

# IN PART

THE MAGAZINE FOR THE BRETHREN IN CHRIST COMMUNITY

*Spring 2008*





# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Today, I received my first *In Part* magazine. I couldn't put it down, but read it cover to cover. I greatly enjoyed all the writings, especially the one by Doris Barr. As a pastor, I'm encouraged that this first issue included so much on practical holiness and that message for today. May we all be challenged to live much more a life of holiness for God's honor and glory.

May you and your staff continue the excellent work that is evident in your (our) first magazine.

**JOHN M. KEEFER**—Belleville, Pa.

I write to send congratulations on *In Part*! It is excellent and brilliant and creative and—oh, I could go on!

So thank you for *In Part* and again, congratulations!

**JEAN DEETER**—Mechanicsburg, Pa.

Good job! This magazine could be a health hazard—it kept me up reading 'til almost midnight!

**LEVI BRUBAKER**—Lancaster, Pa.

I was able to read some of *In Part* on the internet and today received the printed copy. I'm looking forward to the new (or revised) material. Already, Doris J. Barr's "Pursuing Holiness in the Nitty-Gritty..." has spoken quite strongly to me. Thanks for allowing us to receive this periodical.

**CLYDE L. MARTIN**—Akron, Pa.

We would love to hear your thoughts, reactions, and suggestions for *In Part*! Please send them to the editor at [INPART@BIC-CHURCH.ORG](mailto:INPART@BIC-CHURCH.ORG) or to the address on the back of this magazine.

# THE VIEW FROM HERE

When my very pregnant mother hoisted herself up onto my bed (a gravity-defying act) in order to join me there for my nightly prayers, I don't think she had any idea that she was about to help her three-year-old daughter make the most important decision of her life. For when she was finally able to plop down next to me, she looked both surprised and overjoyed when I told her that I wanted to ask Jesus into my heart that evening.

It is fortunate that my mom witnessed the event, as I haven't the foggiest memory of it. Because of this, I found myself asking questions about the "legitimacy" of my conversion. If I didn't even remember the moment, then did it really "count"? If I didn't understand all the implications of my decision at the time I made it, did that mean I'd need to try again?

I wish I had been able to read this issue of *In Part* earlier on in life. From beginning to end, this issue is a true celebration of salvation and the unique ways people are living it out in their lives. I hope you enjoy reading the many stories that follow as we think not only of the "moment" we decided to come to Christ, but of how we must continually decide to search for light and truth in life, whether we are three or 103.

Happy Spring,

*Kristine*  
Kristine Frey, Editor

# IN PART™

Spring 2008

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THE MAGAZINE FOR THE BRETHREN IN CHRIST COMMUNITY

## BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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## FEATURES

### 6 Forsaking a halfway covenant

→ *Ingredients for becoming a full disciple*

BY LUKE L. KEEFER, JR.

### 10 Stepping through salvation's gate

BY LYNNE COSBY



## DEPARTMENTS

### 2 IN MOTION

→ *Praying for empowerment ·  
The trip of a lifetime ·  
When the smoke clears ·  
Extreme makeover*

### 4 PART OF THE WHOLE

→ *In the desert, but  
not deserted*  
BY TASHA BOOKS

### 5 TO OUR CORE

→ *Salvation and the  
restaurant*  
BY LYNN THRUSH

### 14 VIBES

→ *Reading into faith*  
BY HARRIET SIDER BICKSLER  
→ *Evangelism by the book*

### 16 TO THE POINT

→ *Reflecting on salvation*  
BY CHARLIE MASHINTER,  
WALT ROBERTS, &  
CARL SHANK

### 17 PARTING WORDS

→ *Beyond skin-deep  
salvation*  
BY PERRY ENGLE

## FAMILY NEWS

A quarterly publication, "Family News" chronicles the births, weddings, deaths, and anniversaries within the BIC. Please visit [BIC-CHURCH.ORG/FAMILY](http://BIC-CHURCH.ORG/FAMILY) or write to us at the above address to subscribe or submit family news items.

## LOOKING FOR MORE PARTS OF THE BRETHREN IN CHRIST STORY?

Visit *In Part* Online at [INPART.ORG](http://INPART.ORG), where you will find pictures, discussions, and resources that relate to this issue!



## IN MOTION

STORIES OF THE BIC IN ACTION

## PRAYING FOR EMPOWERMENT

**BIC congregations** across North America began the new year with a Week of Prayer and Fasting. This year's theme of becoming more dynamic through God's empowering grace was supported by *Praying for Empowerment*, a devotional guide designed to help lead church members through the week with scripture, meditations, and prayers by Brethren in Christ pastors and leaders.

Creativity flowed as church leaders personalized the week's theme to the local setting. For example, Jim Baker, pastor of the Heise Hill BIC Church (Gormley, ON), proposed that church members write a prayer request and their name on a blank card. The cards were then collected and redistributed along with the prayer booklets, so that each person was responsible for keeping a fellow church member in prayer. As congregants read through the booklet, they prayed for God to empower not only themselves, but also their prayer partner.

"The idea was to let someone else carry your personal burden for a week," Jim explains. "My wife and I each picked up a request on the way out, and it has been amazing how God has drawn us to those particular individuals as we bring them before the throne of grace each morning."

JORILEE PARK  
Cumberland Valley BIC (Dillsburg, Pa.)

The world travelers from Paxton Ministries (Harrisburg, Pa.) take a break while hiking in Puerto Rico's most famous rainforest, *El Yunque*.



↑ PHOTO: John Gill

## THE TRIP OF A LIFETIME

"I had a blast!" That's how Ben Delp, a resident of Paxton Ministries (Harrisburg, Pa.), describes his "chance of a lifetime" visit to Puerto Rico.

