

IN PART

THE MAGAZINE FOR THE BRETHREN IN CHRIST COMMUNITY IN NORTH AMERICA

Spring 2010

when
GOD
seems
ABSENT



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We were surprised . . . in fact, shocked that you had a quote from Daniel Berrigan in the inset “These indelible words” on page 8 of the winter issue. You included Berrigan—a man who was, for an extended period of time, on the FBI’s ten most-wanted persons list—with passages from the Scriptures and John Wesley! Surely there must have been other, more suitable persons whom you could have quoted in our Church’s publication.

Kenneth Markley—*Grantham, Pa.*

In the last issue’s letter from the editor, I read about your experience buying free/ reduced school lunch, and I wanted to share my experience. My sister and I qualified for the school lunch program after my father died and my mom literally had no income. It’s funny, because we actually thought it was cool to stand in the line, have some lady slap corn on our tray, and then sit with others eating the same. There was always the kid who loved everything and would watch to see what we wouldn’t eat, and then ask in a way that you had no choice but to say, “Here, you can have it.” We didn’t feel uncomfortable . . . we were “in” with the lunchroom crowd.

Rachel Diaz—*Miami, Fla.*

THE VIEW FROM HERE

In 1942, when Robert Bell, my grandfather, was 11, he, his mother, and his sister sailed across the Atlantic Ocean on a cargo ship called the *West Lashway*. The family had been serving as missionaries in the Ivory Coast, but as World War II escalated, they were ordered to return home to the U.S.

All was well as the ship made its way up the coast of South America, until, on one placid Sunday afternoon, two torpedoes, fired by a German U-boat, ripped into the vessel’s hull. The *Lashway* sank in just two minutes, so quickly that the radio operator was unable to transmit an SOS signal.



↑ Me and my grandpa, Robert Bell

Without time to get into a lifeboat, my grandpa and his sister and mother went down with the ship, caught in the swirling vortex of the sinking wreckage. Yet somehow, they each swam their way back up to the surface. Sputtering and coated in a sticky, syrupy palm oil that had leaked out of the boat, they were able to scramble onto a lifeboat.

They and 16 others would sit—literally shoulder to shoulder—on that eight- by 10-foot raft for the next 20 days. Every hour, minute, second was relentlessly perilous: The glaring sun and churning sea. The vicious, circling sharks. The maddening hunger. The chilling dark of night. The physical exhaustion and psychological strain. God’s apparent desertion.

Yet in the midst of these bleak circumstances, my grandpa recalls astounding—dare I say, miraculous—moments of hope and provision. At one point, the group had run completely out of drinking water. The crew members asked my great-grandmother to pray, and a single grey cloud lavished fresh rain on the survivors. As their time at sea lengthened, exposure to the sun became the greatest threat. It was the palm oil, which had seemed so irritating, that worked like suntan lotion, shielding them from the sun’s rays.

My grandpa’s story reminds me that evidences of God’s goodness and presence often come to us in ordinary and illogical ways, like a bothersome palm oil that ends up being lifesaving. Or a time of unemployment that brings new vigor and opportunity. Or a moment of failure so that a greater, unforeseen work can succeed. Or a God-in-the-flesh who humbles Himself and becomes obedient to death—even death on a cross!—that His children might live.

Kristine

Kristine N. Frey, editor

Now I know in part, then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. I Corinthians 13:12

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IN MOTION



PHOTO: Michelle Rumford

Shirley Teal, of Springvale BIC (Hagersville, ON), comforts **Andrice**, a 30-year-old woman who came to the **Mission of Hope Clinic** (Aubry, Haiti) with a broken hip, an injury sustained from a wall falling on her during the January 12th 7.0-magnitude **earthquake** that shook the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince and surrounding areas. Shirley was one of **56 volunteers** from **three Canadian BIC churches** who had arrived at the Mission, a multifaceted Christian ministry, the week before. No team members were harmed as a result of the quake. Before returning to Canada on **January 18th**, the team spent **six days** administering support and medical aid to dozens of **injured survivors** from nearby villages.

Visit **IN PART Online**
at **INPART.ORG** to find...

- Stories about the ongoing efforts of BIC in Haiti and how to support them
- More on the Williams' trip to pick up their adopted daughter in Ethiopia
- Information about General Conference 2010
- The Spring 2010 edition of "Family News"
- Group discussion questions on this issue of *In Part*

NEWS FLASH

**6,450**

Copies of "Changed" prayer guides purchased for the 2010 BIC Week of Prayer & Fasting

90

Churches and Regional Conferences that used the guide

423

Visits to the Williams family news story (see next page) during its first week at BIC-CHURCH.ORG

1,360,000

Total dollars (US) given to the BIC World Hunger Fund by Canadian and U.S. donors since 1999

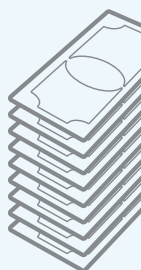
67

Percent of BIC in North America who believe that God controls most events in their lives*

93

Percent who said they believe God has a specific plan for their lives*

*SOURCE: 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



UNEXPECTED PROVISION

Prayers support BIC family during attempted attack on airliner

On **December 14**, a request for prayer went out to leaders in the Great Lakes Conference and General Church. People across North America responded to that call on behalf of Jeff Williams, pastor of Nappanee (Ind.) BIC, and his wife, Krista, who were traveling to Ethiopia to adopt their daughter, Emily. Yet no one could have guessed the unexpected necessity of those supplications.

