

IN PART

THE MAGAZINE FOR THE BRETHREN IN CHRIST COMMUNITY IN THE U.S.

Fall 2014

FINDING UNITY IN DIVERSITY

How Christians can build our lives on God's truth—even when we disagree



IN YOUR WORDS

Many thanks for the Summer 2014 issue of *In Part*. I noted with appreciation your quotation of John Wesley (“Give me one hundred preachers . . .”) on page 9. It seems to me that despite our frequent references to our Wesleyan holiness heritage, in our publications and preaching we seldom hear quotations from past and present leaders in the holiness movement. So this quote was especially welcome, as well as being pertinent to Chelsea Dawn’s article, “Multiplicación.”

John Hawbaker
Harrisburg (Pa.) BIC

Thanks to Bishop Perry Engle for his really interesting column in the Summer 2014 issue of *In Part*. I sometimes embarrass my spouse by striking up a conversation with a total stranger. At times, the conversation involves giving the other person a bit of help in their time of need, a good way to let them know that we are Christians and we care.

Carol, from InPart.org

Creative contributor



Brian Menkis recently graduated from Messiah College where he studied sculpture. Though he often works on a small scale, his largest sculpture is 24 feet tall. Learn more about him and his artwork at BRIANMENKIS.COM.

THE VIEW FROM HERE

“Just read the Bible and do what it says.” That’s good advice in theory, but hard to put into practice. As a young believer, I struggled with the logical conclusions of such an approach. Should I literally cut off my hand if it causes me to sin (Matt. 18:9)? Should I really tell women they’re “not permitted to speak” during worship (1 Cor. 13:34)?

I suspect most of you reading this issue of *In Part* would tell me no. Instead, you might suggest that these scriptural passages point to enduring *principles*—like avoiding temptation and not creating disturbances within the Church—by which believers should live their lives.

Of course, rejecting literalism doesn’t solve all our problems. Even when we embrace the Bible’s guiding principles, we will inevitably encounter questions and tensions. Sincere believers will disagree on what the Bible means—and on how we should put its words into practice.

As Brethren in Christ, we believe that God is calling us to “build our lives on the Bible’s truth.” But as the articles in this issue of *In Part* illustrate, that’s not always an easy call to fulfill. What do we do when faithful Christ-followers differ on the correct application of God’s word? What are the strategies and techniques we might bring to Scripture in order to discern the wisdom and guidance we need for our lives? More to the point, what are the biblical virtues upon which we BIC have sought to build our lives in the past—and how might they continue to shape us in the future?

Even as we seek to answer these challenging questions, we rest in the assurance that God, through the presence of the Holy Spirit, guides us in the process—and remains faithful to us throughout the journey.

Devin C. Manzullo-Thomas,
guest editor

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THE MAGAZINE FOR THE BRETHREN IN CHRIST
COMMUNITY IN THE U.S.

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 THE U.S.**

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IN MOTION

Ever wondered . . .
what's application?

ap·pli·ca·tion

| apli'kāSHən |

NOUN:

the act of putting an idea or concept into operation

USED IN A SENTENCE:

When we Brethren in Christ say we want to build our lives on the Bible, we're talking about application—our desire to put God's word into action every day.

FOCUS

"Greet one another with a holy kiss"



A scriptural salutation

For Brethren in Christ of an earlier era, the "holy kiss" was an expression of their desire to apply Scripture faithfully. While the symbolic practice may seem strange in North American churches today, previous generations took Paul's exhortation literally—"Greet one another with a holy kiss" (Romans 16:16)—and sought to be fully obedient, while also understanding the biblical principles of Christian love and fellowship underlying the act. In this 1950 photo, two men from the Robinson Ridge (Ky.) congregation observe the gesture at a love feast celebration.

DOES THE BIBLE TELL ME SO?

It seems obvious: the first step in applying God's word is to actually read the Bible! But according to recent studies, Bible reading is a rarity in America. And even when we read Scripture, we often don't know what to do with it.