Each fall, a few residents and staff members from Paxton Ministries, a BIC-associated housing facility for mental health and retardation clients from disadvantaged settings, head to a vacation destination. But this year's group of six male residents, two staff members, and one staff member's spouse ventured farther than ever before by traveling to Puerto Rico.

"Paxton Ministries prides itself on its ability to enable residents to experience things they would never experience in another residential facility," explains John Gill, a Paxton staff member who helped organize the trip. Darrell Reinford, another staff member and trip participant, notes that the excursion, which was partially paid for the residents themselves, supports Paxton's broader vision of encouraging independence, while also providing support to its clients.

Both residents and staff talk animatedly about the vacation, during which they enjoyed everything from the waves on the beach, to the Puerto Rican cuisine, to a group trek along *La Mia* waterfall in *El Yunque* rainforest. The group also visited a friend and former resident of Paxton who now lives in Puerto Rico.

Tim Mull, another resident, says that he loved the rainforest and enjoyed swimming right up under a waterfall. "The Caribbean is a dream come true for people. It's paradise."

Visit [PAXTONMIN.ORG](http://PAXTONMIN.ORG) to find out more about Paxton Ministries.

PEGGY MUMPER  
Harrisburg (Pa.) BIC

Michael Demoff helped fight the wildfires that ravaged southern California late last year.



↓ PHOTO (L): Michael Demoff  
↓ PHOTO (R): Jonathan Olshofski

## WHEN THE SMOKE CLEARS

The roar of the fire was deafening. The heat, unbearable. The flames, relentless. Mike Demoff, a new member of GracePoint BIC (Ontario, Calif.) and a firefighter in his second year with Station 74 in Fontana, Calif., struggled to see beyond the bright flames that pierced the smoky darkness around him. Assigned to structure protection, the husband and father of three fought with all his might to save a home succumbing to the inferno, dreading the command from his captain to "Move on!"

For eight days in late October 2007, 14,000 acres of forest burned in the San Bernardino Mountains, destroying 450 structures. The area

Community support helps Andrea Collins spend more time with family as she battles cancer.



was devastated. "It looked like someone dropped a nuclear bomb," Mike, who has been involved in emergency response for 12 years, recalls. "It looked like the moon."

As the smoke from the fires cleared, however, Mike found that he had another battle to fight. Only this time, it was a spiritual one that threatened his newly rededicated faith. When encountering an entire street of destroyed homes with the exception of one house, questions flooded his mind: Why this house? Why this family? Who are these people?

Yet amidst the chaos, God provided Mike with understanding, so that as he looked upon the anguish of those who had lost their homes, he felt compassion. Mike learned to focus on the most important things in life: "Houses can be rebuilt. Material possessions are just things. I was reminded that if everyone is alive, then that's a good thing."

KIRSTEN GRUBB  
Upland (Calif.) BIC

## EXTREME MAKEOVER

In the few months since Andrea Collins was diagnosed with inflammatory breast cancer, she's undergone chemotherapy, radiation, and a double mastectomy. With a husband and six kids, ranging in age from one to 17, she's also relied on community support to make it through.

Fortunately, Andrea has had plenty of that, including from her BIC church, Circle of Hope (Philadelphia, Pa.). Partnering with her non-Christian friends, who organized the project, Circle of Hope members helped to convert Andrea's oldest son's bedroom into a recovery room for her.

The room had its challenges. "There was a poster covering a hole in the wall, and there was nothing peaceful or serene about it," says Shelley Crognale, a Circle member.

But, as Andrea reports, the end result was worthy of a home makeover show. "They transformed it from a standard 17-year-old's room into a very beautiful bedroom. They painted it and put in a comfortable chair, beautiful curtains, and new bedding."

Rachel Sensenig, another Circle member, describes the project as representative of the church's broader vision for serving its urban neighbors: "We don't come in like, 'This is Circle of Hope!' We come alongside what other people are already doing."

JEFF QUICK  
Circle of Hope Broad & Washington  
(Philadelphia, Pa.)

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at INPART.ORG

- FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE UNIQUE SERVICES OF PAXTON MINISTRIES
- DOWNLOAD THE BIC PRAYER GUIDE
- GET TO KNOW THE "IN MOTION" CONTRIBUTORS

- SEE HOW CIRCLE'S "UNDA WATER" PROGRAM IS CHANGING ITS NEIGHBORHOOD...AND THE WORLD
- VIEW A PHOTO JOURNAL & ANDREA'S BLOG ABOUT HER LIFE WITH CANCER
- READ ABOUT MIKE'S EXPERIENCES AS A FIREFIGHTER

INPART.ORG



# PART OF THE WHOLE

FOCUSING ON ONE COUPLE'S FAITH

## IN THE DESERT, BUT NOT DESERTED

*The Dennisons share about coming to faith in the Navajo community*

by TASHA BOOKS

**Johnny B Dennison, 73**, can remember sleeping in a hogan (a mud brick shelter) on a sheepskin bed, but now he and wife, Nellie G, 71, have a house with running water. Living in the Nageezi Navajo community in New Mexico, the Dennisons are part of the Brethren in Christ church plant Freedom of Nations.

"We did a lot of good things for our people without knowing God . . . but we didn't know He loved us until we found out about Him six years ago," relates Johnny B. He points to Ben Stoner, who planted Freedom of Nations: "He told us." Despite their suspicion of strangers, a common sentiment among the Navajo, the Dennisons had allowed the Stoners into their home because, says Johnny B, "We had nothing to fight for."

Johnny B reports that other Navajo are "still afraid of something"—possibly that their land or culture might be jeopardized by outsiders. But the Dennisons aren't afraid. "Since we believed the Lord, He's taken care of us, He's protected us . . . He's comforting us," Johnny B says.

