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INTEGRITY, a journal published bimonthly by an independent nonprofit corporation, 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 the Board as a whole.



*Artwork by Jan Green, Waterford, MI*

July/August 1990

# Integrity

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## How Great Is Our God!

Each Wednesday night over the past two years, I have taught a group of upper elementary school-aged children in a class we call "God, the God of Science." I am trying to impress upon them that belief in God and the pursuit of science are compatible because God created the so-called "laws of science." Our study has covered the flight of Voyager II as it sent us its last pictures of our solar system and began its lonely journey out of our solar system and through our Milky Way galaxy. Its journey covered 4.43 billion miles over 12 years. A trip from one end of our galaxy to the other at the speed of light would take at least 100,000 years. And it is difficult to imagine that our galaxy, with its billions of stars, is just one of billions of such galaxies.

How powerful is the God who created such a universe! Just the size of His universe boggles our minds. But how boggled should our hearts be to grasp how long, how wide, how high, and how deep is the love of this God for us? How awed should we feel to know that this God wants to fill us with Himself? Ephesians 3:18-19.

As you read this issue's articles, we hope that you are encouraged and reminded of this mighty Creator's love for you, personally.

Bruce and Diane Kilmer  
Co-Editors

## If Jesus Is Not Our Personal Savior, Do We Have A Savior?

LARRY DOTSON

"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one cometh to the father but by me. I am the door. If anyone enters through me, he shall be saved. I am the good shepherd. I lay down my life for the sheep and I give them eternal life. I am the bread of life. The bread that I give is my flesh. He that cometh to me shall never hunger. I am the light of the world. He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

I recently heard an evangelist tell his radio audience, "Jesus is not your personal savior. He's the savior of the church." The fact that the speaker would see these two objects of salvation as being in conflict says a great deal about the way we can be conditioned by religious indoctrination to view matters from different perspectives. The distinction between Jesus as personal savior versus being the savior of the church may only be a matter of semantics, since Christ's church is nothing more than a collection of persons, but it's a distinction that should not be overlooked.

The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus is both Lord and Savior. Although the two are inseparable, man must identify with each. When we profess our faith in Jesus, we are not just responding to God incarnate, the creator of all things who has the power and authority to demand that we come to Him. We are also responding to the man Jesus, the man called the friend of sinners, the humble servant who laid down his life in order that others could gain life, and who softly and tenderly calls sinners to come to him.

There's no such thing as salvation on the group plan, i.e. through "the church." Jesus' gospel invitation is extended to each of us on an individual basis. It demands a personal response and that response must first be to him and nothing else. He calls us to enter into a sinner-savior relationship with him, which becomes the foundation for following him as Lord. The only class of people he seeks this relationship with are those who know they need him (Mt 9:12, Lk 18:13-14). In the story of the two debtors and the sinful woman, Jesus taught that it is this personal need for him that motivates our love for him and that the more we have to be forgiven of, the more we will love him (Lk 7: 41-47). We can't rejoice at being found unless we know we were lost. We can't experience a new birth unless we know there is something wrong with the old one. Jesus' invitation can have no personal meaning for us until, like the sinful woman, we bring our sin and guilt and lay them at his feet in exchange for the forgiveness and freedom that only he can offer.

So when we deal with the question, "What will you do with Jesus?," we deal with his invitation to come to *him*, not to a Church, not to the Bible, not to a plan of salvation, and not to anything that might be presented as being necessary to complete the work of the cross in order to "contact" his blood. We are surely just as much in disobedience to the will of God when we fail to submit to his grace and mercy as when we fail to submit to any overt act of obedience that we perceive as being essential to our salvation. Only grace and mercy can draw sinners to their savior. Obligation and duty

can only lead them to the works required to fulfill that obligation. There is nothing that can put a person *in* Christ until they have first come to him. Only when we become personally united with Jesus through faith can we really know that we actually have a savior, mediator, and high priest.