56% of Americans are "pro-Bible."*

*People who believe the Bible is the actual or inspired word of God with no errors.



Bible ownership is strong . . .

88% of American households own a Bible.



. . . but Bible readership is weak . . .

37% of Americans read it once or more a week.



. . . and application is weakest.

Only 57% of those who read weekly give a lot of thought to how the Bible might apply to their life.

SOURCE: Barna Group, "State of the Bible: 6 Trends for 2014," BARNA.ORG/BARNA-UPDATE/CULTURE/664-THE-STATE-OF-THE-BIBLE-6-TRENDS-FOR-2014#.VB2FXYPDVPO

TO OUR CORE

EXPLORING THE CENTRAL VALUES OF THE BIC CHURCH

GUARDRAILS, CENTERLINES, AND TRAVEL LANES

Limits and leeway on the highway of biblical interpretation

by ROB PATTERSON

Anyone who has driven on a U.S. highway knows that the limits of the road are determined by two features: guardrails and centerlines. Violate either feature and you're flirting with danger. Both boundaries are restrictive, but they also permit a measure of safety and freedom within the traffic lanes.

This highway imagery can be helpful in explaining our Brethren in Christ (BIC) approach to the Bible. In traversing Scripture's highway, our centerline is Christ. As BIC, we interpret the whole text—both the Old and New Testaments—through the life and teachings of Jesus. By focusing on Him, we hope to avoid drifting into potentially dangerous lanes of interpretation or application.

The guardrails are formed by our process of interpreting and applying the Bible in community. Together, we seek to discern what the Holy Spirit is saying as to how we should live out God's word day to day. By approaching Scripture as a community, not just as individuals, we avoid the reckless driving that could cause us to depart the road of truth.

Though the words and life of Christ comprise the centerline of the BIC path, and though community discernment determines the guardrails, questions remain. For instance, how wide is the road we're traversing and how much freedom does the driver have in his or her traffic lane? In other words, how far can someone deviate

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



Photo: iStockphoto.com/panic_attack

in their application of God's word and still be BIC?

Not too long ago, we BIC applied Scripture in very black-and-white ways. For instance, we read Romans 12:2—"Do not conform to the pattern of this world"—and interpreted it as requiring a particular kind of "plain dress." Back then, the price for deviation in application was expulsion from the body.

Today, we have exchanged many of these prescriptive practices for guiding principles. We seek to emulate Jesus and avoid conformity to the surrounding culture in word, deed, and attitude, without laying down a lot of rules and regulations. Our desire is to center on Jesus and remain bounded by the wisdom of the community. But within our particular contexts, we retain some

freedom to determine what cultural conformity looks like—and to figure out the best way to avoid it as the Holy Spirit guides us in the "renewing of our minds" (Romans 12:2).

In navigating the biblical highway, there is no doubt that we value the centerline and our guardrails. Admittedly, though, our community sometimes disagrees on the proper width of our travel lanes. Some think our lanes are too narrow; others, too wide. Still, we remain confident in our principles and values as we welcome the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit to lead the way.



Rob Patterson spends a lot of time traversing the highways of western Pennsylvania, Maryland, and West Virginia as bishop of the Allegheny Regional Conference. When not on the road, he enjoys spending time with his wife, Daryl.



Finding **UNITY** *in* **DIVERSITY**

**How Christians can
build our lives on
God's truth—even
when we disagree**

by Fred Miller



Imagine you are a first-century Jewish follower of Jesus living somewhere in Asia. You just led your Gentile neighbor to a loving faith in Jesus. Everyone in your community is filled with joy! Then, the next week, your neighbor gives birth to a baby boy—and things get complicated.

You see, God made it clear in Genesis 17:10 that every Jewish male child should be circumcised as a sign of God's covenant. If a child didn't get circumcised, he was cut off from the community. For 2,000 years, your people have faithfully followed this command. It has been a core belief and practice. But now Jesus the Messiah has come, and as a result the

Church must figure out what Old Testament commands still apply—and what to do about your neighbor's son!