Johnny B left the reservation as a young teen to attend an Indian school in Arizona and later worked on the Union Pacific Railroad in Wyoming, but he returned to New Mexico to marry Nellie G. The Dennisons have



been together for 55 years and are the parents of 13 children.

The couple made a declaration of faith in 2004. "We believe Him even though we don't see Him. God is real, I know I believe Him; Jesus is real, I know I believe Him; His Holy Ghost is real, and I believe Him," Johnny B declares.

Johnny B had always had a hard time believing the traditions taught by the Medicine Man, a Navajo spiritual leader. "Just carry this arrowhead and it will protect you," he was once told. "I never felt anything," Johnny B says.

When they were first learning about God, the Dennisons attended a local Christian revival meeting. An offering was taken, but all they had to give was a few pennies. They asked God to bless their gift. Soon after, one of their daughters gave the couple

a \$30,000 truck. "What we pray for is always there, right in front of us," Johnny B affirms. "Our life was alright before, but now it's better."

Johnny B often gets up around 4 a.m. to read his Navajo translation of the Bible. He sings his own songs from Scripture, sometimes at public gatherings as a testimony of what he believes. When the Dennisons think about following God, Johnny B speaks for them both when he says, "We want to serve Him, talk about Him, sing to Him, dance to Him."

### IN PART Online at INPART.ORG:

- LISTEN TO JOHNNY B'S SONGS OF FAITH
- DISCOVER OTHER WAYS THAT THE BRETHERN IN CHRIST CHURCH IS REACHING OUT TO THE NAVAJO PEOPLE IN NEW MEXICO



**Tasha Books** is a freelance writer who grew up in Santa Fe, N.M. She lives in Harrisburg, Pa.

# TO OUR CORE

EXPLORING THE CENTRAL VALUES OF THE BIC CHURCH

## SALVATION AND THE RESTAURANT

by LYNN THRUSH

**Gateway's ministry staff** has met for lunch at a nearby restaurant every other month for over a year. As I was paying the bill the last time we were there, the waitress who served us said to me, "Your church is my favorite group. You're easy to serve; you don't complain." She went on, "We have lots of church groups that meet here, and they are hard to serve." (Truth be told, I also tip well.) It's the first substantive conversation I've had with our waitress. What I know is that our church has the inside track on having a spiritually significant conversation with this young woman because of what she saw in us.

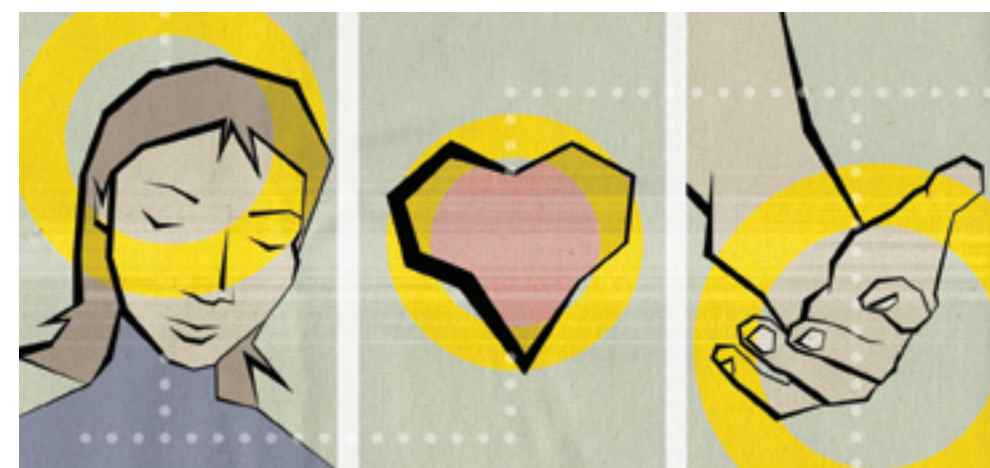
The Brethren in Christ Church, along with many other churches, is in these days describing salvation more broadly than as primarily an assent to the question "Will you receive Jesus Christ into your life so that you can go to heaven?" In his book *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*, Christopher Wright identifies this inadequate view of evangelism as "a safe long-term personal exit strategy from the world."

### TO READ MORE . . .

*about salvation, as well as other Brethren in Christ core values, see the book Focusing our Faith: Brethren in Christ Core Values, edited by Terry L. Brensinger.*

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→ We value the free gift of salvation in Christ Jesus and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.



As this son of Ireland recalls, though most persons could have told him how to "get saved," he also heard the language of hatred, bigotry, and violence coming from the same mouths.

In contrast, we are saying that as new creations in Christ, we are about the work of Christ, redeeming and renewing people and His whole creation. Integrity of life—holiness—worked out in gracious interactions with restaurant servers (and everyone else) is not optional behavior, for it is there that they see the life behind our words.

So it is in our churches. I think, for example, of a college student who came to us first through youth friendships and then into our young adult network through a carwash raising money for YouthQuest (a biennial conference for BIC youth). She heard

the Word in our worship services and at YouthQuest, and she saw our lives. This past summer she declared her faith in Christ during her baptism. She is now one of our youth leaders and was at the luncheon when our staff received the compliment.

Our understanding of salvation influences how we witness and make disciples. I'm glad the Church is comprehending salvation in broader ways than words divorced from actions. I'll tell you, it felt really good to be complimented by our server. And now, I've got a wonderful platform for our next conversation.



**Lynn Thrush** is the senior pastor of Gateway Community Church in Chino, Calif. He shares his passion for biblical theology with students through his work as an adjunct professor at Azusa (Calif.) Pacific University, and he shows his love of sports by rooting for the Los Angeles Dodgers and Lakers.





