

Faith Networks

A Newsletter for Cooperation in the Churches of God

March 2005

Forward Focus

Jesus said, “No one who sets his hand to the plough and then looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:62, REB) One facet of this teaching is the word picture of a plowman looking forward, and not back. Why is it so important to look forward? What does this have to do with following the command of Jesus to make disciples?

Like many of you, I have plowed (using a tractor, not an animal) and I can attest to the accuracy of Jesus’ statement. One cannot plow correctly while looking backward! Shift your focus from looking forward, and you begin to plow crooked rows! Looking back also makes it impossible to see and surmount obstacles (a rock, a stump?), and increases the likelihood of sustaining damage from hazards (a groundhog hole, a sinkhole?) that may lie ahead. In addition, the operator must pay attention to the engine that drives the plow (more critical if an animal), and that is up front, not behind. Even more importantly, a farmer knows he must study the lay of the land to know how best to plow the field in the first place to prevent soil erosion and promote healthy crops.

How should we apply these simple facts to our job as Christians today?

First of all, we must certainly realize that the Power that drives the plow (and everything else we use) is God, through His Spirit. We can plow and sow and water, but it is God that gives the increase. (1 Cor. 3:5-9) It is the Spirit of God that grants understanding of His word. (1 Cor. 2:9-11) Apart from this Power, all of our effort is in vain.

It also follows that we should study the lay of the land before we begin plowing. When Jesus sent advance teams to announce his travels, he instructed

them to get to know the people in the towns, to discover their needs, and to serve them. (Luke 10:7-9) Jesus did the same, and expects us to do likewise. (Matt. 25:34-40)

Looking forward also helps us to be alert to obstacles. Not everyone will be receptive. (Luke 10:10-11) We need to focus on people, sensing their reactions, and serving their needs as the Spirit leads, not looking back at what’s already been done. As God gives success, it is important to stay humble and disciplined—giving the glory to God, not men. Paul himself was on guard, lest he find himself disqualified! (1 Cor. 9:27, REB)

Of course the most obvious lesson of this analogy is that looking backward results in crooked rows. How does this apply to us? Unfortunately, many of us in the Church of God have tended to identify ourselves by what we have experienced rather than with whom we serve, and the job He has given us to do.

When we focus on the past—on the things that have happened to us—we sow in crooked rows. We attempt to spread the words of God, but they are so colored by our experience that the message becomes muddled, even unintentionally perverted—crooked!

It’s time that we follow Paul’s example and forget what is behind and strain towards that which lies ahead. (Philip. 3:13) God has given each of us at least one plow (gift). How are you using yours? Which direction are you facing?

The fields are waiting. There’s so much to do. Grab your plow—and don’t look back!



Brian Drawbaugh
Pennsylvania
trimco@direcway.com

Reservations About Evangelism

A dozen years ago I was working in Church Administration for a denomination and was listening to a “pitch” on evangelism. It was an educational movie about a family inviting a young man whose car broke down far away from his home to live with them. The thrust of the idea being presented was to make friends of people so they could be invited to your church.

Around the same time, there were floods and other natural disasters, and some pastors were pushing their congregations to help out as a way to get “good press” for their church so more people would find out about it.

There was something that bothered me about these “pitches” and the other ideas that I was hearing for evangelism. It took me a while to put my finger on it.

Do you know what it was that bothered me? It was motive.

You see, the goal that I was hearing was to get people to “come to my church.” The emphasis was on “my” church. Get good publicity so people would be impressed with “my” pastor and “my” congregation.

Lingering in the background was the idea in my church culture that all the other churches were inferior at best or “false” at worst. Even those who believed much like my church taught were inferior because of their leadership or some other flaw.

I couldn’t accept the ideas being put forward about evangelism. They just didn’t strike me as being right. It also bothered me that I had such a negative reaction to what my church was espousing. How could I be “against” evangelism?

Over time I learned three principles that have made all the difference:

First: Our motive should not be to “get” people to come to “our” church. Our motive should be to introduce people to the real Jesus and lead those whom God calls to baptism. Those who are called and respond may end up attending our congregation—but if they become disciples of Jesus Christ and attend elsewhere, shouldn’t it be seen as a tremendous win for the greater family of God?

