

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD CANADA - ÉGLISE UNIVERSELLE DE DIEU, CANADA

NORTHERN LIGHT

SHARING OUR STORY

JANUARY - MARCH 2008

La doctrine de la Trinité

The Trinity...Just A Doctrine?

Paul-First Century Stress Fighter

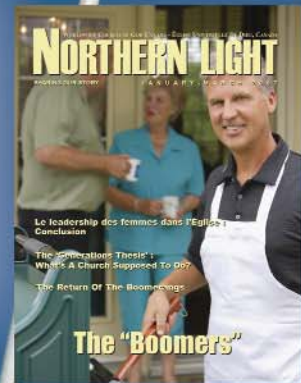
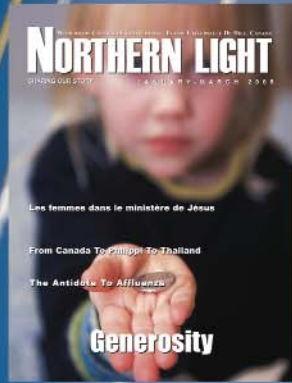
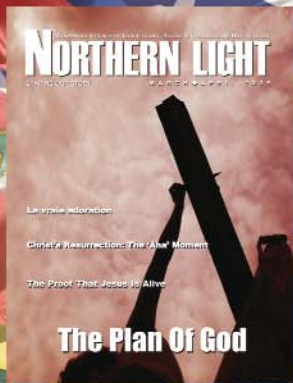
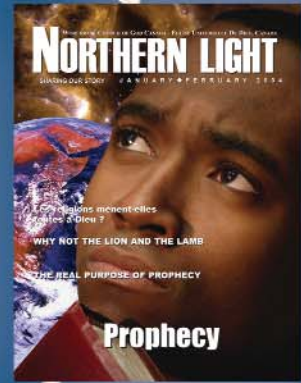
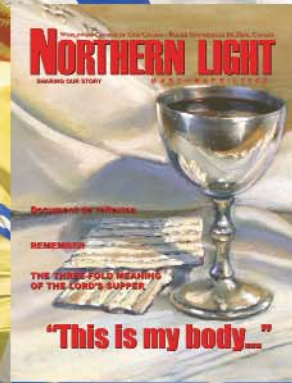
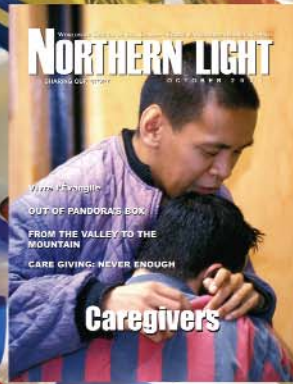
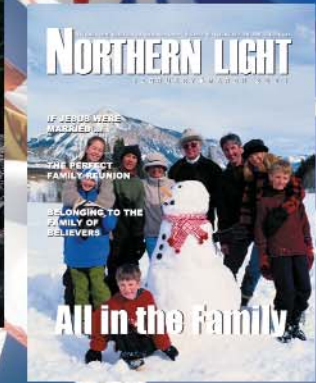
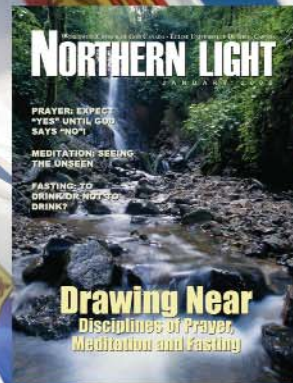
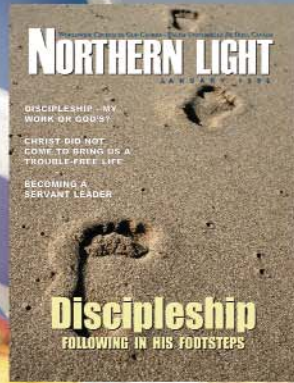
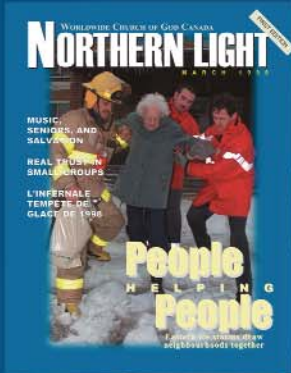
**Stress
And The Christian**

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD CANADA - ÉGLISE UNIVERSELLE DE DIEU, CANADA

NORTHERN LIGHT

SHARING OUR STORY
FOR 10 YEARS

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Stress And The Christian

A MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

We've come a long way! It's an expression that many of us hear from time to time, but it can be an expression which carries with it a story about a profound journey.

I recently used this expression when telling a ministry colleague about my experience giving the message at the North Battleford Remembrance Day community service. Having come from a pacifist background, it would have been unthinkable at one time that I would even attend a Remembrance Day service, let alone give the key-note message at one.

I'm sure many of you have had similar experiences looking back at your lives and present Christian walk. I know of so many stories of people who have seen major changes in their lives when they come to realize that God loves them and wants to see them walk away from their former lives.

In a sense, this issue of *Northern Light* has become another one of those instances where we can say that we, as a denomination, have "come a long way." It wasn't that long ago when our church publications would hardly discuss the idea that Christians can suffer from stress, let alone mental illness and its sometimes tragic ramifications (See: **A Fallen Soldier**, page 22), in such an open and frank manner.

The reality is that Christians are affected by our environment and the circumstances we find ourselves in. We do not live in some sort of magical, protective bubble. If that was the case our spiritual ancestors would have had an ideal life. Certainly, even a quick reading of the Scriptures will dispense such a notion.

However, these same spiritual ancestors knew where they could gain comfort and strength when facing difficulties and stress. When passing the mantle of leadership over the children of Israel to Joshua, Moses made the following statement:

"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you" (Deuteronomy 31:6).

As a person who has dealt with my own personal struggles with depression, physical illness, and times of family tragedy, those words are not merely nice platitudes. Instead, they have become the stuff of personal theology, what I call the theology of "where the rubber meets the road."

We've also come "a long way" in another matter. This issue marks the 10th anniversary of this publication. When this magazine was conceived in a meeting 10 years ago, I could hardly imagine I'd be stuck at the keyboard this many years since. Thanks for your continued support and wonderful articles. We still have a story to share, after all these years!**NL**

Bill Hall

The Trinity...Just A Doctrine? 2

Ask ten average Christians in ten average churches to explain the doctrine of the Trinity, and you'll probably get ten different explanations.



La doctrine de la Trinité 6

Demandez à dix chrétiens moyens dans dix Églises moyennes d'expliquer la doctrine de la Trinité, et vous obtiendrez probablement dix explications différentes.

Paul-First Century Stress Fighter 16

"I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked"

Personal	2
Director's Desk	10
Women's Ministry	12
Focus On The Holy Spirit	13
The Journey	14
Theme Articles	15
Bible Study	24
Commentary	28
God's Grace	29
National News	30

FRONT COVER: Even followers of Jesus are not immune from the effects of stress.

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Northern Light magazine is the official magazine of the Worldwide Church of God, Canada. It exists to share the stories of our members and congregations on their Christian journey. Northern Light does this by featuring articles that encourage, nurture and inform.

Le magazine Northern Light est le magazine officiel de l'Église universelle de Dieu, au Canada. Il sert à raconter les histoires de nos membres et de nos assemblées tout le long de leur voyage chrétien, au moyen d'articles qui encouragent, nourrissent et informent.

By Mike Fezell

The Trinity...

Just A Doctrine?

Ask ten average Christians in ten average churches to explain the doctrine of the Trinity, and you'll probably get ten different explanations. Most Christians "accept" the Trinity as orthodox Christian doctrine. But they would be at a loss to explain why the doctrine matters, or how it affects their Christian lives.

As Catherine Mowry LaCugna explains in her introduction to *God For Us*, the Trinity is a doctrine that most people "consent to in theory but have little need for in the practice of Christian faith."¹

LaCugna continues, "On the one hand, the doctrine of the Trinity is supposed to be the center of faith. On the other hand, as Karl Rahner [one of the most influential theologians of the 20th century] once remarked, one could dispense with the doctrine of the Trinity as false and the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged."²

Does it make any difference?

And no wonder. The doctrine is hard to understand, and most discussions about it are...well...boring. For the average Christian, the kind of people who have families to feed, jobs to get to, and lives to live, what difference does an ancient doctrine make anyway? God is God, isn't he? Isn't that enough? If he happens to be Father, Son and Spirit instead of just Father, well, fine, but that doesn't really change anything from our end, does it?

Actually, it does matter. It matters a lot, in fact—which is exactly what you'd expect us to say since, after all, why else would we be writing an article about an ancient, boring doctrine?

First, let's dispense with going through all the biblical proof that the doctrine is correct. You can find that elsewhere, including on the Worldwide Church of God website. [Just visit www.wcg.org, click on "Search our site," and type in

"Trinity."] Instead, let's spend some time talking about why the doctrine of the Trinity matters, and especially, why it matters to you.

Let's start by taking a look at the common idea that God is a single, solitary being "out there" somewhere, looking down on Earth, watching us, judging us. Bette Midler put it to music in the chorus to her tune "From a Distance" with the lyrics, "And God is watching us, God is watching us, God is watching us from a distance."

This God comes in three main flavors: first, vanilla, the one who just kind of wound up the universe and then stretched out in the heavenly gazebo for a few-billion-year nap. (Who knows, maybe he wakes up once in a while and does something nice, kind of like the kind of God George Burns portrayed in the film *Oh God*.) Second, red hot cinnamon, the one who keeps careful tabs on everything everybody does, and since everybody blows it now and then, he gets madder and madder. His worshippers say he takes joy in watching people who offend him slowly roast but never quite get done. Third is apricot, the one who might or might not like you, depending on many things, none of which are all that clear to anybody. He's the one that Montreal Alouette fans pray to for touchdowns.

Sometimes this God comes in an alternate flavor, water balloon. You might think



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water balloon isn't a flavor, but it is. It's chewy, and the variety of colors is endless, but it always tastes watery. This God is more of an abstract principle than a supreme being, kind of a "spirit of everything" that you can try to get in touch with if you empty your head of all thoughts and sit still long enough without going to sleep. (I think that's where Burger King commercials come from.)

A God who wants to share

The God of the Bible is not like that. The God of the Bible is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These three divine Persons ³ share perfect love, joy, unity, peace, and fellowship. And the reason that's important to know is that when the Bible talks about us being "in Christ" it means that we get to take part in that divine kind of life. Just like Christ is the beloved of the Father, so we too, because we are "in him," are also the beloved of the Father.

That means that you are included in the household of God. It means you're not an outsider or a stranger. You're not even a respected guest. You're one of the kids, beloved of the Father, with free run of the house, the grounds, and the fridge.

The trouble is, you probably have a hard time believing that. You know you're an @#%&*, you know what you're really like deep down inside, so you think God doesn't like you. How could he, you figure. You don't even like yourself. So based on your assessment of your "goodness/badness" ratio, you determine that God is more than likely mad at you, and far more than likely mad at all those other @#%&* types you meet in traffic every day.

But the whole point of God letting us know through the Scriptures that he is Father, Son and Spirit, and not just "God out there somewhere," is so that we'd know he really does love us and we really are on the ins with him. And again, how do we know? Because Jesus, you know, "God with us," "God

in the flesh," the one the Father sent not to condemn the world but to save it (John 3:17), is the Father's Son, and that means that the Son of God is now one of us. And as one of us, but still God, only God in the flesh now, he dragged the whole ragged Coxe's Army (look it up on Wikipedia if you don't have a Funk and Wagnall's) of us home to the Father right through the front door.

No, we didn't deserve it and no, we didn't earn it. We didn't even ask for it. But he did it anyway, because that's the exact reason he made us in the first place—so he could share with us the life he has shared eternally with the Father and the Spirit. That's why he tells us he made us in his image (Genesis 1:26).

Showing us the Father

Salvation isn't about a change of location, floating off to some secret set of coordinates in the Delta Quadrant called heaven, as if that would solve all our problems. And it's not about a new super government patrolled by angelic cops who never miss an infraction of the divinely decimal penal code.

Salvation is about getting adopted into God's family and learning how to live in it. And the Trinity is at the heart of it: The Father (Let's get technical—the First

Person of the Godhead) loves us so much, in spite of our screw-ups, that he sent the Son (the Second Person of the Godhead) to do everything it took to bring us home (John 1:1, 14), and the Father and the Son sent the Spirit (the Third Person of the Godhead) to live in us and teach us how to live in God's family so we can enjoy it like we were created to do instead of being screw-ups forever.

In other words, the God of the Bible is not three separate Gods, where one, the temper challenged, unpredictable Father, is so furious at humans that he just has to kill somebody in order to calm down, so the sweet, loving Son, seeing Dad about to lose it, steps up and says, "Okay, if you've got to kill someone, then kill me, but spare these people." The doctrine of the Trinity is important precisely because it keeps us from seeing God in such a ridiculous way, and yet, that is how a whole lot of people do see God.

If you want to know what the Father is like, just look at Jesus, because Jesus is the perfect revelation of the Father. Jesus told Philip, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). He told the crowd, "I and the Father are one." We know how the Father feels about us because we know how Jesus feels about us.

"To summarize, God is not some isolated cosmic bean counter "out there" keeping tabs on us in preparation for Judgment Day, nor is he three Gods with very different ideas about how to deal with humanity. The God of the Bible is one God who is three divine Persons, in perfect unity and accord, who love each other in perfect love and dwell in indescribable joy, and who created us for the express purpose of sharing that life with them through our adoption into Christ, who is eternally the beloved of his Father."

Key points

1 God created all humans in his image, and he wants all people to share in the love shared by the Father, the Son and the Spirit.

2 The Son became a human to redeem all humanity through his birth, life, death and resurrection and ascension.

3 Christ has already paid for our sins, and there is no longer any debt to pay. God has already forgiven us, and eagerly desires that we turn to him.

4 We cannot enjoy the blessing of his love if we don't believe he loves us. We cannot enjoy his forgiveness unless we believe he has forgiven us.

5 When we turn to God, believe the good news, and pick up our cross and follow Jesus, the Spirit will lead us into the transformed life of the kingdom of God.

To summarize, God is not some isolated cosmic bean counter “out there” keeping tabs on us in preparation for Judgment Day, nor is he three Gods with very different ideas about how to deal with humanity. The God of the Bible is one God who is three divine Persons, in perfect unity and accord, who love each other in perfect love and dwell in indescribable joy, and who created us for the express purpose of sharing that life with them through our adoption into Christ, who is eternally the beloved of his Father.