Soon after arriving safely in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital city, and meeting Emily, Jeff and Krista learned that the proper paperwork for their daughter's visa had not yet arrived at the U.S. embassy. Following three days of frantic emails and phone calls, Emily was cleared to enter the U.S., and the three made their Christmas Eve connecting flight from Addis Ababa to Amsterdam.

"We had a definite sense that God's hand had played a significant role in making it all work," Jeff affirms. "We knew of a great number of people who were praying back home for us, and we were so excited to get home."

On Christmas day, the family boarded Northwest Airlines Flight 253 to Detroit. But as the plane neared its destination, the unthinkable happened: Four rows behind Jeff, a passenger, Umar Farouk AbdulMutallab, allegedly tried to detonate an explosive device. Although the attempt failed, Abdul-Matallab's clothes caught on fire. Passengers and crew members moved quickly to extinguish the flames, and the plane landed without incident.

"In the aftermath of the event, I've found the fact that someone tried to



↑ Krista and Jeff Williams (right) with their adopted daughter, Emily, and the directors (left) of the Ethiopian orphanage

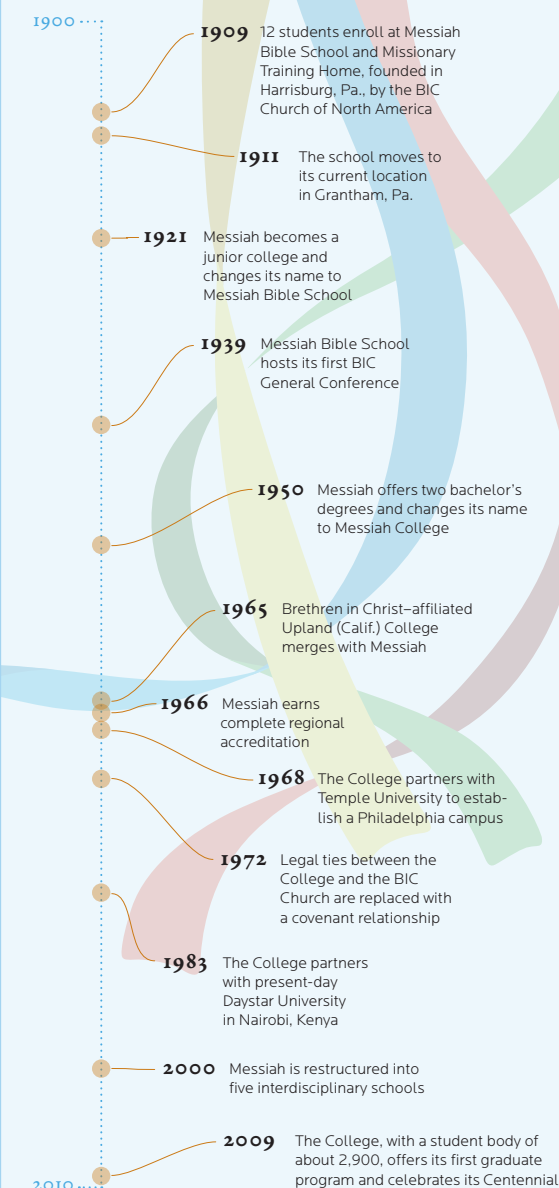
blow up the plane we were on is something that I can't quite shake," Jeff shares. "I have thought about what my reaction should be, as a Christian in general and as a Brethren in Christ in particular. What does it mean to offer love and mercy to someone like this man who tried to blow me and my family up? Not hating him is one thing, but how can I love him? What would that look like? What can I do to help counter this cycle of hatred and violence?"

Part of the answer, Williams admits, has to do with recognizing God's provision. "We are only now beginning to realize how involved our gracious God was every step of the way," he acknowledges. "We get goose bumps thinking about the power of prayer and what kind of miracle really took place on that airplane. It inevitably leads us to conclude that we are living only because of the grace of God, which in turn leads us to ask how we can best live our lives for the God who gave us new life."

For more on this story, visit **IN PART Online** at **INPART.ORG**.

GEARING UP FOR GENERAL CONFERENCE

General Conference 2010 (July 9–12) will be held at Messiah College (Grantham, Pa.), a four-year liberal arts school whose ties to the BIC Church date back 100 years. Brush up on your knowledge of the College with this timeline of events.



PART OF THE WHOLE

FOCUSING ON ONE WOMAN'S FAITH

ARLENE MILLER

In her lifetime, she's been a student, nurse, activist, missionary, professor, international speaker, published author, and missions coordinator. Arlene Miller is ready for your questions.

How did you come to Christ?

My parents were Christians, and I grew up going to Valley Chapel BIC Church in East Canton, Ohio. When I was 5, we came home from a tent meeting, and I just remember being upset, so my parents prayed with me. I count that as the beginning of my journey, because the next day, I had the little neighbor girl down on her knees. I was telling her she needed to get saved!

