

INTEGRITY, a journal published by an independent nonprofit corporation, is basically a ministry of reconciliation which utilizes the varied talents of a large community of believers who seek accurately to reveal God to both the church and the world so that all may become one as he is one.

## Integrity

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### The Potter's Wheel

What do you do with your feelings; should you follow them or shouldn't you? How often we find our feelings tugging at us, urging us to take a certain course, or say or do something. Sometimes we act on those feelings, and later we may even proclaim that the Lord was truly at work through us. Often, however, we may find ourselves trying to repair the damage done by remarks or actions that also came from our feelings. So which do you follow, and which do you suppress?

The life experience of Jesus addresses this question, for He felt the entire gamut of human feelings. Anger, compassion, hunger, satisfaction, anxiety, patience. On these occasions He drew upon two sources, which are clearly seen in two of His greatest

crises. When His feelings seemed to tell Him to avoid Calvary, He went to Gethsemane and committed the matter to the Father in a period of extended, intense, agonizing prayer. In the wilderness when Satan played upon feelings of hunger, pride, and personal ambition, Jesus weighed His feelings and the tempter's arguments against the word of God. His criterion was, "It is written."

But there is danger in this formula. Appeals to prayer and scripture may not get you the answer you want. Jesus' appeal to scripture left Him hungry; His prayer in Gethsemane sent Him to Calvary. But His appeals ultimately gained victory—for Himself and for all of us.

-Gene Cowie

March/April 1985

# Integrity

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### The Lord Has Been Good To Us

About one year ago the editorial leadership of *Integrity* changed significantly when our editor-in-chief, Hoy Ledbetter, submitted his resignation; for Hoy was and had been the founding and only editor of this journal since its inception. But with his blessings and God's gracious guidance we picked up the reins and continued. The directors asked that an editorial board composed of Laquita Higgs, Natalie Randall, Dean Thoroman and the present writer assume the publishing responsibilities; and with considerable reluctance yet reliance upon the guiding hand of God we accepted the challenge.

Throughout the 1984 year we concentrated on the theme of "Life in the Spirit," and feel that a significant contribution was made to the thinking and faith of readers through those well researched, balanced articles on this vital Biblical doctrine. To the members of our board of directors and others who submitted materials we offer our genuine appreciation. God was so good to us as the materials shaped themselves into each issue; and your response as readers has been deeply gratifying.

In behalf of our editorial board and board of directors I want to express our heartfelt thanks for your gracious financial support after our letter was sent out in October. The percentage of reader response far exceeded our expectations, for virtually every letter brought not only verbal and moral support but a gift of your appreciation. God has been so good to us in this ministry of *Integrity*.

With the present issue we focus our attention on Jesus, the source and center of our faith in God. Few aspects of our faith could make greater difference than our personal perspective of Jesus; hence, our special consideration in this issue of the question, "What happens when we see Jesus?" We are indebted to board member Elton Higgs for serving as guest editor and assuming the responsibility of assembling the material on this vital theme; and to each contributing writer our sincere thanks.

While the May/June issue will give much emphasis to the place of the Bible in the life and ministry of the church, we

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### What Happens When We "See Jesus"?

A group of Greeks who were curious about Jesus came to Philip, one of the Twelve, and said, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus" (John 12:21). We don't know exactly what their motivation was, but we may assume that they had heard of his great deeds and of his new teaching, and that they wanted to meet the source of all the stir. We can guess that in their search for worldly wisdom they were little prepared for Jesus' response about the glorification of God through obedient suffering, which Jesus himself shrank from in the flesh, and which was a part of that message of the cross destined to be "a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles" (I Cor. 1:22-23). Indeed, throughout history since Jesus walked the earth, people have been surprised or shocked when they really got a look at him; for seeing Jesus is an experience that changes us by bringing us into contact with the glory of God.

Just as ordinary human beings have many facets to their personalities, so we may expect there to be multiple sides of the personality of Jesus. Different people encounter him initially in different ways: through growing up in a Christian family, or hearing his teaching, or hearing of him from others, or seeing him in a purely superficial way in a so-called "Christian" society. But however we first encounter him, as we come to see who he really is, we realize the significance of his stressing (especially in the Gospel of John) his oneness with the Father and his submission as the Son who reveals the Father. That is

indeed the starting place for understanding Jesus: he is the face of God, the only avenue for our seeing God. Whatever else we know about him, that is the root of it, for if he had not "learned obedience" as the Son, his life would not have mattered supremely, as it did and still does. Having recognized this core of the Son's personality, we may evaluate his various effects on us in a more meaningful context. In offering himself as the perfect *sacrifice*, he provides the means for our being reconciled to God by enabling us to become a part of that sacrifice; as *healer*, Jesus shows the image of God as a voluntary, compassionate participant in the suffering of mankind; as *teacher*, he is revolutionary not so much because he presents new tenets of morality, but because he gives new meaning to our humanness by speaking to us from within it; and in that context, Jesus has the potential to become our intimate *friend*, who walks continually with us, advises and admonishes us, and intercedes for us.