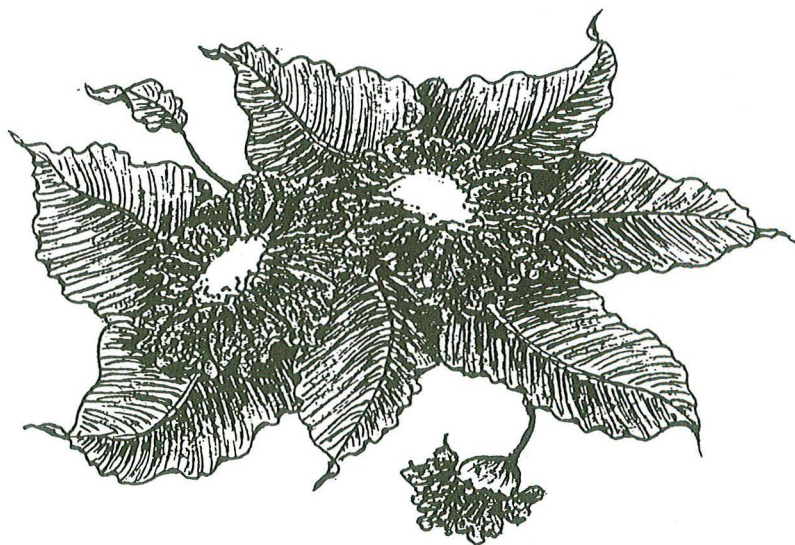
There can be no assurance of salvation without a personal savior. Since we stand condemned by our personal sins, we must be individually saved from those sins. The writer of Hebrews says that Jesus "tasted death for every man," so if we don't accept him as our personal savior, we don't have a savior. What we have is the *hope* of being saved, the bondage of uncertainty that comes from relying on Jesus, *plus* something else: whether it be the "right" Church, knowing Biblical truth, conformity to all the right doctrines, doing "wonderful works" in Jesus' name, etc. While these things may be important, they can't ensure that we won't someday hear Jesus say to us, "I never knew you." Paul wrote that we alienate ourselves from Jesus and fall away from the protection of grace if we seek to be justified by adding to it, because we must then be judged

on the basis of our own works (Gal 5:4-6, Rom 4:4, 11:6).

Yes, Jesus is the savior of the church (Eph 5:23), but the church he's going to save is not the one you go to on Sunday, because the saved and the lost, the wheat and the tares, can sit side by side in that Church. The church that Jesus has been building has no buildings. It is a spiritual house (1 Pet 2:5) whose true number cannot be verified through Church headcounts because the membership roll is maintained by God, not man. It knows not the bounds of exclusive fellowships because each of its members belongs to all other members (Rom 12:5). This church is the only earthly place where God lives (Mt 18:20, 1 Cor 3:16, Eph 2:22) because "the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands." Jesus stands at the door and knocks because he came to seek lost sinners to be his church, but each of us must open the door and ask him in before it can be said of his acceptance of us into that church that "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

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Larry Dotson, a member of the Church of Christ, lives in Centerville, Tennessee.



Artwork by Frankie Shanks, Poplar Bluff, MO

## Dealing with Failure

BEVERLY CHOATE DOWDY and DEBORAH CHOATE SHEPHERD

Dear Bruce and Diane,

When you asked each of us individually to prepare articles for this issue of *Integrity*, Bev, in Atlanta, and Debi, in Detroit each began to consider how to best convey what has been on our hearts. Then we did the natural thing for sisters to do — we telephoned each other to talk about it! It did not take us long to discover we were contemplating the same subject — failure. That is not really so surprising to us, since we have been helping each other deal with some of our own failures for a while now. The two articles below are, in fact, a distillation of the conversations we have had. The thoughts have helped us, maybe they will help your readers.

Beverly & Debi

### Finding Fault — B.C.D.

"I hate it when you say it's my fault!" Knitted brows, flushed cheeks, eyes brimming with tears, my mop-topped, blue-eyed, blond-haired boy shouts with all his might. It matters not if the problem at hand is an unintentional happening or a direct act of disobedience — he violently reacts to the idea that what has gone wrong is his fault. I understand how Trevor feels. I hate it, too!

Fifteen short years ago I vowed to love my husband in sickness and in health, to love him and him only, and among other things to "learn with him Christian stewardship." These promises are, of course, 'til death do us part. I have great peace about weathering numerous storms and keeping those vows. . . storms of sickness and deaths in our families. . . break-ins in our house. . . strife in marriages of those near and dear. . . the few times we've been wronged by someone else. There is nothing quite like hand-

ling problems that others or nature have put upon me. Why, isn't God great to be there? What I have not accepted are the things that have gone wrong that are my fault!

There is an expression for sin in scripture, *hamartia*, which depicts sin as a missing of the target, the failure to meet a goal. One area of failure that especially troubles me is sin in a passive sense, but it is more than that. What I am referring to without going into detail is the fact that I have hardly set the congregational "pace" in the Christian stewardship category. When I see how poorly I have managed my part of this vow, I burn with shame. I am frustrated. I cannot blame anyone else.

