

IN PART

THE MAGAZINE FOR THE BRETHREN IN CHRIST COMMUNITY

Spring 2009

In Pursuit
OF THE BIBLE

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

I had a lot of trouble reading the light, very small print on the pages of the winter issue. I wonder if other elders have this type of trouble. Thanks for listening.

MARILYN WOLGEMUTH—North Newton, Kans.

Thank you very much for this reminder. As we look to future editions of In Part, we will be more mindful of this issue, striving to make this publication enjoyable for the full range of our readership.

Another great edition of In Part! I especially appreciated the article “Balanced” by Mary D. France. One thing not addressed in the issue is the shame people feel as a result of debt, especially when it is a result of poor money-management or the pursuit of “stuff” to manage negative emotions.

I work at Day Seven Ministries (Lancaster, Pa.), with people who are caught in the web—literal and figurative—of sexual addiction and unwanted same-gender attraction. In my opinion, money and sex are the two greatest areas in which shame can be experienced, because people can keep them secret. And what we keep in the dark, thrives in the dark. When these areas are brought into the light, there is hope. Not that the impacts disappear, but that people can experience what it is to be known, loved, and not rejected in the midst of brokenness. I encourage those of us in the Church to seek to compassionately redeem those who are struggling rather than add to the shame they already feel.

DAN KEEFER—Carlisle, Pa.

I have been receiving In Part now for about three years. I look forward to each issue and usually read it cover-to-cover. (There’s no other periodical with which I do that.)

Yours is a high-quality, Colossians 3:23–24 effort in every way: content, graphics, layout, and “joie de vivre en Jesus!”

GARY PATTON—Toronto, ON

THE VIEW FROM HERE

This winter, my husband, Ryan, and I have been passing the dark evening hours reading. Most recently, we’ve become engrossed in *The Year of Living Biblically*, a memoir by A. J. Jacobs recording 365 days worth of his attempts to follow biblical law to a T. (Incidentally, this is the same guy who took a year to read the entire Encyclopedia Britannica in *The Know-It-All*.) A self-described Jew “in the same way that the Olive Garden is an Italian restaurant,” Jacobs hopes that his experiment will lead him to some sort of “spiritual experience.”

Of course, his efforts to apply Old Testament law to his life in cosmopolitan New York City do not come without humor—like when he “stones” an adulterer in Central Park and tries to avoid physical contact with all women (excepting his wife, but including the female passenger sitting “dangerously close” to him on the subway).

We haven’t finished the book yet—we’re just getting to the part about his pilgrimage to the Holy Land—but it’s been on my mind a lot. Along with the comedy, there is an authentic and vital urgency to Jacobs’ search. I know that his approach misses the point of God’s desire for *inward* (not just outward) devotion, but I am struck by his passion and humility. Here is a man skeptical of God’s very existence but still in pursuit of His word (if only for a year). I could do with a little more of Jacobs’ curiosity and fervor, especially since I believe that the Bible is more than bound sheets of bark with ink scrawls.

So as you read this issue exploring how we Brethren in Christ engage the Bible, I hope you will find it laden with encouragement, insight, and practical tips. We can’t all be avid readers or Greek scholars. But we can take steps to grow in our understanding of the Good Book, which will guide us to more than a vague “spiritual experience” as it points us to the True and Living Word of a risen Savior.

Kristine

Kristine N. Frey, Editor

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a quarterly publication that chronicles the births, weddings, anniversaries, and deaths within the BIC family. Visit BIC-CHURCH.ORG/FAMILY or call 717.697.2634 to subscribe or to submit news items.

IN MOTION

STUFFED TO OVERFLOWING

This spring, an old, yellow, 54-passenger school bus rumbled across the 900 miles between Herington, Kans., and Farmington, N.M. Duane Bristow, director of the Navajo BIC Mission in Farmington, had been expecting the bus to roll his way. What he hadn't anticipated were the clothes, bedding, school supplies, food, and other items for the Mission that it carried.

Several months before, members of the leadership council at Rock Island BIC Church in Herington had decided to give the bus to the Mission. Then someone suggested the idea of “stuffing” the bus with donated items as part of the church’s “Rockin’ your island for Jesus” initiative.

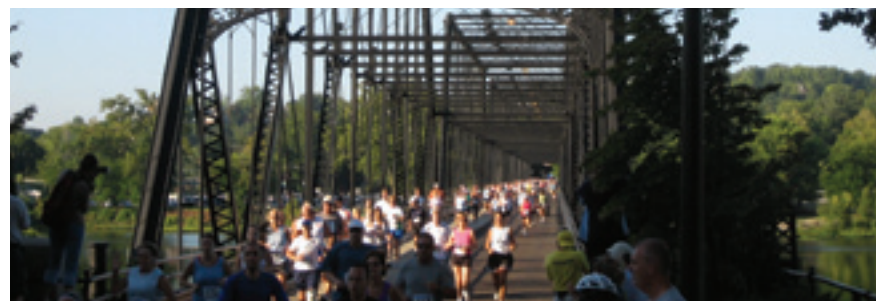
“We’re learning to go beyond ourselves in order to reach out to others in our communities and within the BIC family,” Deb Wiles, senior pastor, explains. “The bus and everything in it are a small part of that.”

Before long, the six other central-Kansas BIC churches had also contributed “stuff” to the cargo, which made its way to the Mission in mid-February. And as for the old, yellow bus, it’s still lumbering along. Its contents have been emptied and distributed, but now it fulfills an even more important role: transporting the children and adults of the nearby Navajo reservation to the Mission for various activities.

■ NAVAJOBIC.ORG

STORIES OF THE BIC IN ACTION

Tammy Astuto Gardecki and Angie Key ran a marathon in Harrisburg (Pa.) to raise funds for the BIC World Missions’ SPICE hostel in Orissa, India, that Hindu extremists destroyed last year.