# FORSAKING A HALFWAY COVENANT

INGREDIENTS FOR BECOMING A FULL DISCIPLE

by Luke L. Keefer, Jr.

*This is an excerpt from the essay "What is Conversion?" which was published in the April 2007 issue of Brethren in Christ History and Life, edited by E. Morris Sider (Vol. 30, No. 1, p. 63–84). It was also read in November 2006, along with three other articles, at the conference on conversion sponsored by the Sider Institute at Messiah College (Grantham, Pa.).*

If you were to ask today's evangelical Christian to explain what the Bible means by salvation, you would most likely get some vague response about justification by faith. I have a growing conviction that we have a weak doctrine of conversion because we have a defective view of sin. Too much of contemporary evangelism only offers forgiveness from our personal record of sins; it fails to address the more comprehensive condition of sin. Frequently, converts are taught that forgiveness has put the ticket to heaven into their hands. It is all God requires for a seat at the table in His kingdom. Discipleship and kingdom living are at best optional. But a sinner needs redemption, deliverance, restoration, reconciliation, and healing if the problem of sin is to be fully addressed. There is no room for a halfway covenant if we want to be full disciples of Christ. Conversion means more than forgiveness: It means a whole new life in Christ.

Gordon T. Smith echoes this point in his book *Beginning Well: Christian Conversion and Authentic Transformation*, contending that conversion is a beginning of the Christian life, but not its final goal. Smith demonstrates that conversion is not just a single event from the past, nor can it be reduced to merely forensic understandings of justification by faith. Rather, when God pardons our past, He also puts us on a new course of life that is a pursuit of holiness. As children begotten by the Father's love, we are to live as those who seek to please Him.

Drawing upon these ideas, I have identified five ingredients which I would describe as foundational to gaining a holistic understanding of conversion.



**1 Conversion is a comprehensive action.** Conversion itself is one biblical word for salvation. It means to turn around and go in the opposite direction. It sums up the many strands of grace that bring pardon, deliverance, new birth, and new life. It assumes the work of conviction, repentance, and faith that opens the door to the overwhelming and divine power which changes one's life. Here is full acceptance with God that includes transformation, discipleship, ethics, and the miraculous presence of the Holy Spirit. Conversion takes sin seriously while also exalting in the super-abounding grace of salvation.

**2 Conversion is a word that includes process as well as event.** Many Christians can recount a date and a place where they met the Lord in a life-changing encounter. Others can point to a time when they were not Christians, and then to another time when they definitely knew they were. Still others cannot remember a time when they did not love the Lord. God regarded their many small steps of faith as constituting true saving faith. These "before," "during," and "after" segments of conversion cannot be disconnected; they flow together.

In our anxiety to know that people are saved, we try to fashion a template with which to judge all salvation claims. But how are we to judge with certainty? In actuality, the subsequent fruit of the Spirit is the only external evidence that we can assess. The inner state of the heart is known to God alone. What we can do is take their testimony at face value, accept converts into the family of faith, and systematically teach them to obey everything that Jesus taught. If they have truly changed at heart, it will be confirmed by a changed pattern of life.

**3 Conversion is the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit.** None of us can, on our own, become a child of God. The Spirit both wills and produces our birth into God's family. On the other hand, the Spirit's role in conversion moves us beyond mere declarative righteousness. The Spirit transforms us from

children of darkness to members of God's family and citizens in the kingdom of God. Conversion through the Spirit produces regeneration as well as justification.

**4 Conversion is the role of the Church as God's saving community.** Christians in the West have largely lost the doctrine of the Church. They often express that Christ is necessary for salvation, but the Church is not.

The Church is God's saved and saving community. It exists to proclaim the Gospel by word and deed. It is the Church that administers baptism as people cross the boundary line from sin into grace. It is the Church that teaches discipleship, which defines what a follower of Jesus is to be and to do. Discipleship involves careful, comprehensive instruction in "all the things that I have commanded you" to do (Matt. 28:19). It also involves providing models of discipleship that can say, "Imitate me as I follow Christ" (1 Cor. 4:16; 1 Th. 1:6; 1 Th. 2:14; Heb. 6:12; Heb. 13:7).

The Church acts as a saving community when it confronts those who are not obedient to Christ's commands. The contemporary Church is weak on the task of discipline, but there is no way to make disciples without it. Jesus often had to rebuke and correct His disciples when they were not learning their lessons. The same is true today.

Conversion, then, is not just the work of the Spirit. It is also the task of the Church as God's saving community. These agents of God work collaboratively. It was no mere accident that at Pentecost the Spirit filled both the disciples and the Church. The Spirit joins believers with their risen Lord and with His body, the Church. If we diminish the role of the Church in salvation, we have something less than the biblical version of conversion.

**5 Conversion is the human response to the Gospel.** Repentance goes further than simple acknowledgement of guilt by expressing sorrow and anguish over what one has done. Repentance is the inward change of heart that is reflected in the outward change of conversion. Many popular Evangelicals today

fear leading people into bondage to legalism and "works righteousness." Thus, they avoid preaching about discipleship and talk only of grace and faith. But this abandons people to a more deadly servitude: habitual sin, from which they see no deliverance until the second coming of Christ.

Christ invites people to be yoked to Him. It is there that they will find rest and peace, for the yoke of Christ's teaching is easy to bear. But being yoked together with Jesus means going where He goes and doing what He does. Discipleship, going with Christ, is a profoundly saving experience. Discipleship's obligations are light in comparison to the crushing weight of sin. Obedience to Christ brings peace in contrast to the turmoil and terror of sin. Discipleship is neither graceless nor is it "dead works." Rather, it is full of grace and productive of the works that glorify God.