Maybe realizing failure is not so devastating to some people. Perhaps it stems from my own sick predisposition to perfectionism. Combine this with a healthy lot of Bible teaching infused with works righteousness. Can you see a major conflict brewing here? I know what is right. I can do what is right. God can give me strength to do what is right. But how deeply have I learned to trust the God of the cross, who tells me unequivocally that my best laid plans will go awry? During the past few years, I have felt the pain of failure. I do not like it. Actually, I am not accustomed to it. God has allowed me to receive millions of positive strokes. It is not that I feel I have not sinned. I have plenty. For example, when the proverb was recorded that says, "When words are many, sin is not far," it was written for folks like me. Many times my tongue has threatened to make my religion vain. It is serious sin to talk too much, to gossip, but it is a sin I feel I have in common with others. But in this other area, personal finances, I have felt alone. Isolated. Wrong. A wonderful thing happened to me on the way to despair over my sins. . .

*The Cross of Christ* is a book by noted evangelical scholar John R. W. Stott, published by the InterVarsity Press in 1986. What this book has told me in a new and provocative way is – welcome to the human race! At the heart of the book is a chapter entitled “The Problem of Forgiveness,” for, indeed, this is the heart of the issues surrounding the cross. It is there where healing begins. I would make all of the things that have gone wrong NONE of MY FAULT. (Like the other day when I got a ticket for not getting new car license tags, another symptom of poor management!) I would like to blame “the serpent,” or “Adam,” or “My Mom” — just someone besides me!

One passage that left a mark on me:

“... To say that someone ‘is not responsible for his actions’ is to demean him or her as a human being. It is part of the glory of being human that we are held responsible for our actions. Then, when we also acknowledge our sin and guilt, we receive God’s forgiveness, enter into the joy of his salvation, and so become yet more completely human and healthy. What is unhealthy is wallowing in guilt which does not lead to confession, repentance, faith in Jesus Christ and so forgiveness.”

I want nothing to be my fault. But if something has gone wrong, I want to be able to fix it myself. For more than 15 years I have taught about the grace of God which offers the only true solution to our failures. Yet when I find myself in a situation where I have caused a costly failure, I really dislike the concept of grace because grace does not let me justify

myself. I do not like to qualify any of my mistakes as sins, but some of them are.

Stott also writes:

“The essential background of the cross is balanced understanding of the gravity of sin, and the majesty of God. If we diminish either, we thereby diminish the cross. If we reinterpret sin as a lapse instead of a rebellion, and God as indulgent instead of indignant, then naturally the cross appears superfluous. . . [A] biblical view of . . . our sin and God’s wrath. . . honors human beings by affirming them as responsible for their actions. It honors God by affirming Him as having moral character”. p. 110

When I see my child struggle with being “at fault,” I feel that pain with him. But I am thankful I can hold out to him, as days go by — the cross. It is a cross that cries out that I am at fault. What Stott’s book has brought to my thinking is the remembrance of Emil Brunner’s concept of human responsibility as “not . . . a task, but a gift. . . not law but grace.” It expresses itself in “believing responsible love” (quoted by Stott, p. 96). I want my son to reflect on the idea that “a guilty conscience is a great blessing, but only if it brings us home” (p. 98). I want Trevor to learn Dr. Hubert Mowrer’s expression that “just so long as we deny the reality of sin, we cut ourselves off from the possibility of radical redemption” (p. 99).

I want to differentiate between mistakes and moral failures. Trevor must, too. I want to learn to say that things that are my fault are my fault. I want to experience, in every area of my life,

a radical redemption. The more I do this the more I am enabled to deal with others when things go wrong that are their fault.

## Succeeding at Failure — D.C.S.

The new religion of the 1990’s is — success. The shelves at all the bookstores groan with books about how to succeed — how to manage time, how to manage people, how to make things happen. College students worship at the altar of accomplishment. One of the tenets of this new religion of success is that we can make our own reality, we can make the things happen that we want to happen. We must set our goals, visualize the life we want, believe in ourselves, shake off the people who are holding us back, and go for it. Even Christians buy into the success religion in the form of a health and wealth gospel. We equate worldly success with moral rightness.

There is nothing in the new religion that teaches us how to fail. When we fail, it’s “bad karma,” something we did make it happen, and we can do something to reverse it if we really want to badly enough. So we repeat the litany of the success gurus. Yet failure is such an integral part of being a human being, we cannot escape it.

All around me, failure causes pain. A very dear friend has recently faced the disruption of a failing business and the likely possibility of personal bankruptcy. Others, equally dear, have lost jobs, because of making bad decisions in the workplace. Marriages are falling apart in a flurry of failed hopes and bitterness. My young daughter was betrayed by friends she trusted because she chose to trust the wrong people.