↑ PHOTO: Used under Creative Commons license (flickr.com/photos/inequidat/2465283181)

A MARATHON EFFORT

As the more than 1,000 runners in this past fall’s Select Medical Corporation Harrisburg (Pa.) Marathon took off from the starting line, most had their eyes fixed on the finish line some 42 kilometers down the road. But Tammy Astuto Gardecki, of the Harrisburg BIC Church, and Angie Key, of The Bridge Church (Hummelstown, Pa.), were focused on a goal halfway around the world: rebuilding the Nuagaon Grace Girls Hostel in Orissa, India. The hostel, one of nine sponsored by BIC World Missions’ SPICE program, had been home to 140 children of Brethren in Christ families before it was bombed and burned to the ground by Hindu fundamentalists in late August 2008.

“Tammy and I have dreamed of running a marathon since we were kids, but we were waiting for a meaningful purpose for our efforts,” Angie says. “We wanted to shift the focus away from ourselves and towards helping others, especially the children at the SPICE hostel.”

And so, in preparation for their first marathon, the pair sent out about 100 letters to friends and family, inviting them to sponsor the run with gifts toward the \$80,000 goal for the Grace Hostel Rebuild Project. At last count, the two had raised \$2,500 of the \$21,960 that has been given toward the effort.

Though the race proved incredibly challenging for both runners—Angie had been struggling with muscle cramps and Tammy couldn’t complete the race because she tore her ACL at mile 18—they nevertheless describe the race (and their reason for participating) as “incredibly exhilarating.”

“I consider this experience an absolute, treasured gift from God,” Angie states.

■ Give to the Grace Hostel Rebuild Project at BIC-CHURCH.ORG.

IN MOTION

MORE THAN AN AFTER-SCHOOL SNACK

While working in the non-profit sector of Elizabethtown, Pa., Joy Astuto saw needs all around her. But she was particularly struck by the lack of affordable child-care options for lower-income households in the community. “The needs of many families were just not being served by traditional child-care programs, especially in the summer months,” she notes. This led Joy, now child care director at Conoy BIC Church, to start a day care and food pantry at the church in June 2008.

Four months later, Joy also helped launch a local chapter of Kid’s Café, an after-school program with over 1,700 U.S. branches that works with local food banks to provide hot meals and nutrition education to children living in “food insecure households.” Five days a week, busses bring more than 20 children to the Conoy Church, where they can play, do homework, and use the computer. At 4:30, kids and café staff members gather for a family-style dinner. The café also serves children in the day care.

Joy says the ministries offered at Conoy BIC center around living out spiritual convictions. “It’s hard to teach a young child that Jesus loves them when they have an empty stomach,” she observes.

■ KIMBERLY FORRY
Speedwell Heights BIC (Lititz, Pa.)

↓ Hundreds of local children attend the Christmas Festival at La Cuidad de Dios (San José, Costa Rica).



↑ PHOTO: Courtesy of Eduardo Llanes

CITY OF GOD, CITY OF CHANGE

As a child, Alejandro Alvarado was an altar boy at a church in San José, Costa Rica. Later on, influenced by the Charismatic Movement that swept across Latin America in the 1970s and '80s, he began studying the Bible with others at his church and, through that, came to know Christ as his savior. Though the priest of the church demanded that the meetings be put to an end, the group’s membership continued to multiply.

Today, the small Bible study that Alejandro began has grown into La Cuidad de Dios (the city of God), a church based in the Hatillo district of San José that welcomes over 5,000 attendees to its three services each week. This past year, as a result of the ongoing friendship between Alejandro and Pablo Lago, BIC pastor of La Roca Firme (Miami, Fla.), La Cuidad de Dios joined the BIC family.

“La Cuidad de Dios is an awesome church that cares for the poor and especially for children in the community,” shares Southeast Confer-

ence bishop Eduardo Llanes, who met with the church’s leadership this past November to explain the core values and vision of the BIC Church. As part of its outreach, La Cuidad de Dios hosts a radio program, holds a yearly Christmas festival for children in the community, and has planted two churches—one in Alajuelita, San José, and the other in Motul, Mexico.

“The church was started in a very rough section of the city. It was the target of vandalism and theft,” says Eduardo. “But now, it acts as an agent of spiritual and social change.”

PART OF THE WHOLE

FOCUSING ON ONE WOMAN'S FAITH

HOW ANITA FOUND JOY(SHOP)

Through the anguish of teenage pregnancy, one woman discovered the delight found in the word of God

by RUTH ROSENTRATER

Shortly after graduating from high school, Anita Keagy, the daughter of a Brethren in Christ pastor, found herself unexpectedly pregnant. Frightened and ashamed, she prayed through her options, eventually discerning that God wanted her to place the child up for adoption. Ten years

later, Anita still struggled with the pain of separation from her child. In desperation, she called the adoption agency and discovered that she could start a file of letters there for her daughter, Twila. Anita wrote to Twila over the next several years.

"With each letter I wrote, I wanted to let her know that I loved her and greatly desired a relation-

ship," says Anita. "I could only pray that curiosity would draw her to the file and that it would lead to a wonderful friendship."

One day, as Anita was reading her Bible, the words of Acts 17:27 exploded off the page: "God did

this [made the world and humans] so that men would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us." She suddenly realized that the Bible was God's "file" of letters to her and all the children who He loves. "I saw that, like me, God is a parent who desires more than anything for His children to seek Him, and He too knows the pain of writing words that remain unread by His people," she says.

Following this epiphany, Anita approached the Bible with new enthusiasm and purpose, drawing the two most important reasons for doing so from Jesus' words in John 8:55: "[...]but I do know Him and keep His word."

"Knowing God and keeping His word means getting intimate with Him, which requires spending significant time with Him," she observes. "I have been convicted to make my time with God the first priority of each day, ordering the rest of my life around that."