That's why the doctrine of the Trinity matters. If we don't understand God the way he reveals himself in the Bible, then we wind up with all kinds of messed up, funky and scary ideas about who God is and what he might be cooking up to do to us some day.

Reconciliation for everyone

You're still not convinced, are you? Well, try reading this one again: “...while we were yet sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). God did not wait for you to get good enough to bring you into his household. You can't get good enough,

which is the reason he went after you to bring you home in the first place. When Paul says God saves sinners, he's talking about everybody, since that's what everybody is—a sinner. (By the way, if you're worried God might find out how rotten you really are and send a lightning bolt your way, take heart, he's known all along and loves you anyway.)⁴

Paul makes the point even stronger in verse 10: “For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!”

Did you notice how Paul puts that reconciliation with God in the past tense? Jesus died for our sins—past tense. God does not count our sins against us—period. They’ve already been paid for. Jesus has already put us in good standing with God. All that remains for us now is to turn to God (repent), believe the good news (have faith), and follow Jesus (let the Holy Spirit teach us how to enjoy life in the new creation).

Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” When we think of God in any other way than the way he revealed himself in the Bible—as the Father, Son, and Spirit who created us and redeemed us and have made us to share their joy through union with Jesus Christ—we’re going to find these words of Jesus daunting and discouraging.

But when we know God the way he reveals himself, we can say with all assurance of joy, “Therefore, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...” (Romans 8:1). “For God,” Paul wrote to the Colossian church, “was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him [Jesus], and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Colossians 1:19-20).

All humanity is included in that reconciliation, according to Paul. In the doctrine of the Trinity, God has shown himself to be the God who loves the world and who

“That’s why the doctrine of the Trinity matters. Without it, we might as well join the Hittites wondering whether Baal will flood out the crops with storms this year or burn them out with lightning. In Jesus Christ, God has taken up our cause as his own. God has, through the atoning work of Jesus, healed us from head to toe, mind and heart, and made us the Father’s Son’s best friends, no, much more than that; made us adopted children of the Father, brothers and sisters of our older Brother and full members of the household of God.”

beckons every person to come to Christ and take part in the joy of life in the household of God. There is no person whom God does not want, whom God does not include, whom God does not love. And in Christ, following the Spirit’s lead, we are all freed from the chains of sin to come to the Father whose arms are open wide to receive us, if only we will.

That’s why the doctrine of the Trinity matters. Without it, we might as well join the Hittites wondering whether Baal will flood out the crops with storms this year or burn them out with lightning. In Jesus Christ, God has taken up our cause as his own. God has, through the atoning work of Jesus, healed us from head to toe, mind and heart, and made us the Father’s Son’s best friends, no, much more than that; made us adopted children of the Father, brothers and sisters

of our older Brother and full members of the household of God.

With Paul, we can only say, “Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” **NL**

Notes:

1 *God For Us*, Catherine Mowry LaCugna, Foreword, p. ix.

2 *Ibid*, p. 6.

3 Keep in mind that the Father, Son, and Spirit are not “persons” in the same way we humans are. They are not three Gods, but one, and each “Person” of the Godhead is distinct, but not separate from the others. For more background, see “Church History Corner” *Christian Odyssey* May 2005 issue.

4 You might enjoy “Was Jesus Plan B?,” *Christian Odyssey*, August/September 2007 issue, p. 20.

de Mike Feazell

La doctrine de la Trinité

Demandez à dix chrétiens moyens dans dix Églises moyennes d'expliquer la doctrine de la Trinité, et vous obtiendrez probablement dix explications différentes. La plupart des chrétiens « acceptent » la Trinité comme étant une doctrine chrétienne orthodoxe. Mais ils seraient perplexes d'expliquer pourquoi la doctrine est importante, ou comment elle affecte leur vie chrétienne.

Comme Catherine Mowry LaCugna l'explique dans son introduction de *God For Us*, la Trinité est une doctrine à laquelle la plupart des gens « consentent en théorie, mais qui leur servent à peu de choses dans la pratique de leur foi chrétienne. »¹

Mme LaCugna poursuit : « D'une part, la doctrine de la Trinité est censée être le centre de la foi et, d'autre part, comme Karl Rahner [un des théologiens les plus influents du 20^e siècle] l'a fait remarquer, quelqu'un pourrait se passer de la doctrine de la Trinité parce qu'il la considère fautive, et la grande partie de la littérature religieuse pourrait bien rester pratiquement inchangée. »²

Cela fait-il une différence quelconque ?

Rien d'étonnant. La doctrine est difficile à comprendre, et la plupart des discussions sur la Trinité sont... hé bien... ennuyeuses. Pour le chrétien moyen, c'est-à-dire le genre de personnes qui doivent nourrir leur famille, se rendre au travail et vivre leur vie, quelle différence une doctrine ancienne fait-elle de toute façon ? Dieu est Dieu, n'est-ce pas ? Cela ne suffit-il pas ? S'il est le Père, le Fils et le Saint-Esprit au lieu d'être seulement le Père, c'est bien, mais cela ne change pas vraiment quoi que ce soit pour nous, n'est-ce pas ?

En réalité, la Trinité a de l'importance, beaucoup d'importance. C'est exactement ce à quoi vous vous attendiez que l'on dise, puisque après tout pourquoi

écrivions-nous un article au sujet d'une doctrine ancienne et ennuyeuse ?

Tout d'abord, exemptons-nous de passer à travers tous les arguments bibliques pour prouver que la doctrine est exacte. Vous pouvez trouver cela ailleurs, y compris sur le site Web de l'Église universelle de Dieu. [Vous n'avez qu'à visiter www.wcg.org, cliquez sur « Search our site », et tapez « Trinity ».] Passons plutôt quelques minutes à discuter de la raison pour laquelle la doctrine de la Trinité est importante, et surtout pourquoi elle est importante pour vous.

Commençons par examiner l'idée courante que Dieu est un être unique, retiré là-haut « quelque part », regardant la terre, nous observant et nous jugeant. Bette Midler a mis cela en musique dans le refrain de sa chanson « From a Distance » avec les paroles suivantes : « And God is watching us, God is watching us, God is watching us from a distance ». (Et Dieu nous observe, Dieu nous observe, Dieu nous observe de loin.)

Ce Dieu vient en trois saveurs principales : premièrement, à la vanille, un Dieu qui, après avoir fini de créer l'univers, s'étire dans le belvédère céleste pour une sieste de quelques milliards d'années. (Qui sait, peut-être qu'il se réveille de temps à autre pour faire quelque chose de gentil, un peu comme le genre de Dieu que George Burns dépeint dans le film *Oh God*.) Deuxièmement, à la cannelle piquante, un Dieu qui surveille attentivement tout ce que fait chaque personne et, étant donné que tout le monde fait des gaffes de temps à autre, il devient de plus en plus irrité. Ses adorateurs disent qu'il prend plaisir à regarder les pécheurs rôtir lentement mais, sans jamais être tout à fait cuits. Troisièmement, à l'abricot, un Dieu qui pourrait ou non vous aimer, en fonction de plusieurs choses, dont aucune n'est vraiment claire pour qui que ce soit. Il est celui pour qui les fans des Alouettes de Montréal

prient quand ils veulent voir un touché.

Ce Dieu vient parfois dans une quatrième saveur, le ballon d'eau. Vous pourriez penser que le ballon d'eau n'est pas une saveur, mais au contraire. Difficile à mâcher et offert dans une variété infinie de couleurs, il a toujours un goût fade. Ce Dieu est davantage un principe abstrait d'un être suprême, un genre « d'esprit de tout » avec lequel vous pouvez essayer de communiquer si vous videz votre esprit de toutes pensées et vous assoyez assez longtemps sans vous endormir.

Un Dieu qui veut partager

Le Dieu de la Bible n'est pas ainsi. Le Dieu de la Bible est le Père, le Fils et le Saint-Esprit. Ces trois personnes divines³ partagent un amour parfait, une joie, une unité, une paix et une communion parfaites. Et la raison qui est importante à connaître est que, lorsque la Bible parle de nous comme étant un « en Christ », cela signifie que nous participons à ce genre de vie divine. Tout comme Christ est le bien-aimé du Père, nous aussi, parce que nous sommes « en lui », sommes les bien-aimés du Père.

Cela veut dire que vous faites partie de la famille de Dieu, que vous n'êtes pas un étranger. Vous n'êtes même pas un invité respectable, mais l'un des enfants bien-aimés du Père, libre d'utiliser la maison, la cour et le réfrigérateur.

Le problème est que vous avez probablement de la difficulté à croire cela. Sachant que vous êtes un « drôle de numéro », et que vous êtes vraiment dans votre for intérieur, vous pensez donc que Dieu ne vous aime pas. D'ailleurs comment pourrait-il vous aimer quand vous ne vous aimez même pas vous-même ? D'après l'évaluation de votre rapport bon/mauvais, vous déterminez que Dieu est probablement irrité contre vous, et probablement plus irrité contre tous les autres « drôles de



numéros » que vous rencontrez chaque jour sur les routes congestionnées.

Mais la raison pour laquelle Dieu nous fait connaître par l'Écriture qu'il est Père, Fils et Esprit, et non seulement un « Dieu quelque part », c'est pour que nous sachions qu'il nous aime vraiment et que nous sommes réellement gagnants avec lui. Encore une fois, comment le savons-nous ? Parce que Jésus, « Dieu parmi nous », « Dieu fait chair », celui que le Père a envoyé non pour condamner le monde mais pour le sauver (Jean 3.17), est le Fils du Père, et cela veut dire que le Fils de Dieu est maintenant l'un de nous. Et en tant que tel, tout en étant Dieu, mais Dieu fait chair, il nous a amenés à la maison du Père, en nous faisant entrer par la porte d'entrée.

Nous ne le méritions certainement pas, et nous ne l'avons pas gagné non plus. Nous ne l'avons même jamais demandé. Mais il l'a quand même fait parce que c'est exactement la raison pour laquelle il nous a créés en premier lieu – pour pouvoir partager avec nous la vie qu'il a partagée éternellement avec le Père et l'Esprit. C'est pourquoi il nous dit qu'il nous a faits à son image (Genèse 1. 26).

Un Dieu qui nous montre le Père

Le salut, ce n'est pas une question de changer de lieu, en flottant vers un certain ensemble secret de coordonnées dans le Quadrant Delta appelé ciel, comme si cela réglerait tous nos problèmes. Et le salut n'est pas non plus un nouveau super gouvernement patrouillé par des policiers angéliques qui ne man-

quent jamais une infraction du code pénal divinement décimal.

Le salut, c'est d'être adopté dans la famille de Dieu et d'y apprendre à vivre. Et la Trinité est au cœur de cela : le Père (la 1^{ère} personne de la Trinité) nous aime tellement malgré nos manquements, qu'il a envoyé le Fils (la 2^e personne de la Trinité) accomplir tout ce qui était nécessaire pour nous ramener à la maison (Jean 1.1,14), et le Père et le Fils ont envoyé l'Esprit (la 3^e personne de la Trinité) demeurer en nous et nous enseigner comment vivre dans la famille de Dieu pour que nous puissions y prendre plaisir comme Dieu l'a voulu à la création, au lieu d'être des fiascos pour toujours.

Points principaux

- 1. Dieu a créé tous les êtres humains à son image, et il veut que tous participent à l'amour partagé par le Père, le Fils et l'Esprit.**
- 2. Le Fils s'est fait homme pour racheter toute l'humanité par sa naissance, sa vie, sa mort, sa résurrection et son ascension.**
- 3. Christ a déjà expié pour nos péchés, et il n'y a plus de dette à payer. Dieu nous a déjà pardonné, et il désire ardemment que nous venions à lui.**
- 4. Nous ne pouvons pas prendre plaisir à la bénédiction de son amour si nous ne croyons pas qu'il nous aime. Nous ne pouvons pas jouir de son pardon à moins de croire qu'il nous a pardonné.**
- 5. Quand nous allons à Dieu, croyons à la Bonne Nouvelle, prenons notre croix et suivons Jésus, et l'Esprit nous conduira dans la vie transformée du royaume de Dieu.**

Autrement dit, le Dieu de la Bible n'est pas trois Dieux différents, où l'un, le Père imprévisible et au caractère difficile, est tellement furieux contre les êtres humains qu'il devait tuer quelqu'un pour se calmer, afin que le Fils bien-aimé, voyant son Père perdre la tête, intervienne et dise : « D'accord, si tu dois tuer quelqu'un, alors tue-moi, mais épargne ces gens. » La doctrine de la Trinité est importante précisément parce qu'elle nous empêche de voir Dieu de cette façon si ridicule et, cependant, c'est ainsi que beaucoup de gens considèrent Dieu.

Si vous voulez savoir à quoi ressemble le Père, vous n'avez qu'à regarder Jésus, parce que Jésus est la révélation parfaite du Père. Jésus a dit à Philippe : « Celui qui m'a vu, a vu le Père » (Jean 14.9). Et il a dit à la foule : « Moi et le Père sommes un ». Nous savons ce que le Père éprouve pour nous parce que nous savons ce que Jésus éprouve pour nous.

En résumé, Dieu n'est pas un quelconque comptable cosmique isolé « quelque part » qui garde un œil sur nous en vue du jour du jugement, et il

n'est pas non plus trois Dieux qui ont des idées très différentes sur la façon de traiter avec l'humanité. Le Dieu de la Bible est un Dieu en trois personnes divines, en parfaite unité et en parfait accord, qui s'aime d'un amour parfait, qui vivent dans une joie indescriptible et qui nous a créés pour le but précis de partager cette vie avec eux par notre adoption en Christ, qui est éternellement le bien-aimé de son Père.

C'est pourquoi la doctrine de la Trinité est importante. Si nous ne comprenons pas Dieu comme il se révèle lui-même

dans la Bible, alors nous nous retrouvons avec toutes sortes d'idées perturbantes, effrayantes et angoissantes sur qui est Dieu et ce qu'il est en train d'inventer pour un jour nous punir.