My own failures are legion: I set out at regular intervals to become a faithful daily Bible reader — each attempt “fizzles” after some months, weeks, or even days. Several years ago, I announced I would never wear a certain size jeans again, but even that large size is too small for me now — I have failed to keep up the healthy eating and exercise habits I once had. I was certain my love of literature and learning would inspire my children to be outstanding students, yet my son seems to place

no value on a formal education — school administrators (and I) give me failing grades in parenting. Even this article should have been completed weeks ago — I failed to sit down to write when the opportunities were there. The list goes on until I can say with Paul “*Miserable creature that I am, who is there to rescue me out of this body doomed to death?*” (Rom. 7:24).

We often tell the story of the prodigal son so we can tell the part about when the son makes a decision and literally turns his life around. What about the days and years in between his departure and return, when the father had let him go, and had to live with the knowledge that he seemed to have failed to teach his son to honor God, or even to be a responsible person? Imagine the sense of failure and defeat as he watched his son go down that road to certain destruction. And yet this father is thought to be a picture of God the Father. How can it be? Does God know what it is to fail? If God is all-knowing — then He must know even this.

I have always believed that Jesus bore the punishment for all my sins. In the physical pain of the cross, He took whatever punishments I deserve. It recently became clear to me that He experienced not only pain at the hand of others, but the pain of knowing his own failure. He was a teacher, whose every student failed the final exam — until the day he died, they still did not understand what he was saying about the kingdom of heaven. He was a friend, who was betrayed and deserted by those closest to him when he needed them most. He was a son, born and raised with great expectation of success, only to be executed as a criminal before his mother’s very eyes. For that matter, when it came to facing the cross, he could not bring himself to do it. He had to say, “*not my will, but yours*” (Luke 22:42).

There is comfort for me in realizing our Lord, the one without sin, has known what it is to fail. I have come to believe that failure is not merely evidence of sin, as some would have us believe, but is itself the temptation to sin. I mean this: Our failures can cause us to give up to despair, or to forsake the Lord and attempt to correct things by our own efforts, condemned to an endless cycle of effort and failure. Or we

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can admit we are wrong and powerless to change ourselves, and accept the grace and forgiveness of God. We must be willing to simply say, "Have mercy on me, a sinner," (Luke 18:13) instead of "give me a chance, I'll straighten out the whole mess." We can know the "godly sorrow that worketh repentance" (II Cor. 7:10) — what Robert Short and Charles Schultz call "Good Grief!" Then we can know, with Paul "there is no condemnation for those who are united with Christ Jesus, because in Christ Jesus the life-giving law of the Spirit has set you free from the law of sin and death. What the law [the success religion] could never do, because our lower nature robbed us of all it's potency, God has done: by sending his own Son in a form like that of our own sinful nature [knowing all kinds of defeat and failure], and as a sacrifice for sin, he has passed judgment against sin in that very nature, so that the commandment of the law may find fulfillment in us, whose conduct, no longer under control of the

*lower nature, is directed by the Spirit. . . those who live on the level of the spirit have the spiritual outlook, and that is life and peace" (Roman 8:1-6).*

We can know freedom from failure — not from the pain or the knowledge of our own fault — but from the despair, and from the need to find within ourselves the way to fix it all. The way is to admit the wrong, and accept the forgiveness offered. The prodigal's decision and trip home would have been fruitless without the forgiving father waiting at the door. Thank God that Jesus, by tasting our failures, has become our success.

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## Earth Day 1990

PERRY C. COTHAM

*(Now that Earth Day 1990 has passed, we thought this sermon delivered April 22, 1990 would be a helpful reminder for the resolutions and good intentions many of us made that day. — Editors)*

*Text: Romans 8:22-25; Psalm 24:1-2; Genesis 1-2.*

*Hymns: Praise the Lord, Ye Heavens  
Adore Him  
Hallelujah, Praise Jehovah  
This Is My Father's World  
For the Beauty of the Earth  
All Creatures of Our God and King*

It may seem strange that a subject such as this would be discussed from the pulpit. Historically, the church has cared very little about the

earth. The great theologians were not much concerned about environmental issues and conservation. Evangelical churches have built their wall between the spiritual and the physical. And, many church leaders never thought much about the "lilies of the field and how they grow." Earth concerns have been treated simply as that — earthly and not heavenly matters.

But how wrong we have been! True enough, the Bible does not treat the environment as an issue, as such. The Bible documents are concerned with heavenly matters, to be sure, but it has a great deal to say about creation and man's relationship to this earth.