It was Anita's desire to share her passion for the Word that inspired her in 2005 to hold a workshop at her home church, Manor BIC (Lancaster, Pa.). Little did she know that this single workshop would lead her to establish what is today JoyShop

Ministries, a nonprofit organization dedicated to teaching participants practical ways to seek God in Scripture each day. Since its beginning, Anita has conducted JoyShops on college campuses, at churches, in prisons, at retreats, and—to her special delight—at public and private high schools across North America.

While Anita's teenage pregnancy and the surrounding circumstances were exceptionally challenging, they have given way to the many blessings in her life today. In addition to her reunion with Twila, Anita celebrates the home that she and her husband have made for their four children in Lancaster. And most importantly, she experiences new depth in her relationship with God, which she loves to share through the telling of her story.

To learn more about Anita and her journey, read her book, The File: A Mother and Child's Life-Changing Reunion, available to order at JOYSHOP.ORG.



Ruth Rosentrater, of Nappanee (Ind.) BIC Church, coaches volleyball and works in the athletic department at Oswego (N.Y.) State University. She enjoys drinking hot tea, especially in New England's cold winter months.

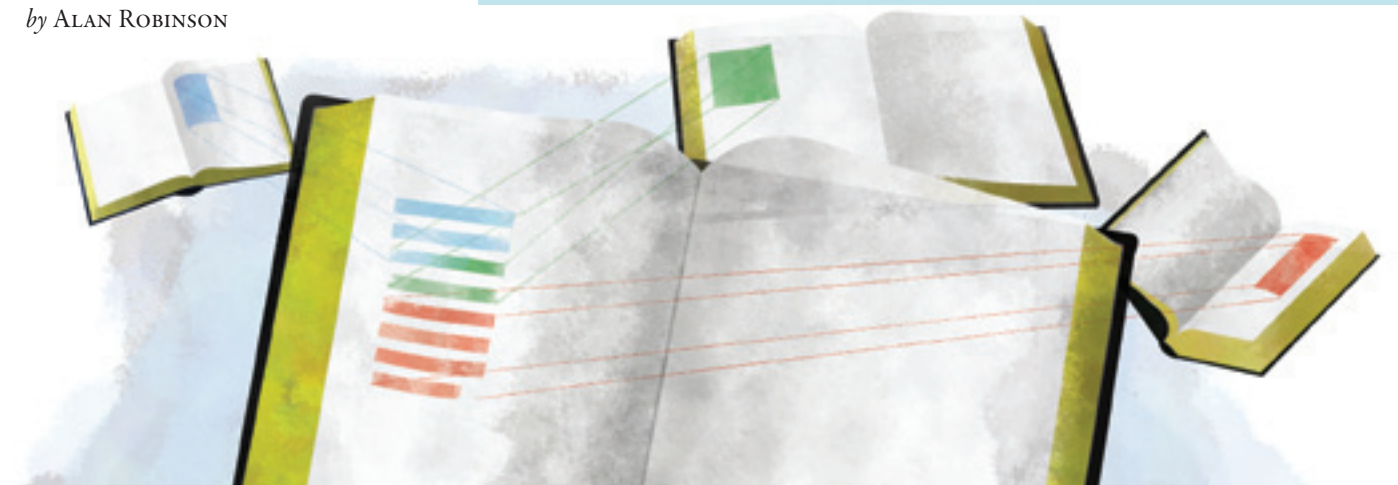
TO OUR CORE

EXPLORING THE CENTRAL VALUES OF THE BIC CHURCH

READING GOD'S RESTORATION PLAN

by ALAN ROBINSON

→ We value the Bible as God's authoritative word, study it together, and build our lives on its truth.



If you were to walk into the garage of a mechanic who was in the process of restoring a vintage car, you'd probably see a mess. Pieces of the carburetor would be all over the floor, some of the doors might be removed, and the paint job wouldn't have been completed yet. Now, you wouldn't take a snapshot of that scene and say, "This is the way a car is supposed to be. This is its showroom condition." You would understand that it was in the process of being restored.

This illustrates a principle for how to approach the Bible. We should not point to one verse and, without regard to its broader context, declare, "This is the final answer. This is the complete picture of what we should do." Each verse is but a snapshot in the sequence of God's redemption of the world. The first two chapters of Genesis present us with the "showroom condi-

tion" of creation. But in Chapter 3, we see the Fall, when creation gets wrecked by sin. The rest of the Bible relates the story of God's restoration project, culminating in the coming of Christ and Revelation's picture of the re-created heaven and earth.

As is true for most Christians, we Brethren in Christ tend to emphasize some parts of the Bible over others. For us, the concept of progression or hierarchy in the Bible speaks to our belief in the revelation of Scripture. We give more interpretive priority to the New Testament and the "showroom condition" chapters in Genesis than we do to Old Testament law, because we believe that Christ fulfilled the law and prophecies and represented a higher revelation from God. As the writer of Hebrews put it, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets [...],

but in these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son" (Hebrews 1:1–2).

Christ, too, described His coming as superseding the ways of the Old Testament. Jesus continually pointed to the Hebrew law and placed Himself above it, announcing, "You have heard it said that . . . But I tell you . . ." This doesn't mean that we reduce or remove the revelation of the Scriptures in the Old Testament. We simply acknowledge that if Jesus modified or clarified the law, His words must be taken into account. And as we do so, we become part of God's divine restoration project.

Adapted from "When Kingdoms Collide," a sermon delivered by Alan Robinson at Carlisle (Pa.) BIC Church on September 14, 2008.



Alan Robinson serves as the senior pastor of Carlisle (Pa.) BIC Church. A native of Northern Ireland, he and his wife, Sharon, live in Carlisle with their two daughters. In his spare time, Alan enjoys football (or what US Americans know as soccer), running, cycling, and photography.



What's hermeneutics got to do with it?

The Bible: It's God's revelation to humankind and the believer's touchstone for evaluating truth.

But do we understand it?

by Bruxy Cavey

As history makes clear, the Bible—in human hands—is often anything but safe. Across the centuries, passages from Scripture have been used to justify an appalling array of evils—war, violence, racism, and even torture.