So it is that in this issue of *Integrity*, we have articles on seeing Jesus as "Father," as Sacrifice, as Healer, as Teacher, and as Friend. In the first of the following articles, *Integrity's* Editorial Advisor and former Editor-in-Chief, Hoy Ledbetter, very lucidly expounds the meaning of Jesus as "Father." The rest of the writers in this issue are probably not known to most *Integrity* readers, but they have a fresh way of presenting their material, and we hope that you will find the Spirit of God speaking to you through them. Rae Smith (assisted by

the Guest Editor) has presented the personal challenge of seeing Jesus as God's perfect sacrifice; Connie Graham pictures Jesus as healer through the eyes of a fictional prodigal son; Marge Wood has a very imaginative portrayal of Jesus the teacher as he might appear in contemporary America; and Meg Mitzel shares with us her very personal view of Jesus as friend. These are not, of course, the only points of view

## Jesus As Father

### HOY LEDBETTER

In trying to patch up broken lives I have often encountered people who were severely damaged by bad experiences with their fathers. Some have been physically or sexually abused. Others have been made to feel that their worth is to be measured by their achievement, so that a minor failure, such as making a poor grade on a test, can result in a decision that life is not worth living. Many have suffered rejection, or have been convinced that they were an unwelcome burden on the family, or have felt the force of discrimination as another child received favored treatment. Often they have struggled in vain to know a father's forgiveness for wrong done. Or the father may have simply been too cold and distant, so that a close, warm relationship was beyond reach.

Such conditions were prevalent and had to be taken into account when God sought to reveal himself to his world as Father through his Son. He knew, as he approached a generation in which pagan fathers might get rid of unwanted babies by "exposing" them, that unless the negative associations could be circumvented, the no-

from which Jesus can be seen, but they do have a relationship to each other, and they make us aware of the magnificent and inexhaustible richness of being acquainted with our Lord Jesus Christ. May we say always (and accept the consequences of saying it), "We wish to see Jesus."

Elton D. Higgs  
Guest Editor

tion of father would not always bring joy and might even repel rather than attract. So God had to provide a new definition of the term, and a new model one could point to and say, "This is a real father— one who can be fully trusted to love and accept and forgive, and not to abuse or abandon."

This revelation, without which our understanding of the word "father" may be dangerously inaccurate, was the burden of his Son, whom the Old Testament prophet denominated "Everlasting Father" as well as "Prince of Peace." When no one had ever seen God, he "made him known" (Jn. 1:18). When he was asked, "Show us the Father," he could truly reply, "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (14:8-9). But what people saw was not always easy to believe.

The father in Jesus' well-known parable hardly corresponds to the world's view of what is "normal." The unregenerated outlook is better represented in a story passed on by A.M. Hunter. A certain "prodigal son" found himself in "a far country" where the minister whose counsel

he sought urged him to go home, expressing confidence that the lad's father would "kill the fatted calf" for him. He did go home; and some months later he met the minister, who asked him, "Well, did he kill the fatted calf for you?" "no," the young man said regretfully, "but he almost killed the prodigal son!" Now that is the kind of reaction many of us have come to expect from our fathers.

### Basis of Sonship: Doing or Being

But Jesus' parable in Luke 15 presents no ordinary father. The returning son, who had spent his entire fortune in the far country, received no tongue-lashing for his wastefulness. He faced no taunting "I told you so." He was not ordered to make restitution, or to give some declaration of regret or pledge of love, or to agree never to leave again. With no preconditions on his part, he was lavished with the rich blessings of home far beyond what his older brother thought appropriate. His father would not even permit him to finish his well-rehearsed confession, for he wanted no slave. When the son protested, "I am no longer worthy to be called your son," the father acted quickly to prove that he did not need to be. The only excuse the father made for his extravagant behavior toward the one who had failed in performance, who had cost rather than enriched the household, was this: "My son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." His status, the highest that could be conferred, was based, not on *doing*, but on *being*.

The elder brother, who could not appreciate this way of evaluating people, was a victim of the slave mentality which continues to demoralize God's people even at this late hour. But this sickness is not necessarily unto death; it may be overcome by those who "see what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God." God's overwhelming love is seen

in two ways in the New Testament: in our adoption, as this verse suggests, and in the fact that "while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" on the cross. Since in adoption we escape slavery, we should know the difference between a slave and a son.