And is that how you got into missions?

Not quite. My grandmother said to me one time that she hoped I'd be a missionary. That got me thinking about it.

The other thing that played into it was my background. Canton was a steel town, so we had people from all over come there to work. In fact, when I was working as a visiting nurse, I learned to speak some Greek because I had so many Greek patients. And so, I just learned to really appreciate the people from all these different ethnic groups.

Where did you serve as a missionary and what did you do?

—Mike Holland, BIC World Missions

I taught nursing courses at the school in Macha, Zambia, for three-and-a-half years. I've often said that I went to Zambia a girl and came back a woman! Years later, while on faculty at Messiah College, I went back and spent one summer teaching ethics at Sikalongo Bible Institute in Choma.



Favorite jelly bean flavor: Any, as long as it's spicy

Least favorite veggie: Steamed okra

Fun fact: Enjoys classical mysteries

Currently attends: Elizabethtown (Pa.) BIC

How have you been involved with BIC World Missions' Scholarship Program for International Children's Education (SPICE)?

—Michelle Wenger, BIC World Missions

My friend, Anna Jean Mann, coordinated SPICE for many years and promoted it at our church, Elizabethtown BIC. She and her husband, Lowell, were missionaries in India. I'd always wanted to go there, so in 1999 I went with them to Bihar. Five years ago, I started to work as the SPICE coordinator.

The BIC Church in India runs nine schools in India and Nepal for children of BIC families. What we do here is basically find and coordinate North American sponsors for the students. When I took over, we were sponsoring just under 500 students, and when I left this summer, we were at about 750.

You've had many travel experiences. Could you share one that was particularly significant for you?

—Sharon Benner, BIC World Missions

I think one travel story that tops the list is when I met the boys at the SPICE hostel in Zion, India, on the BIC World Missions Vision Trip I went on in November 2008. I actually recognized many of their faces from having worked with their pictures as I matched them with sponsors. They called me "auntie," a term of respect for older women. I felt love for these young men with so much potential.

IN PART at INPART.ORG

- Read more from Arlene's interview
- Sponsor a child through SPICE
- Submit questions for our next subject, retiring Quiz Master John Weaver

TO OUR CORE

EXPLORING THE CENTRAL VALUES OF THE BIC CHURCH

LETTING GO OF OUR LIFEBOATS

Amidst the storms of life, authentic security comes through Christ alone

by JOHN REITZ

In the book of Acts, an entire chapter is given to the suspenseful story of a perfect storm. Hurricane-force winds and waves overtake the ship transporting Paul from Israel to Italy, where he will stand trial for his outspoken commitment to Jesus. As the storm escalates, the crew drops anchor and throws cargo overboard in an attempt to survive. At one point in the story, the sailors decide to make a last-ditch effort and save their own lives by lowering the lifeboat into the sea. But Paul, acting on a message from God, directs the soldiers on board to cut the ropes holding the lifeboat, warning that they'll die if they don't stay with the ship. Remarkably, the soldiers listen to Paul and let the lifeboat fall away.

Anyone who has ever sailed before knows that lifeboats provide a final security when your ship is in trouble. Oftentimes, in the midst of life's storms, we're a lot like seasoned sailors. We have "lifeboats"—our family, career, house, friends, or savings account—that we cling to for protection. But there will always come a time when we realize that even these "safe places" are not truly secure. As this story in Acts illustrates, what

→ We confess our dependence on God for everything and seek to deepen our intimacy with Him by living prayerfully.

we've turned to as lifesaving in the past, may, in reality, be life-threatening. Our lifeboats can actually keep us from God and the true adventure He has for us.

It is only when we come to the point of recognizing the inadequacies of our false securities that we can begin putting our trust in God and opening ourselves up for life transformation.

In my experience, though, this comes with the unsettling realization that Jesus' safe place usually feels anything but safe. Relying on God often means that we must take some risks. But I've discovered this about the place Jesus has for us: It doesn't leak. In fact, it is often those places that seem filled with the most danger and risk that invigorate our lives and bring us authentic security in Jesus.



John Reitz is the founding pastor of The Bridge Church in Hummelstown, Pa. In April, he will become the senior pastor of Grantham (Pa.) BIC.



ILLUSTRATION: Leslie Gates



A Good Friday journey into shadows

In search of a hope that passes understanding

BY *Rebecca Ebersole Kasperek*



I remember a particularly disastrous piano recital from my teenage years. Since my toddler brother was sick, my parents had sent me off to the recital early with the promise that one of them would try to attend. As I waited for the program to begin, strangers filled the church sanctuary to capacity. My breath quickened listening to other students polish off complex sonatas and concertos. The teacher announced my name. Still no glimpse of my parents. I perched on the grand piano bench and felt alone. My fingers stiffened with nervous electricity. I became hopelessly lost in the middle of one piece and had to begin again. The keys blurred before my eyes. Finally, I struck the last note, and the audience clapped graciously. As I trudged back to my seat, I noticed with a start that my father was standing in the back doorway of the sanctuary. He had been there all along. But, despite his supportive presence, I had responded to the situation as if I'd been on my own.