Réconciliation pour tout le monde

Vous n'êtes toujours pas convaincu, n'est-ce pas ? Eh bien, essayez de relire ceci : « alors que nous étions encore des pécheurs, le Christ est mort pour nous » (Romains 5.8). Dieu n'a pas attendu que vous deveniez assez bon pour vous amener dans sa famille. Vous ne pouvez pas devenir assez bon, et c'est pourquoi il vous a cherché pour vous amener à la maison en premier lieu. Quand Paul dit que Dieu sauve les pécheurs, il parle de tout le monde, puisque c'est ce que nous sommes tous : des pécheurs. (En passant, si vous vous inquiétez que Dieu puisse découvrir à quel point vous êtes vraiment pécheur et envoie un coup de tonnerre dans votre direction, prenez courage, il le savait depuis toujours et il vous aime quand même.)⁴

Paul renforce l'idée encore davantage au verset 10 : « Alors que nous étions ses ennemis, Dieu nous a réconciliés avec lui par la mort de son Fils ; à plus forte raison, maintenant que nous sommes réconciliés, serons-nous sauvés par sa vie. »

Avez-vous remarqué comment Paul parle de cette réconciliation avec Dieu au passé composé ? Jésus est mort pour nos péchés – au passé. Dieu ne nous impute pas nos péchés, un point,

c'est tout. Ils ont déjà été expiés. Jésus nous a déjà réconciliés avec Dieu. Tout ce qu'il nous reste à faire par la suite, c'est d'aller à Dieu (nous repentir), croire à la Bonne nouvelle (avoir la foi) et suivre Jésus (laisser le Saint-Esprit nous enseigner à jouir de la vie en tant que nouvelle création).

Jésus a dit : « Si quelqu'un veut marcher à ma suite, qu'il renonce à lui-même, qu'il se charge de sa croix et qu'il me suive. » Si nous pensons à Dieu de tout autre manière que celle qu'il a lui-même révélée dans la Bible – comme le Père, le Fils et l'Esprit qui nous a créés, rachetés et permis de partager leur joie par notre union avec Jésus-Christ –, nous considérerons ces paroles de Jésus comme intimidantes et décourageantes.

Mais quand nous connaissons Dieu comme il se révèle lui-même, nous pouvons dire avec joie et assurance : « Maintenant donc, il n'y a plus de condamnation pour ceux qui sont unis à Jésus-Christ » (Romains 8.1). « Car c'est en lui que Dieu a désiré que toute plénitude ait sa demeure. Et c'est par lui qu'il a voulu réconcilier avec lui-même l'univers tout entier : ce qui est sur la terre et ce qui est au ciel, en instaurant la paix par le sang que son Fils a versé sur la croix » (Colossiens 1.19,20).

Selon Paul, toute l'humanité est comprise dans cette réconciliation. Dans la doctrine de la Trinité, Dieu s'est montré comme le Dieu qui aime le monde et qui invite chaque personne à venir à Christ et à participer à la joie de vivre dans la

famille de Dieu. Il n'y a personne dont Dieu ne veuille pas, que Dieu exclut, que Dieu n'aime pas. Et en Christ, en suivant la direction de l'Esprit, nous sommes tous délivrés des chaînes du péché pour venir au Père dont les bras sont grands ouverts pour nous recevoir, seulement si nous le désirons.

C'est pourquoi la doctrine de la Trinité est importante. Sans elle, aussi bien joindre les Hittites qui se demandaient si le dieu Baal inonderait les récoltes de l'année en envoyant des tempêtes ou en les brûlant avec le tonnerre. En Jésus-Christ, Dieu a pris notre cause comme la sienne. Par l'œuvre expiatoire de Jésus, Dieu nous a guéris de la tête aux pieds, y compris l'esprit et le cœur, et il a fait de nous les meilleurs amis de son Fils. Mais plus encore, il a fait de nous les enfants adoptifs du Père, les frères et les sœurs de notre frère aîné et des membres à part entière de la famille de Dieu.

Avec Paul, nous pouvons seulement dire : « Gloire à Dieu pour son don indescriptible ! » **NL**

Notes :

1. *God For Us*, Catherine Mowry LaCugna, Foreword, p. ix.
2. *Ibid*, p. 6.
3. Rappelez-vous que le Père, le Fils et l'Esprit ne sont pas des « personnes » comme nous. Ils ne sont pas trois Dieux, mais un seul, et chaque « personne » de la Trinité est distincte, mais non séparée des autres. Pour plus d'information, voir l'article « Church History Corner » dans le numéro de mai 2005 du *Christian Odyssey*.
4. Vous pourriez apprécier l'article « Was Jesus Plan B ? » tiré du numéro d'août et septembre du *Christian Odyssey*, p. 20.

By Gary Moore

National Director

When The Boat Rocks

Life has challenges. It has high peaks and deep valleys—as Frank Sinatra used to sing, “...you’re riding high in April, shot down in May.” This has always been true. Further, the pace of life and change is speeding up exponentially. New products come on the market at a fantastic clip. The latest technology is only “the latest” for a very short time. One’s three-year-old computer is viewed almost as an historical relic!

In the past, a person might have at least a reasonable expectation of eventually settling into a career and working until retirement. For most, those days are past. Young people are being told to expect to have several different employers over a working lifetime, if not be involved in several different vocational fields.

Our cities are growing fast. New development and ever more sprawling housing developments are pushing the urban boundaries further into the surrounding countryside. The density of population is rising as well, as condominium and apartment developments reach skyward—increasing the population density and the attendant sense of crowding and congestion.

As a result of these and other pressures, the stress level of the average person is rising. How does one cope with all this pressure? How does one get used to the

near continual need to change, to learn new things and to adjust? How do you cope with the traffic? How do you handle the crowds? Where can you escape from the noise?

Of course, we need to be realistic here. Our physical lives involve change. To cease to change and grow is to die. A certain level of stress is inevitable and necessary, and even serves as a stimulus to our development. Often growth on any level comes from responding to pressure and stress. However, stress can become debilitating, and begin to drain us of our mental, emotional, physical and seemingly even spiritual energy. It can lead to fear gripping our thinking, and worry becoming a dominant preoccupation. Stress then ceases to be constructive, and becomes quite destructive.

There are many books and articles that have been written about stress management and stress reduction. Many of us have our own individual ways to cope with stress, and no doubt you have heard much advice. A lot of it has to do with learning to take breaks, engaging in exercise and other forms of recreation to reduce stress levels. Taking days off, and occasionally taking a vacation can be helpful too. However, there are some extreme stressors in life that can’t be relieved using such otherwise useful tools.

What do we do when the boat that is our life really rocks? How can we keep from

capsizing? What will anchor us and keep us stable when everything around us is chaotic? It is only in God that we can find that ultimate stability. Only in him can we find an anchor strong enough to stand the most violent storm (Hebrews 6:18-19).

The author of Hebrews harkens back to the earthquake that rocked the mount when God made the covenant at Sinai with the people of Israel. He draws our attention to a great shaking to come—a shaking that will rock both the earth and the heavens—a shaking that will remove everything that can be shaken. All that will be left is the eternal kingdom of God—the unshakable kingdom (Hebrews 12:25-28).

It is only as we are spiritually anchored to Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God that we can find true stability. Everything else can be shaken, including our finances, our health, even our very lives. However, the love relationship that God extends to us through Jesus Christ and our life with him is that which nothing can break. As Paul puts it, “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

Let’s find our ultimate anchor in life in those things which can never be shaken! **NL**



de Gary Moore
directeur national

Quand souffle la tempête

La vie comporte son lot de difficultés : de hauts sommets un jour et de sombres vallées le lendemain. Il en a toujours été ainsi. Encore plus, le rythme de la vie et des changements s'accélère de façon exponentielle. De nouveaux produits arrivent sur le marché à une vitesse incroyable. La dernière technologie n'est « la dernière » que pour très peu de temps. Un ordinateur de trois ans est presque considéré comme une relique historique !

Anciennement, une personne pouvait au moins avoir une espérance raisonnable d'embrasser un jour une carrière et de travailler jusqu'à la retraite. Pour la plupart, ces jours sont derrière nous. Les jeunes se font dire de s'attendre à avoir plusieurs employeurs au cours de leur vie, si non de travailler dans divers domaines vocationnels.

Nos villes grandissent rapidement. De nouveaux développements et l'étalement toujours croissant des banlieues font reculer les limites urbaines encore plus loin dans la campagne environnante. À mesure que des condominiums et des édifices à appartements sont construits en hauteur, la densité de la population augmente, ainsi que le sentiment d'entassement et de congestion qui l'accompagne.

Et quel est le résultat de tout cela et d'autres pressions ? Le niveau de stress de la personne moyenne monte. Comment quelqu'un peut-il faire face à toute cette pression ? Comment quelqu'un peut-il s'habituer au besoin de changement presque continu, à apprendre de nouvelles choses et à s'adapter ? Comment affronte-t-on les embouteillages sur les routes ? Comment s'habituer aux foules ? Où peut-on aller pour fuir le bruit ?

Bien sûr, nous devons être réalistes. Notre vie implique des changements. Cesser de changer et de grandir, c'est mourir. Un certain niveau de stress est inévitable et nécessaire, et sert même de stimulus à notre développement. La croissance sur n'importe quel plan découle souvent de notre réponse à la pression et au stress. Cependant, le stress peut devenir paralysant et commencer à nous drainer de notre énergie mentale, émotionnelle, physique et apparemment même spirituelle. Il peut conduire à une peur qui saisit nos pensées, et à l'inquiétude qui devient une préoccupation dominante. Le stress cesse alors d'être constructif et devient très destructif.

Plusieurs livres et articles ont été écrits sur la gestion et la réduction du stress. Certains d'entre nous ont leurs propres façons de faire face au stress, et vous avez probablement entendu beaucoup de conseils à ce sujet. La plupart de ces livres enseignent à faire des pauses, à

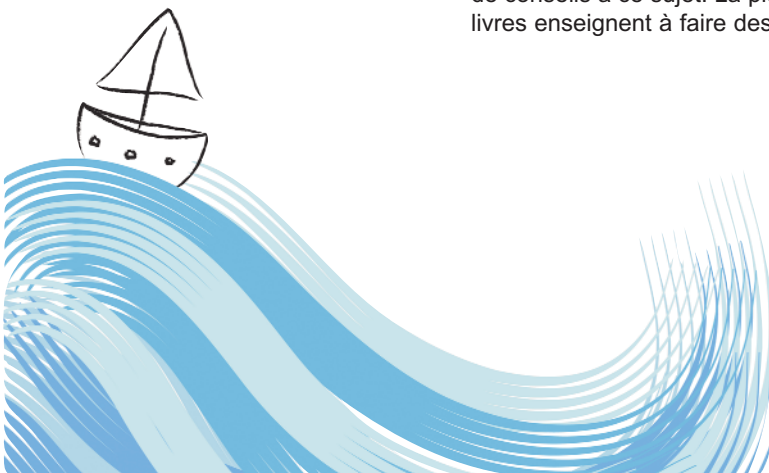
s'engager dans un programme d'exercices ou d'autres formes de récréation pour réduire le niveau de stress. Prendre des jours de congé et, à l'occasion, des vacances peut aussi être utile. Toutefois, il existe des facteurs de stress extrêmes qui ne peuvent être soulagés par ces moyens utiles.

Que faisons-nous quand la tempête souffle vraiment dans notre vie ? Comment pouvons-nous éviter de chavirer ? Quelle ancre nous gardera stables quand tout autour de nous est chaotique ? Ce n'est qu'en Dieu que nous pouvons trouver cette stabilité. En lui seul pouvons-nous trouver une ancre assez solide pour résister aux tempêtes les plus violentes (Hébreux 6.18,19).

L'auteur du livre aux Hébreux rappelle l'événement où Dieu ébranla le mont Sinäï lorsqu'il fit alliance avec le peuple d'Israël. Il attire notre attention sur un autre événement à venir où Dieu ébranlera non seulement la terre mais aussi les cieux – un ébranlement qui fera tout disparaître. Tout ce qui subsistera est le royaume éternel de Dieu, le royaume inébranlable (Hébreux 12.25-28).

Ce n'est que si nous sommes ancrés en Jésus-Christ et au royaume de Dieu que nous pouvons trouver la véritable stabilité. Toute autre chose peut être ébranlée, y compris nos finances, notre santé, et même notre vie. Cependant, la relation d'amour que Dieu nous offre par Jésus-Christ, et notre vie avec lui est la chose que rien ne peut briser. Comme Paul le dit : « Oui, j'en ai l'absolue certitude : ni la mort ni la vie, ni les anges, ni les dominations, ni le présent ni l'avenir, ni les puissances, ni ce qui est en haut ni ce qui est en bas, ni aucune autre créature, rien ne pourra nous arracher à l'amour que Dieu a témoigné en Jésus-Christ notre Seigneur » (Romains 8.38,39).

Cherchons notre ancre suprême dans ces choses qui ne peuvent jamais être ébranlées ! **NL**



By Dorothy Nordstrom

*Canadian Women's Ministry
Coordinator*

Running Nowhere In Every Direction

This is the story of my life I think to myself and laugh as I read the title of my next assignment. It was an eight week Bible Study titled: "Running Nowhere in every Direction" by Karen lee-Thorpe. Most of us have felt this way as we juggle the many tasks of being a homemaker and the numerous things that flood our lives. We are all too hurried, living in an age of speed, governed by the clock and the result is often stress and anxiety.

For example: Grocery shopping, one of the numerous things we need to do.

I reflect:

The store is bulging with people, everyone around me is in a hurry and a little frustrated. The checkout lines appear endless. Resigned, I push my cart into the closest one and settle down to wait. I no longer try to find the shortest line, a practice I gave up years ago. Somewhere I can hear a tired child crying and an anxious mother trying to console it. A wave of sympathy washes over me as I remember back to the days of shopping with tired, unhappy children.

In years past I tried to be a line dodger. But, as luck would have it, there always seemed to be someone more aggressive and practiced at switching lines than me, women on a mission, and they would beat me to the shorter line every time. If by some chance I did make it to a shorter line, something would happen, like an argument over a price, and I would not get out of the store any quicker. In fact, it usually ended up taking longer and the result was frustration and anxiety.

A few years ago, I changed my outlook on shopping and frankly it has not only spared me from ulcers, but has changed that aspect my life. I even smile as I write this, because shopping has become relaxed and enjoyable, except of course for the prices, but even that I have accepted, and I have learned to



appreciate the fact that I do have choices "To Buy or not to Buy."

One day while standing in a grocery line, I took the opportunity to browse some women's magazines. Almost every magazine had an article on stress and fatigue.

