children of their maids but won’t acknowledge them. Perhaps more peculiar to Guatemala and other Latin American countries are the fathers who live and work in the USA and send money back to the family.

They are gone for years at a time without seeing their families. Those who don’t emigrate often migrate to get jobs that keep them far from home for weeks at a time. Others are gone all week and only get home for the weekends, for years on end. The father’s economic input is there, but his presence isn’t. It isn’t surprising that some Guatemalan children know they have a dad, but they don’t have a recollection of him.

For those whose father is prominent in the home, there is often a separation when the child pursues education beyond ninth grade at a boarding school, coming home about once a month for a long weekend. It seems

that almost everything in Guatemalan culture conspires to keep a child from any prolonged contact with his or her father.

Is it any wonder that we often hear the believers sing “Never, never, never has He left me”?

What we can do

Although Christianity is well established in our town, like anywhere, there is room for ministry. Part of what we are trying to do is live a Christian lifestyle in plain view of our neighbors. We can model what is not known. For example, word got back to us of an Indian man, well acquainted with Scriptures, who had been in our house when one of our children was misbehaving and needed discipline. I excused myself to deal with the issue. I think a “time out” was the corrective measure. As a result, our visitor understood that there is a difference between discipline and a beating. I don’t even remember the incident, but the fact that this private disciplining, seen by one witness, got back to us through the grapevine, told us that he sure did! It is sobering to realize the extent to which our lifestyle is being observed.

We can share Marty as a father with the children in our neighborhood. Often it is the simple things that mean so much. One is to come into our yard and get on the swing and beg Marty for

“just one big push.”

When 25 kids came to our son’s birthday party, Marty was part of the tug o’ war, falling on the ground with the rest of them. And when they misbehave, he can discipline in love, which is sometimes nothing more than sending them out of the yard with an explanation of what the offending behavior was.

We also have the opportunity to answer their questions, and as any parent knows, it is a rare child who doesn’t have questions! We especially spend time with them when they ask questions about God and the demons. (One child told of the witchcraft her aunt practices in the house adjoining hers.) That leads to prayer with the children, for protection from the Evil One.

We believe that God knew he was sending His son into a world filled with pain, suffering, and sorrow from a lack of good fathers. He also inspired Paul to talk about his role as a spiritual father figure. Paul told us to imitate him as he imitated Christ. And what was Christ’s response to children? Let the children come, and do not forbid them. In a culture of high illiteracy, we are aware that the only version of the Bible some of our neighbors will read will be the “version” that we Christians live. ❀

Diane Quigley went to Guatemala in 1981, and met her husband, Marty, there in 1985. Their ministry focus is helping Mayan Indian peoples to meet the Father God of the Bible through Scriptures translated into their respective indigenous languages. They live in Uspantan, El Quiche, Guatemala with their son, Joe, and daughter, Miriam.



A Father's Love

Kevin Corbin

A father's love for his children is hard to explain. You have to experience it. It is different than a love a man has for his wife or his friends. I am the father of two boys (ages 20 and 14), and I am very proud of both of them. God has blessed my wife and me with children that turned out far better than our parenting abilities should have allowed.

My sons are the joy of my life and the bane of my existence. At times I'm so proud of them that I almost burst at the seams. Others times, I want so much for them to be perfect, that I miss the joy that they bring to me and am harder on them than I should be.

Both boys have been overseas on mission trips, unaccompanied by either my wife or me. I trusted God and I trusted the common sense my boys have, but I was torn. I didn't know whether to hold on tight and not let them go, or to host a parade and tell the world, "Look what my boys are doing!"

In the end I did neither. I hugged them, prayed with them, told them I loved them and sent them off in the

care of God. I was frightened for them, proud of them and a thousand other emotions all at the same time.

I regularly tell them how much I love them and how proud I am of them. Sometimes I get a blank stare in return. I know that down the road when they become fathers, they will understand what I was talking about, but that uncomprehending stare hurts in the moment.

God the Father knows what it is like to pour out His love to someone and have a blank stare—or rejection—in return.

Fathers are supposed to foreshadow God for our children. We are called to be wise, fair, giving, forgiving, loving and just. Like Him, we are called to be servant leaders, who put others needs first. The reality is that we are, at best, some of those things, part of the time.

I pray that my boys will see God in the things I do right and recognize that it is me, not God, who is fallible when I mess up. Our heavenly Father carries to perfection with ease all those things that we can at best faintly mirror.

I think about what it meant for God to give up His Son for me. I cannot truly understand it, because I would give up my life for my boys; however, I cannot imagine loving so much that I would give them up for someone else. Given a choice between saving the life of one of the boys or saving my own, I would save them every time.

I understand part of God's heart better since I became a father.

Sometimes as a dad, I must let my boys make mistakes and face painful consequences. There are times that the only way they will learn is the hard way. I allow them to make the mistake, knowing what they will face for their choices and it tears my heart apart. I bite my tongue to keep from saying "I told you so." I want to make the consequences disappear, but I know that in the long run, it is better for the boys to face up to reality.

I try to understand how God must have felt when He was left with no choice but to banish Adam and Eve from the garden. I see Him standing there with a resolute, stern face, telling

them to leave. Inside though, His heart must have been breaking because He knew they could not have fully understood the consequences of their action.

God sees the same thing happen every day to millions of His children. I can't imagine the pain He feels. I understand, if only for a moment, that line that, as a child, I hated to hear, and never understood until now: "this hurts me more than you."

As a father, I also get to watch my sons succeed and make the right choices. I have a great sense of pride and joy in their accomplishments. As our Father, imagine how much it pleases God when we are triumphant—when we turn to Him and are obedient.

Fatherhood is a roller coaster of emotions. The bad times hurt beyond description and the joys are sometimes forgotten, but I confess that becoming a father was one of the best things I have ever done.

Thank you, God, for my children.
Thank you, God, for being our patient Father. ❀

Kevin Corbin is a Canadian writer, speaker and Bible teacher with a passion for people to know Jesus. His work has appeared in many local, regional, national, and international newspapers and magazines. He writes in a variety of genres for Christian and non-Christian audiences.

He is the author of the daily on-line devotional "Gleanings from The Word: Experiencing an Extraordinary God in Ordinary Life." Gleanings is read by more than 30,000 people worldwide.

Gleanings can be viewed on the web at <http://gleanings.jesusanswers.com> or delivered free to your e-mail in-box by sending a blank email to Gleanings_From_the_Word_subscribe@yaboogroups.com



Amos: A Call to True Worship and Justice

Jim Pool

This is a transcription of a sermon given in March 2002. -Ed.

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.” These are among the last words of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. King was a preacher, a pastor, a leader—a social activist who was concerned with peacefulness. King was a herald, a herald for justice. King’s messages and life had a prophetic quality, calling a nation to honor God and pursue true justice. When I read the prophets of old, I often think of Martin Luther King, Jr., who proclaimed a message in keeping with theirs, who sought to live a life modeled on theirs, and who died the kind of death they often died—martyred for his vision and passion.

The prophets help us understand Jesus

The era of the prophets is one hard to pinpoint (seeing as it spans centuries), but to understand Jesus and His Kingdom, we must come to grips with the prophets, for He saw Himself as standing in the line of their tradition. The prophets were messengers of the Kingdom, declaring, and often acting out, what life in that Kingdom was truly like. To help us hear their voice and

their message, let’s look at one prophet in particular, one of the so-called “8th century prophets”—who were among the first of the writing prophets. There were a handful of prophets who were near contemporaries of each other, and who each proclaimed a similar message: a call to Israel and Judah to return to God, to faithfulness in body and mind and heart, in word and worship and deed. In this article we will engage with the word of the Lord through the prophet Amos, hearing his challenge to Israel (and to us) and reflecting on how we can heed his call.

Amos, who didn’t consider himself a prophet

Amos challenges us, calling us to worship and justice, to be people of faith who rely on God in trouble and honor Him by caring for those He cares for. Amos is the third book of the so-called “minor prophets” after the major prophets of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. We’ll be focusing on chapter 5.

Now, Amos himself did not consider himself a prophet. At one point, when criticized by the “powers that be” over the sharpness of his message, this is how Amos responded(7:14-15), “I am

not a prophet, nor am I the son of a prophet; for I am a herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs. But the LORD took me from following the flock and the LORD said to me, ‘Go prophesy to my people Israel.’” And so he did. This isn’t a major point of our study, but it is nonetheless very instructive for us. Amos did not consider himself privileged with some special status, nor did he consider such an office necessary, in order to declare the word of the Lord. His desire was to be faithful to God by sharing the wisdom and message God had given him. In our day, Amos would be a nurse or a teacher or a teller or an engineer or a stay-at-home mom. Now our words do not carry the same authority which Amos’ did, but all of us, regardless of our “office” or position, can share the words of God with power and conviction. I am not the only one who preaches – we are all the ministers (aka “servants”) of the church. This point is good to remember, the next time we see a need and assume, “I’m not qualified to take care of that.”