In a similar way, my emotions and perceptions often shape the way I experience God's presence: Sometimes God feels as close as my next inhalation; at other times, God appears to be absent from my life. In college, a Good Friday Tenebrae service began to transform the way I view God's seeming absences. Not knowing what to expect, I walked into a sanctuary lit only by low lamps and a candelabra. As the worship leader read each passage of Christ's

Passion followed by a somber hymn, acolytes extinguished each candle, until only one remained. After a period of silence, the leader proclaimed Christ's death, speaking His last words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" and extinguishing the final candle. Darkness immersed us. I waited for some benediction, some mention of the Easter comfort to come, but only silence and darkness remained. I began to consider the disciples, who had seen miracles and wonders, had believed Christ to be the Messiah, a conquering King and an avenger of injustice; yet they had left

Calvary alone in their disappointment and grief. I lingered and prayed, and then I, like the disciples, like everyone else in the sanctuary, eventually just got up and walked away.

This might sound like a disappointing conclusion to a service, but the experience has become a touchstone in my spiritual life. It led me into the disappointment of Christ in Gethsemane when He asks for the cup to be taken away, yet it remains. I felt the despair of the

disciples when their Messiah dies on a cross instead of calling down legions of angels to save Himself. I entered into the communion of saints facing the vexation of prayers that seem unanswered, miracles left unsprung. The death I honored that Good Friday wasn't just Christ's death; it was also the death of my image of an Easter-only God, the death of my belief that the full outpouring of human experiences can be channeled into a predictable stream of understanding.

The death I honored that Good Friday wasn't just Christ's death; it was also the death of my image of an Easter-only God.

In the years following the Tenebrae service, I haven't found answers to every question, silenced all fears, dislodged clamoring doubts. I have, however, tried to enlarge my faith to encompass the brutal reality and scandal of the crucified Christ as well as the hope of Christ resurrected. I have come closer to recognizing that just because I don't always sense God's presence in my life doesn't necessarily mean that God is not there. I'm less concerned with protecting God from unanswered questions and more interested in connecting with God's complexity, in sustaining our relationship no matter what I'm feeling or thinking at the time.

When it comes to trust, I look to my 20-month-old daughter, Clara, as an expert. She lives fully in the present moment. If she's hungry, she complains and trusts that we will feed her. If she falls, she runs to us, arms thrust upward, confident we'll comfort her. Whatever happens, she has placed her simple trust in her parents.

As adults, however, we know both too much and too little to make this type of trust easy. We know the world holds love, malice, and uncertainty. We have learned to anticipate the future, to worry. We have traced the shape of God's seeming absence. And yet, God's relationship to mysteries of suffering and evil remain complex beyond our grasp.

In the face of our limited understanding, I resonate with Hebrews 6, which describes a hope that is rooted in the character of God. I still remember reading the following passage and beginning to understand hope, not as an ephemeral concept, but as the foundation of our lives: "We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." This promise is not a quaint optimism, but an active decision to "seize the hope set before us." Despite circumstances and mysteries beyond our comprehension, it is this hope that provides sanctuary, that remains sturdy, present, as an anchor of the soul.



Rebecca Ebersole Kasperek is a writer, editor, and poet. She attends Harrisburg (Pa.) BIC Church and lives in Paxtang, Pa., with her husband, David, and daughter, Clara. She also serves as an editorial advisor for *In Part*.

Q&A on Tenebrae

- WHAT?** Tenebrae (pronounced TEH-neh-bray) is the Latin word for "shadows" or "darkness." A Tenebrae service contemplates Jesus' final days on earth.
- WHO?** Christians of many faith traditions participate.
- WHEN?** This service is usually held on one of the days leading up to Easter Sunday: Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, or Holy Saturday.
- WHY?** To draw people into the drama of the Savior's betrayal, agony, and crucifixion.
- HOW?** The interplay between light and dark is a key element in Tenebrae, so the room's lights are usually dimmed and a candelabra with several lighted candles is placed at the front of the room. The service may incorporate music, prayers, sermons, or communion, but it centers around readings from the gospels that record the events leading up to Christ's crucifixion. After each passage is read, a candle from the candelabra is blown out. The snuffing of the last flame symbolizes Christ's death and leaves the congregation in darkness.
- In some services, the final candle, called the "Christ candle," is not blown out but hidden from sight to represent the apparent triumph of evil over good. A loud crash is made to symbolize the earthquake, the tearing of the temple veil, and Christ's resurrection. The candle is then restored to its original place, the only light in the room.
- Tenebrae services do not have distinct endings, with congregants departing in silence. This is to show that the story of Christ does not end with His crucifixion, but with His resurrection on Easter Sunday.

What He Left Behind

by Rebecca Ebersole Kasperek

A boulder, cast aside
like an olive pit.
An earthquake. Divine
lightning that blinds
before illuminating.
Guards who tremble
at the earth's gaping scar.
A dropped flask
of the aloe and myrrh
that slow decay.
A reeking cavern
strewn with crimson linen.
Wine vinegar stains
on the burial cloth
that cradled his head.
The piercing nails
of his absence.
A solitary mourner,
fearing the worst
kind of theft. The clutch
of unease before death
or delivery. An angel's
message too stunning
to believe. The conviction
that something was
awakening that had never
risen among us before.
Shrouds of fog burning
in morning's lit air.