I can often tell who are those that believe their congregation or their church denomination is the one and only true church because they bristle at this idea. Ever wonder why many churches of God don’t cooperate with each other in regard to evangelism? Could it be because they don’t want to invest time, money, and work only to have people attend another (inferior/false) church?

What is the real motive behind our evangelism? Is it helping people find salvation through Jesus Christ, or is it “getting” more people to sit in “our” church services?

Second: When we do good works so our church can be noticed, or befriend people to get people to come to “our” church, we are lacking the kind of “heart” Jesus wants us to have. One of the sermons I give at our Evangelism Conferences is based on the “Three Lost Parables” of Luke 15. Jesus really cares about “the lost.” In my old church culture, I heard some ministers publicly lampoon those who were trying to “save the lost.”

I wonder how they would interpret Luke 19:10 where Jesus said, “For the Son of man came to seek and to save what was lost.”

Many people are hurting, but that doesn’t mean they are blind to the motives of others. Most can tell when someone really cares. Helping people because we love them, we want to see them share joy instead of pain, and we’ve been there ourselves is different than offering to help them because we have ulterior motives.

Having a genuine heart for the lost can be a challenge for us. It can require a change in attitude ourselves. I am working on changing mine.

Would Jesus want us to serve only those who would join our congregation? In Matthew 25:31-46, the difference between the sheep and the goats appears to be an almost unconscious attitude of seeing others hurting and taking care of their needs. Jesus makes it clear that He expects nothing less of His disciples.



Guy Swenson
Indiana
www.ntevangelism.org

Continued on page 3

Faith Networks is a voluntary effort by a group of individuals interested in promoting cooperation among the Churches of God and encouraging healthy relationships both within congregations and between them. Resources have been made available for the initial stages of Faith Networks by members of the Church of God Cincinnati.

Editor:

Jim O'Brien

Associate Editors:

Pam Dewey

Joan Osborn

Page Layout:

Dan Farnsworth

Peer Review Team:

Guy Swenson

Bill Jacobs

Ron Dart

Ray Wooten

Dave Havir

Wendy Pack

Pam Dewey

Jim O'Brien

C. Wayne Cole

Contributors:

Brian Drawbaugh

Jeff Osborn

David Antion

Erin Puckett

Contact Information:

P.O. Box 1811

West Chester, OH 45071

jobrien@fuse.net

(513) 755-0040

... Reservations continued

Third: A friend of mine loves to say, "You can't give what you don't have." I'd love to give my kids a million dollars each—but I don't have a million dollars to give. In the same way, we can't give people excitement about becoming a Christian if we aren't excited ourselves.

Authentic Christianity is more than mastering doctrines. It is more than living a life based on "duty." Obedience to God is part of repentance and becoming a "new creation." However, some never get past obedience. Their maturity is arrested, and they see a glory in "duty."

God intended us to feel joy, peace, patience, gentleness—and people love receiving the fruits of the Spirit. They are healing.

We give from what we have—in fact, we have given what we have. If people are not responding, could it be that we ourselves are missing something that people truly need?

Heart? Hope? Joy?

When we invite people to our fellowships, what will they find—people attending church just because of a sense of duty within a fence of doctrine, and with an attitude of superiority?

Or will they find authentic Christian families enjoying their walk with God, and a church that is "fun" and full of life?

The good news is that God will give us everything others need to receive from us. Authenticity sometimes means changing the status quo. Commitment to the Great Commission of Matthew 28: 18-19 can prompt us to place heart, hope, and joy as higher priorities.

When we do our part in leading those God calls through our "planting and watering" to a joyful salvation, we are on a rich path of harvest. We are learning to give genuinely with the benefit of others foremost in our minds.

Kind of like Jesus evangelized.

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Close Encounters

After his long ordeal, and after his close encounter with God, Job said something incredibly profound. But hardly anyone seems to take notice. After hearing God's answer to all his complaints, after he had really gotten the picture, Job said, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

I can't help thinking that I am today where Job was before God spoke to him. I have heard of God with the hearing of the ear, but my eye has not seen him. Don't get me wrong. I believe in God, but so did Job. I obey God, but so did Job. I pray to God, but so did Job. There is no act of righteousness that I have done that Job would not have done, and all this before he really saw God. That means that I am squarely where Job was. And that means I very likely share his vulnerability. I want to tell you where this first began to dawn on me, and what I think it means.