Genesis begins by narrating a story of creation. It is God who made everything on earth — the rivers, streams, ponds, trees, animal life, hills, valleys, mountains, deserts, grass, plants,

atmosphere, and stars. And God also made human beings, beginning with man and then woman, and placed them in an environmentally perfect surrounding.

God gave commands: To work with the earth by tending the animals and tilling the ground and to have dominion over all the physical world. There was also a command to continue the process of creation: "Be fruitful and multiply." (It's pretty obvious that we have kept that command.)

Human history has taken a long course — many centuries. The earth itself may be many millennia old. Who knows? During this time, man has attempted to improve his earthly environment. Indians burned forest land in order to have pasture for livestock and soil for crops and gardening. From the turn of the century, Americans have drilled holes in the ground and extracted oil, refined it into liquid gasoline, and used it to fuel internal combustion engines, not simply in millions and millions of cars but also in tractors, trucks, lawnmowers, boats, planes, motorcycles, and power tools. As Americans we have damned rivers to create lakes all over this country. Currently, thousands of Brazilian natives are cutting down or burning the rain forests in order to build their houses or plant their crops. For centuries we have extracted coal from the earth and natural gas to warm our homes and fuel our machines and factories.

And then we have turned to chemistry to find a better life. Using petroleum products and chemicals, we have made plastic and styrofoam and other non-biodegradable materials for our convenience.

Now we face a situation where we have nearly depleted what God has given us. There is only so much oil to fuel automobiles driven by only one commuter at a time. There is only so much natural gas. Think of the earth as a giant sponge filled with life-sustaining fluid that humans have gripped and squeezed until it is almost dry.

### Developing a Theology of the Earth

It is time for evangelical churches to develop a theology of the earth and environment. Many scriptures address this subject, including the

ringing affirmation: "THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S AND THE FULLNESS THEREOF."

If the earth belongs to God, then it is sacred. In one New York church, the theme one Sunday was "Earth Day" and members brought apples, barley, and flowers to lay on a simple wooden altar to give thanks for nature's bounty. The minister praised the offerings and then opened a bag of garbage and began to scatter it around the altar. The congregation gasped at apparent blasphemy. "We trash the earth, yet it is every bit as sacred as any place within this church," the minister explained.

We have kept the Genesis commands of populating the earth and having dominion ("subdue the earth") over the creation. Now we need to look at a greater principle — that of stewardship. What we see has been entrusted to us. Many of us own land; some have farms. But in a real sense you and I don't own this land. We did not create it and someone else will be using it and living on it after we are gone, just as someone used it before it became "yours." You and I are just stewards.

Beyond the concept of stewardship, the Bible instructs us that there is an inter-relationship between God, the human creation, and the physical environment — each dimension mutually witnessing and harmoniously functioning within a unified, cosmic context. The creation of the earthly system is not simply for humans' use, as much as it serves to underscore and demonstrate God's glory and purpose.

We need to remember that many people feel a greater sense of the divine when they get out in nature. That was not only true for people such as Henry David Thoreau at Walden Pond, but was true for Jesus, who withdrew into the desert, and for David, who observed the starry host and exclaimed: "When I consider the heavens, the stars, the works of thy fingers . . . what is man that you are mindful of him?"

When out in nature, we see how small we are and how great is our Father's world! In the aftermath of the Exxon Valdez oil spill, every reference to the environment was prefaced with the adjective "fragile." Nothing is further from the truth — the environment is nearly indestructible. It has survived ice ages, collisions of com-

ets and meteors and it can survive anything that you and I do to it.

One aspect of the environment is fragile — the set of conditions favorable to human life there. The ecosystem is forever in flux. To Mother Nature, our concern with endangered species must seem like shallow sentimentality: 99% of the creatures ever to have come into existence have vanished. A large number of entire species have now become extinct.

It does not matter to nature if the globe is populated by beautiful people, interesting animals and cute pets, or by trilobites, thunder lizards, or six-eyed telepathic slugs. What nature cares about is that the ecosystem lives and it does not need us or the sea otters of Prince William Sound or any other particular creature to confirm its toughness.

On the other hand, we need the ecosystem. And we need the rain forests to ingest the carbon dioxide we exhale and to produce oxygen for us to breathe. And we need fresh soil to grow our crops. We need fresh water to drink and for bathing, and we need nutritious food to eat. We need fuel to keep ourselves warm. We need fresh air to breathe. We need to be responsible for the kind of earth that we give our children and grandchildren for their home.