RELYING ON GOD

Out of a job, but not out of work

*While coping with the hardships of unemployment,
a woman finds new opportunities for service*

by Lisa Brown

Have you ever had that “funny feeling”? Not funny, like a good joke that makes your stomach hurt from laughing so hard, but funny, like the uneasiness that usually indicates coming change? I had this feeling a few months ago.

The day had begun like normal: I went into work, I sat at my usual desk, and I talked to the usual people. After returning from the kitchen, though, I noticed that I’d missed a call from the head of our Human Resources Department. I immediately started a conversation with God that went something like this: “What’s going on? In the 12 years I’ve worked here, I’ve never had a call from HR. Should I start gathering up my personal belongings?” Several minutes later, my boss called and asked me to meet him in the HR office. This is when that “funny feeling” really took hold.

From the minute I was told that my position was no longer valid, I had a sense that God was on the move. Although I didn’t dislike my job, I was bored. I’d been in need of a change for years but was comfortable.

People often talk about how God wants you to come out of your comfort zone; however, actually venturing out is another story. For the first few weeks, I think I went through the stages of grief. I don’t presume to compare job loss to the loss of a loved one, but I felt like my mind and emotions went through a similar process of mourning. There were days when I would sit in the backyard and write down my thoughts, all the while asking God what He was doing.

I’m not the type of person who can stay at home all the time, so I started walking. Sometimes I would find myself quite far from our house, lost in the music of my iPod or just the thoughts in my head.

Through these long journeys, God brought new friends into my life. I started walking with two women from my neighbourhood and have built close relationships with them. When the weather is too cold for walking, we meet for coffee and we share our life stories. Neither of them knows Jesus, but I trust that God is working through me to show them the love He has.

I found myself being able to make time to socialize and work on establishing relationships with some of the stay-at-home moms in my area. I started volunteering at a local food bank once a week. I began helping out at my church, as

well. Being able to drive someone without a car where they needed to go, or sit with a friend at the hospital while she awaited unpleasant tests, was truly a blessing. As I began to realize this, the uneasy feeling of being out of work started to dissipate. If I could think of unemployment as working for God, things seemed more positive.

The extra time I’ve been able to spend with my daughter, Abigail, has also been amazing. When you work fulltime, household chores and running errands have to be done at night and on weekends. Now, I am able to do them during the day, which means more time for playing and spending quality time together. There are days that I’m able to pick her up early from school, and I feel that even just that extra hour with her has made a difference in our relationship. Spending extra time with my husband at night has also been a blessing, as we’d both been feeling there hadn’t been much time for one-on-one conversation.

As the weeks, and now months, pass, God continues to change me. Currently, I am working part time at our church and once a week at a local movie theatre where new parents are able to get out with their babies to see a movie. I’m finding that no matter where God employs me, there are always opportunities to build relationships.

Although I try to remain positive, I have to admit, there are days when I get up in the morn-

ing and wonder why I’m not getting any response from the résumés I send out. It can be very discouraging. I know there are many people out of work right now and probably dozens applying for the same jobs that I am. In these moments, I have to remind myself that it’s all in God’s timing, not mine. He is the provider for all we need as a family, and we need to trust that. This isn’t to say that I don’t need to make an effort to find a job, but just knowing that everything in my life, including my family’s finances, are in His hands is what I cling to.

I continue to pray that God will use me. I’m open to whatever plans He has for my family, and if the hard financial times come, I need to trust Him, as that’s what He really wants.

.....
Lisa Brown is a freelance writer who lives with her husband, Kevin, and their daughter, Abigail, in Oakville, ON. The family attends The Meeting House, and all three are self-proclaimed movie fanatics.

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matter where God
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RELYING ON GOD

The problem of doing

A BIC church plant navigates the tension between doing too little... and too much

by Bruce Johnson

The Bridge at Beans is a church plant in Sterling, Ill., that meets weekly for worship and Bible study at the Beans, Books, and Beliefs coffeehouse. One Sunday morning this past October, a group of us who lead the plant gathered before the service for our monthly meeting.

Attendance is a typical topic of discussion in our meetings, but for some reason it dominated the conversation that week. We were far from where we felt we should be attendance-wise and weary of preparing for a service that no one—or so it seemed to us—participated in except for ourselves.

Frustrated and discouraged, we then made two dire mistakes: We started to complain, and we began to formulate ideas and programs to make the numbers grow. Maybe a door knocker would bring more people in, or a mass mailing—we just knew that we needed to do something.

Then someone brought up the issue of space. Even if we could bring new people in, more than 50 would never fit in our current facility. In our grumbling, we took on a road-block mentality, bemoaning our limited space and God’s “scanty” provisions.