A slave has no value except in terms of what he is able to produce. If he cannot work for the advantage of his owner, he will have no place in the household. If he becomes mentally or physically disabled, so that he cannot produce, he will forfeit his standing and most likely will be disposed of. The system of slavery has not encouraged a benevolent attitude toward broken-down human beings.

The son, on the other hand, belongs in the home simply because he is a son. His value is not determined by what he does—by some noteworthy achievement, some quota of production, some activity which will enrich the head of the house—but by who he is. Acceptance on this basis lies at the very heart of the gospel.

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The Bible teaches that if we fail to see God through the eyes of his Son, we fail to be truly Christian. In order that we might be able to do that, "God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (Gal. 4:4-6). And again: "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is the Spirit himself

bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God..." (Rom. 8-14-16).

## Slaves or Sons?

As these passages indicate, when we are delivered from slavery and become sons, the Spirit of God's Son within us cries out, "Abba! Father!" This cry is the evidence that we are children of God; in it the Spirit bears witness with our spirit to that fact. The word "Abba," a term of endearment that a small child in an Aramaic-speaking home in the time of Jesus would have used of his father, has received a great deal of attention in recent years. It is doubtful that we will come up with a better English equivalent than "Dad." To call God "Dad" may seem inconsistent with his holiness and therefore irreverent, but there can be no doubt that Jesus so used the term, that he by it taught us to view God in a way which was unknown before he came, and that he has left us with what someone has called a "God as Dad" theology.

In this connection it is very important that we see the oneness of God and Jesus. In Jesus as Father we can see God as Son, and it is only through his revelation that we can arrive at an accurate definition of both

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achievement.

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"son" and "father." This is no mere academic exercise. If we are to be redeemed from slavery and experience sonship, we must come to grips with the implications of God as Dad. What does this concept mean for me?

It means that my standing in God's family does not depend on my own achievement. God does not accept me and love me because I am teeming with talent or have avoided mistakes. I can therefore have confidence in his goodwill when I accomplish

much less than I would like. It rescues me from the disastrous notion that there is no point to my life when I have repeatedly failed, and from the disruptive inclination to try to gain points by making others look bad.

It *should* mean that my church is not a slave church, where only successful people are really wanted or respected and where there is such fear of failure that nothing will be undertaken unless the outcome is assured. The spirit of slavery falls back into fear and buries its talent in the earth, but not so the spirit of sonship, which recognizes that God often calls us to take great risks.

## The Spirit Cries out, Abba, Father"

Knowing God as Dad delivers me from the immature and mistaken notion that I must work to get close to God, that I must always come up with devices to make me feel his presence, and that I have failed if my worship does not receive high marks from my peers. I do not cry "Abba!" on my own. To try to do so is to make my life a labor of legalism rather than an expression of sonship. This prayer does not issue from my own initiative but is *the Spirit* crying out. When in my worship I am "cumbered with much serving," I have reverted to the slave mentality, and I dishonor the Spirit by doubting his presence and assuming his duties.

This view of God sets my obedience in an entirely new light. Its motive is no longer the force of law, but the power of a new affection. God's commandments are free from all sense of burdensomeness when we ascend to the level of him who is one with the Father.

Finally, it enables me to understand and appreciate the Holy Spirit. He is the Spirit of adoption, and I can have no greater experience of the Spirit than for him to cry out within me, "Abba! Father!"

# Jesus As Sacrifice

BY RAE SMITH  
AND ELTON HIGGS

One thing is clear: Jesus' death on the cross was for me. It should have been me on that cross instead of him, because it was my sins that deserved death; and it's the same for everybody else, too. The law of God is good and perfect, and it shows me what my problem is: I can't measure up to God's perfection. Even if I could keep the law of God perfectly as it was presented in statutes through Moses (and nobody can), I can't meet the standard of pure thinking that Jesus set forth in the Sermon on the Mount. It's not only a matter of not *doing* wrong in order to be perfect, it's also a matter of not *wanting* to do wrong. If we think about the deed in our hearts and long to see it happen, we are guilty before God and condemned by the law. So there I am, an enemy of God through my disobedience. If I can't satisfy Him on my own, then who's going to do it for me? The penalty of my sin is death, and "one will hardly die for a righteous man," let alone for a sinner. But "God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. 5: 6-8).