#### Our most urgent need

The choice that we, as hearers of the Gospel, must make is whether we will trust in Christ or continue in our sins. And that requires us to engage in a profound exercise of repentance. If we refuse to do this, baptism will be meaningless, and we certainly will not be given the promised gift of the Holy Spirit. God knows human hearts. Just as He withheld the gift of the Holy Spirit from Simon Magus because his heart was not right with God, so He will not give the Spirit to those who have not repented.

And so, perhaps our most urgent need is to be reconverted to the Gospel. We need to be attentive to what God wants to do in our churches. We are the patients; He is the physician. He might give us a clean bill of health and say, "Carry on as you are." Or he might discover problems that require different degrees of treatment. In either event, we must be healthy disciples ourselves if we are to disciple the world's peoples. We do not want to be people of a "halfway covenant;" we want to be full disciples of Jesus Christ.

#### Author's Note:

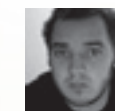
*Much of this article is a blend of my own ideas with those presented by Gordon T. Smith in his book Beginning Well: Christian Conversion and Authentic Transformation (InterVarsity Press, 2001). In places, his book has provided key concepts that I then developed in my own way. At other times, the key concern is mine, although he provided a framework with which to describe it. And then, there are times we think so nearly alike that one might think I am merely paraphrasing, when I am actually setting forth my own views. I therefore provide this general note to inform the reader that I am substantially indebted to Gordon Smith throughout this article.*

#### IN PART Online at INPART.ORG:

- LISTEN TO "CAN YOU LOSE YOUR SALVATION?" BY TOM SEAMAN, PASTOR OF CEDAR HEIGHTS BIC
- REGISTER FOR A BIC CORE COURSE ON THE THEOLOGY OF SALVATION
- CHECK OUT LUKE'S SUGGESTIONS FOR MORE RESOURCES ON SALVATION



**Luke L. Keefer, Jr.** is a professor of church history and theology at Ashland Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Doris, attend the Ashland (Ohio) BIC Church. They have three married children and four grandchildren.



In addition to working as a full-time designer for Mennonite Central Committee, **Tim Hoover** is founder and lead designer of *TheInfantree.com*. The Infantree is a gallery and artist collective based in Lancaster, Pa.



# Stepping THROUGH SALVATION'S Gate

BY Lynne Cosby

*Jesus' words in the Gospel of Matthew—"small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life"—may explain the misperception in some quarters that salvation is a one-size-fits-all experience. However, as the stories that follow illustrate, the events that bring someone to salvation's small gate are unique to each individual, as is the journey on the narrow road that lies beyond.*



PHOTO: Tomasz Adamski



PHOTO: Tomasz Adamski



PHOTO: Matthew Lester

## AT THE ENTRANCE

Some people are reared in the faith and meet Christ at an early age, as was Nate Yoder, the son of a Mennonite pastor. When Nate was 10 years old, he attended a weeklong, old-fashioned tent revival. Though just a boy, he knew that he was a sinner; but each night, Nate was afraid to go forward to make a profession of faith. The last night, he thought, "How long am I going to say 'no' to God?"

Others grow up around the faith, yet don't make that faith personal until later on in life. Elise Robitaille was raised in the church. But when she was in college, she realized that, although all her years of Sunday school had given her a good biblical foundation, she didn't really know God.

Still others journey to faith from totally unchurched backgrounds. Paul Burns did not grow up in a church-going family, and after he was married, he and his wife, Cathy, rarely went to church. Over the years, whenever they did attend a worship service, Paul never felt he belonged. And when his wife, who was already a Christian, would ask him if he believed in Jesus, he would respond that he wasn't sure what he believed.

## SETTING OUT

Nate Yoder views his coming to Christ at an early age as no less important than the salvation of someone older who has lived a life of many vices. "Being saved as a child or being saved from a life in the gutter—it's the grace of God that saves us either way," he says. He believes it was God's grace that kept him from having to go through some of the devastating things others experience before God's grace reaches them.

During Elise Robitaille's college years, she met some charismatic Catholics who spoke of Jesus as a real person they actually knew. "It just floored me that I had known about Jesus all this time but didn't know anyone who talked to Him like He was a real person," she relates. "Within a few hours, they introduced me to this person named Jesus." She had been calling herself a Christian all along, but she knew that her life was different from this point on, because she now had a relationship with Christ.

A few years ago, friends invited Paul and Cathy Burns' two children to a program at their church, Westheights Community Church in Kitchener, ON. "Both our kids had great things to say about Westheights," says Paul. When Paul and Cathy accompanied their children to a corn roast sponsored by the church, the couple was not prepared for how welcoming everyone would be. "They were so friendly, we thought it was odd," says Paul, laughing. "But we thought it was great, too."

*"Being saved as a child or being saved from a life in the gutter—it's the grace of God that saves us either way." —NATE YODER*



PHOTO: Matthew Lester



The Burnses decided to attend the Sunday morning service the next day. “The service was totally different from what we’d seen before,” recalls Paul. “And the sermon really related to our everyday lives.” The family started attending Sunday school classes, and Paul began to study the Bible at home. He sees now that even the difficulties he had experienced at work helped to lead him toward Christ. “All these things were steps that got me where I am today. On Christmas Eve 2006, I opened my heart to Jesus Christ,” Paul says joyfully.

### ON THE ROAD

As ten-year-old Nate Yoder grew into adulthood, God led him to become a pastor, like his father. Now, Nate is the senior pastor of Palmyra (Pa.) BIC and the nominee for Atlantic Conference bishop. Over the years since his conversion, he has come to view salvation and life as an ongoing journey. “God is asking me to expand His kingdom in my heart and in the world,” Nate says. “When that happens, I’m experiencing salvation—I’m still being saved.”