Today, the admonitions we hear to be “in the Word” daily should perhaps also come with warning labels: “Handle with care, misreading can be hazardous.” Every believer has the potential to misinterpret the Bible’s message, and for those of us living in the materialistic, self-indulgent society of North America, I sense that our tendency is to read the Bible as though it revolves *around us*. We open the Scriptures because we expect them to clarify everything *for us*—to provide wisdom for important life decisions, help with resisting temptation, or encouragement for obstacles we face. We haphazardly pick out passages and act as if they were written exclusively *for us* and, in so doing, we become blind to the truth of Christ that the Bible actually conveys¹. Without a healthy hermeneutic (or principle of interpretation) and certainly without Jesus at the center of it all, the Bible can be a dangerous thing. It is not enough for us to simply be committed to reading the Bible²; we also need to devote ourselves to reading with care.

Encountering the Word

It’s not surprising that misinterpretations of the Bible continue to plague us today. As 1 Corinthians 13 tells us, mystery inherently surrounds the Bible: On this side of eternity, we can only expect “to know in part and prophesy in part.” In addition to the inherent mystique of the Holy Text, the authors of the Bible lived in another culture and time, writing in languages and addressing audiences quite different from those of the 21st century. All these layers make the text more complex—and trickier to understand.

Bible scholars use the word exegesis—which comes from the Greek word for explanation—to describe the act of applying a solid hermeneutic in order to interpret a text correctly. To exegete a passage is to find its appropriate, intended meaning. In contrast, a faulty hermeneutic—one based upon our own assumptions, biases,

and desires for what we want the text to say—results in eisegesis, or the misinterpretation of God’s word.

Jesus, through His life, modeled the ultimate example of flawless exegesis. John 1:18 says, “No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him” (NRSV). The word “explained” in this passage is the Greek word for exegete. Jesus exegetes God—He shows us or interprets to us who God is. When we use the Scriptures as a medium to learn more about Christ, we also get a fuller glimpse of God.

Choosing your ‘Words’ carefully

At the time when the authors of the New Testament recorded their accounts, two forms of Greek existed: Attica Greek, which was the sophisticated language used by the elite and the philosophers who wanted to show their command of words, and Koinae Greek, the language that people used as they went about their day-to-day business. Interestingly, the New Testament writers chose the more accessible Koinae Greek.

Even more interesting is the fact that though the Gospels were written in Koinae Greek, Jesus wouldn’t have spoken Greek at all. He would have spoken Aramaic. So why did these New Testament authors write in Greek at the cost of recording the exact words of Jesus? The reason seems pragmatic: Greek was the most widely read language of their day. For the writers of the four biblical Gospels, it was more important to get the message out than to have the exact words of Jesus known by all. It was the message they wanted us to focus on, not the specific words.

These decisions by the New Testament writers reinforce a broader theme woven into the New Testament—that the faith offered by Christ is extended to everyone, regardless of education, social standing, or ethnicity. God wants us to be able to understand and connect with His words.

Drawing from this precedent, I suggest that we freely engage various Bible translations, exploring how each of them resonates within us. Living in North America, we have access to myriad versions, all with their own strengths, weaknesses, and nuances. Some versions (such as the New American Standard) provide strict, word-for-

1. See Luke 24:27

2. See John 5:38-40

word translations, while others (like the New Living Translation) focus more on communicating the broader ideas or concepts of a passage. We shouldn't be afraid to read passages in a few different Bibles, comparing them and observing how they impact us.

Different study Bibles also offer different annotations on sections of text. Some Bible notes emphasize the "there and then" by providing background information about the cultural context, the original word choices, or the translation process of a passage. Other study notes highlight the "here and now," seeking to impart present-day, personal applications. Ideally, a combination of both is good. In my experience, one of the best ways to study the Word is to read a passage and then investigate a variety of notes in different versions of the Bible. These will provide well-rounded, thought-provoking perspectives on the text.

Developing a community hermeneutic

Today, most North Americans own at least one copy of the Bible, which gives us the incredible opportunity to read the Scriptures for ourselves. This doesn't mean, however, that studying the Bible is a solitary activity. We simply can't figure it all out on our own, nor are we supposed to. Instead, we need to interpret the Bible within the wisdom of the faith community.

Christ came at a time when community was the context for the text, when brothers and sisters gathered together in house churches to hear and discuss the Word together as it was read aloud to them. Similarly, we need to develop a community hermeneutic—a way to gather around the Scriptures to share our thoughts, learn from each other, and examine our interpretations within the wisdom of a larger group.

Connecting with other members of the family of Christ occurs when we meet to worship or participate in a small group. But it also happens when we delve into books, commentaries, videos, or art that was created by brothers and sisters of the Kingdom who have come before us. As we examine their reflections on the Bible, we enter into the text with them, exchanging thoughts across time.

What's hermeneutics got to do with it?

Getting the (big) picture

It's easy to get bogged down while reading the Bible, whether by the seemingly trivial details that some books record or by our own preoccupation with discovering how each passage relates to us. This makes understanding the meta-narrative, or the grand picture, of what Scripture teaches vital. The crux of the entire Bible rests upon God's radical love for a broken and unworthy people. In sending His son, Christ, He revealed to all creation, all humanity, and all the spiritual order that He isn't concerned about power, prestige, or perfection, but rather with love, compassion, grace, and humility. Each verse of His word should be read within this revelation.

Considering context

Rarely can we properly exegete even a single verse without taking into account its broader context. Context encompasses many facets, including history, culture, and literature. Some questions to keep in mind while reading include: How does this passage fit into the meta-narrative? What is happening in the verses surrounding it? In what literary genre is this verse written? (History, biography, law, poetry, wisdom, prophecy, epistles, and apocalyptic literature are all genres found in the Bible, and each requires its own interpretative approach.) What message was the author trying to convey, and how would the original audience have interpreted it? How does this passage point to or enlighten our understanding of Jesus?