Well, why is a sacrifice necessary, and why does it do any good? Wherever sacrifice has been done in the past as a religious observance, it was taken for granted that it would convince some deity that the one or ones making the sacrifice were willing to give up something valuable in order to make their god happy with them or to persuade him to do something for them. The supreme sacrifice, of course, was to offer another human being, and the purity of the victim was often the main requirement. God commanded sacrifices under the Mosaic law, but they were of grain or animals, and it was always clear that human sacrifice, particularly of babies, was an

abomination to the Lord. (Yes, there's Jephthah and his daughter, but that's a strange case all the way around.) The most significant sacrifice offered under the Law of Moses was the one on the Day of Atonement, when the high priest went into the Holy of Holies to offer a lamb for the sins of all the people during the past year. When the priest went in, he had to purify himself first with the strictest ceremonies, or he would die in the presence of God. For the Presence of God destroys sin; that's the reason sin can take place only when the sinner turns away from Him. So there's both the function and the necessity of sacrifice so far as the Lord God Jehovah is concerned: it enables Him to deal with people who otherwise couldn't even stand before Him because of their sin.

## Set Right With God

But the animal sacrifices had to be repeated over and over; they were only stop-gap measures (see Hebrews 9). In order to set human beings right with God, there finally had to be a human sacrifice, and there was no human being good enough to be offered in that way. That's where Jesus comes in. The only way for humanity to be able to stand permanently before God was for at least one man to be completely free from sin, so that he could be the perfect "lamb" for the sake of all the others; and that could happen only if God made another Adam who could get it right this time. And the whole process had to be carried out by a person who would suffer willingly for a bunch of creatures who knew very little about what God wanted them to be and generally cared

even less. As it turned out, of course, most of those creatures rejected the sacrifice even after they knew about it.

So what does the sacrifice of Jesus mean to me? Well, it means first of all that he subjected himself to all the horrors of a world filled with sin and its results, and that he did that in a body that was open to the temptations of Satan; he had to go through all that to be made perfect for the actual sacrifice. And then, when it came time to die on the cross (hardly a dignified "altar"), not even His closest friends understood what was going on, and in the most terrible moment on the cross, His Father turned His face away. Jesus became sin for our sake, and the Son, for the first and only time, suffered separation from the Father. A part of God had to suffer death in order to redeem us. What love is this!

### Dying To the Flesh

So Jesus returned to the Father to stand before Him as our perpetual High Priest, having offered Himself once and for all as the perfect sacrifice. He took our sins into his own body and paid the price for us, but we must recognize and confess Him as our redeemer. Now I'm willing to stand back and accept Jesus as my sacrifice so long as I don't get too mixed up in it. I'm not really too happy with the idea of dying to the flesh, which is what I have to do if I'm going to get the benefit of Jesus' sacrifice; I have to participate in his sacrifice and die with him (Gal. 2:20), and then that enables me to become a living sacrifice to God

*(Continued from page 22)*

plan to include a special article on the unity conference held at the Central Church of Christ in Irving, Texas, January 17-19. This will certainly be viewed as one of the most significant efforts to be exerted during 1985 to explore the changing stance of many leaders and congregations within our Restoration churches. The present writer

(Rom. 12:1-2) and to offer worship to Him. As long as I live in the flesh, I'm God's enemy, because I haven't taken hold of the sacrifice of Jesus and said, "That's *my* sacrifice, the one I desperately needed to make but couldn't because I couldn't even get up to the altar." Jesus takes us into the Holy of Holies with him and says, "Now that I've gone in before you and sacrificed myself, your own sacrifice of yourself can mean something."

This is where the cross of Christ comes into focus with me. What am I going to do with Christ? Am I going to accept what he has done in my behalf and let him come into my life and stamp his image upon me? Or am I going to leave him hanging in my place and go my merry way until my sins find me out? Jesus made the supreme sacrifice for me, and now he's asking me to present to him my body so that he can live in and through it, and to sacrifice my old nature so that I can be made alive in him. Amazing as it seems, He wants to make a little "Jesus" of me! And how small is my sacrifice, in comparison with his, that brings me to the experience of that transformation! But Satan, and sin, and death are defeated through that beautiful and powerful act, for we know that if we die with Jesus, we shall also be raised with him. Praise be to God for His great and wonderful gift!

Rae Smith resides in Southfield, Michigan and serves as a live-in and travel companion for an elderly woman there.

was privileged to share in this momentous experience, and we believe that our readers will savor the impressions made during these three days of discussion, exploration, and fellowship on the direction the church should be pointing in our contemporary world.

Joseph F. Jones, Chairman  
Integrity Editorial Board

# The Great Physician

BY CONNIE GRAHAM

(This letter written by a son to his father may not be unlike many written in Jesus' day.)