Amos’ challenge

The heart of Amos’ challenge to the people of the northern kingdom of Israel is this, “Seek the LORD that you may live.” This is found in verse 4 and is repeated in verse 6 of Chapter 5; this repetition serves to highlight this as the core of Amos’ message. It bears repeating: Amos is challenging his hearers to seek the Lord that they may live. It is an urgent need for the people of Israel. Notice how this section

opens – with a song, a dirge, a song of grief and doom, a sorrowful picture of the virgin Israel abandoned, all alone, desolate and fatally wounded so that she cannot rise. It is not a happy picture, nor the opening you might expect from the prophet—it is certainly not the image which the Israelites saw when they looked in the mirror. But it was what Amos (and thus, God) saw when he perceived the Israelites. Do you feel the force of this? Do you feel the pain of this picture? Imagine the Church, the Bride of Christ, beautifully adorned to meet her groom, but instead lying destitute in a pile of trash, wedding dress torn, weeping and alone. That is the force of this passage. Do you sometimes feel that way about the Church? Can you imagine what might bring the Church, which is us, to that place? If you’re having trouble, Amos will help stir your creative juices.

Pouring out rain and judgement

Challenging the people with this vision of themselves lying destitute, hopeless, alone, the prophet’s first move is to remind them of whom the Lord is they should seek. He does this in verse 8, the Lord is “He who made the Pleiades and Orion and changes deep darkness into morning, who also darkens day into night, who calls forth the waters of the sea and pours them out on the surface of the earth, Yahweh is His name.” The God whom we are called to seek is none other than the

mighty creator God, Yahweh, the One Who Is, the One who is with us and for us. This is the God who not only pours out rain, but also is able to pour out judgment, wherever and upon whom-ever He wills. This is our God.

Next, the prophet reminds them of who they are—in other words, he reminds them of their sin and why they stand under judgment. What is the essence of their sin as pointed out here? It is a self-indulgent disregard for justice and the poor. There is a disregard for justice. The leaders of the community refused to listen to wisdom or correction when making decisions and deciding on matters of justice. In the Bible, “the gate” refers to the gates of the city or village, where it was common for the leaders of the community to come together to decide on matters of importance for the community. They abhorred those who possessed integrity. They took bribes and persecuted those who were righteous, and the poor. In fact, they

**WHAT IS THE ESSENCE OF THEIR SIN?
IT IS A SELF-INDULGENT DISREGARD FOR JUSTICE
AND FOR THE POOR.**

refused even to listen to the poor or hear their cases. But they went even further with the poor, for the wealthy leaders also extorted the poor, so that they could build fine houses and live extravagantly. I once saw a news piece, by the Fox 2 TV Problem Solvers, where they investigated a wealthy man who owned dilapidated property in

downtown Detroit, complete with cracked walls and cockroaches, while he lived in a beautiful lakefront home in wealthy north Oakland County. He refused comment, as you might expect. Let's just say that the Fox 2 Problem Solvers would be all over these wealthy Israelites!

Return to trust in God

So, in the midst of their sinfulness and rebellion, Amos called on the people of Israel to return to their God. They were called to seek the Lord because they trusted in many other things. They needed God in order to avoid judgment and exile, and these other things they were trusting in would not protect them. This passage outlines three specific areas in which they trusted in things other than God. The first is found in v. 5 - Bethel and Gilgal. Bethel and Gilgal were prominent cities of Israel. Bethel was one of two places in the country where the king had established a high place—where the people corrupted the true worship of Yahweh. Literally, verse five reads, “do not seek Bethel;” God is contrasting these two ways—seek ME, and do not seek these ways of your own devising. Trust me, not your own wisdom and strength. Obey ME, not your false teachers. Bethel and Gilgal, our own strength and wisdom and ideas of truth, will not be able to stand in the day of God's judgment and they will come to ruin and exile. We also get the sense from verse 11 that they trusted in their own wealth—they had built houses of well-hewn stone with

pleasant vineyards. They trusted in the security they created for themselves to avoid judgment and trouble. Do not be fooled, God says, a plump 401k with a diversified stock portfolio in a comfortable suburban home will not save you in the day of trouble—His hand can reach you there and He is able to bring you down, should you force His hand by persisting in failing to seek Him and continuing in the abuse of justice.

Hear this: He doesn't really want to do it, our God is not a judgment-crazed petty tyrant who longs to harass people in their comfort. Rather, He is a God who longs to provide true comfort, the comfort of reliance on Him, and in keeping with His passion for justice and goodness, so that all can enjoy this provision. He longs to bring us goodness, and He also longs to see us refined so that our hearts are truly set on Him. He refined Israel and He is able to refine us, if need be. Finally, the nation of Israel trusted in the day of the LORD. To talk about this fairly would require an entirely separate sermon, but I think it is important so please stick with me for a minute while I develop this point.

The day of the Lord

Over the course of its glorious and turbulent history, the people of Israel often found themselves beset by enemies who threatened their way of life and existence. To them, this was a threat to the promise of God to provide them this land and to their call as His people. In response to these seasons of difficulty, the prophets, leaders, and

people developed a theology of “the day of the LORD.” The day of the LORD would be the time (not necessarily a literal day) when God would act decisively to restore their fortunes, defeat the enemy, and bring to them the fullness of the blessings they were promised by God. In our day, many in the church would think of “the Second Coming” or maybe the “rapture”, or

**“DO NOT BE FOOLED,” GOD SAYS, “A
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possibly some kind of “outpouring” or “revival” in the same way; it is the time when God will decisively act to restore our hopes and bring about the final blessing. The northern kingdom of Israel was under serious threat from the increasingly powerful empire of Assyria during Amos' ministry, and it is clear that they were looking to the “day of the LORD” as one way for their escape. “Well,” says Amos, “be careful what you ask for, since the day of the LORD is a day of trouble and judgment as well as blessing. If the day of the LORD were to come now and He found you as you are now, it would be like you were a man fleeing from a lion, finally escaping him only to turn around and find that you had hidden in a bear's den! Or, if you finally make it safely home from the lion, you slam shut the door, and tiredly lean against the wall to catch your breath, only to

be bitten by a snake hiding in the cracks!”

Jesus picks up this same theme for his contemporaries, which Matthew writes about for us in the Sermon on the Mount, “Not every one who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name cast out demons, and in your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you, depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.’” This is such an important theme that it is picked up again later in Matthew’s gospel. This is the famous parable of the sheep and the goats—where those who encountered the Lord in their feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, welcoming the stranger, are blessed and inherit the kingdom. Those who failed to do these things, to their clear surprise, are cast into judgment.

We need to hear Amos!

We need to hear this message! I don’t want to be a doom and gloom guy, but this is a vital message of the Kingdom and central to God’s mission on earth. We are called to seek the LORD, to truly seek Him, and there are consequences for not doing so. Amos teaches us this, as do many of the other prophets.

How do we seek the LORD?

We need to bring this all together.

Amos makes a clear call to the people to seek the LORD, but what is it that they should do? How do they, and we, go about seeking the LORD? We might expect that the answer would be to call a big church meeting, to pray and fast, and give lots of money to the church. That is often how we think of “fixing” our church problems. Let’s look at God’s answer through Amos. Look at verse 21-23—“I hate, I reject your festivals, nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them; and I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps.” This is strong language! Sure, the northern kingdom had corrupted their worship of Yahweh with golden calves and an improper priesthood, but that is not the point that God is driving home here. He says that in verse 5. Here He is saying that, even if maybe they were to try and straighten that stuff out, and go with the practices which He had given them (these were God-ordained practices!), that He would not listen or even look. God’s concern is not primarily with these ritual sacrifices – as He calls to their remembrance in vv. 25-26, they did not have this official religious system of sacrifice in the wilderness, and yet God still was with them, even though they carried the idols of false gods with them! This religious system will not save them; God will. God’s concern is not with the maintenance of a “system,” but with

the development of character in His people, the growth of His Kingdom of goodness and justice, and others outside of His blessing coming to enter into it. Hear this—I love our services of celebration, and our reflection services, and our worship, and our giving. But God is not interested in those things if we are not concerned with His heart of justice and goodness and helping those outside the Kingdom enter into it.

Let justice roll down

So what did the people of Israel need to do? What should we always be careful to ensure is happening in our community? Hate evil, love good, pursue justice. If we seek good and not evil, then the Lord will be with us, just as we say that He is. Finally, Amos paints a beautiful picture for us in v. 24: “Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” Have you ever seen a big waterfall out in nature, or a mighty stream? There is such beauty and power, and the water just keeps coming and coming and coming. That is the power and place of justice and goodness in the Kingdom of God.

In closing, I want to ask you one final question. What would it look like for you to release rivers of justice and righteousness, to see these flow out of your life? How could you do it? Will you take the time to ask God and see if

He will help provide an answer? Will you trust Him enough to respond? Can we as a community release healing waters of justice and goodness into our communities? How? That is our call.