Topics covered stress in a number of facets, how to handle it, in the work place, at home, in marriages, schools, and in our lives in general. The fact is, stress is going to be part of our lives; it is part of our human existence in this modern day. Today even our children are stressed. It seems there is no time to just be a child with homework, after school activities, sports programs and numerous lessons filling a child's day. Everyone is stressed, Christian and non Christian alike; it is part of our human existence.

I wish I could say the rest of my life, (not just shopping) has completely changed and become more relaxed and enjoyable, but I am still a work in progress. I think life is kind of like a shopping centre, full of choices, too many choices and some of them are not healthy choices. The key is making wise choices. We don't have to choose everything, or rush, switching from line to line, trying to get through life in the quickest line. Take the

line that best suits your family, and while in that line, do your best to rest and enjoy the wait.

To be honest, even trying to write this article has been stressful. Too many thoughts flooded my mind, all running in different directions, but they kept coming back to the same place, Jesus. "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you" (John.14:27).

How do we get this rest, this peace? It is so simple and yet so hard. Stop running nowhere, and turn our direction to Jesus. This place of rest is available anytime and any place around the clock. All we have to do is stop. Even in the midst of a busy day, or while stuck in traffic we can stop and take hold of the peace Jesus left with us. Jesus, withdrew to quiet places. The Bible says he went often to the Father (Luke 5:16).

In this shopping centre we call life we have a lot of choices but the most important choice is rest. The last chapter of that study "Running Nowhere in Every Direction" was on Rest. It talked about taking a day of rest. This is a very important principle, but remember, Jesus is our Sabbath Rest and he is available every day. He is at the end of the best line. Choose Him. **NL**

The Holy Spirit...

Is It In You? Really?

By David Sheridan

*Pastor, Grace & Truth Fellowship,
Red Deer, and Lethbridge
congregations*

Gatorade—is it in you? During the Grey Cup final, players of the winning Saskatchewan Roughriders football team were re-hydrating and refuelling by drinking Gatorade. A popular television commercial for this energy-giving sports drink graphically shows athletes in an x-ray format guzzling Gatorade all the way down into their pulsating stomachs! There is no doubt—the drink is in them!

Consider the following sentence: “The Kenyan marathon runner was running in a light t-shirt and shorts in the blowing snow in a wintry Canada in the night in the zone!” I suppose the expression “in his worst nightmare” could be added. The Oxford Dictionary gives fourteen different uses of the preposition in! To say the baby swallowed a marble and was “in danger” leaves no doubt as to where the marble was—inside the baby’s throat or stomach.

But what does it mean to say the Holy Spirit is in you?

Living in You

God the Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Godhead. Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit from God the Father to his disciples, saying He “lives with you and will be in you” (John 14:17c). This indwelling seems to be in anticipation of the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost when about 3,000 were baptized and indwelt with the Holy Spirit who brought them to repentance.

Temple of the Spirit

A Christian values his or her physical body as a sacred place where God dwells. The apostle Paul asked, “[D]o you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you...therefore honour God with your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). The presence and power of the Holy Spirit helps

battle sexual immorality and gluttony, providing comfort in times of trial and testing.

Controlled by the Spirit

God the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in the life of a believer. “You however are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you” (Romans 8:9). Human nature no longer has the same hold on those following the lead of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit unites believers with God the Father and God the Son.



Where is the Holy Spirit?

What does it mean to say the Holy Spirit is in a believer? Is this to be taken literally or metaphorically? If the Holy Spirit is inside us, then in what specific part of the body?—the heart, the mind, the soul, the spirit? Surely not the stomach—where the Gatorade goes and the marble ended up! There are millions of Christians living today—does each one have a tiny portion of the Holy Spirit inside them? The author David knew the answer to the questions “Where can I go

from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?” (Psalm 139:7). To ask where is the Holy Spirit is to ask a flawed question!

Answer: a Loving Relationship

To say the Holy Spirit is in you simply means to have a close, warm, loving and intimate relationship with God. Christians love the Holy Spirit, pray for His gifts for the work of the gospel and long to produce His fruit in their lives. This close relationship enables the Holy Spirit to transform believers into the image of Christ.

The Holy Spirit is not physically located inside human bodies since He is spirit and does not have location in time and space. The Holy Spirit is not physically distributed throughout planet earth. To say the Holy Spirit is omnipresent means He is able to influence people, places and circumstances everywhere in space and time. God the Holy Spirit is nowhere in any physical sense and has no location in space because God is a non-spatial, non-temporal spirit. The Holy Spirit is not a physical being or a material person.

To be “filled with the Holy Spirit” is to “walk” with God in a loving relationship.

Close and Closer

God the Holy Spirit yearns to be close to followers of Jesus, actively interacting with them daily. This is superbly captured in the expression—“The Holy Spirit is in you.” God the Holy Spirit longs to constantly guide Christians into all truth and to be a Comforter in times of stress. A Spirit-led body of believers will welcome “in to their hearts” the invisible but clear and present Spirit who gives them eternal life.

God the Holy Spirit lives in us! Now that is close and an extra-special intimate relationship! And more energizing than Gatorade! **NL**

By Phil Gale

Member, Victoria congregation

He Made Tents

In the world you will have tribulation; but be encouraged, I have overcome the world (John 16:33).

Stress is of this world, and it therefore demonstrates to us that the closer we are to this world, in a spiritual sense, the closer we'll be to stress. And by spiritual, I mean in attitude—where the heart lies. As Christians, we are in the world but not of it. Our goal and focus is different, and it's only when we become too immersed in this world's affairs that it begins to have a negative effect on our lives.

Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well (Matthew 6:33). Also note that the emphasis is on “given,” as opposed to “strived for.” If we have all our needs, what is there to get stressed about?

It's easy to see God as our own personal vending machine where we deposit a coin in the slot (good works), and out comes a blessing. Food, clothing and shelter are all we really need, and if we follow the example of the Apostle Paul, he worked his own passage delivering the gospel message to the places to which he was led. I know it sounds strange, but on his journey he wasn't setting up stands to promote tent sales. He didn't sell franchises for his tabernacle products.

So, are we in step with God's purpose? I don't know about you, but I want to fulfill God's purpose in and for me. I want to appreciate God for who he is, not only for what he provides. In short, I want my life to be about God. If I can do that, I can distance myself from all the stressful events that affect me directly and indirectly.

It's not easy to hand over control to God, live one day at a time, demand nothing, but appreciate everything. All we actually need is food, clothing and shelter, and if we have more than that, we are rich.

Matthew 6:24 says, “No one can serve two masters—you cannot serve God and mammon.” The word mammon is an interesting word, and I quote from the *King James Bible Commentary* (Nelson):

“The term ‘mammon’ is derived from the Aramaic term for possessions or wealth. Jesus is not condemning money or possessions in and of themselves, but the improper attitude of enslavement toward wealth. There is no halfhearted service for God. It is either all or nothing. Jesus gives the believer no option between loving God and loving the world. The regenerated heart is one which so longs for righteousness and desires the things of heaven that it lives above the temporal things of the earth.”

We can either be devoted to God or devoted to our lives here on earth—but not both. Christ tells us to seek first the kingdom and God's righteousness and he will provide for us.

The Apostle Paul's ministry was hard for him, and he suffered a lot. But he was devoted to God and the mission he'd been given. This did not always result in comfort and plenty, quite the opposite. But he did have food, clothing and shelter as he needed it.

According to Larry Crabb in *The Pressure's Off*, there are three intruders who seek to deceive and seduce us into believing error as compared to the truth of God (page 61):

1. The world around us—with all its glamor, promises and false expectations, short-term pleasures instead of long-term security in God's kingdom.
2. The devil—who seeks to deceive and devour us, mixing a little truth with a lot of error, and leading us away from God.
3. The flesh that lies within us, or our own deceiving minds and hearts (Jeremiah 17:9). We convince ourselves wrong is right because of what we really

want. We justify our actions and convince ourselves we deserve better.

Larry Crabb goes on to say: “It's difficult to recognize when it happens, but at some point a shift occurs in our thinking. Somewhere—we stop thinking of Christ as Sovereign Lord (if we ever did) and regard Him more as a Useful Friend. The point of knowing Him becomes a good life for us now, in this world.”

The Apostle Paul is our example, in that he was on the Lord's side, and ambition and desire for things in this life, as few as they were for him, were secondary to his primary goal of preaching the gospel. In order to survive, he made tents. Paul was content with his life in Christ, and it kept him strong in times of great stress. His mission statement was: “For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”

As in our present times, stress was rampant in the New Testament era, but because his mind was on the things of God, Paul was able to say: “I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content; I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.”

I can do everything God requires of me (as opposed to what I want to do) through Christ who provides the strength (my paraphrase of Philippians 4:13).

Paul faced stress, but as we read through his letters, we can see how he coped with it—he stayed close to God and His purpose. [NL](#)

Lightening Up When Tightening Up

By Jonathan Buck

Pastor, Barrie, Huntsville,
North Bay, Peterborough, and
Sudbury congregations

“I don’t know you that well,” my doctor said, “but there’s one thing you need to do, and that’s lighten up.”

Lighten up, I thought? Are you crazy? The silly man obviously had no idea what was going on in my life. He did know, however, that I’d been to Emergency with chest pains and high blood pressure so, yes alright, I needed to do something, but not lighten up, surely, because how can anyone lighten up nowadays when there’s so much to worry about? The news on TV is always horrible, global warming and greed are wrecking the planet, friends and family have a never-ending list of woes, junk food’s killing us and we’re stuck with ever-rising prices, worsening traffic, weather scares, poisonous plastic, cyber-bullies and peanut allergies.

We’re pinned in a world of unceasing and growing stress. And our ways of easing stress aren’t helping much either, like comfort foods saturated in fat, sugar and salt, and TV that leaves you empty. Vacations provide a brief escape, per-

haps, as do drinking binges and parties for many people, but it’s back to work on Monday, back to the bills and the neighbor’s cat digging up your flowerbeds, and more trips to the doctor and dentist to reveal yet more bits of you falling apart.

And I’m in the same boat too, so I knew I was under stress but I admit it surprised me when it brought me to a standstill. There I sat in Emergency, hoping someone could tell me what was happening to me, and to stop it before it got any worse. After a battery of tests spanning several days, scary lectures from doctors and worrying myself awake for many nights, I was now being told to lighten up!

Despite how ridiculously shallow that sounded at the time, it was the only help I’d been offered that didn’t involve extracting blood and taking pills. But what does one do nowadays to lighten up? Well, I got all kinds of advice on that front: go for an early morning walk to hear the birds sing, listen to soothing music, watch comedies on TV, take up a hobby, breathe deeply, think positively, eat better, take a nap when tired and above all, stop worrying.

But I can’t stop worrying, that’s my trouble. I’m a gifted worry-wart. I live in a body that won’t let me rest. I understand all too well why Paul cried out in Romans 7, “What a wretched man I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” because I live in a body that’s trying to kill me, too. And it’s not just with worry, either, it’s with anger and frustration, as well. I can’t stop being furious at the damage being done by nutty world leaders and religious fanatics. I get apoplectic at the waste of money and resources. What do I do?

But, hang on, didn’t Jesus experience stress? Yes, he did. “During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the One who could save

him from death” (Hebrews 5:7). Oh, so Jesus needed constant saving from his body of death, as well. He too had a head full of raging thoughts and a culture full of temptations trying to kill him that he couldn’t deal with, either.

So, how did he lighten up? Well, in that same verse it says he cried out to God for the power to calm his thoughts and resist temptation, and “he was heard.” It was as simple as that! But does that work for me, too? Apparently, yes, because the next couple of verses explain that Jesus went through that process for our sakes, so he could then become the source of our salvation. In other words, Jesus will do for me what God did for him. When Paul asked the question, then, “Who will deliver me from my body of death?” he knew the answer, having experienced Jesus delivering him so many times he could eventually say, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).

You mean, I can stop the raging worries in my head and resist the temptations of the culture that are killing me? Yes, because those were the same things that Jesus sought salvation from during his time as a human, and now he’s there for me when stress and temptation are pulling me under. In this ridiculous world, Jesus offers a constant miracle cure, or as Paul called it, a “peace that passes all understanding” (Philippians 4:7)

So, my doctor thinks I should lighten up, eh? Well, maybe I’ve just discovered how to. Next time I’m in his office, then, I hope I’m considerably lightened. And if he happens to ask what changed, I could always hand him this article. He helped me; I’d like to return a favor. **NL**



By Neil Earle

*Pastor, Glendora, California
congregation*

Paul-First Century

I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked”

It goes on, folks...

“I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have constantly been on the move” (2 Corinthians 11:26-27, 23-25).

Who was better than the apostle Paul at turning his trials into such



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“Three times I was beaten with rods, once stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have constantly been on the move...”

forceful literature? He scratches out a surging rhythm with his quill even as he sings the blues. His simple insistent repetition drives home the message. We are drawn in. We can't help but react: “This man has been there! This man knows something about stress!” (Do I hear an “Amen”?)

A Sentence of Death

That same apostle Paul who went at life like gangbusters also showed us the way through the “Valley of Stress.” Paul knew that sometimes the only way through trials is right through them. That's why his words sprout wings and soar as he explains how over and over again the grace of God allowed him to turn seeming extinction into glorious victory. “We do not want you to be uniformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death” (2 Corinthians 1:8-9).

“The sentence of death.” Ugh. What

My Stress Fighter



...e I was
...t a night
...en on the

an apt phrase for us moderns used to negative reports from the doctor's office. We hear it in the siren from the ambulance tearing down the block, our daily allotment of doom and gloom pouring off the almost inescapable TV monitors (in High Definition yet!), pastors tensing as the telephone rings, that annoying beeper ringing from the phone hung to our belts. Today, thanks to all these modern marvels, we get to take our stress home with us.

*Song, song blue, everybody knows one,
Song, song blue, every garden grows one.*

The apostle Paul drove home one of the key principles in dealing with stress: "But this happened (pick any peril of Paul you like) that we might not rely on ourselves but on God who raises the dead" (2 Corinthians 1:9). By now we should know that this writer from way back in what some might be tempted to call the simpler times of the First Century is eminently qualified to speak to us about

today's stressors. Simpler times? Not many of us have been flogged to an inch of our lives or stoned with sharp spiky rocks and left for dead (Acts 14:19).

Yet this First Century stress fighter could not be stopped. Paul continues: "He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and *he will deliver us*" (verse 10). This line reflects hope and hope is essential in fighting stress. Paul says elsewhere we are "saved in hope." But Paul is not finished yet. "On him we have set out hope that *he will continue to deliver us*, as you help us by your prayers" (verse 11).