Dearest Father,

How special that name has become to me. Now when I think of you my heart longs to see you. What joy I feel when I realize that soon I will, God willing, be coming home.

Your patience, understanding, and wisdom have frequently been sources of strength to me as I traveled. I never forgot the look on your face when I left so many months ago. Your eyes could never hide your feelings; yet you allowed me to go, neither knowing where my adventuresome, troubled spirit would lead me, nor even if I would ever come home again. I know that you inquired often of my whereabouts and that you were most concerned about my state of mind, and rightfully so; but now let me assure you that all is well, very well, with your son. Father, I have so much to tell you. How I long to share with you, my first teacher, the things that I have seen and heard. The time you spent teaching me of a God of love has borne fruit, for now I know and believe in that God.

In the weeks before I left, you often spoke of a man named Jesus. You told me of the stir he created in the temple when he came there teaching, preaching, and healing (even on the Sabbath, God forbid). It seemed totally illogical to me that my Father, an educated man and a teacher in the temple, not only gave credence to this Jesus by discussing his radical ideas, but later, after no small amount of agony, accepted him and sought to be counted as a follower. Father, I watched you suffer because of that decision. I often asked

myself why one like you would forfeit all the privileges afforded our class to follow one so lowly, one who obviously delighted in being associated with the poor, the sick, and the weak. I believed he could offer me nothing, at least nothing I wanted, anyway. There were more important things for my life and I was going to pursue them.

In my new found freedom I traveled from town to town. I stayed to work only long enough to provide for my immediate needs—even more importantly, for my immediate wants. Then I would leave to go to a new place, repeating this pattern. One morning I awoke to the sounds of excitement as crowds passed by the field which had provided me a place of rest the night before. When I questioned the passers-by they mentioned Jesus. They told me of his miracles; the sick are made well, the dead to live again, the blind to see, the lame to walk, and the hungry masses to be filled. "So much from so little," they cried, "Come and see, follow us, for we are going, too."

I found myself attracted to the hope of a day different from the many before; it was this hope, together with a bewildering mix of curiosity and hunger, that motivated me to go. Initially I watched him from afar—the crowds made that easy. Whatever their reasons for coming, come they did. The scribes and Pharisees were a part of every crowd, as were the common people, but it was the masses of diseased and sick that I found most interesting.

If they could not get there by their own power, then they were led or even carried by loved ones. I saw their bodies ravaged by disease. I saw their eyes white and hollow with blindness. I saw the years of pain and suffering that searched every muscle for

strength enough to endure one more day. But more importantly, what I saw was one man who reached out and touched the unclean, and with that touch, lives were transformed. In his eyes they were not just masses; instead, they were individuals in need who had come with hope, and from that he could not turn away.

The Healer touched lives and made them more than physically well. He reached out to offer all-abundant life—not just temporary physical healing, but all that they would need to live a victorious life now. I heard him speak as no other would dare. I could not get him out of my mind. Questions and the search for answers led me back to him, for he was the only one whose answers really mattered.

Jesus. What I discovered about him will, I believe, forever change the world. He is the one foretold by the prophets of old. Isaiah once said that one would come to take up our infirmities and carry our sorrows. The power he had, the authority which allowed him to forgive sins and exorcise evil spirits, his compassion and the wisdom he showed can only come from one source. He called the source “My Father.” The teachers of the law and the Pharisees could not explain how this man could say or do the things he did, so the accusations flew and the plotting began. Jesus’ responses were always powerful. “The Son has authority on earth to forgive sins.” “I drive out spirits by the spirit of God.” There can be no doubt: this Jesus is the son of God!

When Jesus saw the crowds he had compassion on them. It was not just pity that motivated his actions, it was love. His compassion was not limited to the physically ill, but to all whose lives were troubled or empty. Yes, he healed the sick, but his focus was far greater. His remedy was total and forever. He was not just interested in the shell. His primary goal was to heal us all from the malady of sin. I shall never forget when with out-stretched arms and pleading eyes he cried, “Come unto me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.” Great is the Father’s love who sent

His Son to earth so that all could have everlasting life.

Jerusalem: a holy city that welcomed The King of the world and then crucified Him five days later. God watched this happen to His only Son. He was present when the decision was made by the rulers who believed that the only way to silence and stop this powerful movement was through death—Jesus’ death. Did God abandon His Son at the most critical time of his life? He could not, He would not! Every muscle of Jesus that screamed for relief was connected to God’s nerve center. Every tear shed tasted salty to God, too. Every cry uttered was magnified in the Father’s ears. This same Father God will forever understand pain and suffering because He’s been there.