He’s quick to quote one of his favorite authors, Dallas Willard, who asks in his book *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, “Why is it that we look upon salvation as a moment that began our religious life instead of [as] the daily life we receive from God?”

After making her own personal commitment to the Lord, Elise married and had five children. Seventeen years into her marriage, her spiritual journey reached a crisis point when her husband, Robert, was diagnosed with terminal cancer. “My passion for my spiritual growth had waned over the years,” she admits. “But with Robert’s diagnosis, my faith came into play in a big way.”

As she and Robert explored the topic of life after death, she began to understand that, although he had gone to church every week, he didn’t know whether he was going to heaven. “I realized he didn’t know Christ,” she says. She dusted off her Bible, and the two of them began to search the Scriptures for answers.

A month before he died, Robert had a very dramatic conversion experience. Elise awoke one morning to hear him weeping in the next room. Hurrying to him, she asked what was wrong. “I’m saved!” he answered. “After that, he witnessed to everyone who came to see him,”

*“...I had known about Jesus all this time but didn’t know anyone who talked to Him like He was a real person.” —ELISE ROBITAILLE*

Elise relates. “He wasn’t happy to be dying, but he was at peace.” A week before he died, Robert told Elise that his greatest wish was that all his kids would be saved. “They all made professions of faith within a few months of their dad’s death,” she shares.

Robert’s death reignited Elise’s faith. She felt she needed to seek out a church where her own faith could be lived out in a practical, day-to-day way. In her previous church experiences, people were reluctant even to speak the name of Jesus. But at Covenant Christian Community BIC in Penetanguishene, ON, she says, “Christ’s name was on their lips. He was their center.” She and her children began attending there, and she’s still there after ten years.

Elise’s spiritual journey did not stop when she found a church where she felt she belonged, however. She got involved as an assistant in the church’s ministry program, and after four years she became associate pastor of the church. She still searches for where God will lead her on this lifelong spiritual journey.

Accepting the challenge of his pastor, Paul Burns read the entire Bible last year. “The rewarding thing for me is that now my wife and my son have both started reading it through,” says Paul. And his daughter has asked her parents for her own Bible as well.

*“Getting baptized with my family made my commitment to faith stronger.” —PAUL BURNS*

In June 2007, Paul and his whole family made the decision to be baptized. “That was a really special thing,” says Paul. “Getting baptized with my family made my commitment to faith stronger.” Paul also recognizes that he’s more humble than he was before meeting Christ. “I was always a person who said I could take care of myself,” he says. Now he knows he needs God in his everyday life as he walks the narrow way.

### THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

For Nate, Elise, and Paul, the decision to step through salvation’s gate, though a life-changing moment, was just the beginning. From that point on, it’s been all about the journey and the assurance that Jesus Himself is with them on the road.

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**Lynne Cosby** is a freelance writer and a member of the Grantham (Pa.) BIC Church. She lives in Grantham with her husband and two sons.



**Tomasz Adamski** lives in Waterloo, ON, where he does for a living what he likes best: photographing people and their events. [adamskitom.com](http://adamskitom.com)



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PHOTO: Tomasz Adamski

PHOTO: Tomasz Adamski



## VIBES

AN EXPLORATION OF FAITH AND POPULAR CULTURE

## READING INTO FAITH

by HARRIET SIDER BICKSLER

I have been part of a women's book club for more than 20 years. It began with women from the neighborhood and, even though some of us have moved out of the original neighborhood, our group is still going strong.

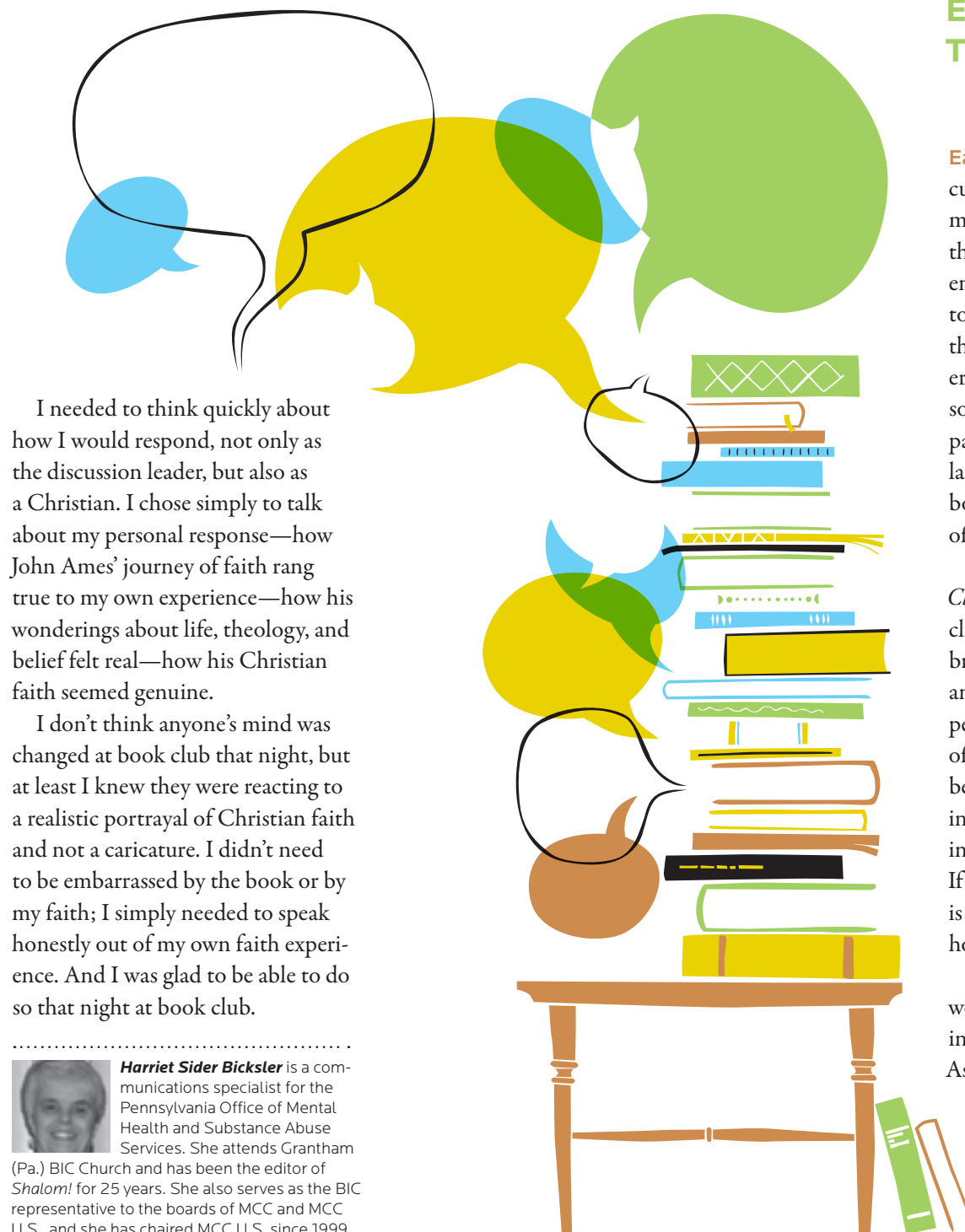
Some of the women in our club are active church members, while others do not place a high priority on faith, and still others are downright antagonistic toward orthodox Christianity, especially the evangelical variety. With such diversity in faith perspectives, we tend to select more literary works of contemporary, secular fiction rather than what might be categorized as "Christian fiction." So when I acted as the moderator on the night our book club discussed the novel *Gilead* by Marilynne Robinson, I wasn't sure what the reaction would be.