What did Paul know that we often forget?

Purpose. That's part of the answer. Once we see a purpose in our sufferings and stresses then that often transforms the situation. Take the patriarch Job. If he had known God was betting on his rugged endurance it would not have been half as much a trial (Job 2:3). It's

that not knowing the outcome that makes trials so stressful. We don't know how it's going to turn out and the stomach-churning, nail-biting uncertainty is one of life's profound tortures. But remember, it is explained in this issue that total absence of stress is death. The human organism needs a certain amount of stress to survive just as weight-lifters need weights, but...in moderation.

The Commanding Heights

To struggling groups of Christians Paul brought the good news of what he had learned—he knew how to win, he knew how to lose, how to have lots, how to have little (Philippians 4:10-13). His mission in life was formidable, nothing less than challenging the cruel and corrupt Roman Empire with the good news of another King and Kingdom.

He was a living embodiment of psychologist Scott Peck's principle that the stresses which do not kill us can actual-

ly make us stronger. In Paul's case, even with a weakened physical constitution and frequent illness (2 Corinthians 12:7-10), he was able to claim eventual victory. This was because of one simple, glorious trait: In his mind's eye, the power and purpose of God in his life was always greater than the stress he was facing.

This is why he could state in that very same book in which he recorded having received the sentence of death: "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ" (2 Corinthians 2:14). Later he added this: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Not content with that he pushed

on to the commanding heights turning adversity and stresses on their head: "I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me" (2 Corinthians 11:9). He then delivers the ultimate "victory roll" in the face of stress and danger, now almost "walking on air" with calm serene faith: "That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (verse 10).

A Life's Battle Plan

These are indeed the commanding heights, aren't they? How do we get there? Paul, First Century Stress Fighter was the ultimate God-intoxicated man. For Paul, Christ was his life and his life was Christ. No more dedicated Christian has ever lived. And few have suffered more setbacks and distresses. Paul well knew and effectively taught that trouble is not an option but a required course. He was so personally well-acquainted with stress that he passed on the remedies for winning the fight against it. Here are five of his battle-tested strategies.

1. Physical exercise.
2. Eating well.
3. Remember your victories.

4. Look for a lesson in the testing.
5. Ask for encouragement.

Physical Matters Matter

In an era before light rail transit Paul, like Jesus before him, like William Wordsworth and Mahatma Gandhi, was one of history's famous walkers. "In journeyings often," he says. The geography of the Galatian interior was rough enough for motivating someone to stay

Christians who have logged some time with their God and Savior share the sweet sensation of having walked as victors through the fire with them on more than one occasion.

in shape, as was the Arabian Desert (Galatians 1:17). In the 21st century the link between frequent bodily exercise and stress reduction is seen as almost absolute. Paul offered this offhand advice to his young friend Timothy: "physical training is of some value" (1 Timothy 4:6). It is. It is indeed. Your doctor knows that sustained walking and aerobic exercise lowers blood pressure, smoothes out the irregularities in the nervous system and has a general calming effect.

When troubles assail us like the waves of the sea, it's sometimes advisable to call a halt, quit what we are doing and take a walk, breathing deeply as we go. This helps clear the mind to sort out the negative barrage of stressors that are coming at us. In stress the body is under siege. We feel like we are coming apart. But Jesus said in Matthew 6:25 to not worry (*merismos* in the Greek). The force of the expression is "don't even think about worrying" because worry can get us so worked up that we feel we are "coming apart" (*merismos*="divide the mind"). Instead let our bodies program the mind to settle down. Clear minds are necessary for sorting out alternatives. When we walk and pray as we go—and give God thanks for being able to walk

and pray—then things begin to take on more perspective and perspective can slowly restore our peace of mind.

Another principle relating to the physical is one we are prone to underestimate when under stress. Acts 27 is a favorite chapter for many. Facing certain shipwreck and the divine assurance that they'd have to swim for their lives, Paul the prisoner, the little Jewish tentmaker, takes over. He told the crew of the doomed vessel *and* his Roman guard:

"For the last fourteen days you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food—you haven't eaten anything. Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive" (Acts 27:33). The mind affects the body but the body also

teaches the mind. Under high stress we sometimes abandon normal patterns. Paul advises against that. This is a huge subject but much good advice is available today.

Remember Your Victories

Christians who have logged some time with their God and Savior share the sweet sensation of having walked as victors through the fire with them on more than one occasion. Paul puts it well in his meaty and profound little exposition in Romans 5:1-5,

"Therefore...we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand." Note the hope-filled words—peace, access, and stand. "And we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only so but we also *rejoice in our sufferings*, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

Marvelous words here. Experienced Christians know the process. The Holy

Spirit is a friend sent to us in our adversities. This friend has got us through some tight spots in the past. He will help us in the future, for he is eternal. Thus Christians draw strength from looking back at those nodal moments of life when faced with new stresses. In fact it is exercising the “thanksgiving muscle” to do so. Think: Why should God deliver us this time if we haven’t thanked him for the last time (in a way of speaking). Thanksgiving and praise are not only entry portals to the high heavenly places (Psalm 100:4), they are also attitudes that eat up stress.

Consider: It is almost impossible to be singing God’s praises, mind off self, focused on what God has done and is doing in our lives and...to be simultaneously stressed out. Acts 16:16-28 records Paul and Silas being thrown in jail after being publicly whipped and humiliated. Their reaction? Singing hymns at midnight. What an unnatural sequence of events. Unnatural, because supernatural. When God is in the picture the unbelievable is believable.

No wonder Paul reminded the Philippians of battles they had been through together (Philippians 1:3-6).

vision with increasing anger and envy as the space shuttle took off. Within minutes her anger and fury turned to repentant awe and thanksgiving as *she saw the Challenger explode before her eyes.*

That was a lesson learned quickly. Life isn’t always so dramatic but, if we think about it, we can think of times when the lesson we learned was better for us even then the deliverance. That’s what David meant when he wrote, “Thy loving kindness is *better* than life” (KJV). The Psalms of David are excellent stress fighters.

Sometimes one just has to hang in there. There comes a time when all our human ingenuity falls short and we have to hang on for dear life. Paul faced such predicaments often. Remember God has promised—*we will get through this* (Hebrews 13:6).

Ask for Encouragement

Along with trying to find something to be thankful for amid the stress—at the very least we can be thankful that God is still there, eh?—we can ask for an encourager. One thing we often forget to do in facing stressful situations is to simply ask for help. Ask God to send you an encourager. Supernatural encouragement often shows up through quite natural means—a neighbor, a friend, a workmate, a boss, a child, a family member. Be alert to such guides and encouragers. The Holy Spirit is a skilful and subtle worker (Hebrews 13:2). We often have to ask God to show us where he is working amid our trouble because it is the nature of stress to make us lose our focus.

One Bible teacher summed up many of the Psalms as a journey from orientation to disorientation to reorientation. The apostle Paul would have liked that. The Psalms were often on his lips. Let the same thing be said of us and we too will learn how to be stress fighters. We will be following Paul, the first century stress fighter, just as he followed Christ.**NL**

Look for the Lesson

There is usually always something to learn from hard testing even if the original trigger was not our fault. My mother used to say, “It’s an ill wind that doesn’t blow somebody good.” I’ve learned that that is very true. Sometimes the lessons take years to learn but they can be the most valuable experiences in life. One pastor tells the story of a wife who was terribly upset and embittered at God at the fact that NASA had rejected her husband’s excellent qualifications to be the first teacher in space.

They chose a woman instead, a decision she felt was rooted only in “political correctness.” Perhaps she was right but this lady fumed and fretted and stressed herself out as she watched via tele-

Within minutes her anger and fury turned to repentant awe and thanksgiving as she saw the Challenger explode before her eyes.

By Roy Page

Pastor, Vancouver, Prince George
BC congregations

Stress, Submission, And The Spirit

Half a century ago, during the decade of the fifties, many articles were written discussing how the average working person in the future would spend all of the leisure time they would have as a result of a 30-hour work week. Modern technology, we were told, would free up so much time that the challenge would be to know how to enjoy so much time of relaxation.

The reality is that modern technology has enslaved people and left many with precious little time to relax. With the development of computers and cell phones and other nifty gadgets, people are now “worked involved” more hours per day than they were in the fifties. None of us is immune from this culture of bus-i-ness. For example, I now find myself obligated to check my email regularly, since these days that is how people primarily communicate, and that involves spending the first few minutes each time deleting unwanted and unsolicited spam messages that have to primarily do with supposedly improving my sexual prowess!

Is this world insane or what?

The fallout of all this “busyness” is stress. Some argue that up to 90% of illness and disease has stress as its primary trigger. Lacking peace of mind, modern Western people are constantly ill at ease, “dis-eased,” over-stimulated and “adrenalin rushed.”

In his book *When the Body Says No*, Vancouver physician and bestselling author Dr. Gabor Maté discusses his experiences with patients who, he concluded, were often suffering physical ailments caused by inner stress. Often the stress was caused by underlying unresolved life issues. He even formulated a particular personality style that predisposes certain people to stress-related illness (e.g., the tendency to bottle things up inside).

I read the book after having been diag-

nosed with cancer, and, eh! I have some of those personality traits too—so does Lance Armstrong, and, of course, so do many of you reading this article! The problem is not necessarily with the personality but with the stress—or at least the factors that are causing it. And the fact is even faithful, Spirit-led Christians are not immune to suffering stress and all the subsequent ills that go along with it such as depression, illness, discouragement and burnout. The question is, how do we deal with stress when we are faced with it?

The first step is to identify the cause(s) of stress and whether these are outside influences or self-inflicted (i.e., based on our own thoughts or responses).

The first step is to identify the cause(s) of stress and whether these are outside influences or self-inflicted (i.e., based on our own thoughts or responses). Each cause requires a different strategy in order to deal effectively with the problem.

One lady I knew was a social worker who worked in a battered women's safe house. Three to five years was the maximum anyone was allowed to work in that position because of the high negative stress these workers were subjected to daily. She was committed to helping these women and children in need, so the hours she wasn't working involved using coping mechanisms to deal with the work-related stress. Every evening she would spend literally hours sitting in a chair listening to classical music before she went to bed.

This was the price she was willing to pay to ensure that the stress did not destroy her as she continued to assist those in need. Her strategy to deal with stress outside of herself was to develop effective coping mechanisms that allowed her to pursue her desire in spite of the stress-related nature of her job.

Taking regular breaks is a must for people in stressful careers—whether those breaks be daily, weekly or monthly. One of the principles of the sabbatical rest was to help keep balance in people's lives.

Another case is of a young man who pursued his passion and was able to land the “perfect” job—being paid to do what he loved to do. He was good at what he did and as a result many projects were directed his way. Unfortunately each project had dead-

lines and, being responsible and diligent, he found himself spending most of his

waking hours at his place of employment with the resulting stress of neglecting his wife and marriage. His health began to suffer as a result. What started as a dream became a nightmare. The only sensible strategy he could employ was to leave that particular vocation.

Two different, but equally effective, examples of dealing with stress when it is caused by factors outside of self: counteracting its negative impact by the use of coping mechanisms or completely removing oneself from the cause of the stress.

Scripture makes plain that trials and tribulations will be part of the Christian's life, and for us that usually means *stress*. As has been jokingly but truthfully stated, the only stress-free people are dead people! Peter G. Hanson, M.D., in his 1985 bestselling book *The Joy of Stress—How to Make Stress Work for You*, claims that the problem is not stress but the *wrong response* to stressful situations: “As a family practitioner, I see not only what kind of disease each patient has, but what kind of patient each disease has. When someone falls ill with a heart attack, dies of lung cancer, or simply seems to be catching one virus after another, it is wrong to simply

blame 'bad luck.' A common factor often emerges in these cases of hardship: simple mismanagement of their own lives, usually in response to stress" (preface, page xi).

It is not what happens to you that matters but how you respond to what happens, but agreeing with this old adage doesn't automatically guarantee an appropriate response to stressful circumstances. But since scripture makes such statements as, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you face trials of many kinds..." (James 1:3) and tells us, amazingly, that the early apostles actually rejoiced at suffering a shameful and painful flogging (Acts 5:40-41), it is clear that stressful situations outside of ourselves do not necessarily need to cause internal stress.

In fact, the real cause of the stress can sometimes be our own thought processes—we become our own worst enemy and make a less than perfect external situation into an internal crisis. The Process of Manifestation is a psychological term that states *thoughts* lead to *emotions* that lead to *actions* that lead to *results*. Whereas thoughts give us direction or beliefs, emotions provide us with motivation that lead us to actions which in turn produce results (T. Harv Eker, *Secrets of the Millionaire Mind*).

In the example of the disciples we see that their *thoughts* caused an *emotional* response of rejoicing, followed by the *action* of teaching and proclaiming the good news, with the *results* of others coming to know the name of Jesus. Apparently, based on what they expected to happen by following Jesus, they were able to respond in a positive stress-free manner, whereas wrong expectations can certainly add to the stress we suffer under circumstances that are difficult or unpleasant. That is one of the reasons Jesus bluntly told his disciples ahead of time that "in the world you will have tribulation" (John 16:33). Paul warned the disciples in his day, "We must go through many hardships to

enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). In the same way, Peter admonished the disciples to not be surprised at the painful trials they were suffering as it was part of being a follower of Jesus (1 Peter 3:12).

Unlike many of our African and Asian counterparts, many of us Western Christians do not expect "trouble and tribulation" to be part of our life and consider it "a strange thing"—in spite of Peter's admonition—which causes unwarranted stress. In other parts of the world when people commit themselves to be a disciple of Christ they accept that suffering is part of the deal.

Knowing and believing that God is sovereign in our lives—and that he is good and we are constantly in his presence—certainly reduces the internal stress we may otherwise experience when times are not easy.

Knowing and believing that God is sovereign in our lives—and that he is good and we are constantly in his presence—certainly reduces the internal stress we may otherwise experience when times are not easy. Paul tells us, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God (Philippians 4:6). But, interestingly, he says that the outcome is not necessarily fulfilled petitions but, "...the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus"(verse 7).

Willingly submitting to, and accepting, what God allows in our lives—being convinced that he is committed to working things out for our benefit (Romans 8:28)—is part of the key to reducing the internal stress that difficult circumstances can cause. We need to recognize and accept that life in this world is not organized for our *comfort* but for our *training*.