Only after we consider these issues should we reflect on the transferable principles for today's context.

Living in the Bible

The Bible comes alive when we live in it and it lives in us. This means that we must actively engage the text, which might require some creativity on our part. Exercises like reading out loud, writing notes in the margins, journaling, praying conversationally through a passage, meditating, and committing verses to memory are all tools we can use to pursue the text. This will make the Bible a place for us to "do life."

Handle with care: Misreading can be hazardous

As we plumb the Bible's depths, here are some interpretive tendencies to avoid:

Over-moralizing, or turning a story from the Bible into a personal moral lesson, without regard to context

EXAMPLE: Israelite law demanded an "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" principle of punishment for personal offenses (Exodus 21:23–25). An over-moralized interpretation of these verses might fail to take into account that this instruction is from the Old Testament, which is surpassed by the revelation of the New Testament in which Christ commanded His disciples to love their enemies.

Over-symbolizing, or turning a historical account into a personal allegory, without considering how it reveals God's character

EXAMPLE: Considering the story of Gideon's triumph over the Midianites in Judges 6–7, an overly symbolic reading might cite this as proof that God always brings success to His followers. But it might disregard what the event reveals about God's nature, such as His patience (which he showed toward Gideon in his initial unbelief) and His merciful faithfulness (which was displayed in his willingness to deliver the Israelites, even though they had been disloyal).

Over-personalizing, or turning the main focus of the Bible onto oneself, without reflecting on how it enlightens us to Christ

EXAMPLE: Genesis 37–50 tells the story of Joseph, Israel's favored son, who was sold into slavery by his jealous older brothers. Later on, Joseph was put in charge of Egypt, which enabled him to save his brothers when a famine struck the land. An individual employing an overly personalized interpretation might read this—looking for a life lesson—and conclude that this story discourages parental favoritism. This may be a valid message, but it misses the narrative's real core. The story of Joseph serves as a grander picture of the redemption of sin and the coming Christ, who, like Joseph, endured suffering to accomplish God's greater good (Genesis 50:20).

Living out the Bible

The most important step of any Bible study occurs when we close it. The way we live reveals whether we have engaged in an academic exercise or a self-interested search for personal encouragement, or whether we've actually sought out lasting life change. Ultimately, life change is the most lasting way for us to remember anything. While we may consciously forget the data, our lives serve as a record for ourselves and for others of our strivings to live like Christ.

As history can attest, understanding the Bible is no easy task. Even when we put solid hermeneutical principles into practice, we are not guaranteed to "know in full." But as we work out our partial understanding of Scripture here on earth, we can remain encouraged by God's promise that His Spirit dwells within us and that one day we will "know fully, even as we are fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Adapted from "Truth or Consequences," a sermon delivered by Bruxy Cavey at The Meeting House (Oakville, ON) on January 27, 2008.



Bruxy Cavey is the teaching pastor at The Meeting House, a family of churches in the greater Toronto and Ottawa areas that share the same teaching. He is also the author of *The End of Religion: Encountering the Subversive Spirituality of Jesus* (NavPress, 2007). He lives in Hamilton, ON, with his wife, Nina, and three daughters—Chelsea, Chanelle, and Maya—as well as their dog, Toby.

PRACTICALLY SPEAKING

BIC members discuss the role of Scripture in their everyday lives

According to a 2006 survey¹ of BIC Church members...

97% see the Bible as the word of God

36% say they read or study their Bible daily

As these findings illustrate, many Brethren in Christ hold a high view of the Bible, but we seem to struggle with knowing how to engage it ourselves on a consistent basis. To shed some light on this dilemma, *In Part* magazine invited several individuals who were in attendance at the 2008 General Conference in Toronto to take part in a roundtable discussion on reading the Bible. Rebekah Basinger, executive director of congregational relations, moderated as participants shared the struggles, discoveries, and joys they've experienced while engaging Scripture during the various seasons of their lives.

Meet the conversationalists:



Steve Airth is the pastor at GracePoint, a BIC church plant in Ontario, Calif. He lives there with his wife, Nicole, and their four children and spends his spare time studying for classes at Fuller Theological Seminary (Pasadena, Calif.).



Rachel Diaz is an attorney in Miami. Only a few months after this discussion, she and her husband, Hamlet, celebrated the birth of their first child, Olivia. The family attends La Roca Firme BIC (Hialeah, Fla.). Rachel has served on the General Conference Board since 2005.



Kimberly Forry is a member of Speedwell Heights BIC (Lititz, Pa.), where her husband, Adam, serves as the senior pastor. She spends her time being "mommy" to her two children and doing freelance communications work.



Kris G. lives in Thailand, where she works as a math teacher and serves as the leader of the BIC World Missions team there. While in the U.S., she can be found either taking road trips to visit friends all across the country or at her home church, Souderton (Pa.) BIC.



Lois Saylor serves as a deacon at Harrisburg (Pa.) BIC Church and lives with her husband, Andy, in Elizabethtown, Pa. She is also assistant chair on the leadership team of the BIC Council for Women in Ministry and Leadership.



John Zuck ministered as a pastor and church planter in Alberta, ON, and Pennsylvania for 27 years before becoming bishop of the Great Lakes Conference in 2004. Today, he and his wife, Connie, have settled in West Milton, Ohio, and attend Fairview BIC Church (Englewood, Ohio).



REBEKAH: We all hear that we should be in God's word daily, but life's demands can make it difficult to carve out the time to read the Bible. How do you deal with that challenge?

JOHN: I was never able to read the Bible through until I was in my twenties. [It was then that] I experienced the fullness of the Spirit within me, and I suddenly had an intense desire to read the Bible cover-to-cover—the whole thing. I've had the practice ever since of reading it through each year. For me, it's not only a passion—it's also a discipline. Even when I don't seem to have time, I'll read at least a little. Sometimes, it doesn't feel like I got a lot out of it, but it's amazing how the words become embedded in my mind and will just naturally come out!