As a Christian who has read other fictional portrayals that perpetuate negative stereotypes of the Christian faith and life, I found *Gilead* to be a breath of fresh air. A beautifully written and critically acclaimed book, *Gilead* tells the story of John Ames, an elderly pastor from the small, rural town of Gilead, Iowa, who is dying from heart disease. A believable lead character who is clearly a Christian and yet who doesn't make me cringe, John Ames has spent his whole life working out his salvation, continuing

to believe and minister to his congregation with integrity even when he isn't sure about some things. Now in his old age, he is confident enough about his relationship with God not to be afraid to leave a written legacy for his son that includes his questions and doubts.

When discussing the "matter of belief," John advises, "Don't look for proofs... They are never sufficient to the question, and they're always a little impertinent, I think, because they claim for God a place within our conceptual grasp... It was Coleridge who said, 'Christianity is a life, not a doctrine,' or words to that effect. I'm not saying never doubt or question. The Lord gave you a mind so that you would make honest use of it. I'm saying you must be sure the doubts and questions are your own...." Given my own Christian experience, that seems a profoundly true observation about the nature of the faith journey.

But that night, as our book club discussed the novel, some women objected—not to the style and artistry of the book, but to the overt Christian faith of the main character. Though most of them could appreciate the book's creativity, those who were inclined to be antagonistic toward Christianity had a hard time getting past the content.



I needed to think quickly about how I would respond, not only as the discussion leader, but also as a Christian. I chose simply to talk about my personal response—how John Ames' journey of faith rang true to my own experience—how his wonderings about life, theology, and belief felt real—how his Christian faith seemed genuine.

I don't think anyone's mind was changed at book club that night, but at least I knew they were reacting to a realistic portrayal of Christian faith and not a caricature. I didn't need to be embarrassed by the book or by my faith; I simply needed to speak honestly out of my own faith experience. And I was glad to be able to do so that night at book club.



**Harriet Sider Bickler** is a communications specialist for the Pennsylvania Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services. She attends Grantham (Pa.) BIC Church and has been the editor of *Shalom!* for 25 years. She also serves as the BIC representative to the boards of MCC and MCC U.S., and she has chaired MCC U.S. since 1999.

## EVANGELISM BY THE BOOK

Easy access to technology may be cutting into the reading time of the majority of North Americans, but there are still a lot of people who enjoy a good book. And many of today's readers are choosing to do their reading in the company of others. It is estimated that 30 million or so Canadians and Americans participate in a book club, and the popularity of these "communities of the book" continues to grow in a world of people hungry for relationships.

Diana Loevy, author of *The Book Club Companion*, notes that book clubs help "deep friendships develop, bringing out members' sensibilities and opinions—and perhaps their personal stories." In the safe space of a book club, talk often ranges far beyond the title of the month and into topics of an intimate nature, including conversations about faith. If we are ready to give witness, there is ample opportunity to share the hope that is within us.

Reaching out to friends or co-workers via a book club is an interesting twist on friendship evangelism. As the following pointers suggest, it's a strategy that can be used just about anywhere, with anyone.

**1. Goals** Ask yourself why you want to meet as a group and what you hope to get from the experience, both collectively and individually.

**2. Members** Try to get a diverse group of people together, but also keep in mind individual personalities, tastes, and schedules.

**3. Size** Having a core group of 8–10 people creates a nice balance between intimidating intimacy and impersonal anonymousness.

**4. Books** You may want to choose an assorted collection of books, or you may prefer to focus on a particular genre, author, or subject. Either way, it works best to read one book per month.

**5. Format** Each month, encourage a different group member to select the book and lead the discussion on it. Discussion questions can often be found online or in the book itself. Having time for snacks and ice-breakers can also make the time more informal and relaxed.