One day, Church leaders call a meeting to resolve this issue. Must Gentiles who trust in Jesus be circumcised? The council debates this question for many hours and eventually concludes no, because “we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God” (Acts 15:19).

The challenge of “doing theology”

Not everyone agreed with the decision of this council. Not everyone was comfortable with changing the practice of a 2,000-year-old scriptural command. And some probably continued to circumcise their children. Yet the council's decision about non-circumcision eventually became a universal belief of the Early Church, and all were expected to affirm it.

This story illustrates a key task of the Church: to reflect on the Word to determine how God is speaking (interpretation), and to set standards for how we live out that truth today (application).

A further necessary task is to consider levels of importance to the biblical truths revealed in Scripture. The New Testament church also recognized this reality. In Romans 18, Paul refers to “disputable matters,” concluding that “everyone needs to be fully convinced in their own mind” and that those of different minds ought to “accept one another.” Today, we understand these passages to mean that Christians are free to conclude different things (on certain matters) if our hearts are devoted to God. In other words, some biblical truths must translate into “core” beliefs and practices—and others should not.

As Christians, we face the primary challenge of knowing how to hold fast to core beliefs while allowing freedom on non-core matters. Too often we hold *all* beliefs as core beliefs, and we do so in dogmatic ways that build walls between earnest, faithful followers of Jesus. When we act in such ways, we allow little room to question, to explore, and even to hold differing views with grace.

Denominations face this challenge on multiple fronts. How do we “do theology” corporately? In other words, how do we both defend our beliefs and yet free present and future generations to challenge (on biblical grounds) some of those beliefs? And how do we do this without seeing the challenging individuals as disloyal? After all, every denomination—including the BIC—has changed some beliefs over the years. This process of discernment and change must be understood as a healthy part of the Church's process, just as the Early Church debated—and ultimately changed—their beliefs as well.

Dogma, doctrine, and differences

So how do we distinguish between core beliefs and practices and non-core matters? Theologians have suggested various approaches. One option is to sort beliefs and practices into three categories: dogma, doctrine, and differences.

“Dogma” refers to those beliefs and practices that are determined to be essential to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and are embraced by all Christians (BIC and others). These core beliefs and practices unite us because they are rooted in the life, teaching, person, and work of Jesus. Examples of dogma would be believing that Jesus is the Son of God, that salvation comes by grace through faith in Jesus, and that God calls us to follow Jesus in repentance and obedience through an inner transformation by the Holy Spirit.

“Doctrine” refers to those beliefs and practices that are considered important but not essential to our faith. These are usually taught by the leaders of a church or denomination as important distinctives that set the church or denomination apart from others. Doctrines could change over time, but would likely change very slowly. There may be degrees of freedom for individuals in a local church to question or disagree about these matters, but the beliefs held by leaders and the major-

ity should be respected as such. Examples for the BIC would include a commitment to pursue peace with all people including enemies and an affirmation of women in church leadership roles.

“Differences” refer to those beliefs and practices about which we agree to accept diversity. Here we hold differences loosely, and we actively encourage discussion and debate on such matters. Differences do not define us, nor are they officially taught, even though some beliefs and practices in this category may represent a majority viewpoint. Some people may even hold these views quite strongly and believe opposing views are unbiblical; yet we agree we can still “be BIC” and disagree. Examples of differences might include whether Christians should drink alcohol, how exactly God created the Earth, and what the Bible teaches about the last days.

In reality, the BIC have never formally (to my knowledge) employed these three categories, although we have probably done so informally. Because of this, what some might define as doctrine, others might see as differences, and vice versa. For these reasons, we need to exercise both clarity and charity as we seek to build our lives on God’s truth.