The Great Physician was dead. At the time, it seemed that with Jesus’s death went everything I dared hope and believe in. Hasn’t it always been that death is the final battle? Hasn’t defeat always been synonymous with the last breath? It was so—until Jesus died. Praise be to God, the story doesn’t end there! He lives! The tomb stands empty because death could not enslave him. After three days Jesus arose by the same power that lives today in the lives of believers. Never again will death have the same significance it had before. Instead, death brings us one step closer to ultimate healing. A time will come, He promised, when I, too, will be raised in “newness of life.” The battle has already been fought and I stand on the Victor’s side. I’ve traded my weak, weary, troubled spirit for power, fullness, and peace in Jesus.

There is still more to tell, Father. I pray this letter does not precede my arrival by many days. I’m sure you can understand better why the name Father has become even more special to me. May the heavenly Father grant my earthly father grace and peace.

In love,  
Your son

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Connie Graham is a homemaker and mother of two young children in Clawson, Michigan.

# Jesus, The Great Story-Teller

BY MARGE WOOD

Jesus as teacher can perhaps be shown as much by what is not said as by what is said in the New Testament.

What kind of man was he?

Do you know anyone like him?

Picture a robust man—a working man. Strong and vital, but always in control of himself. A cordial man.

In contemporary terms, a cabinet-maker. Lives in a decent, modest home in a nondescript part of the city. Drives a well-used pickup with toolbox. He’s a hard worker, good at what he does—takes a great deal of pride in his workmanship.

He’s a good neighbor. Always checks on the old man living alone near him. Helps keep up the house of the young woman trying to survive with her small children and smaller paycheck. And what stories he tells—he’s always sitting on the steps after supper telling stories. Sad stories, funny stories, strange stories. Stories to make one think. All the neighbor kids sprawl on the porch and sidewalk so they won’t miss a word. Some of their parents listen too and dream strange dreams of a better way.

People trust him. Never once has he screamed at a mechanic when frustrated over the poorly-done repairs on his pickup—yet next time the mechanic tries harder to do a good job.

He always has sensible answers when teenagers, half-taunting, half-serious, ask him “What would he do if...?” Down at the cafe everyone knows his or her secrets will never be laid out with the coffee.

He’s fun too. The neighbor children are always watching, ball in hand, for him to pull into his driveway. They know he’ll take time to play for a few minutes. He always leaves them with a hug and “Be good, okay?” He helps with homework when he has time and listens carefully to their pro-

blems. For him they would do anything.

How can anyone be so good?

At night his lights burn late as he studies the Word, pondering. He pours out his heart to his Father, who always has time to listen. Often he’s not really aware whether he’s awake or asleep, but seems to have a supernatural source of energy during the day.

Of course, he is so busy he really doesn’t have time for a family—and that leads to talk. “...saw him with *Mary Magdalene*? Hmm...” “...always hanging around with young boys. No wife...hm.” “...just him and some other guys live there. Some women come in and cook and clean once in awhile.” Nothing is done but people have long memories. Maybe that’s why some turned on him when he was down.

He continues his work, quietly and unobtrusively. Gradually a group of young men form around him. Strangely, they leave their jobs and start helping him. A reporter comes, asking questions of the neighbors. Who pays the bills? What are they up to? What is this, a commune or something? A new religion or cult?

The young woman says, “I don’t know anything about him. Never makes any trouble. He helps me, helps the kids. They adore him.”

The old man says, “Oh, I think he’s some kind of a preacher. Does carpentry work to pay his bills. He’s different, you know. People he’s never seen will come up and ask him what to do about things. You can just look at him and know he’s good. When we go to the cafe to eat, people always want to ask him questions. The other night people were three deep around the table. They were so busy listening to him and asking questions they forgot to eat and the owner finally had to throw every-

one out so he could close. Never saw anything like it.”

More and more, people come to him. On the street, at work, in the grocery store he has people crowding around him. Local authorities notice and wonder about his credentials. He never mentions having gone to school, but what he says rings true—and besides, there are fewer problems in town with him helping people. He really *cares*.

Then one day a huge yellow school bus is parked in the driveway instead of the pickup and a FOR SALE sign is in front of the house. “Where’s your pickup?” the children ask. “Why is your house for sale?” He just gathers them all up in a big bundle, hugs them and grins. “My friends and I are all going on a *long* trip. You’ll all have to help each other while I’m gone. But I’ll come back some day and I’ll write to you while I’m gone.” And he does. Postcards. Every few days a different child receives one. They share them with each other. And they reminisce about the things he told them.

“Capernaum. Had to wear my suit today. Missed having you help me tie my tie. It got exciting in synagogue today—a man had a seizure and we had to stop and help him. God healed him. He’s okay now. Love you. Be good.”