KRIS: Echoing what John was saying about it being a discipline, the reality is that we're all given the same amount of time. I struggle because we live in a culture that has so much information and so many options coming at us that we have to make choices about what we do all the time. About six years ago, God basically removed my desire to watch TV. Now, that's not for everybody, but you would be amazed at how much more time I have. But it is a choice, and it's a discipline because there are so many things screaming for our attention.

KIMBERLY: My struggle to find time in the day is not with TV, but it's with my kids. I get up, and my kids are there. And when they go to bed, I have a million things to get done. I know that's got to

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

be an excuse, but I haven't quite found my way around it yet. If I have a snatch of time, I might read a prayer or something from Brother Lawrence or a Psalm. But it's not always that I'm able to sit down and read from the Bible. And I don't know what that says...

LOIS: It says you're a mother of young children. I've definitely been there. When we had young kids, I'd read them Bible stories sometimes and be like, "Oh, look, I'm reading the Bible!" But now that I'm at a different stage of life when I actually do have the time, I really do love to take an hour and sit awhile to read and journal.

RACHEL: I heard a pastor say that he read the Bible to his kids every morning for 18 years, and never in those 18 years did any of his kids say, "Praise the Lord! God has spoken!" But he said it was a discipline, and you do it. Like John said, it comes back to you later. Hamlet, my husband, is very formal about reading the Bible. He sits in the dining room in the morning, and he reads the Bible through. But that doesn't work for me. I need more guidance in my reading—like from devotionals and sermon notes. And since I speak two languages, I sometimes can jump over to the English and see how it says it there and understand it a little differently. I've also started leav-

ing a Bible in the living room, in the only place that has a TV, so when I'm sitting there, there it is. I'm looking at it, and it's staring back at me.

STEVE: I have several things on my plate. My office is in my home, but I'm also a stay-at-home dad because two of my children are young and stay home with me. I'm in seminary, so I'm in the Word and doing a 15–30 page exegesis on passages all the time, and it's very easy to "count" that as personal study. I need things like, "Have you

read your Bible? Then don't turn on the internet. Don't check your email."

REBEKAH: I'm intrigued by the word "discipline" that a number of you have used—because discipline isn't a very popular word in today's society.

LOIS: I think it depends on how you use it. For me, that word is kind of negative. Once in my life, I decided that I needed to read the Bible through, and I did that. Once. I appreciate those of you who do it more regularly, but there were also times when I felt like I was bombarded—like I *had* to and I wasn't a good Christian if I didn't. But that approach doesn't work for me. And so, it seems to me that there's an element of discipline, but I think there should also be freedom to do what works for you. I think God can work in different ways for different people.

KIMBERLY: I agree. I decided this year I would journal. I'm not legalistic about it, and it's not every day. Some days, it's journaling about what this verse said to me. Sometimes it's poetry or a tune in my head. But that's unique to me. I can't go to my husband and say, "You really need to be journaling. It'll really enrich your reading," because he hates doing it. He does not want to journal when he's reading the Bible. So I don't think it's a prescriptive kind of thing.

REBEKAH: We've been discussing Bible reading as a personal, private activity; but in our core value, we talk about studying the Bible together. What does that mean?

KIMBERLY: I think it's necessary to have that balance, because [when] I am reading the Scriptures all by myself, it's going to be my interpretation of them—my worldview. When I'm with other people, they're going to bring up some things that maybe I'm not hearing right now. Or they have a different worldview than me, and they can instruct me on something—and I think that's helpful.

RACHEL: I think it helps in relationships. Hamlet and I try to, in the evening, pray together—read the Bible and pray together, and again I think it speaks not only to my spiritual growth but just for that connection in relationship.



REBEKAH BASINGER

JOHN: Speaking of the family aspect, we have trouble even being together for a meal time, and so how do we work at *that*? The ideal, of course, is to have some time together as a family where something is used that's relevant for the kids. In my experience, we had some books, some little devotional things, to work for kids and teens. It can't be long, it can't be boring.

STEVE: Sometimes we use devotionals [as a family]. We get started on one, and it gets really repetitive really quickly. So we've got to find other ways to connect with our children. So we're in front of the TV watching *Hairspray*—you know, the one with John Travolta?—and at the end of it I say, "Wow. What was in there? There's some neat stuff in there." The next thing you know, [the kids] start becoming theologians of what they've just watched, and then we're able to use it as a teaching tool: "What does Scripture say?" I try to use whatever avenue we have.

KIMBERLY: And that's the whole "don't compartmentalize your life." It's not, "OK, I had my Bible reading. Now I can go do something else." Try to integrate.

KRIS: You know, sometimes when we talk about [Bible study], it becomes a check-it-off—but let's get back to why we're doing it. It's about a relationship. And it shouldn't just be an intellectual thing that happens; we are relating to our creator, God, and we're learning about Jesus. It's ongoing. It's a dialogue.

REBEKAH: So what do when we don't understand that dialogue? How should we approach tough passages?

LOIS: There's that one Psalm, and I don't know which one it is, but I'm reading it and it's beautiful and it's wonderful—and then all of a sudden, they start talking about dashing babies' heads against walls. And I'm just like—you know, it's jarring. I have a lot of problems with the war-like images. But I think sometimes, too, I don't necessarily have to make myself know the answers all the time. I have to live with some ambiguity here.

RACHEL: So what do you do with Revelations? You know, it's a lot of horses and fires and...is it alright to just never read it? Can we just skip certain books? First Chronicles, Revelations...

LOIS: Leviticus...

JOHN: There's certainly a lot we can learn from studying the Scriptures, studying prophecy and so forth, but there are a couple of principles that I fall back on in these kinds of areas. The one would be in Acts 1:7, [...] and the other related one would be in 1 Corinthians 13: "Now we see through a glass darkly"—that's the old King James. There are some things that are not clear right now, and they're probably—wait, let me change that word from "probably"—they're not supposed to be clear. It's as clear as God wants it to be.