It was with this mindset that, at 10:30 a.m., we opened the coffeehouse doors for Sunday worship. The first thing that I saw was a gentleman, who attends more often than not, come through the doors with two dozen cookies. We already had a huge spread of desserts donated by the coffeehouse that morning, and although I thanked him, on the inside I was thinking, “Oh great, he brought in more food to throw away.”

A second later, a group of men that had not attended in months arrived. However, this time, these fathers had come with their wives, and, more than that, their children, who greatly blessed our worship house. I turned to do some work on the week’s PowerPoint presentation and remember hearing the front door slamming constantly. By the time I turned around again a few minutes later, 10 people had turned into 20. Then more arrived, and we turned into over 40 people at last count, not including those of us in leadership.

Before I knew it, all the coffee and desserts were gone. Tables were full, couches were full, and floors were covered with diaper bags, toys, backpacks, and purses.

For some reason, we had thought that God was relying on us, when really, it is He who is in control.

We had run out of clean cups for coffee, water pitchers were empty, and plates were piled high on the gray bus totes. Transformed from our earlier discouragement, we became servants trying to get everything ready for worship around all these people. What a great problem!

God often speaks to His people either through silence or bold revelation. And that week, amongst the family sounds, baby smells, and cheerful smiles, we had seen a “bold revelation” of God in our midst. As everyone in the leadership team passed by each other, we made small comments like, “God showed us who is in charge today” and “Looks like we got what we feared; we need to repent.” The worship was great, the food was gone, and the testimonies of the lives God touched through us were apparent.

The Bridge at Beans has normal apprehensions about not doing enough for the success of the church plant. But

on that Sunday, we learned that we should also be careful not to do too much, stepping in front of God’s work along the journey. For a brief moment, we had thought for some reason that God was relying on us, when really, it is He who is in control.

As a church, we realized that trusting God isn’t just about

what we say or what we do, nor is it based on an emotional “feeling,” which we sometimes confuse for spirituality. God enlightened us to the fact that it means believing that His mercy covers what we do (and don’t do) for His kingdom. It is a combination of grace and faith: God’s grace and our faith, stacked like bricks one on top of the other and mortared by the intention of our hearts.

In the end, we saw God’s greatness that day. As for the next week, we learned that God either has a sense of humor or didn’t think that we had mastered the lesson. The following Sunday, we had just five people at worship.

IN PART at INPART.ORG

→ More essays by people learning what it means to rely on God

Bruce Johnson is the co-owner of Beans, Books, and Beliefs coffeehouse, as well as the co-pastor of the Bridge at Beans, which meets there. He and his wife, Betty, live in Rock Falls, Ill., and are both employed full time in addition to their weekend coffeehouse operations. Whenever they have a spare moment, they enjoy traveling.

BRINGING GOD INTO THE GAME

When it comes to faith and sports, should Christians be calling “foul”?

by RUTH ROSENTRATER

In 2009, quarterback Tim Tebow led the University of Florida Gators to victory in the Bowl Championship Series (BCS). Before the game, in a locker room huddle, Tebow offered this reassurance to his teammates: “We’re going to win because we’re going to handle it the right way; we’re going to be humble with it, with God leading us.”

Since his first year on the team, Tebow has become a sort of superhero in the world of college sports, garnering attention—and devoted followers—on and off the field because of his outspokenness about his faith. In addition to the standard “I ♥ Tim Tebow” message, the 17,000-member Facebook club dedicated to him features such laudatory remarks from fans as, “God is good. Timmy is good too” and “For life! Tebow rules the world.”

Although some people might chalk this up to typical flattery, a deeper current runs through the comments. The almost mythic stature of Tim Tebow sheds light on the mores of North American society and its understanding of faith and sports. For many, the relationship between the two has grown so strong that they are virtually indistinguishable, and the world of sport has become a religion itself.

The religion of sport

The United States, often characterized as one of the most decidedly religious nations in the West, leads

the way in transforming sport into “one of the most pervasive forms of religion—implicit and often explicit—in the modern world,” writes Michael Grimshaw, professor of religious studies at University of Canterbury in New Zealand. As anyone who has ever

Perhaps most troubling, the religion of sport has all but claimed the Sabbath day as its own, even in the lives of many Christians. Whether it’s the kids’ soccer game or NFL playoffs on TV, sports often dominate families’ Sundays. Rather than a day of rest, the Sabbath becomes



watched a major sporting event such as the Super Bowl or March Madness can hardly deny, athletes have become objects of adulation and even worship.

The religious parallels extend to other aspects as well. Rituals, traditions, and sacred stories are embraced by eager fans and passed on from generation to generation. Communities of people gather to share their common love for a team or sport. Ardent devotees take pilgrimages to the hallowed spaces of Lambeau Field and the old Yankee Stadium. Objects such as the Lombardi Trophy, the Stanley Cup, and the Grey Cup are reverently adored.

yet another day of surrendering to the life-consuming nature of sport.

A healthy perspective

In light of these struggles, many Christians question how they can successfully be in the world but not of the world in this arena. Assigning sports their proper priority is a good place to start. It is the responsibility of each believer to recognize when their healthy appreciation for a player or team or their own athletic participation has crossed the line into idolatry. Setting boundaries and time limits can help Christians enjoy sports while keeping them in perspective.