But the dilemma is this: every

WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE FOR YOU TO RELEASE RIVERS OF JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS, TO SEE THESE FLOW OUT OF YOUR LIFE?

aspect of our culture will be fighting against us. We live in a self-centered, overly-busy, individualistic culture. I am sure that most of us are asking ourselves two questions: “who is going to look out for my needs if I am looking out for the needs of others?” and “how I am really going to fit this into my schedule?” If we are honest, we are thinking these things. No one is to blame here, we were all born and raised in this culture. We breathe it like air.

What we need is radical rethinking, the kind that Jesus calls us to, and radical living, which the Holy Spirit empowers us to do. Living lives of worship and justice will be hard, but there is hope. We can look out for each other’s needs, as a community, and we can encourage each other as we seek to create room in our lives for justice. Let’s press on together. ✨

Jim Pool holds a B.S. from West Point and an M. Div. from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He and his wife, Megan, pastor the Royal Oak Vineyard Church in Royal Oak, Michigan.



Don't Worry

Ann Evankovich

I'm having a ball watching your son eat his Danish," the stranger in line behind me at the airport whispered. I had been watching too, but in the anxious, protective way of a mother in a crowd. Mick was gulping down his breakfast in the seats while I waited for the boarding passes. I smiled and looked at my 5 year old again. He was going for the sticky fruit center. The pastry wrapped around his blueberry face and his eyes were closed, oblivious to the growing mess on the floor and in his lap. When was the last time I ate something with such simple abandon, such engrossing pleasure?

"I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3). Did they have danishes in Jesus' Jerusalem? What was it about this jelly-covered boy that Jesus wanted me to see?

I think it was the same thing I saw in the little girl worshipping in the front row at the last Zoe worship conference in Nashville, TN. A spectacular group of children were leading worship with every muscle in their bodies. I was

tapping my foot. I was clapping my hands and singing along. But the little girl on the front row was jumping. She was dancing. Her hands were stretched straight up to the sky. I held back. She did not.

When children are delighted with anything, they aren't concerned with what anyone else is thinking. It's more than that, even. Children aren't even aware of the presence of others in moments of pleasure. They aren't worried about their shoes getting muddy when they see a beautiful stream. They aren't worried about their pants matching their shirt. They aren't worried about blueberry stains on their clothes. They aren't worried about raising their hands too high in worship.

We teach them to worry.

"I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." We have to change to become like children. But change is so frightening.

Children don't worry about how others perceive their joy. I do. I have to figure out how to lay my worry down. It would be a big change for me

to stop worrying. "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to life?" (Matt 6:27) I catch myself when I feel the impulse to raise my hands in worship. Who is sitting behind me? Will they think I'm showing off? Is anyone else raising her hands? And then the moment of freedom in my worship is squelched. I have to find a way to cast off my inhibitions—especially when I worship.

My daughter and her friend were on the front pew to have the best view for a baptism. They were standing, bouncing as they waited for the ceremony to begin. My first impulse was to make them sit and calm down. But then I wondered why we all weren't as excited to see this new birth. "But the fruit of the Spirit is . . . JOY . . . Against such things there is no law" (Gal 5:22-23). I let them delight in the baptism. I longed for the freedom they felt. There is no law against joy.

Jesus requires us to constantly undergo change to become more like him. "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). Too often we perceive change as an admission of error. But changing does not necessarily mean that we were wrong before, only that we are striving to improve and move closer to God. In Paul's second letter to Corinth he tells us that we are "being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is Spirit" (2 Cor 3:18). Change comes from the Lord. We are in a process of transfor-

mation that is guided by Him. We need not fear change. "Perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18). We cannot stop change when God wants it. Even Gamaliel the Pharisee recognized this when he said, "For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God" (Acts 5:38-39).

TOO OFTEN WE PERCEIVE CHANGE AS AN ADMISSION OF ERROR. BUT CHANGING DOES NOT NECESSARILY MEAN THAT WE WERE WRONG BEFORE, ONLY THAT WE ARE STRIVING TO IMPROVE AND MOVE CLOSER TO GOD.

My home congregation, a Church of Christ, has been wrestling with change with the intensity that Jacob wrestled with God in Genesis 32. Right now we are limping like Jacob, who was changed forever by his encounter. To every change, there has been resistance. When a woman made an announcement on Sunday morning about the program she was coordinating, four people walked out, never to return—just because a woman was speaking from the pulpit. When we remodeled the auditorium so the podium didn't have the feel of the Holiest of Holies, someone said it violated his idea of "sacred space." He left. When we added Power Point to our worship service, someone complained that showing artwork "isn't scriptural." He left too. When my

father and I co-taught a Sunday morning adult class for men and women, people left again. I was accused of “wanting my name up in lights” when I asked if my name was going to be listed as a teacher with the male teachers. Change for us has been slow and painful. But the pain, the

BUT IF OUR GOAL IS TO FOREVER BE RECOGNIZED AS A MAINLINE CHURCH OF CHRIST, THEN OUR WORRY ABOUT WHAT OTHERS THINK HAS TAKEN OUR SOULS PRISONER.

resistance to change, comes from our adult worries. We are not approaching God as the children approached Jesus in the crowd. They ran through the crowd and climbed into his lap. We more often are the stiff crowd, keeping out women, children, artists. And why? Because we let our worry guide our actions instead of our focus on Jesus.

I think the bottom line of our congregational worries is that we fear that other Churches of Christ will no longer recognize us as a Church of Christ if we keep changing. Our worry is paralyzing us. In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul talks about becoming all things to all people in order to win them for Christ. If our mission as a church is to reach those people who truly don't know God, then we have to use means that are culturally relevant. Paul did. Jesus certainly was culturally relevant. But if our goal is to forever be recognized as a mainline Church of Christ, then our worry about what others think

has taken our souls prisoner.

God is the only being that is changeless (Heb 13:8, James 1:17). I have heard several of my critics chide me with, “Change for the sake of change is wrong!” If I were brave, I would say in response, “Resisting change for the sake of staying the same is wrong.” Refusing to consider that change is possible shows hubris. How can we be certain that we are the ones who have all the right answers? Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us to “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, He will make

your paths straight.”

God is our Father. We can trust him. No matter how much even our earthly fathers love us, they want us to change. Fathers want their children to grow and learn. God wants this for us too. God sent his only son Jesus to change everything. *We must change to please him.*

In my next worship service, I probably won't be dancing or jumping like that little girl in Nashville. Change is a process, like a long journey. Have you ever taken a journey with a child? Children enjoy

playing car games. They are excited to make stops along the way and explore or run around the lawns at the rest stops. But if you have ever traveled with children, you know their predominant unrelenting question. It is my question, too, as we journey closer to the lap of Jesus through changes that include the inclusion of women's voices, new music, emotional worship, technology, and art: Are we there yet? How much longer? How far have we come? Will I still be alive when we get there? ❀

Ann Evankovich lives and worships in Bowie, MD. This article can also be found on the website of the Zoe Group, www.zoegroup.org, the organization which publishes new Wineskins, the magazine to which Integrity's readers will be introduced. We encourage you to visit this site for more articles like Ann's.



**ETERNAL GOD,
WHO COMMITS TO US
THE SWIFT AND SOLEMN TRUST OF LIFE—
SINCE WE DO NOT KNOW
WHAT A DAY MAY BRING FORTH,
BUT ONLY THAT THE HOUR FOR SERVING YOU IS
ALWAYS PRESENT,
MAY WE WAKE TO THE INSTANT CLAIMS OF YOUR
HOLY WILL,
NOT WAITING FOR TOMORROW,
BUT YIELDING TODAY.
AMEN.**

—COLLECT, BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER



An Interview: Don't Give Up

Laquita M. Higgs

What word would you use to describe the teenagers of America? "Confused." responded Vic Bliss. "Searching," added his wife, Mary.

Vic and Mary are well qualified to answer that question. Vic, who has degrees from Rochester College and Abilene Christian University, has been the youth minister at the Trenton Church of Christ in Trenton, Michigan, for almost eight years. That's a long time, as the average stay of youth ministers is from 18 to 24 months. Vic, who is also in charge of teen week at Michigan Christian Youth Camp, has been instrumental in bringing to Christ a number of youth who come from non-Christian homes. Teen Praise on Sunday nights at Trenton (a church of over 400) sometimes has as many as 60 young people worshipping God.

Vic says that teenagers are confused because they are testing many things—many of them quite different from the teen experience in past years—at an earlier age. On the other hand, Vic finds teens open to giving God a chance, and Vic is deeply committed to sharing his faith with them, telling them that there is hope in a world that seems

hopeless. The teen years are a critical time period in getting a commitment to Christ. A large percentage of Christians make their commitment before the age of eighteen, but some of today's teens tend to be skeptical because they have seen a lot of sham, so Vic tries very hard to be totally honest with them. He tells them that, with Jesus, they'll have a ride that they'll never forget—for they are giving up control to Someone Else. Vic notes that teens like challenges, so he challenges them to have big goals, such as sharing their faith and bringing one friend to Christ.