This approach argues for a fairly large BIC “tent”—a tent that holds many people with a multiplicity of views. The approach also gives pastors and leaders some freedom in their individual understanding of Scripture and the Spirit’s voice. But this individual freedom must, of course, be balanced by our commitment to community. We must continue to interpret the Bible together, requiring everyone to be accountable informally to the wisdom of the gathered church. In accepting this approach, we allow members of our community to hold minority views, but at the same time we require that minority to listen to and honor the conclusion of the majority. And, of course, the majority must remain open to the prophetic voice of the minority as well. We must allow for both unity and diversity in proper measure.

Making unity and diversity work

In practice, making unity and diversity work is often a process—a somewhat cumbersome and messy process. It involves discussions and debates, fears and concerns. It requires open Bibles that

As Christians, we face the primary challenge of **knowing** how to **hold fast** to core beliefs while **allowing freedom** on non-core matters.

invite myriad interpretative results. And it necessitates grace and patience. At one time we may view a particular issue as doctrine and require unity; some time later, that same issue may be put into the differences category, and we will welcome diversity on the matter.

Our BIC history is helpful in this regard. For many years, we saw plain clothing as a doctrine issue. Leaders and members were expected to dress in a distinctive way that set them apart from their non-Christian neighbors. Today, dress has moved from the domain of doctrine to differences. Though God’s word does not change, majority discernments about God’s word can and do change over time.

The present reality is also instructive. Our BIC membership covenant requires members to “consent to instruction in Bible doctrine,” though not necessarily to agree with BIC understandings. Individuals must listen and evaluate for themselves but still respect and honor the denominational position if they personally disagree. In other words, the category of doctrine is already at play in our church today.

To me, making unity and diversity work means acknowledging first and foremost our focus on Jesus as revealed to us in the Scriptures. We look to His teaching, His life example, His cross, His resurrection and ascension, His commissioning of his apostles, and His sending of the Spirit. Our starting place is with him. We seek to gain insights about what Jesus considers dogma, doctrine, and difference. This doesn’t resolve all our disagreements, but we can at least follow the model of the Early Church and freely debate them—with humility, grace, and patience.

Living out unity and diversity

Speaking personally, I value a family of believers that allows me to ask biblical questions without being labeled disloyal. I value the historical voices of the past as well as today’s new voices. I value the diversity of BIC voices and I value the diversity of non-BIC voices. I value the stability of our 10 Core Values and I value debates over non-core values.

I feel this way, in part, because of my own experiences. When I began my current pastorate, our church had a policy that women could

not serve on the church board unless qualified men were unavailable. Yet our denomination affirmed full participation of women in the life of the local congregation. My personal view aligned with the denomination. Ultimately, after many years of teaching and dialogue, we voted to change our policy and conform to denominational policy. And I’m very grateful that we weren’t “kicked out” during our years of nonconformity!

My point is that the BIC was patient with us and allowed us freedom on a matter that was clearly against BIC practice. This was, in my mind, a doctrine issue (not dogma) that took some people many years to be persuaded by BIC teaching. Some remain unconvinced—and that’s okay. Yet we still welcome them into fellowship and encourage them to consider the wisdom of the gathered church.

Embracing a messy process

Truth be told, most of us would like to resist this messy process. But is there really any other way that honors God? Surely we cannot freeze all our beliefs in time and say we have achieved perfection. Surely we cannot muzzle all dissenting voices and assume the majority is always best or right. Yet just as surely we cannot follow every minority voice, investigate every alternative view, or assume that a few lone voices are the primary way God speaks to us.

In other words, we must embrace both unity and diversity. We must value the past without idolizing it, and we must value the future without accepting every new idea that develops. It’s not the easiest path to take, but it’s a path that seeks to honor Scripture, listen to the Spirit, dialog as a community, and acknowledge—as this magazine’s title reminds us—that we “know in part” (1 Cor. 13:12).

Ultimately, we can rest in the confidence that God is pleased with our hearts. We may not get all our interpretations and applications right here on Earth, but we can offer God a pure heart, a humble spirit, and a loving attitude toward one another along the way. And that, we *know*, will please him.