Submitting to the desires of the Spirit is also a key to experiencing this inner peace. Sigmund Freud postulated that much neuroses was caused by repressed sexuality and, without doubt, repressing strong desires can certainly be a cause of much stress. The solution for many was complete freedom of sexual expression which has resulted in heartache, disease and death for millions. The biblical solution is a change of heart—to desire what is right so that the stress of inner conflict is no longer a factor (Galatians 5:16-18).

Christians cannot live totally stress-free lives. The experience of totally stress-free living is for a future age. But the fact that we have been given hope and the faith in an ever-present resurrected Savior

who is constantly interceding on our behalf to ensure our ultimate eternal salvation, goes a long way in helping us deal with stress. As Jesus said to the disciples, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).NL

By Camay Achtemichuk*Member, Yorkton congregation*

I have a plaque I bought in Cherokee, North Carolina, hanging on the outside of my front door, that reads, “*Oh, Great Spirit, grant that I may never find fault with my neighbor, until I have walked the trail of life in his moccasins*” (A Cherokee prayer).

The phrase, “Stress and the Christian” can be a whole lot like “Stress-and-the-rest.” What “they ‘should have’ (or ‘not have’) done, is open to scrutiny. “They shouldn’t think that way”, is a bit different—we can only know exactly what “he” thinks, if he chooses to tell us. But, “They shouldn’t feel like that,” is a judgment call.

Such a judgment call involves us knowing the absolute causes for one feeling “that way” today, plus knowing what happened in their life before “today.” Even that depends on environment, personality, attitude, and temperament. We may assume how one feels, and we may be way off. We have our own filters impacted by our own values and interpretations. Something that devastates me, might have been only a “blip” on the screen of life to someone else.

That Cherokee prayer certainly has a lot of truth.

Let me tell you a story:

There was D.R., a man born into a dysfunctional family. He had served in the military a couple of years (a U.S. soldier, in Germany) and then he had come home to marry Jaci (from a less dysfunctional family) who was waiting for him. They had three lovely daughters, Mandy, Marie, and Morgan.

Over the years, these dysfunctional parents learned a lot. They became Christians, and loved their Lord very much. The family weathered two fires that took two homes; then went through a flood that demolished a third home.

It will never be known whether D.R.’s time as a soldier affected him, though he was not in any war. A separate, outside, factor in their lives had also caused much stress, along with the tragic circumstances in the death of D.R.’s

younger brother. Even so, D.R. and Jaci became closer as they grew older. They had welcomed five wonderful grandchildren, and were a close-knit, family—not without trials and problems, or faults—but still were a family full of love.

Over time, D.R.’s health deteriorated steadily, and he was in great pain. He asked for help at the Veteran’s Administration Hospital, and was given pills, pills, upon pills, and had been taking medication for depression for sever-

A Fallen Soldier

A Fallen Soldier

**You were just a simple private—not a general, or even a major.
You didn’t always “obey your orders”—many times, fell “out of favor”.
Working, at fighting inner battles in wilderness or in the field,
You found the armor of your Savior—wore it proudly, with the Shield.**

**Whither body, heart, or mind, betrayed you—matters not just how you died,
God had bade you be His soldier. Then, they played TAPS, and we so cried.
Medals pointed to your mettle, but they cannot show your worth.
To your God, you’ve been made perfect, forgiven; justified; by your New Birth.**

**You; wife; three loving children—five “family jewels” in your crown!!
So cherished in God’s arms eternally, you’ve been given much renown.
Whither “Now”; “Later”; “Then” (God is Present. Future. Past.),
We love, and miss you, yet we’ll remember,**

**A Fallen Soldier,
Home. At last.**

By: Camay Achtemichuk



al months. He had surgery on his feet more than once, and at times, walking hurt very much.

Jaci gave up any hobby she had, to spend her time with him. His depression began “rubbing off” on her. Not being able to drive, her girls would drive her so that she could be outside her (by now, darkened) home. The bedroom, where D.R. spent most of his time, was kept dark because he couldn’t stand the light, and, he seldom went outside. He told Jaci that part of the depression he suffered was the fact that he was no longer able to take care of her or the rest of his family.

It was a lovely day, in that tiny West Virginia village, when their middle daughter, Marie, was with them, to take Jaci grocery shopping. Marie went to tell Dad they were leaving but he wasn’t in bed, or in the tiny trailer FEMA had sold to them after the flood—small, but enough for the two of them. She told Jaci, and she went out the front door while her mom went out the back.

There were screams, then complete shock.

He was out there. Hanging from the tree house he and their oldest grandson had built, a couple of years earlier. D.R., a Christian whose pain had led to taking his own life, who couldn’t know the pain he left for those who loved him. D.R., who, even before that point, may not have believed he was loved, or was “worth loving” by man or God.

D.R., a Christian, whose inner and outer suffering had pushed him (as we all have done, for just a moment) to lose sight of God’s Amazing Grace. But for him, the “moment,” turned out to be fatal.

But this story isn’t just about D.R. and his stress. It’s also about Jaci—a different person, with a different psyche, with a different response. Of course she and Marie were devastated. They would have had little love, otherwise. But she had her children and grandchildren—and her mom (Momaw), who flew out that evening to be with them. Momaw could only stay two months, due to out-

of-country insurance, but those nine weeks gave time for small changes in the midst of complete bewilderment.

Jaci and Momaw were together, most of the visit, though before she flew home, Jaci wanted—needed—a few nights alone—since alone she would be, for a long time.

Once, Marie, who had found her dad, had a complete meltdown. Momaw helped her up off the floor and held her close, while Marie was crying, “Why? Why, Momaw? Why did he do it?”

Momaw said, “I don’t know sweetheart. But I truly believe, if it’s still important, you can ask him someday!”

It must have been the “right” answer, and I know it was a “God” answer. Because she hadn’t been thinking those thoughts at all. Marie has settled down some, and is coping, along with the rest of them. Or should I say...the rest of us. You see, this is also my story. I am Momaw and Jaci is my daughter, who may now, nearly a year later, be beginning to believe a bit in the strength I assured her she has.

D.R. was my son-in-law, and many times I think, “What hell he must have been in!” We just never realized it. The fact is he was also a Christian and was not “weak.” His response, no, reaction, to an overload of stressors was tragic, for all of us. Yet, Jesus knows all this, and welcomes him, just as he will welcome the three of us, all Christians: Jaci, Marie, and me.

All the platitudes, or “shoulds,” or “coulds,” in the world could not have changed anything. It would have to have been a different person, with a different life, in different circumstances. The fact is, it wasn’t. It was D.R., as he was, where he was, and where he had been.

So, don’t ever believe, “It can’t happen to a ‘real’ Christian”. And please don’t ever judge the person, til’ you’ve “walked a mile in his shoes.” **NL**

By Michael Morrison

Announcing The King:

A Study Of Luke 1:1-38

Luke begins his book about Jesus with a preface that describes his research methods. His introduction (all one sentence in Greek) is similar to the beginning of Greek historical works:

“Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:1-4).

Luke does not say that there is anything wrong with previous accounts, which were written by reliable eyewitnesses, but he wants to add his research to strengthen the faith of his readers. “I have checked it out,” he says, “and it is true. I’ll give you the details.”

Ancient writers sometimes dedicated their books to a patron who paid the cost of making copies of the book. Theophilus may be such a sponsor, a person interested in Christianity. Since his name means “lover of God,” any reader who loved God would be invited to read. Luke presents his book as a historically accurate account of “the things that have been fulfilled among us.”

An announcement to Zechariah

Just what are those things? Luke hasn’t yet told us. He begins by putting us into the flow of history—a story of God’s people: “In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron” (v. 5). Luke is writing at least 60 years after these events, but his details suggest that he has done enough research to find the facts. The priests were divided into 24 divisions; each served two one-week periods each year.

“Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord’s commandments and regulations blamelessly. But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years” (vv. 6-7). Being childless was a disgrace in that society, and some people might assume from it that Zechariah and Elizabeth were not pleasing God. But Luke assures us that they were righteous in every way.

Now that he has introduced the characters, he tells the story:

Once when Zechariah’s division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. (vv. 8-12)

A priest could offer incense in the temple only once in his lifetime, and some never had that honor at all. Zechariah may have been nervous at his responsibility, and the sudden appearance of the angel frightened him. The angel told him:

Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth. Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. (vv. 13-17)

Zechariah had apparently given up hope for a son, but he probably still prayed for God to rescue his people. So the angel tells him the first step in the salvation of Israel: Zechariah will have a son—not just any son, but one who is “great in the sight of the Lord.” As part of his special role set apart for God, he would avoid wine (a rule that Nazirites also followed, but John was probably not a Nazirite). He would be a great prophet, turning the people back to God, fulfilling the prophecies of Malachi 4:5-6 and Isaiah 40:3. After a gap of several centuries, God would again inspire one of his servants to speak to the nation.

How can I be sure?

But Zechariah was reluctant to believe it. He asked: “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years” (v. 18). The angel then gave him reasons to believe—first, that the message was from God, and second, that a miracle would happen to Zechariah himself:

“I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time” (vv. 19-20). Zechariah was righteous, but he asked for evidence, so God gave him some he could not deny. God keeps his promises, whether they are to a nation or to an individual.

“Meanwhile,” Luke tells us, “the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak” (vv. 21-22). The priest who offered incense was also supposed to give a blessing, but Zechariah could not.

However, Zechariah kept his commitment, staying in Jerusalem as long as his priestly division was supposed to



serve, and then he went home. Elizabeth became pregnant, but kept her pregnancy secret for five months (vv. 23-24). And she rejoiced: “The Lord has done this for me,” she said. “In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people.” She went from disgrace to favor.

An announcement to Mary

The next event Luke tells us about happened “in the sixth month”—in the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy. He introduces the characters: “God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary” (vv. 26-27). She was probably a teenager, with a legally binding commitment to marry Joseph. Joseph may have been much older; we do not know.

Gabriel went to Mary (we do not know how he appeared) and said: “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you” (v. 28). This was an odd greeting, Mary thought, and she “was greatly troubled at his words” (v. 29). She was just an ordinary girl; why should she be given this honor? So Gabriel said:

Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and

give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end. (vv. 30-33) The angel announced that Mary would have a child, the Son of God, the son of David, a ruler forever. In other words, the Messiah. What a breathtaking announcement! (This is commemorated in March in traditional Christian calendars as the Feast of the Annunciation.) She was to name him Jesus, which means “The Lord is salvation.”

This is not a vague prophecy that in some distant future Mary would become pregnant and have a son. That wouldn’t be much of a prediction, since almost all women had that experience. Mary understood that she would become pregnant right away. “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” (v. 34).

Mary’s question sounds similar to Zechariah’s, but Gabriel did not rebuke her for skepticism. Perhaps an old priest was supposed to have more faith than a teenage girl, or perhaps Mary simply had more faith. To answer her question, Gabriel basically repeated his prophecy,

and gave Mary a sign by revealing Elizabeth’s pregnancy. Gabriel answered:

The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God. (vv. 35-37)

God’s Spirit will cause you to be pregnant, he said, which is why your son will be the Son of God. And if you want further evidence of a miraculous pregnancy, go ask your relative Elizabeth. (We do not know how they were related.) If God can cause an elderly woman to become pregnant, he can also cause a young woman, even a virgin, to become pregnant. He will keep his promise.

Mary’s response is a model for all of us: “I am the Lord’s servant,” she said. “May it be to me as you have said” (v. 38). Her attitude is a great example for all of us. She was willing, even though women who became pregnant before marriage were not treated well in that society. She would go from favor to disgrace—and she did not yet know the heartache involved in being the mother of the Messiah. **NL**

Questions for application

Have I carefully investigated the facts about Jesus? (v. 1)

What prayer would I most like God to answer for me? (v. 13)

Is my heart turned toward my children? (v. 17)

Do I consider myself “highly favored” by God? (v. 28)

Am I as willing as Mary to let God work in my life? (v. 38)

de Michael Morrison

L'annonce du Roi :

une étude en Luc 1. 1-38

Luc commence son Évangile sur Jésus par une préface qui décrit ses méthodes de recherche. Son introduction (d'une seule phrase en grec) est similaire aux introductions des ouvrages historiques grecs :

« Plusieurs personnes ont entrepris de composer un récit des événements qui se sont passés parmi nous, d'après les rapports de ceux qui en ont été les témoins oculaires depuis le début et qui sont devenus des serviteurs de la Parole de Dieu. J'ai donc décidé à mon tour de m'informer soigneusement sur tout ce qui est arrivé depuis le commencement, et de te l'exposer par écrit de manière suivie, très honorable Théophile ; ainsi, tu pourras reconnaître l'entière véracité des enseignements que tu as reçus » (Luc 1.1-4).

Luc ne dit pas que les récits antérieurs écrits par des témoins oculaires fiables étaient mauvais, mais il veut ajouter sa recherche pour fortifier la foi de ses lecteurs. Il dit en quelque sorte : « J'ai tout vérifié, et c'est vrai. Je vais vous en donner les détails. »

Les auteurs anciens dédiaient parfois leurs écrits à un protecteur qui payait pour la transcription de copies du livre. Théophile est peut-être un tel donateur, une personne intéressée au christianisme. Étant donné que son nom veut dire « aimé de Dieu », tout lecteur qui aimait Dieu était invité à le lire. Luc présente son livre comme un récit historique précis « des événements qui se sont passés parmi nous ».

L'annonce faite à Zacharie

Quels sont donc ces événements ? Luc ne nous l'a pas encore dit. Il commence par nous situer dans l'histoire – l'histoire du peuple de Dieu : « Il y avait, à l'époque où Hérode était roi de Judée, un prêtre nommé Zacharie, qui appartenait à la classe sacerdotale d'Abia. Sa femme était une descendante d'Aaron ; elle s'appelait Élisabeth » (v. 5). Luc écrit

au moins 60 ans après ces événements, mais ses détails suggèrent qu'il a fait suffisamment de recherche pour vérifier les faits. Les prêtres étaient divisés en 24 classes et, chaque année, chacune servait durant deux périodes d'une semaine.

« Tous deux étaient justes aux yeux de Dieu et observaient tous les commandements et toutes les lois du Seigneur de façon irréprochable. Ils n'avaient pas d'enfant, car Élisabeth était stérile et tous deux étaient déjà très âgés » (v. 6,7). Ne pas avoir d'enfant était une disgrâce dans cette société, et certaines personnes pouvaient présumer que Zacharie et Élisabeth n'obéissaient pas à Dieu. Mais Luc nous assure qu'ils étaient justes en toutes choses.