A word for parents

What word does Vic have for parents of teens? He cautions that it is a mistake to assume that a youth minister can or should take care of all the spiritual teaching. It is essential that parents not give up, but keep teaching and modeling what it is to be in love with Jesus. Vic's own faith and love affair with Jesus was deepened by a tragic car accident a few years ago that claimed the lives of his parents, but their influence on Vic lives on, for he still looks to their example of modeling the right priorities. Parents must pray fervently for their children and spend

time with them, involving themselves in the children's lives. However, he cautions that families should spend their time well, not getting so busy with extra activities that they have no family time at home.

Vic believes that fathers have an essential role in families—in modeling Jesus and creating "an atmosphere where kids can wrestle with and ponder the mysteries of God." Fathers are especially important in the spiritual development of sons, but now that Vic and Mary have two daughters of their own (Victoria, 4, and Rachel, 2), Vic recognizes that fathers are no less important for girls, as it is through the encouragement and approval of their fathers that they develop self-esteem. Having a family has enhanced Vic's ministry, since he can now model to the teens the respect and care that a father should have for his family.

The church as encourager

How can the church encourage teenagers? Vic says that a supportive church will "look past the outrageous attire and see their hearts" and will have a high tolerance for some "teen stuff," such as earrings and purple or green hair. There's a big gap between generations, who are often not comfortable with each other and don't know how to talk together, but we must learn to bridge the gap, for teens need the older adults to look up to. It's also important to have elders and a preacher who help create an atmosphere that is welcoming to kids, both in sermons and in interpersonal

relationships. Most of all, the church can pray for its youth.

Vic attributes his success as a youth minister, first of all, to the Lord, then the fact that he has a totally supportive wife. The vivacious and energetic Mary is no less active in ministry than Vic. Teens are often in her home, and she teaches a Bible class for teen girls. She also organizes several ministries for younger children, all of which bring in families from the community: VBS, a Spring Fest and an Autumn Fest, and a monthly meeting of Moms and Kids.

Parenting younger children

I asked Mary and Vic for their observations about parenting younger children. Mary notes that, although she has two degrees in education, it is quite different when working with one's own children. "Sometimes we feel that we are in over our heads, but there's so much joy, too." They pray a lot for the children and try to teach them that Jesus lives in their house, not just at church. More than anything, Mary says, stress that Jesus loves them.

Some other hints: limit the time that a child spends in front of the TV; Vic notes that "some kids are hypnotized

"JUST AS THE TWIG IS BENT,
SO THE TREE'S INCLINED "

-ALEXANDER POPE

by (that) household idol." Work at having time just for family, even if it is something as simple as going to a park. Choose your battles; "Kids don't need to have you nagging at them all the time." Start giving responsibilities that are age-appropriate; even four-year-old Victoria has simple chores to do. The little ones are always watching, so it is important to model a good relationship between parents. Remember that those few years with young children are very precious, because the time is relatively short. Surround yourselves with other Christian adults to help you through this important job of parenting.

Parenting, but especially working with teens, has its discouragements, both for parents and for youth ministers, but Vic advises, "Don't give up, even though some kids seem so hopeless." Just the day before, Vic had been visited by a young man who had been brought to the youth group by a friend for three years—and for three long years had caused trouble. But now, Vic reports, the seed is beginning to grow in that young man. Vic knows what he's talking about when he says, "Don't give up. Don't limit what God can do'."

When a child's pet dies

From Edward Fudge
<Edward@EdwardFudge.com> come these musings in his gracEmail, written in response to an interesting question from a parent:

"A sister in Texas writes, 'We are in the process of watching a family dog



die, and I'm feeling rather inadequate to prepare my children for this inevitable event. Has God no further use for animals after life on earth? I would appreciate your thoughts."

Edward Fudge replies, "I don't know any New Testament passage that clearly says animals will inhabit the Age to Come. However, the prophet Isaiah includes animals in his portrayals of God's promised future (Isa. 11:6-9; 65:17,25). The Apostle Paul also says that 'creation itself' awaits its final 'redemption,' which could easily include its animal residents as well (Rom. 8:18-22). Whatever their future, God has created a vast multitude and variety of animals here and now—for the benefit and pleasure of human beings, to be sure, but that is only part of God's creative purpose.

"God also made his creatures for his own sheer joy. Upon completing his

creation, God pronounced it 'very good' (Gen, 1:31). The Lord is 'glad in his works' (Psalm 104:31). The world does not exist merely for us. This truth pricks our vanity, but it has not been missed by the poets. 'Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,' reflected Thomas Gray, in his wonderful *Elegy* composed in the churchyard of his parish church at Stoke Poges, England. A century later, Ralph Waldo Emerson echoed the point from the other side of the Atlantic. 'Beauty is its own excuse for being,' mused Emerson after finding a rhodora blooming deep in the woods. God, not man, is the real center of things.

"When we lose a pet, we may use the occasion as an opportunity for teaching children that death is part of the present fallen order of things, that grieving is appropriate and natural, and that in the end God will have the last word over death itself when he

raises all his people to live with him forever. And we may tell our children, I think, that God created their little pets as well, that he sees and cares about the death of even a little bird, and that he is able to raise the animals also if he sees that is best for them and for us (Matt. 10:29; Lk. 12:7)."

A SUGGESTION: Melissa and Whitney Simon, who live in Grosse Ile, Michigan, are long-time fans of the audio series, "Adventures in Odyssey." Melissa reports that they always listen to a tape before going to sleep. They loaned some tapes to our Rachel, and they really are good, being entertaining, as well as teaching excellent moral lessons. Originally a radio show produced by Focus on the Family, sets of 12 different episodes (30 minutes each) may be purchased for \$18.99 from a discount store (list price: \$24.99) and are appropriate for age seven and up. Available also on CD and video. ❁

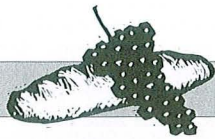
Laquita Higgs has been a member of the Board of Integrity for over 25 years. Recently retired from her professorship at the University of Michigan, she spends her time parenting Rachel and working and worshiping with her husband, Elton, at the Trenton, MI, Church of Christ. Laquita has written this parenting column, Bending the Twig, for the last five years. You can find almost all of her parenting articles on line at www.integrityjournal.org.

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The Food of God the Father

Elton D. Higgs

Jesus's last discourse with his disciples (as presented in John 14-17) is permeated with references to His Father—as is his whole life. He makes it clear that the Father is the source of everything that the Son is bringing to the world, and that the Son has no significance except as an interpreter of and an avenue to the Father. All things are bound up in the Father; from the Father Jesus proceeded, and to Him He was to return (Jn. 16:28). Paul says that in the consummation of all things, Christ will “hand over the kingdom to God the Father,” so that “the Son himself will be made subject to him,” and “so that God may be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:24-28). Jesus always expressed His relationship with the Father as one of complete submission to the Father's will. Not only do we have His agonizing “Nevertheless, thy will be done” when He was about to go to the cross (Matt. 26:36-42), but in a calmer moment, when the disciples wonder what He has had to eat, He says, “My food . . . is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work” (John 4:34).

As Jesus feeds on the will of the Father, so the Son's disciples are to feed on Him: “Just as the living Father

sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me” (John 6:57). This statement comes at the conclusion of His long discourse on Himself as the Bread of Life, which, in contrast to the manna eaten by His audience's Jewish ancestors in the desert, is “the true bread from heaven” given by the Father to bring “life to the world” (John 6:32-33). They took pride in having as their fathers Abraham and those who had been fed miraculously with manna in the desert, but Jesus assures them that “Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever” (6:57-58). With the coming of Jesus, it was no longer necessary or desirable to appeal to earthly lineage to establish spiritual patrimony and the family credentials that go with it. As He said in another context, when He was told that his physical family were wanting to speak to Him: “Pointing to His disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in Heaven is my brother and sister and mother’” (Matt. 12:49-50).

In spite of noble sounding maxims promoting the “fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man,” no purely

human attempt to claim the fatherhood of God can bring us into His family. Only the Son of God—who in perfect obedience to His Father became the Son of Man for our sake—has seen the Father and can present us to Him as adopted children who are granted the privilege of trusting and obeying Him without fear of judgment (John 6:46-51; 1 John 4:13-18). As we partake of the Lord's Supper, we acknowledge and celebrate the work of Jesus, who ushers us into the Presence of the Father through His having ripped apart the veil that separated us from God,

“once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb. 9:24-26; 10:19-20). Here is the glorious new basis for mankind's being able to claim the fatherhood of God: separating sin has been set aside, and we stand before our Father as brothers and sisters of the Son of God Himself. And as the family of God the Father, we look forward with confidence to that final “wedding supper of the Lamb” (Rev. 19:9), where we shall be fed by the will of God forever. ✿

Elton Higgs, retired professor of English at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, is an elder at the Trenton, MI, Church of Christ.