What we *don't* necessarily need:

1. The convenience of plastic so that we don't have to return glass containers.
2. The convenience of plastic diapers so as not to wash cloth ones.
3. The convenience of every American who holds a driver's license to own and operate his or her own private car.
4. The luxury of driving to work alone.
5. The convenience of letting water run for hours at a time while bathing and shaving.
6. The convenience of throwing away any appliance or machine that we are tired of, bored with, or that needs repair.
7. The convenience of a toasty warm house in winter when we're wearing only pajamas, or a near frigid, cooled house in summer.
8. The convenience of burning our leaves and clipped grass.
9. The exhilaration of high-powered but gas-guzzling vehicles. (Each day Americans

use more than 82 million gallons of gas traveling more than three billion miles in 135 million cars — and emit 1.5 billion tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.)

10. The luxury of throwing away our old magazines, newspapers, and paper packaging. (Half of all the paper used in this country is used solely for packaging.)

## Getting Perspective on the Problem

We are not called to worship nature even though we may consider it sacred. We are warned of this idolatry in the Scriptures. But we can fall in love with the earth. We can appreciate its natural beauty. We can take care of it and cherish it. We can realize that the earth is big enough to take care of our need but not great enough to accommodate our greed.

Can we say that we are good stewards if we witness the destruction of half the Earth's species? Is it ethical to avoid discomfort in our lifetimes and refuse to change the situation?

The problems are serious. This lesson is intended only to raise our consciousness. We may be facing ecological disaster and catastrophe. The world's population, now at 5.2 billion, will double and maybe triple in the next 75 years.

Wouldn't it be tragic if we ended the Cold War and avoided the likelihood of a nuclear holocaust only to find ourselves trying to survive on a dead planet, an uninhabitable moonscape called home? Our petty little debates over denominational differences would look about as urgent as two bald men fighting over a comb.

## Taking Responsibility

What can we do? We certainly cannot do the big things, such as stop the poaching of elephants for their ivory or stop the cutting down of the forests or stop the dumping of toxic wastes directly into streams — because, quite manifestly, those are not deeds of which we are personally guilty.

There are probably a hundred things we can do, ranging from lowering our thermostats in winter, to using only recyclable packaging; from reducing the amount of pesticides and her-

bicides we use, to increasing the amount of walking and carpooling.

Most of all, let's not waste. Is that not one of the main points of the story of the feeding of five thousand? Even though Jesus fed the multitude miraculously, he still insisted that the food which was leftover be collected for a future meal.

If everyone made small sacrifices then collectively we would see some major improvements. However, *everyone* is not going to make small changes in their lifestyle. The changes required are radical and sacrificial. Most of us shun those kinds of changes. Christians ought to be experts in how to make radical lifestyle changes, but, of course, we're not! It's so easy for us to feel comfortable with the status quo, just as it was and continues to be for our elected officials who can seldom see past the next election.

A few years ago a radical group of student protesters pitched in their individual dollars to purchase a new car and then take their individual turns bashing it with a sledgehammer before the car, their symbol of all that is wrong with the ecosystem, was buried. Then the

students got in their OWN automobiles and drove away from the rally — no person relinquished his or her own vehicle. Let others make the major sacrifices, we reason.

Let us remember: it is our lifestyle as Americans, more than that of any other nation, which has produced so much of the catastrophic effect of human existence upon the environment and ecosystem. If all nations of people lived the lifestyle of the middle-class U.S. citizen, the earth would have had neither the space nor the resources to support its current 5.3 billion population. How ironic that we as Christians give allegiance to a Man of Nazareth who was poor, often homeless, and who extolled the virtues and advantages of simplicity and poverty!

As Christians we have often proclaimed in word and song that "this earth is not our home." That's true enough, but the earth is the only home we've got right now. We'd better do all that we can to make it a place our children and their children can live in.

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Perry Cotham works as a training specialist for Tennessee's Department of Human Services, besides serving as part-time minister and college professor in the Nashville area.

## Breathing Lessons and Seeing Lessons

CRAIG M. WATTS

Sometimes we pay the least attention to the most important things. Yet we tend to be prematurely confident about our mastery of the basic tasks of life and we resist the suggestion that we very well could have some re-learning to do. We may react like the pregnant teenager in Anne Tyler's new novel, "Breathing Lessons — really! Don't they reckon I must know how to breathe by now?"