Fred Miller is senior pastor of Cumberland Valley BIC (Dillsburg, Pa.). He encourages believers to live authentic lives centered on God in his book *You & God: An Invitation to Radical Living* (Evangel, 2006).

ABOUT THE SCULPTURE

This sculpture offers an artistic representation of Fred Miller’s three categories of belief—dogma, doctrine, and differences—by utilizing different materials symbolic of each category.



The twigs: Organic and loosely woven, the uppermost part of the sculpture symbolizes “differences.” Just as the twigs stretch and point in multiple directions though tied together with knotted twine, so too do non-core ideas about Christian faith move freely in multiple directions, as honest Christians explore different ways of thinking about the same topic.

The wood: A sturdy wooden framework forms the center section of the sculpture, symbolizing “doctrine.” Though somewhat malleable, the wood nevertheless gives structure to the sculpture, extending from the firm foundation. In much the same way, doctrine—though it could change over time—grows out of our dogma and provides stability and unity within a given church or denomination.

The concrete: Cast concrete forms the solid base of the sculpture, symbolizing “dogma.” Just as the wood and twigs rest upon the concrete, so too do our differences and our doctrines rest upon the foundational dogma of our Christian faith. Without this base, everything else would collapse.

HERITAGE

STAYING FAITHFUL TO GOD'S
WORD, THEN AND NOW

&

HORIZONS

As members of the BIC family, we share a remarkable heritage. Though much has changed in our 200-plus-year history, we continue to **cherish** many aspects of our **past**—and **guard** them as we move into the **future**. In the following article, individuals from our church community reflect on the aspects of our past we ought to preserve for the future—as well as the exciting new directions in which the BIC are moving today. Together, their words reveal how we BIC have sought to build our lives on God's truth, first in the **past** and now in the present and **future**.



GRACE HOLLAND

DILLSBURG (PA.) BIC

One of the most important aspects of our Brethren in Christ heritage is our commitment to the Bible. The early BIC were passionate about wanting to live by the Bible, which they believed to be the word of God. My family carried that passion, and in order to discover what God had revealed about Himself, we studied it daily, read it with the family each morning before the mad rush to catch the school bus, and focused on it several times a week: each Sunday morning during the worship service, each Thursday evening during the prayer meeting, and every other Sunday evening during the young people's meeting.

I believe that we need to guard this aspect of our heritage because God's revelation of Himself in the Bible gives reason to every other aspect of our faith. If we fail to keep Scripture as the foundation, the rest will be a house of cards that comes tumbling down. I am so happy that as a denomination we periodically examine our approach to the Bible, reinforce our conviction regarding its truth and authority, and try to respond to the changing attitudes to it that swirl around us. With God's help, we will continue to treasure His word.

JANE KRAMER



CROSSROADS BIC (SALINA, KANS.)

My husband Ron and I became members in a BIC congregation only four years ago, so our history with this church family is pretty short. Still, in our brief journey with the BIC, I've come to realize that much of what I grew up hearing in the church of my youth matches what my pastor preaches and teaches today. In other words, I think the "heritage" that I grew up with overlaps a lot with the BIC heritage! Let me explain, using two examples.

First is the concept of holiness. As a youth, I was blessed to have a pastor who came out of the Wesleyan tradition and taught us how to live a holy life. He encouraged us to strive for Christian perfection, not by our own works but through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Imagine my excitement when I learned that the BIC have also stressed holy living throughout their history! I believe we need to cherish this aspect of our heritage. We must continue to teach holiness in our congregations.