The Fatherhood of God

By Harold Fowler

Have you ever been gripped by a concept that literally turned your life around, an idea that offers solid hope and endless comfort to strugglers? The Fatherhood of God is this kind of idea, especially as it relates to one's life and ministry on the mission field in Italy. Even though I have been a Christian for over a half a century, my own view of His Fatherhood changed over the years to love Him more.

The Fatherhood of God in Italy

As a concept in Italy, "the Fatherhood of God" is the refreshing, vital, spiritual antidote for several poisons that are choking out the spiritual life of many people in Italy.

The poison of culture

As a country, Italy is culturally Catholic, but not religiously so.¹ While there are certainly exceptions, the common level of faith is fundamentally a smattering of biblical information, and vast ignorance.

Despite Catholic teaching to the contrary, so many Italian families practice birth control that government

statistics can report a zero population growth. And despite this lack of desire to have children, people tend to exalt motherhood above all virtues. Their byword, "Madonna," traces back to an urgent appeal to the Virgin. The underlying reason seems to be this: "God and Jesus are so far away; what would they know about real life? The Holy Virgin Mary has a mother's heart; surely she can best understand my suffering!" So popular dependence on her intercession is deeply felt and publicly expressed.

A cultural spin-off of this glorification of the mother figure is the corresponding absence of a godly male as role model in Italian life. Stereotypes of macho males and Latin Lovers, causing a love 'em and leave 'em attitude, necessitate the prevalent matriarchal arrangement. The concept of fatherhood is undermined because so few men have had valid role models themselves. Many still consider children to be the mother's total responsibility. Even in the church, few men volunteer to lead children's programs of instruction. They still depend on their own mothers to

straighten out difficulties in their marriages and care for the grandchildren. The male expectation is to be served; the female role, to serve. "Let Mamma do it" and "May the Madonna help us!"

Contrarily, our heavenly Father models a kind of servant leadership that demonstrates concretely that sincere service to others, in the humblest capacities, is truly great leadership. The truly human Jesus stands as the antithesis to the sympathetic heroine that so many people perceive in His mother. Our Father deliberately sent him to a life of humiliation on earth, then sacrificed him on a cross; now we can begin to grasp the depth of anguish his Father-heart experiences because of our sin, our weakness and infirmities. Although Jesus said truly, "No one knows me but the Father" (Matthew 11:27), the writer of Hebrews could say,

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. . . For this reason he had to be made like his brothers and sisters in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help

those who are being tempted.
(Hebrews 2:14-18)

The Black Virgin—or a Madonna of any other color—can do none of this! In Italy or elsewhere, we must shout: "We do not have a supreme representative before God who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses! We have Jesus who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet without sin. We can therefore approach the throne of grace personally with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. So let's do it! (Hebrews 4:14-16)

It is really true: he or she who has seen Jesus, has seen the Father! In these and a thousand other ways, our Lord revealed to us the kind of Father that would do for us everything Jesus did. If our Father is anything like Jesus—and Jesus affirms that He is—He is a million light-years ahead of all the earth's holy men put together! Indeed, He's the compassionate, understanding Father we need and long for, the kind of Father we may willingly choose to live and die for.

The poison of legalism

Among some Churches of Christ—not to exclude other conservative groups—the tendency to create sectarian "patterns of the New Testament Church" encourages legalism that effectively stifles God-given Christian freedom and limits creativity and growth. For too many, "restoring the New Testament Church" means "restoring my concept of the Church."

Above and beyond the hermeneutical considerations this misconception entails, I sense that many conscientious believers fear that “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” and living “in accordance with the Spirit” (Romans 8:2-4) is unimpressive and inadequate to control human conduct. The leadership of the Spirit appears too nebulous and ambiguous for them; they feel the need for “a law that has teeth in it.” Such people feel they must “help God by filling in the details about everything he didn’t tell us in Scripture, but that we consider vital in order to know how to act in authorized ways, lead the Church, judge others and know with whom we are in fellowship.” Without specific, detailed laws, they suppose that nothing can be determined with certainty, and this uncertainty drives them to create the laws that become—consciously or unconsciously—the theological bludgeon to bash anyone who disagrees. They fabricate these laws out of hermeneutical conclusions at best and personal opinions and congregational traditions at worst. Then they naively summon the religious world to unite around these theological instruments, supposing they have recovered “the one and only true church of Jesus Christ!”

But the Fatherhood of God is the effective antidote to this legalism! By encouraging us to trust our heavenly Father for everything, Jesus effectively launched an entirely new kind of relation with God. This rapport is based on our Father’s grace, a relationship that no longer depends

upon perennial performance on the treadmill of legalistic perfectionism.² God offers His fellowship to people who will love and trust Him, do anything He says, with no ulterior motive or unconfessed attempts at self-perfection.

The Fatherhood of God and trust: The poison of distrust

Confidence, or trust, is the glue that holds together the strands that constitute a vast web of societal relationships. Where trust wavers, the associations themselves weaken, and the links in the social tissue deteriorate.

Making sweeping statements about anything is always risky business. One generalization, however, seems to describe many (if not most) people in Italy: they do not easily or deeply trust anyone, not even God. Their idea of God is only as a frowning Judge ready to doom imperfect people; it encourages no trust in Him; it leads no one to the joyful confidence that everything good God said about Himself is completely true and dependable.

It is almost as if God somehow proved unworthy of their trust by failing them at some critical juncture in their lives. They see our Father as acting like the man who placed his little boy upon a high table and tells him, “Jump off, Sonny; Daddy will catch you.” The little boy hesitated for quite some time, while the father repeated his promises, “Don’t be afraid: I’ll catch you.” The little tot finally finds enough courage to jump,

but at the moment he did, the dad took a step backward, deliberately letting the boy fall to the floor, hurting himself. Then the father says, “Sonny, let that be a lesson to you: don’t you trust nobody, not even your own daddy!”

If people cannot trust the heavenly Father, then whom can they trust?

In actual fact, the new relation of the believer to God is that of Father and child. While His moral will demands loyal obedience from the believer, this relationship is no longer measured by our perfect performance but by our trusting obedience. His grace enables us emotionally to trust Him. This kind of trust motivates us to want to do whatever pleases Him, because He is our Dad. In this sense, it is true that “it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13).

J.I. Packer summed up this relationship like this:

“What is a Christian? The question can be answered in many ways, but the richest answer I know is that a Christian is one who has God for his Father.

“The revelation to the believer that God is his Father is in a sense the climax of the Bible, just as it was a final step in the revelatory process which the Bible records.”³

If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he or she makes of the thought of being God’s child, and having God as his or her Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls worship and prayers and one’s

whole outlook on life, it means that that person does not understand Christianity very well at all. For everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Testament new, and better than the Old, everything that is distinctively Christian as opposed to merely Jewish, is summed up in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God. “Father” is the Christian name for God.

“FATHER” IS THE CHRISTIAN NAME FOR GOD.

As His children, we have a new family to belong to, a famous family name to honor, and new, convincing motivations to act morally. Everything depends upon our own sense of God’s presence, and our real dependence upon Him for provision and direction.

In the last several years, my own life has been blessed by principles similar to those expressed eloquently by Garry Friesen and J. Robin Maxson.⁴

God’s guidance in the Old Testament reached down into the details of daily life, while His guidance in the New Testament is expressed in more general commands and principles. And yet the New Testament writers evidence no apprehension that God is withdrawing from personal involvement in the lives of His people. In fact, “the relationship of the New Testament believer with God is characterized by the greater level of intimacy.”

It is instructive to compare more closely the nature of God’s guidance in the Old and New Testaments respec-

tively. The first thing we observe is how much more specific the Old Testament directives were. God's provisions for guidance in the Church Age are of a different character. Most of the specific regulations that constituted God's moral will for the Israelites have been moved into the "area of freedom" for Christians. We are free and responsible to decide for ourselves what to eat, what to wear, where we will live, and so on. And all decisions are to be governed by the general commands that comprise God's moral will as revealed in the New Testament.⁵

God's provisions for our guidance are less specific and less empirical (oriented to our physical senses) than the guidance that He gave to Israel. In His wisdom, God saw fit to guide Old Testament saints as "immature children" who had a limited understanding of His nature and will. But those who have the benefit of receiving the revelation of Jesus Christ and the empowerment of His Spirit, God treats as "grown-up children." New Testament believers are equipped to relate to their Father on an "adult" level without requiring the kind of detailed parental supervision that was appropriate to childhood (cf. Galatians 4:1-7).

In short, the concept of God's Fatherhood convinces us of the high value He places on our freedom, on our growth in responsibility and on our maturing. Our Father has given us grace that enables us to trust Him; he is at work in us both to will and to work for his good pleasure. The type of moral guidance that he has given us is

hardly consistent with a relationship to him as slaves. Rather, God's method of guidance for Christians, though less specific and less empirical than that given to Israel, is exactly suited to our status as children of God.