In many of the most fundamental matters the training we receive is paltry and so we are pitifully inept. Reflecting on this fact, Maggie

Moran, the main character in *Breathing Lessons* muses:

"You're given all these lessons for the unimportant things — piano playing, typing. You're given years and years of lessons in how to balance equations, which Lord knows you will never have to do in normal life. But how about parenthood? On marriage, either, come to think of it. Before you can drive a car you need a state-approved course of instruction, but driving a car is nothing compared to living day in and day

out with a husband and raising up a new human being.” (p. 182).

We spend so much time taking lessons about things that are of secondary importance. Yet we seem to think that we can get by with virtually no training at all in those activities that are most essential. Whether we realize it or not, sometimes we may need lessons that teach us to do things that we have been doing all our lives, things like breathing. . .and seeing.

If we are to live as people of faith, we need seeing lessons. Seeing the world in a Christian way doesn't happen automatically. It requires training. Our culture does little to train us to see the world as we should. The newspaper articles and TV advertisements and political speeches frequently offer a vision of the world that is utterly out of keeping with a Christian way of seeing. We need lessons in seeing.

How can we be trained to see in a faith-filled way? Worship. As the Jewish scholar Abraham Heschel once wrote, “Worship is a way of seeing the world in the light of God.” In worship we are presented a view of the world that is truthful. It is truthful because it is God-centered, not self-centered. Worship helps us to see that

the center of reality is not the hostility of nations, or the pursuit of pleasure, but the love of God. In worship we are taught to see our own sin as we enter into prayers of confession. As we give our tithes and offerings, we are taught to see that the things we have are not our possessions but materials put in our care to be used for God's purpose. When we partake of the Lord's Supper, we learn to see the importance of vulnerable love and to see that God wants all people to be welcomed at a common table. This is an important lesson in a world that promotes suspicion-inspired protectiveness and social division. As we pray the Lord's Prayer, we learn to see the necessity of both receiving forgiveness and, in turn, being forgiving toward others.

Without regular disciplined and attentive worship, it is not possible to see the world in a Christian way. Only worship can enable us to penetrate the cloud of illusion so that we can see clearly and live fully.

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## Why Me?

BARBARA L. COVEY

“Why me. . .?” — those words kept echoing through my mind after the surgeon informed me of the diagnosis of breast cancer. Hadn't I devoted my life to caring for others; wife, mother, sister, daughter, nurse, friend? I was all those — no complaints there. Now I needed to be taken care of. Who would be there for me? How would this disease affect my family, my career, my relationships? . . . “Why me?!”

My family had not had a serious threat before. Married 29 years to my best friend, not rich in monetary wealth, but most blessed by

a warm, caring, loving spouse who always “fixed everything” for me. Now we were faced with something he could not fix, tears he could not stop, fears he could not allay and questions he could not answer.

There were no answers to many of the questions. Moments before I went into surgery my husband held me tight and said, “Trust me, it's going to be all right.” And that one word, “trust,” proved to be the key to survival.

Trust in God that whatever happens, it will be OK. Even if this disease takes my life it will

be ok. Trust in my relationship with my daughters. One firmly declared, “It will be OK - it has to be OK!” One analyzed, “We are all women — one in ten will develop breast cancer. I'll probably have it, too, but it will be OK.” One was just there. . .quietly there. When I woke up she was there, when I went to sleep, she was there. . .just in case. .

My friends called to say, I don't know what to do, but I'm here for you. Flowers, cards, toys, all manner of gifts arrived to say we care.

Trust in church members who came by to say I love you. One even uttered, “I wish I could do it for you.” Food was prepared lovingly for a family in crisis, none of whom were hungry.

After the intensity of the crisis was over, we began to re-evaluate our family life. Loss of a body image causes marital difficulties. I kept repeating, “You don't love me as you did before because of the way I look now!” Finally he said, “Why don't you let me tell you how I feel about you, instead of you telling me how I feel?”

We rejoiced that we still had each other. It seemed that all our family members were more compassionate and more eager to show their

feelings. Only then did we really begin to focus outside ourselves and realize there were others going through the same painful experience. Surely we could help.

Through the American Cancer Society's Reach to Recovery program, I began visiting other women in crisis. It is hard to explain the feeling that I experienced when I searched for a house number in the dark, almost gave up, finally found it, rang the bell and had a cancer patient say, “Oh — I knew you would come!”

Paul and I developed a Man-to-Man program reaching out to the husbands or partners of women with breast cancer; giving these men a chance to talk and ventilate feelings to someone who understood.

Through this experience as a family we learned to trust in God more completely, trust in each other more freely and reach out to others more fully. We've truly been blessed. I now have the answer to “Why me?”