“Lake Inn, Sea of Galilee. We’re camping in the hills above this fancy hotel. Lots of excitement yesterday. We were in a boat on the lake and I fell asleep. Woke up in the middle of a terrible storm. God took care of that, too. Whew! Close call. We got *soaked*. Love you. Be good.”

“Jericho. Funniest thing happened today. I looked up in a tree and there was a little bitty man staring down at me. At first I thought I was seeing things. Then I laughed—this man named Zacchaeus had climbed up there to see me! So we went to his house for dinner. He had done some bad things, but he was sorry for them. Probably be here a few days. Love you. Be good.”

At Zacchaeus’ house there is quite a turmoil. His wife can’t believe what she sees. All these men to feed and clean up after,

crowds of poor and sick people all over the yard, clamoring to see Jesus, the rulers of the temple trying to look casual while they check out the rumors. One minute she is proud of Zacchaeus for straightening out his life and the next she is panic-stricken. “What will we *do*? How will we *live*? Here you sit, calmly dividing our life’s savings up to give to poor people. What will I tell the children? What will Mother say? You can’t *do* this to us!” and she storms off, leaving the accountant and Zacchaeus to their bookkeeping.

The living room is turned into a conference room where Jesus can listen to the people. His friends wander throughout the crowd, surprised that they, too, can help people. As they help people their confidence grows. They hear themselves calmly answering questions the way they have heard Jesus do, and they know it’s going to work. All of a sudden, all he has been telling them is clear to them. He has taught them well. It will help them later on.

The next postcard home is postmarked “Jerusalem. Big parade and celebration today. You would’ve had a great time. I may be a long time getting back. I love you. Be good. Always remember the things I told you.” And they do.

The headlines in the papers, the pictures of Jesus being let to the courtroom, the stories of Jesus the troublemaker, heretic, and traitor, Jesus practicing medicine without a license, Jesus eating and drinking with pimps and whores—the children hear their parents’ rising voices and disbelief. And when he is executed the children still feel that somehow he’ll get to come back some day.

Many years later their children and grandchildren repeat the wonderful stories they have been told about Jesus. Sad stories, funny stories, strange stories. Stories that had changed peoples’ lives when they were able to hear them. Stories from the Master Story-Teller Himself.

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## The Perfect Friend

BY MEG MITZEL

I have had some exceptionally lonely periods in my life, as we all have. Mine have been somewhat different in that I have been culturally lonely and isolated. This combined with depression can be equated with a double whammy. In my two overseas ventures totaling three years, I felt such extreme loneliness that it is painful to read my journals from those times. Needless to say, the journals remain packed away waiting for that day, perhaps never to come, when the pain has faded with the memories or the security of a future time can counter the aches.

During those periods abroad and the empty times that I have experienced while living in my native land, I yearn for someone to whom I can express my cultural frustrations, my loneliness, and all of my life’s trials. It seems that the right person is never present at these times. That is what makes them so empty. Nevertheless, I like to try to imagine such a person and the qualities that he might have. Although I have glimpses of him, he keeps slipping away (or maybe he gets pushed away?). I keep grasping for those qualities that will make this friend the perfect one. He will be the perfect recipient of my innermost thoughts of despair and elation.

### Wanted: Perfect Friend

He is a good listener, able to relate to all of my emotions. He is non-judgmental, knowing and understanding the concepts of good and evil but avoiding cruel condemnation. Nevertheless, he asks all of the appropriate questions, and he doesn’t mince words. (A woman from Samaria once had a conversation with a person like this [John 4:7-29].)

He is so aware of the needs of his fellow

man, both spiritual and physical, that he would sacrifice his own right to privacy to fulfill those needs. He thinks of others first, of the details that will make their lives comfortable. (I heard of a man at a wedding a long time ago who did something like this [John 13:1-38].)

He is a man who speaks with wisdom, one who is not filled with the popular and trendy words of the day, but someone who speaks the TRUTH. His statements are thought-provoking, but his manner can be described as that of a gentleperson. (I think I once read about a teacher like this who preached a sermon on a hilltop.)

He would be generally respected and held in high esteem by many. Despite this standing, he would also be able to humble himself and become the ultimate servant. (I heard the most unusual story in church about a man like this. He even went so far as to wash the feet of the men who worked for him [John 13:1-38].)