The Fatherhood of God and me

We moved to Italy in 1964 to begin mission work, with pathetically inadequate support for our family of six. In fact, just as we were ready to leave for Italy, two veteran missionaries cabled: "Financial support inadequate; don't come; letter follows"! However, we were psychologically like an airliner committed to the take-off, and no additional support seemed forthcoming from any church; so we left for Italy anyway. But the assessment of those kind brothers proved correct: we had to tighten our belt so much, our figure made a Coke bottle look prosperous! Sometimes my very resourceful wife, Enid, had only a little pasta and a few tomatoes to feed our active family. Sometimes we borrowed gas money from an Italian evangelist, just to continue a teaching program going in a nearby town.

In those days our financial support arrived as a check in the mail, so naturally, with each day's mail delivery, we anxiously looked for "The Letter." We had no reserves, so each meager amount meant we could hold on for another week or so. I began to dread going to the mailbox, for fear there would be no money to meet our daily needs! During the financial crunch that inevitably kept us strapped, I began to

fear that we would never have enough to support our family, much less accomplish anything for the Lord in Italy.

Wouldn't you know it? At that same time, I was writing a commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, preaching the material as sermons first in Italian and then rewriting them in English for publication in America. Then, in the midst of my uncertainty and anxious agonizing about food, clothing and shelter for my family, I began the exposition of Matthew chapter six! Here Jesus's words hit me like lightning from heaven:

I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food and the body more important than clothes?

I had heard these words all my life, but now with a splendid wife who shared my anxiety, with four little children to care for in a foreign country, and with a mission to complete, these words began to blaze with unusual clarity.

If God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So, do not worry, saying "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

"Your heavenly Father knows!" How could I compose any meaningful comment on this phrase and persist in denying its truth by anxiety for my family and agonizing over the financial stability of our mission in Italy? Morally, I had only two options: either I stop worrying and let my heavenly Father do what He said He would, or I drop the commentary project right then and there out of sheer unbelief, with nothing to say on the subject!

I decided to trust God emotionally to do what Jesus promised. I told Him, "Father, I'm going to write this commentary and try to make believers here in Italy, and trust you to supply whatever we need to get the job done!"

This occurred back in 1965. For over thirty-six years, our heavenly Father has unreservedly justified every bit of confidence we placed in him back then. The children (now six!) about whom I had worried myself sick, all finished secondary schools in Italy and went to college in the States, and our faithful Father continues to care for them every day since!

Congregations we never once visited began supporting our work! People we never talked to directly about money, came forward asking to help us. Jesus was absolutely right: "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Our Father took care of His kids!

Sure, I knew that our Father is incredibly wealthy and loves to help us more than we can ever help Him, but I had to discover it experientially to appreciate it—and Him. In the

process, I discovered something else: the more generously we give to others, the more money he can trust us to handle! Though we are by no means wealthy, we have been given more to share with others than we ever thought possible. As a wise Father, he helped us to learn generosity the hard way, all the while driving home Paul's heart-warming, encouraging lessons:

God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion.

(2 Corinthians 9:8-11)

No wonder God loves a cheerful giver: he is a cheerful Giver Himself! We're talking about our Father!

This confidence has implications for the evangelization of Italy. It puts us in an advantaged position to lead others to believe Him too. It also leads us to pray the kind of prayer that Paul prayed as he knelt before the Father, from whom His whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that everyone may experience the spiritual power that is at work within us (Eph. 3:14-20).

The Fatherhood of God and death

Vito Gentile, my long-time friend and colleague in the Gospel, was preaching minister at Ciampino near Rome. Then he contracted Parkinson's disease, complicated by heart problems. However, he suffered most because he was painfully aware that he no longer had the strength to serve the congregation. His intense frustration reflected his longing to preach; his powerful desire that was hindered only by a body that simply "would not work right." So, his wife Franca requested, "Harold, please say something to Vito that will help him to accept his limitations and relax in the Lord, and not to worry about the congregation. The church can go forward!"

But how do you say this to an older brother who has given his entire adult life to building this church? What words could be both sensitive and adequate to help him relinquish his more than 50-year passionate sense of responsibility for the spiritual growth of these people?

The day came and I chatted with him as best as I could. Here was a man whose speech was little better than mumbling and the telltale quivering of his hands betrayed his sickness. I had prayed many times before, but especially this time, "Lord, what should I say to him?" In fact, I was not always sure Vito could hear me.

Finally, I burst out: "Vito, the church here can go forward; you have prepared people in whose hands you can leave it, even if you see much yet to be done. I identify with your frustration, because I too have many miles to go before I sleep, many projects to complete for the Lord.

There are books I want to write and people to help, before I die. But Vito,"—and here I started to choke up—"I can die tonight without getting all that stuff done. I can simply drop everything and go to be with the Lord, because I am saved by grace, not by my finished projects."

"Vito, we know what it means to have a gracious heavenly Father who saves us by his grace, don't we? He's not going to judge us on the basis of our finished projects and performance but on the basis of what Jesus did at the cross. Vito, we have this certainty because of his faithfulness. So if it pleases God that we both die tonight, we can do it calmly and confidently. Bless God, you and I may go out singing!"

Gathering his strength, he looked up and, with a confident, joy-filled voice that would be strong for a well person, he said, "Thanks, Harold, I needed to hear that from you!" Shortly afterwards, he went on to be with the heavenly Father he had trusted for so many years. That day, he felt the peace of old Simeon, when he took the Christ child in his arms: "Now, Master, you can let your servant go in peace." In the midst of the dreadfulness of sickness and death, grace had made possible complete peace and complete joy based on complete trust. The Fatherhood of God is a concept with which we can go confidently into glory!

Our Father's refrigerator

I would like to ask you parents two questions, "Do your children ever

bring their little projects home from school, especially the drawings that they painted with great patience? Proud of their work, do they ever show you their letters, "Dear Mama" or "Dear Daddy"? Of course, they do! And do you ever put these up for all to see? Do you attach them with a little magnet to the door of the refrigerator in the kitchen? Of course you do. Others hang them up elsewhere so everyone can see them. Now why do we do this? Is it

IN THE MIDST OF THE DREADFULNESS OF SICKNESS AND DEATH, GRACE HAD MADE POSSIBLE COMPLETE PEACE AND COMPLETE JOY BASED ON COMPLETE TRUST.

because these are great works of art? No, they are really mere scribbles and blobs of color; sometimes it is difficult to recognize what the child was really intending to recreate on the paper! In fact, my grandson sent us a picture and actually put a by-line to identify his splashes of color: "This is me in a field of yellow flowers."

So why do we paper our walls with these scraps, as if they were precious works of inestimable value? We put them there because the one who created them is our precious son or daughter! And we "forgive" the many technical imperfections of their productions because we love them!

Now let's imagine another wall, another refrigerator, where on display are your thoughts, your homework, your words scribbled on the pages of your life. This wall, this refrigerator is

in Heaven, where God collects the handwork of his children. Can you see it? All heaven is papered with works of very limited value, but it's your homework and mine, wrinkled and smudged with erasures and, above all, imperfect.

IN CHRIST AT THE CROSS WE ACCEPTED OUR DAMNATION AS WELL AS HIS MERCY AND GRACE.

Curious, we listen as an angel asks our heavenly Father, "But why do you fill heaven with these indecipherable scribbles and awful sketches?"

I think I hear God's gentle response: "Those? Why, my son, Anthony, did that one for me. The one next to it is by my daughter, Martha." And on He goes, naming every one of us, as He shows the puzzled angel each prized piece. "I do not put them on display as if they were perfect works of art, because they are sometimes nowhere near what I would call art. But I put them up because my children prepared them for me, and it's my kids that I care about, not the relative perfection of their work. I love them! Don't you get it?"

Our Father's love and grace permit him to accept our fumbling attempts to imitate and please Him, weak and wobbly as they are! A legalist may never understand such Fatherhood. I know, because I was a "card-carrying" legalist for years.

Some beady-eyed legalist will object to this vision of God's refrigerator: "It's

preposterous. It makes God appear to be satisfied with imperfection!"

So here is another indiscreet question for our objector: "Does God agree with you about everything you think? That is, does God think you are perfectly correct on every one of your personal views? Could He endorse your theological position, without any mental reservation? If not, how can God put up with you anyway? It's not just your imperfect productions that He's got to stomach; He must put up with you! And he does, because He loves you and considers you His child, because you continue to trust and imitate him as an obedient son or daughter (Ephesians 5:1-2)."

Our relationship to Him is not founded on our presumed theological or moral perfection, but upon our Sonship. In Christ at the cross we accepted our damnation as well as His mercy and grace. I love to define these terms like this: "Damnation" is getting everything we really deserve and not getting anything we thought we had coming to us! "Mercy" is our Father's not giving us what we justly deserve. "Grace" is His giving us what we could never deserve.