STEVE: I look for overarching themes, so that when we see a dashing baby verse, we can say, "I don't think that verse sums up all of God's character. That's not *who* God is. So let's look—let's open it a little bit." Sometimes we need to look at the larger picture.

JOHN: When you get that kind of broad view, problem areas aren't nearly as large a problem, because you see the whole context of what the Bible is saying on a particular topic.

KRIS: This is kind of a little bit different, but just to give us a sense of perspective: I don't think people in North America—English speakers—realize what a privilege [it is to have] so many resources and translations that we can understand. There *is* a Bible in Thai. But I'm working with a people group for whom Thai isn't their first language. Theirs isn't even a written language! We're talking about this, and my heart's like, "Wow. My Thai friends can't even have this discussion."

REBEKAH: I think you've brought home a really wonderful point: that many of the conversations we have are so uniquely North American—so privileged and elite. When we step back and realize what we have, we think, "My goodness. What we're whining around about, most of the world can't even access."

Hear more or join in on the conversation at In Part Online at INPART.ORG.



KRIS G.

KIMBERLY FORRY



STEVE AIRTH

JOHN ZUCK

VIBES

AN EXPLORATION OF FAITH AND POPULAR CULTURE

THE GOOD (AND BAD) NEWS ABOUT NICHE BIBLES

by PAT MCCULLOUGH

The Bible: It's not only the best-selling book of all time, but it's also the best-selling book of the year—every year. At our local Christian bookstore, these statistics are made tangible on the entire wall dedicated to Bibles aimed at every imaginable audience. There's the *Green Bible*, the *Archaeological Study Bible*, the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible*, the *Golfer's Bible*, *Chicken Soup for the Soul Bible*, and even the *Bug Collection Bible*. But are these “niche Bibles” a beautiful part of drawing new readers to the Bible or do they represent nothing more than a thinly veiled marketing ploy aimed at unassuming believers? Perhaps the truth lies somewhere in between.

In a sense, my own story models both the “good news” and the “bad news” of these niche Bibles. I encountered my first niche Bible as a teenager. As a consummate procrastinator in high school, I found little motivation for any sort of disciplined study. When I converted to Christianity at 16, my curiosity began bursting at the seams. I had hardly read any book cover to cover, let alone one with a thousand pages of small text and ancient-sounding words like “libation” or “obeisance.” Enter the *Quest Study Bible*, which billed itself

as the “question and answer Bible.”

“If you’ve ever read the Bible and found yourself asking the tough questions,” the *Quest Study Bible* begins in its introduction, “then this Bible is for you.” Yes! That was exactly what I wanted. I had lots of tough questions, and I wanted answers.

I gobbled up the “answers” offered by this Bible with a ravenous hunger for meaning. My problem (similar to the one my newborn son has) was that I would spit these answers back up at everyone around me, a practice which temporarily transformed me into a zealous Bible-thumper. A couple years later, I shoved off to Messiah College (Grantham, Pa.) and, in my continuing quest for more answers, I decided to major in biblical studies. But instead of finding easy answers, I discovered deeper questions. Those questions led me to a career in academic study of the Bible. Looking back, I see that it was my *Quest*



Study Bible that initially sparked my passion for biblical study and started my journey toward a lifelong education. Yet for at least two years, I had been blinded into thinking that the notes of my study Bible were just as inspired as the biblical text itself.

So when we approach our bookstore's wall of Bibles, how do we deal with the difficult act of balancing the “good news” of inspired enthusiasm with the “bad

news” of simplistic answers? How do we discern what Phyllis Tickle calls the “fine line between accessibility and desecration” in niche Bibles? And what do we make of all the Bibles aimed at satisfying innumerable interest groups?

At their worst, these Bibles feed into every reader's addiction: to look for what's most important to *me*. Various traditions choose which portions of Scripture are more authoritative than others—Romans for some, the Sermon on the Mount for others. Our favoritism touches even our interpretation of those passages. For some, the Genesis creation story is a condemnation of Darwinism; for others, it is an environmental mandate.

Such partiality in our Bible reading is inevitable. The Bible is a diverse and complex compendium of ancient texts, and our human brains can only handle so much of that at a time. But if used wisely, the right niche Bibles could actually help us to balance our biases. For instance, if we are passionate about social justice, we would do well to find a good devotional Bible, such as *Today's Devotional Bible* to remind us of the importance of a deeply prayerful life.

On the other hand, if we are already dedicated to personal spirituality, we may be appropriately stretched by something like *The Green Bible* or *The Poverty and Justice Bible*. We may not agree with everything we read, but it should provoke powerful questions. To complement these, a good

reference Bible (e.g., *New Interpreter's Study Bible*) would help any reader with the historical context of the biblical writings.

Having said this, some common sense is in order here. Not all niche Bibles are created equal. While the more gimmicky niche Bibles may attract new audiences, they may also distract us from truly transformational readings. A Bible with “inspirational messages teed up to reach the golfer's heart,” for example, may fall into this category. Worse still, other Bibles may perpetuate destructive stereotypes under the guise of authoritative biblical teaching, such as the “Bible-zine” marketed for teen girls, which—somewhat disturbingly—boasts that it's “A Bible for young women! (And it looks like COSMO!).”

In the end, I can only think of one niche Bible missing from the market: *The Brethren in Christ Church Bible*. Imagine a Bible that incorporates both devotional reflections and biblical study insights, all guided by our core values. Now, that is a niche Bible I could get behind. Are you listening, Bible publishers?