Once we have committed to keeping athletic involvements in their proper place, we can appreciate the many ways sport can enrich our faith and lives. The numerous parallels between athletic and spiritual development can help both spectators and athletes cultivate a better understanding of their spiritual lives. For instance, an athlete’s success in sports depends on delayed gratification—denying oneself in the present to attain a future goal—which is also a central tenet of Jesus’ teachings. Perseverance is another attribute that is highly praised by coaches and the writers of the epistles alike. And Paul uses multiple sports metaphors to explain the spiritual journey to his readers.

Yet playing and enjoying sports can also be an end in itself. Athletic ability, just like any other talent, is a gift from God, and the cultivation of that talent is an act of giving back to Him in gratitude. But we should be willing to accept trials as well as success. Struggling through a college volleyball season riddled with countless injuries and hospital visits, I constantly reminded myself and my team that God was infinitely more concerned with who we were becoming as His children than our victories on the court.

On the (mission) field

Even as involvement in sports can inform the personal faith lives of sports enthusiasts, it can also provide opportunities for them to use their talents and interests as a direct means of spreading the Gospel. One way to do this is by participating in or supporting organizations, such as Athletes in Action and Push the Rock, that special-

ize in sending athletic teams overseas to serve with churches and missionaries in their local communities. In this context, Christian athletes bring a skill set that allows churches to reach people they would have no access to otherwise. On trips to largely atheistic Siberia and to the religious war zones in Israel and Palestine, I have witnessed firsthand the openness of our fellow athletes’ hearts to the message of the love of Christ, simply because they respected our team first as volleyball players.

Once we have committed to keeping athletic involvements in their proper place, we can appreciate the many ways sport can enrich our faith and lives.

In a similar way, Christians involved in team sports have a unique “mission field” open to them at a more immediate level. On a team, people from diverse backgrounds come together and commit to shared goals. These relationships allow a Christian athlete to consistently display the image of Christ to the members of their team through their humility and the respect and consideration they show for teammates, coaches, officials, and athletic opponents.

Even on a team composed solely of Christians, ministry plays a vital role. This small community of people can serve as a microcosm of the body of

Christ. Each team member has a singular role and contributes to the goals of the team in a specific way. Because of the sheer amount of time spent together and the periods of stress endured as a unit, it is also an ideal environment for learning how to serve and love others. In this way, team members encourage and minister to each other.

An instrument of worship

As active participants in God’s redemptive work in the world, Christians are called to engage the North American culture of athletics. This doesn’t mean that we accept our society’s elevation of sports to a religion. On the contrary, we must advocate that athletics, rather than a subject worthy of worship in itself, is actually an instrument of worship to our God.

Sports provide another means of modeling devotion to our faith in the midst of a society that so quickly settles for substitutes, athletic or otherwise. They enable us not only to glorify God, but to learn more about Him and share His good news with others. Instead of distracting us and others from our spiritual lives, sports can be utilized to enrich them. Given today’s atmosphere of sports fanaticism, this kind of change in perspective will likely require sacrifice, practice, and perseverance. But, as the Apostle Paul and those involved in sports can attest, it is precisely this type of perseverance that builds character and leads to enduring hope on and off the field.



Ruth Rosentrater, of Nappanee (Ind.) BIC, coaches volleyball at Gordon College (Wenham, Mass.). In addition to sports, she enjoys reading, good conversation, and going to the beach.

TO THE POINT

How can we make sense of times when God seems unreliable from a human perspective?

Tracie M. Hunter
WESTERN HILLS BIC
Cincinnati, Ohio

As Christians, one of our greatest challenges is to trust God when it seems He is not meeting our needs. In these moments, we need to remember that we don't measure God's character or abilities by our perceptions as humans, but on spiritual evidence. By recalling the difficult times that we've overcome with prayer and faith in the past, we can stand in awe of a God who transcends our natural comprehension. If we are honest, we must admit that we will never fully understand the brokenness of this world—the poverty, death, or mass destruction. But we can teach each other to pray. We can share our testimonies, testaments of divine intervention. These stories of the Lord's faithfulness to us and to our spiritual ancestors in the past serve as our proof that God is real and that God is good.

Darrell Smucker
GREEN GROVE BIC
Spring Mills, Pa.

It's an issue of fundamental belief in God's word. Is God truthful? Is God trustworthy? Understanding is not the issue; believing is. Job 13:15 says, "Even if He slays me, I will hope in Him."

Dan Longmore
MARSH CREEK BIC
OF HOWARD (Pa.)

I would like to suggest three things. First, we must stop pretending that we can always make sense of things. The truth is, we will never make total sense of all that the Lord does and allows in our lives. As the prophet Isaiah says in 55:8, God's methods and manners need not measure up to our standard of sense. Second, we should share our struggles with each other. Third, we must learn to walk by faith, not by sight—for hope, truth, and love will endure through times when life does not make sense and even when the Lord seems to have let us down.