The Father of all mercies

I once saw a comic postcard that pictured the suspicious face of a bewhiskered, toothless man, with this punch line: "If you're so smart; why aren't you also rich?" I forgot it until one day, while I was shaving, I was thinking about some church problem. Then I paused to look at the man in the

mirror, and this line came to me: "If you are so right (about God, the Bible, the Church, the whole lot), why aren't you also joyful?" That was it! Joy was missing, and with it peace, and patience and a lot of other things as well. I prayed, "Father, lead me to your joy." Shortly thereafter, a dear friend helped me to get down off the endless treadmill of unforgiving perfectionism.

Practical implications

The practical implications of discovering God's gracious Fatherhood are staggering, especially as we witness hundreds of our legalistic brothers and sisters struggle up an endless stairway to an inevitably unreachable perfection. They too must take the elevator of Jesus Christ that whisks us immediately up into the perfection of God.

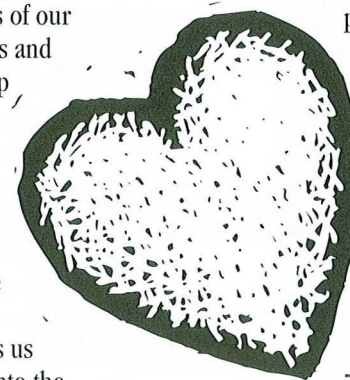
Further, to bask in the confident knowledge of God's grace opens up previously unknown vistas and approaches as we work out our day-to-day interpersonal relationships in conscious imitation of our Father's model (Ephesians 4:32-5:1). Jesus thinks every one of His people can learn to copy our Father's model of loving kindness that legitimates our being consistently kind to the ungrateful and wicked (Luke 6:35-36; Mt. 5:45) as well as to the religiously

mistaken (2 Timothy 2:24-26), even if they never submit to Christ.

I confess to being a "former perfectionist" or at least "a penitent perfectionist" with vulnerability for reversion to legalism; I'm simply not "out of the woods" yet. However, I know I was given mercy and I want others to know where they can obtain it too. This intensifies my sense of purpose on the mission field and anywhere else I find people trudging along in the bonds of perfectionism and fearing God, because they do not yet know Him as Father. These people must hear that, in contrast to nonliving, pagan deities whose devotees must hopelessly cry to them and endlessly sacrifice to appease them, our heavenly Father knows that we need grace and groceries daily (Matthew 6:32). The suffering must hear that He gives only good gifts to His children (Mt. 7:11). And so we tell them, because our Father has led us

into something real, tangible and permanent: Sonship! Daughterhood!

In the last several years I have learned to appreciate God's Fatherhood most of all through His grace, and, thanks to this understanding of grace, have come to the missing peace and the joy I longed for. May we all experience personally that grace, mercy and peace that comes from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son (2 John 3).⁶ ✨



Notes

- 1 The bishops on the Italian Episcopal Commission have officially declared Italy a “mission field,” a land to be re-conquered for the Catholic Church. In other words, they have lost it, and with decline in vocations for priests and nuns, the Roman Church is now importing missionary workers from other countries where vocations are more numerous.
- 2 See David Seamands’ splendid book: *Freedom From the Performance Trap*, formerly titled *Healing Grace* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, a division of Scripture Press Publications), 1989.
- 3 J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1973), pp. 181-82.
- 4 *Decision making and the Will of God, a Biblical Alternative to the Traditional View* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press) 1980.
- 5 Friessen, op. cit., p. 252.
- 6 See Joseph Jones, “Grace and Unity,” *Integrity*, September/October 1981.

Missionary in Italy since 1964, Harold Fowler is author of a four-volume commentary on the Gospel of Matthew (published in English by College Press) and self-published monographs and Bible study textbooks in Italian. Parents of six children, he and his wife, Enid, serve with Churches of Christ and Christian Churches.



MEDITATION

Abba: The Extraordinary Father

Curtis McClane

God is our Father. This affirmation regarding the nature of God has been unpalatable for several years. There is growing awareness, however, that the metaphor of “father” is making a comeback and actually has something to offer this politically correct nation of ours. Particularly is this true regarding the nature of God.

This is not to deny that God’s being and essential nature possess feminine qualities as well. Both Testaments make

reference to “mother” metaphors while referring to God’s work in relationship to His covenant people. It is not the purpose of this editorial to deny this reality, for certainly, the “mother” metaphor has not adequately been explored for what it offers the church today.

What I want to propose is a re-affirmation of God’s “fatherhood” and that, in doing so, one does not have to feel that an essential part of God’s nature is either being denied or

minimized. On the contrary, because of political and religious correctness in the recent past that has challenged every sacred religious tradition, even ways of speaking about God have been radically altered. This alteration has effectively done just that—minimized and denied an essential part of God’s nature.

Both sociological and psychological factors have exacted a heavy toll on healthy concepts of “fatherhood.” The image of father has been interpreted primarily through the lens of patriarchalism and authoritarianism. Because the Old Testament was essentially revealed and written down during the time in society when patriarchal rule was the norm, and since modern times have (at times correctly) critiqued this way of living as oppressive and antiquated, the image of “father” has no real place in a progressive society such as ours.

It is easy to see why any discussion of God’s authority is a hard sell. Parental authority has been so downplayed and truncated that sometimes none exists anymore. If parents have no authority, why should God? After all, we are a liberated society that needs complete freedom to exercise all of our options in searching for a meaningful and fully expressive self without constraints. So, from a sociological perspective God as “father” doesn’t get very many votes.

Things are changing, though. Look at these three recent books:

- Pollack, William S. REAL BOYS:

RESCUING OUR SONS FROM THE MYTHS OF BOYHOOD.

- Kindlon, Dan. RAISING CAIN: PROTECTING THE EMOTIONAL LIFE OF BOYS.

- Osherson, Samuel. FINDING OUR FATHERS: HOW A MAN’S LIFE IS SHAPED BY HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS FATHER.

It is with this last resource that I want to continue our discussion. Osherson says, “The themes of father-hunger and father-search go back to the Greeks and to the Old Testament and forward through great literature to the present day. They’re as old as the story of Abraham and Isaac, as present as today’s newspaper.”¹

The search for a healthy father-figure is almost an all consuming and driving desire for many young men. A study mentioned by Osherson found that ninety-five percent of the young men interviewed held a negative image of their fathers, and for many their fathers were not perceived as being influences at all.² Is it no wonder that God as a father-figure falls on deaf ears today! Many in their middle age years (Boomers especially) have begun to do the work of reclamation and restoration with their fathers, but what does this say about our younger adults?

Not only sociologically, but also theologically, there has been recent recognition of the positive role of fathers. A recent study has attempted to show that Jesus’s healing of the demon possessed boy in Mark 9:14-29 and the raising of Jairus’s twelve-year-old

daughter in Mark 5:21-24 was the response of father-like figure portraying a “non-anxious presence” by extending a hand during a climactic point of deep human need.³ Though I would maintain that the author has over-psychologized the biblical narratives, what we want to notice here is the positive spin on the role of Jesus as a father-like figure.

My own father

Finding my own father was a difficult task. Feeble attempts on my part to re-establish a relationship with him while he was still alive were tentative and awkward. My own immaturity, lack of acceptance, frozen anger and unresolved issues contributed to a lack of forgiveness. But it was only in the process of allowing God to lead me by the hand back to my own father that I discovered the intimate joy of my heavenly Father. At the risk of sounding simplistic in offering guidelines for those of you seeking to fill your hunger for your father on earth and in heaven, allow me to suggest some helpful perspectives:

1. Recognize that your father is (was) human.
2. Turn loose of deep resentment and bitterness due to his human frailty.
3. Wholeheartedly accept and embrace his humanity with all of its limitations.
4. Learn to listen to his own life's story.
5. Recognize and celebrate the signs of God's working in his own life.
6. Take the initiative to speak words of

healing and reconciliation.

7. Ask for his forgiveness for your inability to understand and appreciate him in the past.
8. Take time to journal and specifically write down and celebrate the good things your father has left you.

I know that these suggestions are not a cure-all. However, it has been my experience that if these approaches are not incorporated is some systematic way of healing, then one's ability to experience, articulate, and encourage others' intimacy with God may be significantly curtailed.

Four experiences

God knew that this issue in my own life was going unresolved. He stepped in and provided four experiences that demanded I confront my unwillingness to grow in this area. First, my loving, perceptive, and concerned wife arranged a meeting with my father and me to get the ball rolling. It was initially a painful event beyond description! Second, my aunt and uncle noticed that I was not speaking to my father and encouraged me to do so. Third, I came home one day from the office and heard Oprah Winfrey interviewing John Lee. He had published a book entitled, *The Flying Boy: Why Men Run from Relationships*. I ordered the book and devoured it when it arrived. Finally, one evening I was caught blindsided while watching a PBS 30-minute “filler” program. A young man came back to his roots in Kentucky from a successful business career in California. He took a

two-week vacation to work on the Kentucky farm with his father. He said in the documentary that he wanted to listen to his father, get to know him and accept him for who he was and not try to change him. This was the final coup de grace.