I was reading the book of Revelation, and I came to that passage in the fourth chapter where John in vision gets to see the very throne of God. John described what he saw in the manner of the day. He put all the things he saw into a long paragraph, a kind of summary of the vision.

Let me tell you how I think he saw it. John fell into a vision, and in vision, he found himself in a place that was nothing like he had ever seen before. What dominated the scene for him was a throne with twenty-four seats arranged in a semicircle before it. There was a man seated on each of these seats with a golden crown on his head. To John, they appeared to be elders of one kind or another. Also before the throne, there were seven flames burning, which John describes as the seven spirits of God.

John also saw four creatures that were full of eyes before and behind. It seems kind of creepy, but don't lose track of the fact that this is a vision. As John watched, the creatures sang out: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come." And out of the throne there appeared lightning and peals of thunder.

There appeared on the throne one whom John could only describe in terms of precious stones. And with his appearance, there was a greenish halo all around the throne. Instantly, the twenty-four elders threw down their crowns and sang out: "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." And they threw themselves down before him who sat on the throne.

What I wondered as I read this account and tried to visualize it was—what went through the minds of the twenty-four elders as they did this? Was one of them thinking to himself, "Let's see, was it sing this song and then throw down my crown? Or was it throw down the crown and then sing?" Could I assume that they did what they were supposed to do, that they followed an "order of service"?

I don't think so. How could anyone who wears a crown, a legitimate symbol of power and authority, wear that crown in the presence of the great King of all the Universe? I think they did what was the most natural thing to do. I think they threw down their crowns, shouted praise to God, and fell down before him. They needed no script, no order of service.

They saw with their eyes, the God of Glory. They did not do this because they were supposed to. They did not do it because they were commanded to do it. They did not do it out of a sense of obligation or duty. They did not do it following some accepted form. They did it because they couldn't do anything else. They did it because they saw God.

And so I have to realize that, just as Job had not experienced what the twenty-four Elders saw, we have not even seen what Job saw. We want to see God. And the very awareness of God creates in us a yearning that we should respond to. Not with mere form. Not imitating what someone else does, but with a worship that comes from the heart.



Ron Dart
Texas

ron@cemnetwork.com

Promoting Spiritual Maturity

The Apostle Paul wrote extensively about spiritual maturity. He told the Hebrews that spiritually they acted like babies who still needed milk when they were old enough to be eating solid food. Thinking about what Paul said, a term comes to mind from the child development literature: arrested development. The Hebrews were spiritually immature. Their spiritual development had arrested in their spiritual infancy.

Looking at the spiritual landscape—at my congregation, at the church organizations of our general faith culture, at the church people I know, and at myself—I see a group of people who, for the most part, have been converted to God’s ways years ago, but are laboring to accomplish things that we ought to have mastered early on. We can’t get along with each other, so we part ways. That parting says a lot about the quality of love we have for each other.

We are so focused on ourselves we have no energy to expend in service to those outside our own group. Most of us don’t think much about the poor. Many of us can’t find a way to pray together as the early Christians did. After years of meeting together, we don’t really know others in our groups very well. For many of us, our fellowship has little authentic content.

Many of us ignore the children in our midst, contrary to the example of Jesus. We act as though they are invisible. If we can’t see them, we certainly will never be able to imitate their sincerity and honesty of heart—attitudes that grace the spiritually mature. Instead we focus on being “doctrinally correct.” Yet, we can’t decide among ourselves what correct doctrine is.

How long we’ve attended services is a big issue for us. So also is ordination or position in our group. Many of us have been attending services for years, and yet we have never sought to use the gift of the Spirit God promises to each child of His. These are just a few of the things I see.

In the last eight months, I have traveled with the NT Evangelism Conferences to many congregations and groups. Everywhere I go, I see congregations that eagerly want to learn and to grow, but struggle with the issue of spiritual immaturity.