Larry Olson
LIGHT OF CHRIST FELLOWSHIP
Des Moines, Iowa

When Jesus walked with us here on earth, He could have sent the world spinning around Andromeda. He could have suspended all pain, sickness, and death. This would, of course, have forced many to believe in Him. But that's not the kind of relationship God desires with His fallen image-bearers. He was tired. He wept. He got exasperated. God did not spare Himself from the heartache and suffering of humanity. Likewise, we don't get a free pass when we accept Christ's salvation, but we are promised peace and joy. There is also the hope of another coming reality, one that will be both perfect and perfectly reliable.

→ **What about you?** Share your thoughts and read others' at **IN PART ONLINE** at **INPART.ORG**.

PARTING WORDS

RESTORATION

Mending the wounds of a broken family relationship

by PERRY ENGLE

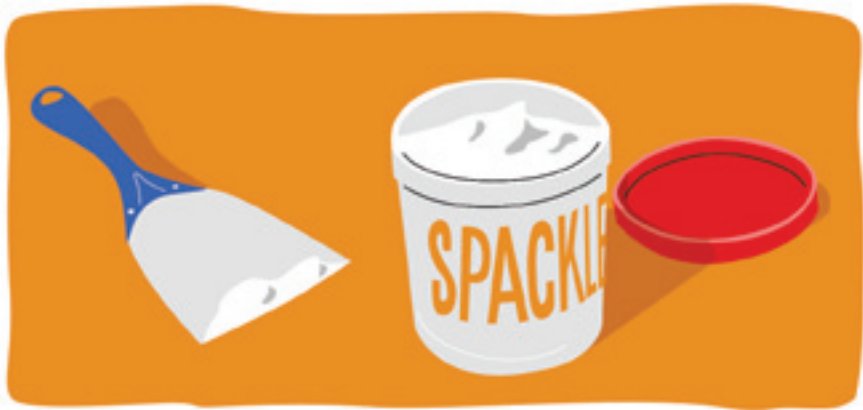
Repairing the plaster walls of an old house is an ongoing chore, but this was no ordinary crack. Actually, it could better be described as a cut, or a gash, or even a wound, but it was time to fix it nonetheless.

I'm sure nobody else had ever noticed it, yet I looked at it all the time. It was about the size of the tip of my finger, but it may as well have been as big as a fist. It was there on the wall, just to the left of where I sit at the dinner table, and I had left it unrepaired for years.

I have replayed the scene dozens of times in my mind, in slow motion (which is how I always see it): My daughter in a rage, screaming at us, her parents—screaming at the world and the injustice of it all. I don't remember if she said she hated us, but she probably did, because that was what she said when she was angry.

And then, without warning, as an extension of her fury, she flung a CD case—the square kind made of rigid plastic—letting it fly like some kind of weapon.

As I play that moment again in my mind, I still don't know how it missed hitting her mother in the eye. It couldn't have been by more than an inch or two. The next instant, it exploded on the wall just beyond my left arm, sending shrapnel across the floor and leaving an indelible mark, one that I have either been unable or unwilling to repair.



This was no ordinary crack—it could better be described as a gash, or even a wound, but it was time to fix it nonetheless.

Spackle is a miraculous, forgiving substance, a white paste used to patch cracks and fissures in the plaster of old houses. I press some into the gouge on the dining room wall. Once dried, it will harden into the consistency of the plaster and can be sanded down, distinguishable only by the difference in color between the snow-white repair and the color of the rest of the wall.

As I run my hand over the spot where the crack used to be, I am amazed at how smooth it is, like the skin of a newborn baby. Soon, I am painting, briskly rolling out a silky layer of Home Depot's best interior

flat enamel. I forget to look, and before I know it, the spot in the wall is gone.

It wasn't long ago that our daughter sent us an email a couple of months into her first semester of college. My eyes still blur at the words: "You guys have done an awesome job. ...It's so hard to comprehend things when you're young. ...I'm just glad that I am able to learn from my mistakes. ...I love you!"

This morning, I looked at our freshly painted dining room through grateful eyes. I couldn't help but be reminded that as good as I have become at patching, sanding, and painting the walls of my old house, it's not even a drop in the bucket compared to what God can do to restore our broken lives.



Perry Engle spent his Christmas vacation repairing and repainting the living and dining rooms of his house. He and his wife, Marta, and two daughters live in Ontario, Calif. Their oldest daughter, Madeleine, is a social work major at Messiah College in Grantham, Pa.



Help for **HAITI**

Support Haiti in its recovery from the January earthquakes by giving to the BIC World Hunger Fund. Contributions will support the work of Brethren in Christ serving in the devastated country, as well as Mennonite Central Committee.

More on the BIC World Hunger Fund and how you can help Haiti at BIC-CHURCH.ORG.

Equipping for Ministry Impact Seminar 2010

WOMEN AS PASTORS

The Brethren in Christ Perspective

The Brethren in Christ Church has affirmed the licensing and ordination of women since 1984; however, some congregations remain reluctant to fully accept women as ordained pastors. This seminar will examine the theological foundation of the BIC position and afford the opportunity for lively dialogue on this vital issue.

This day-long event is open to all BIC pastors and interested parishioners and will be offered in May and June at locations across North America. Visit bic-church.org/equipping/impact/women.asp for more information.

Watch for updates as this discussion unfolds!



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