Une fois qu'il a présenté les personnages, Luc raconte l'histoire :

« Un jour, Zacharie assurait son service devant Dieu : c'était le tour de sa classe sacerdotale. Suivant la coutume des prêtres, il avait été désigné par le sort pour entrer dans le sanctuaire du Seigneur et y offrir l'encens. À l'heure de l'offrande des parfums, toute la multitude du peuple se tenait en prière à l'extérieur. Tout à coup, un ange du Seigneur lui apparut, debout à droite de l'autel des parfums. Quand Zacharie le vit, il en fut bouleversé et la peur s'empara de lui » (v. 8-12).

Un prêtre ne pouvait offrir de l'encens dans le temple qu'une seule fois dans sa vie, et certains prêtres n'avaient jamais cet honneur. Zacharie était peut-être nerveux devant cette responsabilité, et l'apparition soudaine de l'ange l'a effrayé. L'ange lui a dit :

« N'aie pas peur, Zacharie, car Dieu a entendu ta prière : ta femme Élisabeth te donnera un fils. Tu l'appelleras Jean. Il sera pour toi le sujet d'une très grande joie, et beaucoup de gens se réjouiront de sa naissance. Il sera grand aux yeux du Seigneur. Il ne boira ni vin, ni boisson alcoolisée. Il sera rempli de l'Esprit saint

dès le sein maternel. Il ramènera beaucoup d'Israélites au Seigneur, leur Dieu. Il accomplira sa mission sous le regard de Dieu, avec l'esprit et la puissance d'Élie, pour réconcilier les pères avec leurs enfants, pour amener ceux qui sont désobéissants à penser comme des hommes justes et former ainsi un peuple prêt pour le Seigneur » (v. 13-17).

Zacharie avait apparemment perdu espoir d'avoir un fils, mais probablement qu'il priait toujours Dieu de sauver son peuple. Alors l'ange lui révèle la première étape du salut d'Israël : Zacharie aura un fils – pas seulement n'importe quel fils, mais un fils qui « sera grand aux yeux du Seigneur ». En plus de ce rôle spécial d'être mis à part pour Dieu, ce fils évitera de boire du vin (une règle que les Nazaréens suivaient également, mais Jean n'était probablement pas un Nazaréen). Il sera un grand prophète qui ramènera le peuple à Dieu, réalisant ainsi les prophéties en Malachie 4.5,6 et en Ésaïe 40.3. Après un silence de plusieurs siècles, Dieu inspirerait encore un de ses serviteurs à parler à la nation.

Comment puis-je en être sûr ?

Mais Zacharie hésitait à le croire. Il a demandé : « À quoi le reconnaîtrais-je ? Car je suis moi-même déjà vieux et ma femme est très âgée » (v. 18). L'ange lui a donc donné des raisons de croire : d'abord, que le message venait de Dieu et, ensuite, qu'un miracle lui arriverait :

« Je suis Gabriel. Je me tiens devant Dieu, qui m'a envoyé pour te parler et t'annoncer cette nouvelle. Alors, voici : tu vas devenir muet et tu resteras incapable de parler jusqu'au jour où ce que je viens de t'annoncer se réalisera ; il en sera ainsi parce que tu n'as pas cru à mes paroles, qui s'accompliront au temps prévu » (v. 19,20). Zacharie était juste, mais il a demandé une preuve, alors Dieu lui en a donné une qu'il ne pouvait pas nier. Dieu garde ses promesses, qu'elles soient faites à une nation ou à une personne.

Luc nous dit : « Pendant ce temps, la foule attendait Zacharie ; elle s'est étonnée de le voir s'attarder dans le sanctuaire. Lorsqu'il sortit enfin, il était incapable de parler aux personnes rassemblées. Elles comprurent alors qu'il avait eu une vision dans le sanctuaire. Quant à lui, il leur faisait des signes et restait muet » (v. 21,22). Le prêtre qui offrait l'encens était aussi censé donner une bénédiction, mais Zacharie ne le pouvait pas.

Cependant, Zacharie a respecté son engagement, en restant à Jérusalem aussi longtemps que sa classe sacerdotale était censée servir, pour ensuite retourner chez lui. Élisabeth est devenue enceinte, mais elle a gardé sa grossesse secrète pendant cinq mois (v. 23,24). Et elle s'est réjouie en disant : « C'est l'œuvre du Seigneur ! Il a jeté maintenant un regard favorable sur moi, et effacé ce qui faisait ma honte aux yeux de tous » (v. 25). Et elle est passée de la honte à une faveur.

L'annonce faite à Marie

Le prochain événement dont Luc nous parle se passe « six mois plus tard » – au sixième mois de la grossesse d'Élisabeth. Il présente les personnages : « Dieu envoya l'ange Gabriel dans une ville de Galilée appelée Nazareth, chez une jeune fille liée par fiançailles à un homme nommé Joseph, un descendant du roi David. Cette jeune fille s'appelait Marie » (v. 26,27). Elle était probablement une adolescente, qui était engagée légalement à marier Joseph. Joseph était peut-être beaucoup plus vieux qu'elle, mais nous ne le savons pas.

Gabriel a rendu visite à Marie (nous ignorons comment il lui est apparu) et il lui a dit : « Réjouis-toi, toi à qui Dieu a accordé sa faveur : le Seigneur est avec toi » (v. 28). Cette salutation était étrange, pensa Marie, et elle « fut profondément troublée par ces paroles » (v. 29). Elle n'était qu'une jeune fille bien ordinaire ; pourquoi recevrait-elle cet honneur ? Alors Gabriel lui dit :

« N'aie pas peur, Marie, car Dieu t'a accordé sa faveur. Voici : bientôt tu seras enceinte et sur mettras au monde un fils ; tu le nommeras Jésus. Il sera appelé Fils du Très-Haut, et le Seigneur Dieu lui donnera le trône de David, son ancêtre. Il régnera éternellement sur le peuple issu de Jacob, et son règne n'aura pas de fin » (v. 30-33).

L'ange a annoncé que Marie aurait un enfant, le Fils de Dieu, le fils de David, un roi pour toujours. Autrement dit, le Messie. Quelle annonce à vous couper le souffle ! (Cette annonce est commémorée en mars dans le calendrier chrétien traditionnel comme la fête de l'Annonciation.) Elle devait appeler son fils, Jésus, ce qui veut dire « Le Seigneur est salut. »

Ce n'était pas une prophétie vague qui disait que, dans un avenir lointain, Marie deviendrait enceinte et aurait un fils. Autrement, ce ne serait pas une grande prédiction, étant donné que presque toutes les femmes devenaient mères. Marie a compris qu'elle deviendrait enceinte tout de suite. Elle a donc demandé à l'ange : « Comment cela se fera-t-il, puisque je suis vierge ? » (v. 34.)

La question de Marie ressemble à celle de Zacharie, mais Gabriel ne l'a pas réprimandée pour son scepticisme. Un vieux prêtre était peut-être censé avoir plus de foi qu'une adolescente, ou peut-être que Marie avait simplement plus de foi. Pour répondre à sa question, Gabriel a au fond répété sa prophétie et donné à Marie un signe en lui révélant la grossesse d'Élisabeth. Gabriel a répondu :

« L'Esprit Saint descendra sur toi, et la puissance du Dieu très-haut te couvrira de son ombre. C'est pourquoi le saint enfant qui naîtra de toi sera appelé Fils de Dieu. Vois : ta parente Élisabeth attend elle aussi un fils, malgré son grand âge ; on disait qu'elle ne pouvait pas avoir d'enfant, et elle en est à son sixième mois. Car rien n'était impossible à Dieu » (v. 35-37).

L'Esprit de Dieu fera en sorte que tu deviennes enceinte, dit-il, c'est pourquoi ton fils sera le Fils de Dieu. Et si tu veux plus de preuves d'une grossesse miraculeuse, va demander à ta parente Élisabeth. (Nous ignorons comment elles étaient parentes.) Si Dieu peut faire en sorte qu'une femme âgée devienne enceinte, il peut aussi faire en sorte qu'une jeune femme, même une vierge, devienne enceinte. Il gardera sa promesse.

La réponse de Marie est un modèle pour nous tous : « Je suis la servante du Seigneur. Que tout ce que tu m'as dit s'accomplisse pour moi » (v. 38). Son attitude est un grand exemple pour nous tous. Elle a accepté, même si les femmes qui devenaient enceintes avant le mariage n'étaient pas bien traitées dans cette société. Elle passerait de la faveur à la honte ; et elle ne connaissait pas encore la douleur qu'impliquait devenir la mère du Messie. **NL**

Questions pour une application

Ai-je soigneusement vérifié les faits au sujet de Jésus ? (v. 1)

À quelle prière voudrais-je le plus que Dieu me réponde ? (v. 13)

Mon cœur est-il tourné vers mes enfants ? (v. 17)

Est-ce que je considère que Dieu m'accorde sa faveur ? (v. 28)

Suis-je prêt(e) comme Marie à laisser Dieu œuvrer dans ma vie ? (v. 38)

By Jonathan Buck

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“My books are about killing God,” says award-winning author Philip Pullman, and in the third book of his trilogy, *His Dark Materials*, he does exactly that to God. He kills him.

It’s not surprising, then, that Pullman, author of *The Golden Compass*, now a rollicking adventure movie, has gained cult status among atheists. He’s an atheist’s dream, liberally lacing all three of his novels with anti-God, anti-Church and anti-Christian froth that got him labeled “the most dangerous author in Britain.”

He’s certainly been clever. He’s managed to destroy God and discredit Christianity inside books of fiction and aimed them at children who soak up this stuff without question. But children’s books that tear the guts out of God, the Church and religion? That’s pretty heavy material for kids.

In *The Subtle Knife*, for instance, the second book in *His Dark Materials*, Pullman writes: “I know whom we must fight. It is the Magisterium, the Church. For all its history it’s tried to suppress and control every natural impulse. That is what the Church does, and every church is the same: control, destroy, obliterate every good feeling.” And in *The Amber Spyglass*, Pullman has a former nun say this: “They said Heaven was a place of joy and glory and we’d spend eternity in the company of saints and angels, praising the Almighty in a state of bliss, and that’s what led some of us to give our lives and others to spend years in solitary prayer while all the joy of life was going to waste around us and we never knew.”

In other words, kids, who needs all this stuff about God, Heaven and bliss in an afterlife when there’s so much to enjoy in this life now? We have so much to explore, feel and experience in this world, but along come God and the

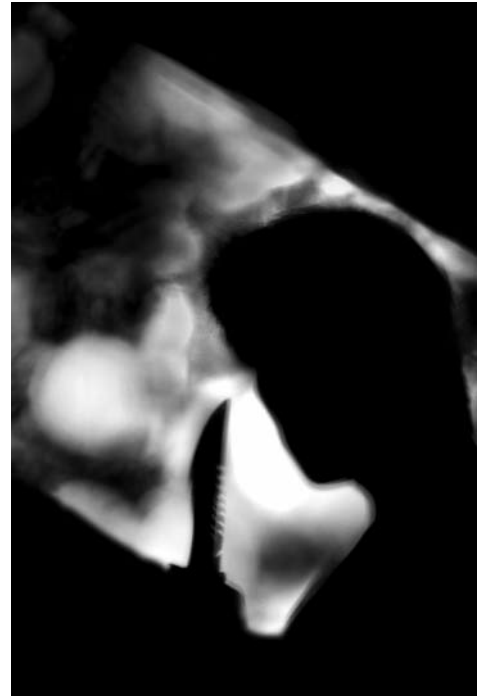
Killing God...A Good Idea?

Church demanding we deny ourselves these joys for the sake of our eternal reward in future. But that’s Christianity, children, it rips the joy out of life. So what does Pullman recommend to children instead? “We shouldn’t live as if it (Heaven) mattered more than this life in this world, because where we are is always the most important place.” Forget the afterlife, Pullman preaches, this life is where it’s at.

He has a point. We live in the here and now so this is where our joy is, surely, not in some vague, idealized afterlife in the future? Well, yes, if you’re someone who’s got money, health and the wherewithal to enjoy this life, but what about the child stuck in an abusive home, or the African child who’s lost his parents to AIDS, or the parents who have a child with extreme autism or cancer? What hope does Pullman’s atheist platitudes offer people like them, when there’s nothing for them in this life and probably never will be? To them the hope of a better life beyond this one is the best news possible.

Christianity goes one better than that, though, by offering powerful help in this life, too. Contrary to what Pullman thinks, Christianity is very much about the here and now. When the apostle Paul writes, for instance, that “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13),” he was talking about the nitty-gritty of daily life in this world, and through Christ’s power being able to meet every challenge life threw at him. Paul was speaking from experience, too. He went to hell and back in his lifetime, finding himself in situations so desperate and so beyond his reach he simply couldn’t cope on his own strength, but when he called on Christ’s power, he got it.

Imagine what that tells billions of people on this Earth for whom this present life is the pits—as it is for all of us at one time or another—that strength beyond our human resources is readily available when we need it. Atheists don’t offer



that. They say our human strength and “the indomitable human spirit” are enough to see us through.

But even Pullman would admit that human strength is not enough. All through his novels the heroes need the help of spirit powers to see them through, whether it be angels, witches, knives that cut through into other worlds in the nick of time, or spirit guidance from a golden compass. Human power is never enough in the worlds of Pullman’s creation, just as human power is not enough in ours.

To me, then, it’s fascinating how an author who scoffs at God calls upon beings and objects with spirit powers to help his human heroes reach their goal. To kill God as a good thing in the minds of children, therefore, is not exactly a great idea is it, when Pullman himself makes it obvious that without the help of powers beyond our own, we humans are helpless? **NL**

Miracle Baby

Stress at overload levels— young parents of a newly-born first child facing an agonizing decision. Doctors are recommending the baby is allowed to die due to major health problems. Numbness and disbelief accompany the heart-rending tears. The young mother remembering the state of alarm, the exhausting days and sleepless nights of those dark times says “those were hard days!”

Seth Johnson was born on Sept. 28, 2006 after 26 weeks gestation. He weighed 2 lbs. 5 oz. and measured 12 inches long. A difficult breech birth led to bleeding in the brain. Seth was flown by Stars Air Ambulance from the hospital in Red Deer to one in Edmonton with a neo-natal unit more advanced in care for newborn babies.