A second concept is living simply. This concept also arises from the BIC heritage, and it has made an impact in my life. Simple living has three outcomes that I think are important for every Christian to embrace. One is compassion. Living simply allows us to put others before ourselves. When you are less concerned about what you can accumulate, you are more likely to think about the needs of those around you and how you can meet those needs in concrete, tangible ways. Another outcome is contentment. Joy is a natural outcome of a life lived for Christ. When He fills our hearts, we have no need of other things. Those things are no longer important. Third and finally, living simply will lead to a correct concept of stewardship. Living simply helps us to realize that everything we have belongs to God, and we are only here as temporary caretakers of what He has given us. When we acknowledge our responsibility as stewards and caretakers, God can create in us truly generous hearts. For these reasons and others, I think we need to emphasize our heritage of simple living.

I thank God for my journey of faith. And I thank God also for leading me to the BIC and its heritage. May God grant us the wisdom to guard our heritage now and in the future.



RAY KIPE

FIVE FORKS BIC (WAYNESBORO, PA.)

I come from a family of missionaries, and for many years my wife and I served on the mission field as well. So during the United States' recent wars, some of my best friends, relatives, and neighbors were nationals of the countries against which our military was fighting. Our government told us these nationals were our enemies. I couldn't disagree more.

Our nation's present perpetual state of war has given me a new appreciation for and conviction of the correctness of our heritage as a people of peace. Throughout our history, we BIC have followed the example of Jesus in giving up our rights rather than fighting for them. We have loved our enemies, served our enemies, and prayed for our enemies—rather than seeking revenge against them or trying to control them. We have sought to embody Jesus' call to bless those who curse us (Luke 6:28).

Yet I believe that for this stance to have any legitimacy at all on a global scale, it must be practiced first in our own homes, in our congregations, and in our communities. This kind of practical peacemaking cannot happen unless we ask for the Holy Spirit's empowerment each and every day. Lord, help us to guard our hearts as we move forward!

HERITAGE



ADAM FORRY

SPEEDWELL HEIGHTS BIC (LITITZ, PA.)

I am a so-called "cradle BIC." I was born and raised in the Mount Pleasant BIC (Mt. Joy, Pa.) congregation, where generations of my dad's family had belonged and served. I graduated from Messiah College, a BIC school in Mechanicsburg, Pa. And since college I've been on the pastoral staff in three BIC churches. So just as Paul described himself as a "Hebrew of Hebrews" (Phil. 3:5), you might call me a "BIC of BICs." In so many ways, the BIC Church has been my home.

When I think about the future of our church, I'm excited that as a cradle BIC I represent a shrinking minority. I'm excited that our faith family isn't limited to people who were born into this family. Over the years, thousands of people have decided to follow Christ and have chosen to do so in the BIC community, and we have welcomed them with open arms.

Moreover, I'm excited that a church started by German-speaking farmers in central Pennsylvania has crossed potential barriers of all kinds—barriers of language, culture, ethnicity, and geography—to become a diverse, global fellowship. All along, our desire has been to answer Jesus' call to make disciples of all nations. And as a result, 80 percent of our people now live outside North America.

I'm also excited that through movements like the International Brethren in Christ Association the voices of our diverse, global fellowship can be heard in our nation and can help shape our future as a church.

In short, I'm excited that our future will look both the same as and yet different than the past. It is a hopeful and exciting time to be Brethren in Christ! And there is no other community of faith I'd rather call home.



ALAN CLAASSEN THRUSH

UPLAND (CALIF.) BIC

When I think about the future of the BIC Church, I'm both excited and a little bit terrified. I don't know what that future holds, but I suspect that the polarization in our culture will continue to infect Christian communities; that tensions will exist between cultural and language groups; and that communities will experience violence and mistrust.

So when I look ahead, I feel a knot forming in the pit of my stomach. Yet I also feel excitement, because it is precisely into the middle of situations like this that Jesus calls us as the BIC Church.

As BIC, we are well positioned to model a different way of relationship in this age of polarization and conflict because our theological heritage connects us with various Christian communities. For example, a number of Pacific Regional Conference pastors gather each year at the Holiness Church Consortium, where we dialogue with leaders from the Assemblies of God, the Free Methodists, and others in the Holiness tradition. We also participate in the regional relief sale of Mennonite Central Committee, a Mennonite and BIC service organization. This opportunity enables us to work together with other Anabaptist congregations. Not many denominations have such a wide range of relationships. God calls us, as BIC, to take the lead in being peacemakers in the Church and in the broader culture.