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## Readers' Response

Dear Brethren,

I have had the March/April issue of *Integrity* around here for a while but I didn't get to read it until over the past couple of days. I try to read each issue. The article by Lloyd Knowles is good and there are some good things in all the issues, but I do take exception to some of the things that appear along the way.

I'm sure you expected to get some feedback on Larry Dotson's article (Baptized Into Christ . . . Without Getting Wet). Some of it sounds more like Baptist doctrine than Bible doctrine.

I don't have time to write at length, but I do want to make some comments about some of the remarks.

I don't know about Larry's experience, about what he understood or did not understand when he was originally immersed, but, having preached more than 41 years, I think I do know something about the Bible. I came out of Methodism when I was 19, after 15 months or so of study and examination of the New Testament. I was still living at home and the change

was contrary to my parents' views at that time, but, after a few months, they also left Methodism. When I came to see the New Testament position, as opposed to denominationalism, it was like a new day in my thinking. I question his statement about the actual conditions of salvation being laid down in Mark 1:15 — repentance and faith. How about the great commission and the book of Acts? How could an alien sinner repent before he came to believe the gospel? What motivation would there be for changing one's mind about his course of life until he first believed the gospel? Where did Larry come up with the idea of "God's gift of faith?" Romans 10:17 doesn't sound like that. I suppose he may come up with Rom. 12:3 but that won't fit.

Where did he get the idea that "this turning to God and trusting in his only begotten son is what it means to obey the gospel, and the gospel can only be obeyed in the heart?" How can baptism be a witness to both repentance and faith or a testimony to faith? One could be baptized (ducked) insincerely and, apparently, some are. The testimony to faith comes from our works as James described in 2:14-26.

Don't misunderstand me. I'm not defending a mechanical approach to becoming a Christian, and the Bible does not teach that, but Larry's answer to that is not the Biblical answer. Does his statement that "faith is the only quality that Jesus ever found in sinful man that impressed him (Matt. 8:10, 15:28, etc.)" (which was still under the law) rule out the necessity of baptism in the new covenant? This is as illogical as some of the "reasoning" I hear from denominational preachers.

I would be interested to know where he got the quote from Alexander Campbell. Was it in the early years of his endeavor to return to the ancient order or was it during the later years of his more developed views? Off hand, I do not know the source of the quote. Coming from his denominational background, Campbell had to make a lot of changes and, obviously, it would have to come over a period of time. I have a great regard for the Campbells and the other early restoration leaders and I am thoroughly committed to the restoration con-

cept, which will be a continual endeavor as long as time lasts. But none of the restoration leaders are our ultimate authority. I believe Larry misrepresents our ultimate authority in several points.

Where, in the new covenant, is remission of sins ever promised apart from baptism — in any passage that is properly understood? Of course, I'm not minimizing faith and repentance but they do express separate thoughts and they are all essential terms of pardon or conditions to covenant relationship with God through Christ. What do Rom. 6:3 and Gal. 3:27 teach if they don't teach that we are baptized into Christ? Doesn't that put us in Christ?

How can people be baptized "in a different manner?" They may substitute something else for baptism but how can a specific act have a different manner?

I believe Larry's use of the incident in 2 Chron. 30:17-20 is a misuse in the connection he makes of it. If he wants to pray that God will save the unimmersed, and if God answers that prayer and does save the unimmersed, I won't fuss about it because that would be up to God, but none of us has any authority to make any promise to any one that God will do that. Neither did Hezekiah have any authority to promise that God would do what he did in the Old Testament incident. He did pray that God would do it and God did it.

I can assure you that I endeavor to teach people what it means for Jesus to be the Christ and what it means to repent so that when they are immersed they understand what they're doing. We are living in an extremely perverted society and it's difficult to get people to think spiritually but that doesn't free us from the responsibility of teaching the Bible firmly and forcefully as it is, instead of changing it around as it appears to me Larry is doing. I don't want to misrepresent him but, according to what he wrote, it seems to me that is what he is doing. If I'm wrong, please correct me.

Yours in Christ,

Lowell E. McCoy  
Springfield, Ohio

## Gratitude

Luke 7.36-38, Mark 2.22, Matthew 23.25-27

What message had He preached  
that day. . .that day "she"  
came his way?

What unlocked a heart  
and unleashed  
a cataract at  
Jesus' feet?

Pathos of God  
long cocooned  
subsumed  
in whitewashed tombs  
in cup and dish.

Like new wine in its season  
ruptures skins of reason,

Simon couldn't understand.  
(can we?)

Christ welcomes whores —  
Through Faith, Fragrant  
Effusive,  
Self unnoticed.

— Michael M. Escoubas

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