Doctors said there was a 70% chance he would be severely handicapped—cognitive disabilities, probably cerebral palsy, epilepsy, blindness, deafness, severe mental delays and life in a wheelchair. He was given a 30% chance of having only minor handicaps. A distraught grandfather asked what were the chances of the baby being totally normal. The doctor said she did not want to take away all hope so there might be a 1% chance—“But brain damage is already present.” Most likely the baby would not be able to talk or walk.

At a meeting with the parents and grandparents the medical team recommended “comfort care.” The bewildered Mom and Dad asked what did this mean. It is a euphemism for taking the baby off life support and allowing him to die in his mother’s arms! The parents Shaun and Rebecca Johnson wouldn’t even consider this as an option. Baby Seth would be left in God’s loving and all-powerful hands.

Seth had hydrocephalus—a term derived from the Greek words “hydro” meaning water, and “cephalus” meaning head. This condition is sometimes known as “water on the brain.” Children



with this condition have abnormal accumulation of cerebrospinal fluid in the ventricles or cavities of the brain. This often causes increased intracranial pressure inside the skull and progressive enlargement of the head, convulsion, and mental disability. Blood vessels in the ventricles in the brain had burst. One doctor asked if it was fair to the little boy to keep him alive. Anxiety levels again skyrocketed as the uncertainty and fear returned!

The doctor explained that care would continue as long as the baby was fighting for his life but if he crashed they would try to resuscitate him only one time. However over the next few days Seth improved and on Day 7 was extubated and his Mom and Dad got to hear him cry for the first time. Over the next three months, the baby continued to grow though there remained problems with swelling and fluid on the brain. Seth was finally allowed to go home on Christmas Day weighing 5 lbs. 12 oz. Hospital visits continued every two weeks for ultrasounds. In February baby Seth required a three-hour high-risk surgery with the possibility of more severe brain damage! But the surgery was a success and there were no complications. The miracles continued!

Today baby Seth is a normally developed healthy one-year old with no signs of cerebral palsy. His doctor said, “Seth is a living miracle touched by God!” The mother Rebecca says, “The only thing that kept me sane through this scary, emotional roller coaster was my faith in God. I prayed every day and I believe

By David Sheridan

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God answered the cries of my heart in his grace and mercy.” Jesus said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30). The Lord hears, helps and helps those whose hearts are burdened.

Seth’s great grandmother Anne Ottenbreit is a member of Grace & Truth Fellowship, a Worldwide Church of God congregation in Red Deer. Anne volunteers at the local hospital and is familiar with the many health problems of premature babies. During the early days of this ordeal Anne prayed and cried and then prayed and cried some more. Her faith was sustained during the stress-filled weeks when there was “more waking than sleeping” by the encouraging first verse of a well-known Christian hymn:

***Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart;
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art,
Thou my best Thought, by day or by night,
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.***

Anne says, “The Lord of my heart gave us a miracle; to God be the glory.” Our loving, all-powerful and gracious Creator God answered the fervent prayers of the family and many others with a miraculous intervention and divine healing. It was God’s will that baby Seth would live. The living Creator is a God of love, mercy and kindness. **NL**

We would like your “miracle” stories! Eric Wilding is collecting stories of God’s intervention in the lives of people. If you have a story to contribute, please send it either by email or “snail” mail to:

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Sliver Meadows Camp 2007

Where does one begin trying to explain the feeling when you leave camp on the last day? Renewed, uplifted, revitalized in the knowledge that Jesus Christ is our Savior, a Savior who promises never to leave us. Confident in the fact that no matter how rough life gets we have friends and family who will do anything for us.

For 11 years I have been trying to explain the overwhelming feeling of hope, appreciation and boost in strength I experience as a result of our yearly camp experience. There is no way, camp is just...special.

This year, more than any other, I have come to appreciate how God truly is in charge and how only through God's strength and guidance can an undertaking such as the delivery of a Summer Educational Program be implemented. The dedication and hard work of so many giving individuals ensures that camp is a reality each and every year.

The theme of camp 2007 was "Helping Hands...need a hand, get a hand, have a hand, lend a hand." Yes, we stole this idea from the penny boxes you come across when you go through a check-out line. But the idea makes a lot of sense. If we need help or support or a helping hand, God is always, and will always be there for us. He lifts us up in our time of need; he knows our heart's desire. In despair we can call out to God and he will comfort us. Not only is God there for us, but members of our community of faith are there to help us deal with the difficulties that arise in our lives.

Struggles occur, and that is when we can rely on our friends, brothers and sister in Christ, and close family members to be the support we need, the helping hands that comfort and support us through our trials. But we also have to be helpers to others. Letting our light shine, being there when others need an encouraging voice, a shoulder to cry

upon, a heavy picnic table moved, is also important. The power of knowing that we have been blessed with the power to help others, to spread God's grace through love and compassion, is awesome.

There were several highlights that week. Gary, Wendy and Kylie Moore spent two days with us, partaking in all elements of camp life. Wendy gave a presentation on her work with the summer camp program in Africa, sharing pictures and video clips of what a day in the life of African camp is like and Gary delivered the Christian Living message on Thursday morning. Having the Moores at camp was an excellent opportunity for both staff and campers to think beyond the confines of our camp and to appreciate that we are a part of a much larger world in which discipleship and compassion are essential.

Saturday morning also saw, as per camp tradition, several baptisms in Lake Nakamum. Despite the greenness common to warm Albertan lakes mid summer, these young people took the plunge and gave their lives to Christ. Six campers/staff were baptized and it was so exciting and emotional; I noticed several teary eyes as individuals were just so glad to see these young people committing their lives to a Christian way of life.

We all look back with fond memories of solar showers, camp-wide pillow fights, and gigantic tug-of-wars (to set the record straight, of course we *let* the campers beat us this year...don't be fooled by the red faces and groans of intense pain by the staff, we actually didn't *really* want to win...did we?).

The food this year was excellent, the weather was cooperative and the praise and worship was enhancing. Once again we graced the town pool with our presence and confused the local community as we booted around in our big yellow school bus. We learnt that coffee in the morning is good, dirty shoes in the mess

hall are bad, and that "stella-el-ola" can provide hours of entertainment.

Well I could go on and on. To quote a close friend of mind, "Camp renews my faith and compassion each year...gives me the love I need to spend the remaining 51 weeks letting my light shine in a less than bright world."

Each person I come in contact with at camp will be someone I will think and pray about for the year to come. I never feel so much sorrow as when I see someone I care about suffering and never so much joy as when I see them uplifted and full of joy. Camp is special – always has been always will be. Through God's will and guidance and the helping hands of all, so many young people leave camp each year knowing that Jesus loves them and this love can be shared.

Jennifer Straub

Thanksgiving Celebration of Christ 2008

Over eight days about 150 members from across Canada, the Western US and as far away as the UK gathered together at the Riverside Conference Center, beside Lake Okanagan, Penticton, BC, to gratefully celebrate and give thanks to our Savior during the Canadian Thanksgiving weekend.

Participants were refreshed and inspired with heartfelt worship, uplifting and informative messages and seminars, supportive and encouraging fellowship and fun-filled social activities. Our guest speaker this year was Glen Weber, pastor of the Portland, Oregon and Vancouver, Washington congregations of the WCG and district pastoral leader for the Northwest US.

Messages from Canadian director Gary Moore and his wife, Wendy, as well as Nigel Kiernander—director of the Mission House in the UK—were part of a full week of sermons and seminars from



Celebration Of Christ participants, out for a ride.

various presenters. Our live, Saturday night concert performer this year was award-winning Christian recording artist Debbie Fortnum. Sunday night, 120 members enjoyed a delicious and superbly catered Thanksgiving dinner. Tuesday night, our annual barbecue dinner aboard the historic paddle steamer S.S. Sicamous included a lively and much enjoyed sing-along.

A dance hosted by Mexican entertainer Diego Alcaraz was enjoyed on Wednesday night. Indoor bowling, a senior's luncheon, a bus tour and wine tasting afternoon, as well as a games evening and a movie evening on the last Friday night were all part of the activity-packed schedule.

Once again, we were able to present the local representative of the Penticton Food Bank, Christine Simmons, with a \$1,800 donation for their winter needs—a contribution which they now depend upon each year to fulfill their ministry.

This Thanksgiving Celebration, having being successfully self-funded for the past four years, has now become a permanent annual tradition! The venue has already been booked for Oct. 11-18, 2008 and we are looking forward to having the pastor general of the WCG, Dr. Joseph Tkach and his wife, Tammy, join

us as guest speakers.

If you are interested in attending and would like to have details, once they have been finalized, please contact:

Craig and Debbie Minke
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Langley, BC
V2Z 2W8
cminke@telus.net

We can guarantee you a very uplifting and worthwhile spir-

itual retreat—just ask this past year's participants!

Roy Page

Canadian Women Ordained

Bob Millman and Gary Moore ordained the first two female elders in WCG Canada—Dorothy Nordstrom and Jeanette Engblom.



From left to right, the picture includes Bob Millman, (pastor of the Edmonton/Wetaskiwin congregations); Jeanette Engblom, newly-ordained elder in Wetaskiwin; Dorothy Nordstrom, who serves as National Women's Ministry coordinator for WCG Canada and is married to Al Nordstrom, pastor of the Grande Prairie, Evansburg and Westlock congregations.

Knock, the Door Will Be Opened



Open Door volunteers

Are you a single mom or dad with small children? Are you finding it hard to cope? Are you trying to do it all alone?

Why do it alone?

That was the question that was presented to the WCG Church congregation in Surrey, BC one year ago by the Administrator of *Open Door Support for Single Mothers Society*, Francesca Acosta. Open Door is a non-profit charitable Society with four locations in the Vancouver and Lower Mainland areas.

After the presentation, 25 members of the Church signed up for the volunteer project, and free advertisements about the service in the Surrey area were aired on local community service TV channels.

The beginning was small, with one mother and her child attending for the first two months. This worked well, as the volunteers had to prepare by getting police criminal checks, up-to-date immunization, first-aid courses, Food Safe courses, and doctor's notes indicating good mental and physical health.

As well, volunteers had to be trained on practices and procedures required in order to obtain a license from the Fraser Health Authority of BC.

On September 15, 2007, the license was issued. Open Door Surrey is now a legal daycare reality, offering support each Saturday morning from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. from September to June.

The volunteer group will provide child minding services for children, ages 18 months to 5 years, as well as mentoring support (physical, emotional, and spiritual) for the moms or dads. If requested, Bible studies or the Alpha course will be offered.

For the past year, operating without a license, the volunteers have met and served 8 mothers, one father, and 16 children, ranging in age from newborn to 12 years. Now that there is a license in place, participation parameters have to be narrowed to meet the license criteria.

Open Door Surrey also provides a clothing and book exchange for the mothers and children.

Nutritious on-site prepared lunches, breakfast snacks, and tea, coffee or juice are served to the mothers and children, as well as to all the volunteers. Bus fare for volunteers is also provided, as needed.

Open Door Surrey hopes to recruit more help from local area churches as the bulk of their volunteers. *Open Door Society* operates on the Christian principles of giving, helping and sharing. Volunteers are also being recruited from Surrey Community Services and Deltassist via web sites.

Open Door Surrey is financially supported by the generosity of the WCG members, which is very much appreciated.

A big thank you to all the volunteers who hope that 2007-2008 term will be a great year to love their neighbors.

Mable Morrison

ANNIVERSARIES

Lees Celebrate 50th Anniversary

On November 29, 2007, George and Marlene Lee celebrated their 50th wed-

ding anniversary. Their children Terri, Laura, Debbie and Valerie hosted a drop-in celebration for their parents in Brampton, Ont.



George and Marlene Lee

George Lee served as pastor for 32 years in the following church areas: Calgary; Bristol, England; Vancouver; and Barrie, Windsor, and Toronto West, Ont. The couple currently lives in Brampton and are active in the Toronto West congregation.

OBITUARIES



Mary Joseph

Ottawa Member Dies at 105

Mary Joseph died in her sleep at the age of 105 on May 5, 2007. She would have turned 106 on Oct. 5, 2007. At age 100, she was still living alone in an apartment, with homemakers coming four times a week. Her daughter Joyce came to live with Mrs. Joseph to care for her the last few years. Only recently, Church members were among those who helped to celebrate Mrs. Joseph's 105th birthday in a special event organized by

the local Guyanese community association.

Born Oct. 5, 1901, in Guyana, Mary Lenora Beatrice Prince Joseph came to live in Canada with her husband in 1965, and after 10 years they both became Canadian citizens in 1975. Mrs. Joseph had nine children, having had twins twice, and was the grandmother of 14, the great-grandmother of 14 and the great-great-grandmother of 12. Only four of her children remain alive today. Her husband predeceased her in 1991.

At church variety shows and senior citizen events, "Mother" Joseph would recite from memory various psalms and poems. Her trademark poem, "One Solitary Man", continued to be recited from memory even in her last year.

Her first contact with the Worldwide Church of God was via the World Tomorrow broadcast and she was baptized in 1973. Mrs. Joseph only stopped attending church services the last two winters due to her health concerns. Her love of God and His word and her commitment to her family and church is but part of the legacy she leaves behind.

Edmund Hum

BIRTHS



Joel Eugene Cooke

COOKE, Joel Eugene; born on November 27, 2007 to Donna and Jim Cooke of the Toronto East congregation. Joel weighed 6 lbs 5 oz at birth. He is welcomed by his parents and two older brothers, Bryce and Gregory.

Vol.11, No.1 Jan.-Mar.

Gary Moore

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Northern Light is published 4 times annually for members of the Worldwide Church of God in Canada. Editorial contributions and comments on any issue raised in *Northern Light* are welcome although unsolicited materials may not be returned. Please address all correspondence to:

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The new online edition of *Northern Light* is available at www.wcg.ca.

Portions of *Northern Light* are generously provided compliments of *The WCG Today*, published monthly by the Worldwide Church of God.

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**Publications Agreement
Number 40063058**

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Do you love to listen to audio tape messages from dynamic Christian speakers? *Northern Light Magazine* is pleased to provide an audio cassette tape ministry in conjunction with the Edmonton, Alberta congregation.

A sermon based on the theme for each issue of *Northern Light* will be prepared by some of the best speakers from across the country.

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This Month's Tape Offer :

Universalism?

Why so much fuss over the idea that God loves everyone enough he might just be planning to save them all? On the other hand, don't we want a God we can trust to take care of evil and evil-doers?



coming in the next issue...



Who Is My Neighbour?

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