This humble service could spring only from an abounding and tender love seen in all of the friend’s actions, a complete love that seeps into your bloodstream and makes you love others, friend or foe, an unconditional love that continues to be consistent despite the less-than-perfect response from those befriended. This unconditional love is so powerful that it reaffirms the worth of each of us as beings in the image of God, even in our fallen state. Such love transforms us through its willingness to be sacrificed for us. The intensity of this love thrills me, but it also fills me with apprehension. (At Easter some cultures remember a man who loved with such intensity that he died a painful death to save his friends [John 15:12-13; John 19].)

I often forget that there really is a real God-man who fits my imaginary descrip-

tion. He is available to me to be a listener, an intercessor, an advocate, and more. He is available and able to be the perfect friend, the one for whom I yearned in those times of extreme loneliness and frustration. He is at my side waiting for me to share the latest developments of every part of my life.

Why do I not go to Him? How can I forget that He is there? Somehow, too easily, I have successfully avoided entrenching my life in His. As I approach a new stage I realize that I have not lived up to the commitment I made more than a decade ago. While Jesus is the Perfect Friend, I could best be described as the Fickle Friend. As a result of the patterns of the past, I've missed part of a valuable and precious friendship. No doubt I've foregone many spiritual riches in addition to enduring painful disciplinary times. Furthermore, I have lost opportunities to be used as a Christ-like friend to others. Christ has been my exam-

ple as listener, servant, and giver of unconditional love who sacrificed His life for me. Now I must attempt to be a friend in His image.

We all long for the perfect friend, but we also avoid the risk in such an intimate relationship. Jesus became our friend at a greater cost than any of us will ever pay. Now it is our choice whether to respond to His sacrifice by letting Him fulfill the continuing role of Perfect Friend, and by letting Him (and here's the real risk of faith) make real friends of us. I suggest that we read about our Friend in the book of John and think about this relationship. If our encounter has the effect it should, it may well be the death—and the life—of us.

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## Scriptures for Study About "Seeing Jesus"

### The Son as "Father"

(showed the Father by being an obedient Son)

John 5-8 esp. 5:19-24; 6:37-44, 54-57; 8:14-19, 23-29, 54-55  
John 12:20-33, 44-50; 14:1-14; 16:25-28; 17:20-26  
Philippians 2:5-8; Hebrews 5:7-10

### Jesus as Teacher

(authoritative, imaginative, sensitive)

Matthew 7:28-29; Mark 1:21-28  
Matthew 9:35-11:1  
Matthew 13  
Hebrews 1:1-2

### Jesus as Healer

(image of God's voluntary participation in man's suffering)

Matthew 8:1-17; 9:1-13, 18-38; 12:9-32  
John 9  
Luke 4:40-41  
Romans 6:1-11; 8:10-11, 18-25  
I Corinthians 15:20-26  
Revelation 3:17-18

### Jesus as Sacrifice

(providing reconciliation, a merging place for God & man)

Hebrews 9:11-28; 12:1-6; 13:10-16  
I Corinthians 5:7-8  
I Peter 1:18-21  
Galatians 2:20

### Jesus as Brother

(instrument of blood relationship, adoption as children)

Hebrews 2:9-18; 4:14-16  
Romans 8:12-17  
Matthew 25:40  
Mark 3:31-35

### Jesus as Friend

(most intimate relationship, continuing involvement)

John 11:1-44; 13:1-38; 15:12-17  
Hebrews 7:23-25  
I John 2:1-11  
Proverbs 27:6 (See Hebrews 12:7-11)

### New-Made Clay (John 9)

Am I he, indeed,  
Who blindly begged for alms  
Before my eyes were daubed with mud?  
What tie now links with new-made me  
That wretch who washed  
His dirty eyes in bright Siloam?  
Enough that blind I was  
And now I see,  
And both those "I's" are me.  
I cannot disavow the flaw  
That gave occasion to His power.

With new-made clay  
He recreated and redeemed  
—Redeemed, and not destroyed!  
Rekindled sight resides  
In those same orbs  
That lightless issued  
From the womb.  
He fused the old and new  
With dust and spit  
That I might not forget,  
When cleansed and whole,  
Where God began with me.  
—Elton D. Higgs

### Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10)

Little and much are merged today  
Because Jesus looked at me.  
I made the move and climbed the tree,  
But He saw more than I;  
He pierced my heart at a single glance,  
Before I, perchance, might scramble back  
To earthly greed.  
Driven by stunted stature,  
I'd climbed above my fellows,  
Just as then I clambered up  
To view this wizard of renown.  
No whit would I be topped  
By scornful townsmen.  
But only from that height  
Came knowledge of my dwarfish soul.  
Receive Him in my house?  
Was not the door too low?  
He stopped, and made me tall;  
He ate, and I was filled;  
He asked, and I gave all  
To reach the mark He willed.  
—Elton D. Higgs