**6. Location** It is a great idea to rotate meeting in individual homes. If this isn't possible, then you can gather at a local coffee shop, library, church, or park.

**7. Promotion** You may want to invite close friends, casual acquaintances, complete strangers, or a mix of all three to join your group. Most people will be thrilled to join, so finding people for the club should be the easy part!

Adapted from: [YOUTHPASTORSFAM.BLOGSPOT.COM](http://YOUTHPASTORSFAM.BLOGSPOT.COM)  
November 10, 2007



# TO THE POINT

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## REFLECTING ON SALVATION

*“What roles do demonstration and proclamation play in sharing our faith with others? How can we become bolder in witnessing to others?”*

**Charlie Mashinter**  
WAINFLEET (ON) BIC

In my experience it may be more useful to seek a third way: witnessing through “being.” If something is really working for me, then I don’t need a plan or a program to force me to share it—it “works” for me, and I believe it could work for you. Rob Bell, pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church in Grandville, Mich., suggests we should perhaps just say to people

who are trying to live without Jesus, “You keep trying that, and see if it works for you—because I, along with a lot of others, have found that it doesn’t. Life is better with Jesus.” If we honestly believed this, then our approach to sharing our hope in Jesus would change. But I’m not sure we really do believe it. We’re still trying to make up our own minds!

**Walt Roberts**  
CROSSROADS BIC  
Hagerstown, Md.

The Scriptures are clear: We are to let our “light shine before men, that they might see [our] deeds” and praise God (Matthew 5:16), and at the same time we are to “Go into all the world and preach...” (Mark 16:15). By living the Christian life—being a good neighbor, hard worker, loving parent, loyal friend, faithful spouse, etc.—we “earn the right to be heard.” That is, we become credible witnesses. However, if we only live the Christian life without clearly explaining God’s offer of salvation to others, we might actually mislead people to the false belief that being a “good person” is all that matters. So, as we gain “favor” (Acts 2:47) with people, we should not hesitate to use our credibility with those individuals in order to be effective verbal ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20).

**Carl Shank**  
CROSSROADS BIC  
Mount Joy, Pa.

From what I’ve seen, the preferred mode of sharing the good news seems to be through demonstration rather than proclamation. Part of this is due to the fact that we believe salvation is a holistic experience that affects all of life and thought, and that obedience to the Great Commission is making disciples, not just converts. Additionally, it is important to the Anabaptist background in us that these disciples become part of a local church community of believ-

ers to continue the process. Thus, relationship-oriented evangelism seems to fit us well.

We must work harder at both preaching and teaching on a personal level. We must motivate second- and third-generation believers to share their faith more actively and train Christians on how to witness to others through relationships. One way to encourage boldness is to have new Christians share their testimonies during church services and lead evangelism efforts.

## EVER WONDERED . . . WHAT WE BIC SAY ABOUT OUR FAITH?

→ According to a  
2006 survey of BIC  
church members:

**62.7%**  
believe that salvation  
depends equally on  
one’s beliefs and  
how one lives

**89.3%**  
are comfortable  
describing themselves  
as “born again”

**2/3**  
said they could identify  
a specific moment  
when they came  
to faith in Christ

**1/3**  
see their journey as  
real, but not as a particular  
moment they  
can identify

Source: Church Member Profile 2006—  
a study of members in three denomina-  
tions, conducted by the Young Center  
of Elizabethtown (Pa.) College and  
coordinated by Donald B. Kraybill.

# PARTING WORDS

## BEYOND SKIN-DEEP SALVATION

by PERRY ENGLE

“Pastor P, check it out. I’m going to put you in my next tattoo.” It’s the type of comment a person, much less a church leader, doesn’t often get.

He’d gotten a number of tattoos since I’d last seen him, and now he was having one drawn up to look like a list of credits on a strip of movie film inked under his skin.

“I’m honored,” was about all I could think to say.

“You’ve had more influence on my life than anyone but Jesus.”

I realized he wasn’t kidding and that I really might end up imprinted in red or blue on this guy’s bicep, where people would forever ask who “Pastor Perry” was.

I can’t say I’ve ever aspired to being a tattoo on someone’s body, but it was a reminder of how indelibly our lives are imprinted on those who cross our paths. Honestly, I’ve spent a lot of time wondering just how much good I’ve done in my twenty years of preaching sermons, writing articles, counseling marriages, and administrating within the Church. I’ve wondered a lot about how much salvation has really taken hold in people’s messed up lives.

Truthfully, my friend hasn’t been doing all that well the past few years. By his own admission, life’s been tougher than he could have imagined.



And even though Jesus gets top billing on his list of credits, his life has been marked more by disappointment than by discipleship.

It’s caused me to rethink my role in leading people to Christ. I’ve come to appreciate that getting people saved is just the first step along the way of helping them become truly converted. As someone once said, our job isn’t just getting sinners into heaven, but getting heaven into sinners as well.

How’s this done? Those new to the faith need to be immediately introduced to an intimate, abiding relationship with Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, “If a man remains in me, and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John

15:5). Ultimately, lives yielded to the Spirit grow in quality, depth, and fruitfulness. Those separated from Him will eventually wither and die.

The Bible says that all of us—tattooed and otherwise—need to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12). It occurs to me that this is God’s way of saying that “being saved” is a whole lot more than just skin deep.



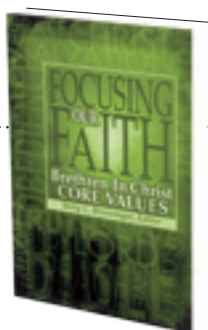
**Perry Engle** is the bishop of the Midwest and Pacific Conferences of the BIC Church. He and his wife, Marta, and their three daughters (all currently tattoo-free) live in Ontario, Calif.



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- WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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