Pat McCullough is a Ph.D. student in New Testament and Christian origins at the University of California, Los Angeles, having recently completed his M.Div. at Fuller Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Christina, are members of Grantham (Pa.) BIC and currently attend Pasadena (Calif.) Mennonite Church. They are celebrating the recent birth of their first child, Declan. PATMCCULLOUGH.COM

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TO THE POINT

In other faith traditions, strict rules dictate how one should use, translate, and care for their sacred texts. But in Christian circles, the physical Bible may not demand any more respect than any other book, and different versions of the text are encouraged as we strive to make the Bible more widely accessible to the most people. Has this lessened the sacredness of the Christian Scriptures?

Jim Baker

HEISE HILL BIC
Gormley, ON

Webster's Dictionary defines sacred as “entitled to reverence and respect.” When it comes to God’s word, I believe this entails accurate translation by scholars well versed in the original languages and working from the best manuscripts available. While I wholeheartedly support packaging God’s word in attractive, user-friendly formats, I also think it’s vitally important to distinguish between a translation and a paraphrase. The sacredness of the Christian Scriptures will never be lost as long as we clearly define which words are “God’s words” and which are man’s words about God’s word.

Rita Wolf

BRIDGE @ BEANS
Sterling, Ill.

I always assumed that everyone approached the Bible just like any other book—until I attended nurses’ training many years ago. One particular day, I was bathing a patient and, in so doing, set some items on the patient’s Bible. He was quick to tell me that nothing should ever be placed on top of the Holy Scriptures and was so severe that I left the room in tears. As I look back at that experience, even though I respect his view, I do not agree. Since then, I have dropped, soiled, and even torn pages in my Bible—accidentally, of course—while traveling to read and to share what’s inside. The seed of the good news can be planted, no matter the condition or the translation.

Dennis L. Ritchey

MONTGOMERY BIC
Mercersburg, Pa.

Perhaps better said, the loss is in people’s respect for the Bible. I was taught to handle the Bible with care, not placing anything else on top of it and discarding worn-out copies properly.

I am not opposed to translations and paraphrases, but we must take care that as we try to make the text more understandable, we don’t lose significant segments of meaning. (For example, compare the difference between Ephesians 2:1 in the NIV and the KJV.)

The Bible talks about there being a famine of the hearing of the words of the Lord (Amos 8:11). In my youth, I remember some saying that that was an indication that an attempt would be made to confiscate and destroy all Bibles. And while this theory may yet prove to be true, I’m more inclined to believe that there will be plenty of Bibles, but that they won’t say anything to change a person’s heart, mind, or life.

Timothy Fisher

WALKERSVILLE (Md.)
COMMUNITY CHURCH

Some time ago, I found myself running on a treadmill as part of a nuclear stress test. During my run, my cardiologist asked what the best kind of running shoe is. My response, in all sincerity, was, “The one you’ll use.” Similarly, it has been said that the best translation of the Bible is the one you’ll obey. I’m not sure there’s a solid connection between the varied translations or paraphrases of the Bible and the loss of the sacredness of the Scriptures. Rather, the sacredness of the Scriptures is lost when the actions of Christ-followers do not reflect those of their leader. Let’s keep the Scriptures sacred by allowing Christ to be our life and letting His life within us to become flesh once again to the world.

PARTING WORDS

GOD’S HILARIOUS WORD

Finding comedy in the unexpected humanity in the Bible

by PERRY ENGLE

I have a confession to make.

Sometimes I have trouble keeping a straight face when while I’m reading the Bible. I even laugh out loud once in a while (although I try not to do this in public worship). I know it sounds irreverent and even immature, but honestly, I can’t help it. Sometimes God’s word just cracks me up.

My amusement inevitably begins in Genesis, with the story of Adam and Eve standing there in the Garden of Eden, wearing nothing but forbidden fruit smeared all over their faces, pointing accusing fingers at each other and the snake. I’ve often wondered if God had to fight back a smile while listening to the first couple make excuses to Him as to why it really wasn’t their fault that all of this happened (Genesis 3).

I grin at Sarah’s response when she hears she’s going to have a baby after she’s “old and well advanced in years”—the understatement of all time, since she’s 90 years old (Genesis 18). God says to Sarah something to the effect of, “Are you laughing because you don’t think I can help you have a baby?” Sarah lies and says, “I didn’t laugh.” God replies, “Oh yes, you did laugh. I just heard you.” Sarah says, “I did NOT laugh.” God, “You did too.” “Did not.” “Did too...”

One of my favorite funny stories

is the New Testament account of Jesus healing the man born blind (John 9). The former blind guy gets hauled in to be grilled by the Pharisees, and it’s more like “Keystone Cops” than “Law & Order.” They keep pressing him for incriminating evidence against Jesus: “How did He heal you? What do you have to say about Him? Do you think He’s a sinner? Tell us one more time how He opened your eyes.” Exasperated, the former blind guy responds to the Jesus-haters with one of the great one-liners in Scripture: “Why do you keep asking me the same questions over and over again? Do *you* want to become His disciples, *too*?”

The book of Acts has a lot of great stories, but one of the best is when Paul’s sermon in Troas goes on so long, a guy named Eutychus nods off, slips out of a third-story window, and falls and breaks his neck (Acts 20). Not to be undone, Paul takes a break from preaching, lays hands on him, raises him from the dead, goes back upstairs to get something to eat, and then proceeds to keep talking until the sun comes up. I know it’s not meant to be funny, but it does comfort me to know that all the churches I know: 1) meet on the ground floor, and 2) only allow their pastors to preach for half an hour.



I want to be clear. The humor I see in the Bible has nothing to do with God, but everything to do with the characters and situations through which God chooses to work. Bumbling and fumbling, all-too-human sinners like you and me are the chosen vessels through whom God determines to transform a fallen world. And that’s not only surprising, but also at times downright amusing.

It makes me love the Bible all the more, as I chuckle my way through stories of how God lovingly and patiently works through people who are every bit as human as I am.



Perry Engle finds a lot of humor in his role as bishop of the Midwest and Pacific Conferences of the BIC Church. He and his wife, Marta, and their three daughters live in Ontario, Calif.

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