We BIC are also shaped by 10 Core Values—values rooted in Scripture, centered on Jesus, and fanned into flame in our lives by the Holy Spirit. These values, when lived in word and deed, shape us into disciples who can confront the challenges of our world with love, grace, and hope. God wants to use us to bring compassion, reconciliation, and transformation into individuals, families, and communities.

I can't predict what our future will be like. But I can say that the world and the Church need our BIC voices and our model of lived discipleship. May God give us courage and grace to be the BIC Church God has prepared us to be.



HEATHER BRICKNER

CARLISLE (PA.) BIC

What excites me about the future of the BIC Church is our desire to follow Jesus together, as a total community. The future of the BIC isn't just about our great leaders, who guide us with integrity and in whom we can place our trust. The future isn't just about the pastors who shepherd our churches. Rather, the future of the BIC Church is about every single person who attends our churches—from the wee little ones to those in their 90s. Together, we want to be known not just as "Brethren in Christ." Instead, our identity is focused on being followers of Jesus Christ first and foremost. So long as we all seek to be followers of Jesus Christ above all, our future is great, because our focus is on where it needs to be. Our focus is on Jesus, and that's where our future lies.

TO THE POINT

BARRIERS to TRUTH

Members of our BIC community weigh in on the question: **In today's world, what is the biggest challenge to building our lives on God's truth?**

I have a friend who practices a flat

and almost entirely literal reading of Scripture. There is little room for ambiguity or mystery in her reading and she is constantly forced to choose between two horrible options: faith or science, faith or friendships, faith or education. Suggesting that the book of Jonah was perhaps a didactic story is equivalent to denying the resurrection of Jesus.

I have a friend who practices an indifferent and almost entirely allegorical reading of Scripture. There is little room for inspiration or authority in his reading and he is never forced to choose between his faith and anything else. Denying the resurrection of Jesus is no more troublesome to him than suggesting that the book of Jonah was perhaps a didactic story.

Maybe the greatest challenge to building our lives on God's truth will be avoiding these two approaches to Scripture.

Josh Crain

Carlisle (Pa.) BIC

When our church set out to build

a new meeting space, we started with pages of blueprints. But we didn't stop there. We hired electricians, plumbers, carpenters, and a project leader to translate those blueprints into an actual, physical building. Those drawings could have sat on a table for ages without accomplishing a single thing. The power of the blueprint became apparent only when the carpenter swung his hammer.

Likewise, though Scripture can rest on a table, it is meant for building lives. For instance, God's word contains admonitions to care for orphans. Powerful! Yet those words, alone, never feed an orphan. When our family chose to become foster parents, Scripture's words came to life. They leapt off the paper, and their power became apparent as our lives and the souls of those children were changed forever.

Scripture is not merely a blueprint for our lives. It is encouragement to swing a hammer.

Jeff Piepho

Revolution BIC (Salina, Kans.)

One of the greatest challenges

facing the Church today is loss of identity. As Paul tells his readers in Romans 12:2, when Christians conform to the ways of the world, they become desensitized to the materialistic, hedonistic culture around them and lose their distinctive identity. When we do what the world does, when we watch what the world watches, and when we speak how the world speaks, we conform. And in our conformity, we fail to challenge the false doctrines and secular currents that are taking over our congregations. Losing our true identity to worldly conformity is one of the greatest challenges to building our lives on God's truth.

Aner Morejón

Southeast Regional Conference

PARTING WORDS

THE GRAND STORY

My exhilarating trek through the Bible in 90 days

by PERRY ENGLE

I knew it would be an arduous task: reading the entire Bible cover to cover in 90 days. It's a big book, and I'm lazy by nature, but I needed a jump-start in my tired and oh-so-predictable relationship with God. To get through the 66 books, 1,189 chapters, and 30,442 verses, I had to average 12 pages a day for three months. Admittedly, I began the journey with a mixture of anticipation and dread.