I made a final visit with my father on New Year's eve 1991. Ten days later he took his own life. All of my bitterness, anger, disillusionment, and alienation had been dealt with prior to this moment. Thank God! In addition to the shock I subsequently dealt with a new anger—Dad, how could you pull the rug out from under us?! Could you not feel the beginning of a new relationship we had been working on for over a year? My ultimate peace came later that spring when I was able to lay a yellow rose on the tombstone in the cemetery. My conversation that day seemed to tie up many loose ends.

Robert Bly once made the comment that you never become a man until your father dies. Both my father and my father-in-law have gone on to be with the Lord. I no longer have them as fatherlike figures who can offer wisdom and counsel. This change in life situation has made me profoundly aware of my own mortality. Perhaps it is this pristine awareness that has helped to crystallized my intimate relationship with God.

This year for Father's Day God placed in my hands the book by Edward J. Farrell, *Little Banquets for Ordinary People: Epiphanies of Everyday*. Farrell has a chapter called “The Ordinary Extraordinary Father.”

The most penetrating question he asked in the entire chapter was, “What will your children remember about you as father?” I have painfully suspected they will have to repeat the process I mentioned above with my own father! Both he and I are/were extraordinarily ordinary!

God as our Father

We have come full circle now with God as Father. Biblically we stand on solid ground proposing a renewal of and a recapturing of this meaningful metaphor in our spiritual journeys.

Jesus could begin his model prayer for his disciples “Our Father in heaven . . .” It is significant that the possessive pronoun is plural and not singular. We stand in relationship to one another as brothers and sisters precisely because we have the same Father. Three places in the New Testament the Aramaic word, Abba, is used for father (Mark 14:36; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6). In each of these contexts God is being addressed in prayer. This was unique to the Christian faith, because nowhere in devotional Jewish literature was God ever addressed with “Abba.” In the first century, it had come to be used in a variety of ways, but certainly included the infantile utterance akin to our “daddy” and the more warm and respectful expression of “dear father.”⁴

The use of “Abba” as an ordinary way of addressing God in prayer points to the intimate relationship that Jesus and his followers can have with God. This relationship is sustained through trust and obedience.⁵ God as Father is

the way we approach the divine throne of grace in our time of need. We rest assured that his nurturing care will sustain us, uphold, secure and steady us in difficult times. ✿

ABBA: THE EXTRAORDINARY FATHER

Abba . . . my first words to You
I need you but do not know how tell You
The Ah and Ba are elemental, fundamental, sacramental
They speak volumes of untold desires
Heart's wishes so deep, so unutterable
Fleeting glimpses of divine nurture
As an epiphany breaks into my sophisticated world
Nurture that responds to my unsophisticated murmurs
Abba . . . spoken so hesitatingly
Can I really call you Daddy?
My daddy is gone
Can you be my Daddy?
My Abba-hunger and Abba-search goes on
Feeling, groping, probing
My inner agony of soul clings to you
Hoping and praying for your strong hand to clasp mine in the darkness
Darkness cannot hide my dear Abba
It is in darkness that you, Abba, feel so near
Take my trembling hand, shivering body, quivering lip
Soothé all tumults in my world with your voice of reassurance
I know all is well
Because you are my Abba!

"Because you are sons and daughters, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, Abba, Father" (Galatians 4:6).

- 1 Samuel Osherson, *FINDING OUR FATHERS* (New York, NY: Contemporary Books, 2001), ix.
- 2 Ibid, 49.
- 3 Donald Capps, "Curing Anxious Adolescents Through Fatherlike Performance," *INTERPRETATION*, No. 2, 55 (April 2001): 135-147.
- 4 Otfried Hofius, "ABBA." In *THE NEW INTERNATIONAL DICTIONARY OF NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY*, volume 1. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), 614, 615.
- 5 Ibid, 615.

Curtis McClane is the co-editor of Integrity.



I*ntegrity* journal is no more. This is our last issue. By majority vote of the board it was decided that the time had come for this journal to cease publication. Since this is my last editorial I want to say a few things to you who are our readers.

The thirty-three year ministry of *Integrity* touched many lives. This journal has had quite an impact over that span of time. For many it was a voice for the voice-less. This journal was a place where issues could be discussed in a non-threatening, non-partisan atmosphere.

I suppose that most of us who are second generation *Integrity* readers, have no idea of the passion, sense of calling and mandate that the original founders of the magazine possessed. I am not quite sure what to make of all that. Perhaps what once were considered the burning issues of the day are now smoldering embers. Perhaps this ministry in God's scheme of things has come to the end of its usefulness for the kingdom. Perhaps we have lost the passion for a cause and most of us are just trying to survive by making a living and providing for our families. Perhaps we prematurely ended it. Only God in time and eternity will be able to reveal that.

I am so thankful to have been asked by the board four years ago to serve as editor. This role put me in touch with many wonderful Christians and believers who were seeking and struggling. *Integrity* provided for them permission to question, argue, ask, debate, scrutinize, and challenge many of the "sacred cows" of our Restoration Heritage. In my own inner heart, listening to the voice of God, it seemed that *Integrity* was turning a corner and a new kind of journal was needed. I think that the day is over when issues of music, gender, translations, baptism, communion, etc. are important enough to draw a substantial audience that cares about trying to delineate, define, and designate how one must believe and practice each one.

One of the last issues of *Integrity* on "Reconciliation and Forgiveness" created one of our largest responses. I think this is indicative of several factors. Individuals outside of our fellowship and Restoration heritage were impressed and moved by the quality of the magazine and its theme. Perhaps God is telling us that the burning issue now for our Restoration heritage is to go back to the Bible for life-gripping issues such as forgiveness, prayer, unity, care for neighbor,

dynamic/life-changing conversion, witness of Jesus, stories of faith, family guidance, health issues, Bible exposition, and a host of other things that our neighbors have questions about.

Maybe the time has come for us to put behind us thirty-three years of visualizing Christian unity and put it into practice. Perhaps our legacy has seen its fruition as we turn you over to the *newWineskins* magazine. It is my prayer that you will see the same spirit, intent, openness and intellectual honesty in that magazine as you perceived in *Integrity*.

Please pray for all of us on the board. We are now going our separate ways and grieving the loss of relationships connected with a ministry. I almost feel as if I am handing over a child for adoption! Maybe the thirty-three years for this journal has a biblical ring! If so, then perhaps *newWineskins* can be the resurrection for you as a reader.

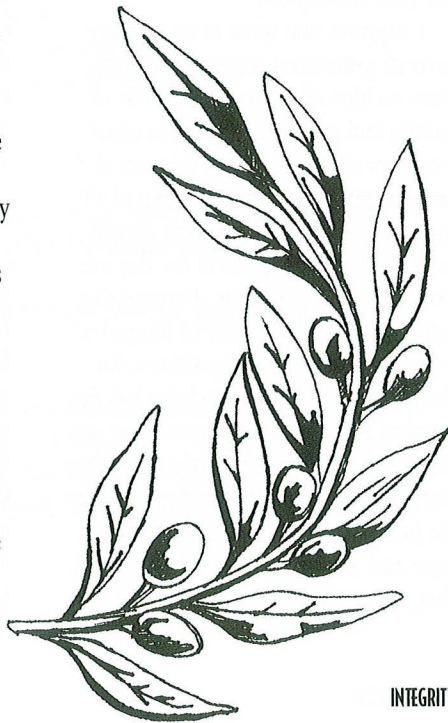
Please feel free to contact me at <diakonos5@juno.com> if you desire further dialogue on the history and place of *Integrity*. I have been asked by the Stone-Campbell Encyclopedia editors to put together an entry for this journal. If you have historical events, people, places or issues you think I need to be aware of so I can include it in the entry, please contact me before May 1, 2002. I am looking forward to hearing from you as a reader. Also, if you think an e-mail monthly would be in order, and you would like to receive a message, just let me know at the above e-mail address.

Now I must say farewell. In the spirit of Thomas Campbell's ending of his Declaration and Address, where he speaks to the unconverted world, he laments, "But your conversion, it seems, awaits our reformation; awaits our return to primitive unity and love. To this may the God of mercy speedily restore us, both for your sakes and our own, that His way may be known upon earth, and his saving health among all nations. Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee. Amen, and amen."

[Declaration and Address, St. Louis, MO: Mission Messenger, third printing, 1978; page 109.]



Curtis D. McClane, co-editor



FOR 32 YEARS, INTEGRITY HAS BEEN BROUGHT TO YOU BY . . .

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Diane G. H. Kilmer
J. Bruce Kilmer
Curtis D. McClane
Noreen Bryant

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The Board of *Integrity* wishes to convey heartfelt thanks to **Bob and Janice Temske** of Main Office Mailers, Livonia, Michigan, for their unfailingly excellent service; moreover, we wish to especially thank them for their spiritual kinship with us, their constant kind encouragement, and their warm, many-faceted generosity to this journal.