I've always enjoyed Genesis and Exodus: the stories are familiar and the characters engaging. But Leviticus and Numbers are grueling, with their focus on the sacrificial system and the seemingly endless tallying of the clans of Israel. The narratives of the kings of Israel and Judah left me worn out, wondering how God could persevere in his relationship with such an idolatrous band of evildoers. In contrast, I found solace in the wisdom and introspection of Solomon, especially Ecclesiastes, which is easily one of my favorite biblical books.

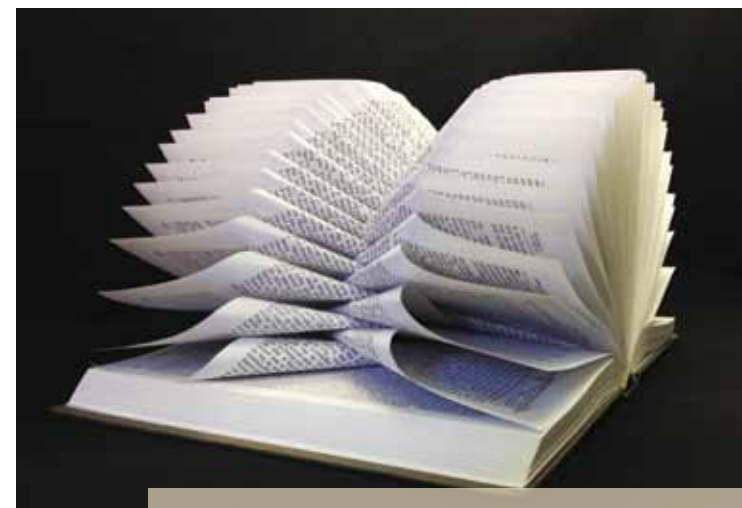
It was a long slog through the Major Prophets—Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel—166 exhausting chapters in all. By the time I reached Ezekiel's dizzying vision of the "wheel intersecting a wheel" (1:16), I needed a break. I started to lag in my reading but caught my second wind with Daniel and his compelling, countercultural sojourn in Babylonian exile.

Even as the Old Testament closes under threat of a curse—the prophet

Malachi's warning that God will "turn the hearts of the fathers to their children" and "strike the land with a curse" (4:5–6)—the New Testament dawns with a sunburst of exuberant hope. Having just traversed 850 pages and 2,000-plus years of Jewish history, the genealogy of Jesus that introduces Matthew's gospel made more sense to me than ever before. Through this lineage the writer seemed to exclaim, "Here He is! The fulfillment of our entire history, the redeemer of our sins!"

I flew through the remaining Gospels, found myself captivated by Acts, and was thoroughly warmed by the Epistles. By the time I reached Revelation, it was as if I was running downhill with fireworks lighting up the night sky.

In Scripture's penultimate chapter, as Jesus announces, "I am making everything new!" (Rev. 21:5), I realized that not only had I finished reading the Bible in just over 12 weeks, but I had also rediscovered the heart of God and the depth of His love for the world in the expanse of His grand story. From beginning to end, my journey revealed a humanity that is eternally lost and universally broken. But more importantly, it provided me with a panoramic view of a God who never wearies in His unrelenting attempt to save us from our own worst enemy: ourselves.



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No other activity in recent memory has impacted my spiritual life more profoundly than reading through the Bible in 90 days. The experience was a reminder that in order for me to build my life on the truth of Scripture, I first need to lose myself in its transformative story.

Indeed, my journey from Genesis to Revelation taught me that Jesus is constantly in the process of making everything new—always has been and forever will be.



Perry Engle is bishop of the Midwest and Pacific Regional Conferences. He and his wife, Marta, and their family live in Ontario, Calif. Perry heartily recommends the Bible in 90 Days program to anyone who wants to grow in their faith.

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