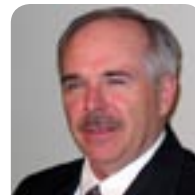
How can we as leaders support and facilitate spiritual maturity in those we serve? Besides his incisive critique of the Hebrews, Paul also told them one thing

they needed to do to become spiritually mature. He said that we become spiritually mature as our “senses are exercised to discern both good and evil.” According to Strong’s, the Greek word for evil could be translated injurious. In other words, Paul is indicating that we learn from experience about what works and what doesn’t, what is good and what isn’t, what’s right and what’s wrong.

I know a woman who has raised two children to teen age. They are wonderful children. As they have grown up, she has consistently offered them plenty of chances to make decisions about their own lives. She includes them in family decisions, family work, and family objectives. Additionally, as her children have asked questions about the questionable behaviors they have seen at church, she has asked them, “What do you think about what so-and-so is doing? What would you do in that situation?” She has helped them exercise their senses to discern good and evil in a personal and real way. Her efforts have yielded the dividend of maturity in her children.

Could this be what Paul had in mind for the Church? When a problem arose, he didn’t write to the elders. Instead he wrote to the whole congregation. He even took the Corinthians to task for not judging wisely when a problem came up. He asked them, “How will you judge the world, if you don’t learn to judge yourselves now?” His questions and instruction were aimed at causing them to think and decide, rather than merely complying with his directives. To put it in modern terms, Paul included the stakeholders in the decision-making.

Of course that kind of leadership comes only from spiritual security and health. We can’t covet control and lead that way. We can’t be insecure and fearful. We have to have faith in God’s power to lead us all, when we share decision-making with others. Yet that seems to be the only way people really mature spiritually. In summation, we could say that spiritual maturity in a congregation occurs more readily when the leadership is spiritually mature.



By Bill Jacobs
New Mexico
billrjacobs@comcast.net

Can We Forgive?

Consider Jesus on the cross: depleted of strength; unquenchable thirst; writhing pain; gashed, bruised, and bleeding; humiliated, mocked, and belittled. Yet he said, “Father forgive them, for they don’t know what they do.” (Luke 23:34)

Jesus taught from the mount saying, “Blessed are the merciful ... turn the other cheek ... give your coat and cloak too ... love ... do good ... pray for your enemies.” Later, he said, “If you don’t forgive others, your Father in heaven will not forgive you.” (Matt. 6:15) Such is the example left by our loving Savior—the utmost expression of mercy and love. How well do we follow in his footsteps? Many of us have experienced recent hurts. How have we responded? I speak from my heart. Have you, like me, had any of the following thoughts?

“I will never get over how _____ treated me.”
“_____ was so intolerant. He made me so mad. I will never go back.”
“I can’t help how I feel. It’s all _____’s fault.”
“It’s not fair! They love _____ more than me.”
“I wouldn’t be in this mess if he hadn’t left.”
“There’s no excuse for what’s happened. Somebody’s going to pay.”
“I have my rights. They can’t treat me this way.”
“Do what? Can’t you see who does all the giving around here anyway?”
“Why is God allowing this to happen? If he really loved me he’d fix things.”
“Me? Give them another chance? No way. They don’t deserve it.”
“It’s always been like this. Things will never change.”

Insert Mom, Dad, husband, wife, friends, co-workers, boss, minister, or church. We all have those who trouble us. Maybe we, as Christians, do not talk openly of our hurts, but our inward thoughts often speak to injury. Correction, criticism, loss of opportunity or job, abuses, broken relationships, lies, unresolved conflict—life is filled with circumstances that wound us. Then ... Disillusionment abounds ... Despondency overtakes ... Despair grabs our souls. Prolonged nurturing of resentment, bitter-

ness, revenge, strife, and hatred will sabotage our physical, and more importantly, our spiritual lives.

“Forgive and forget,” says the flippant age-old adage. “Send away, remove, absolve, pardon, pass over, and excuse” are the dictionary definitions of “forgive.” Think for a moment—would we want to excuse a child abuser who was still abusing? No, that would be absurd. Could we forgive? To follow Jesus means that we would, but we would certainly not wish to forget and return to be abused again.

From this simple example we see that forgiveness does not always require excusing or forgetting. Forgiveness does not demand reconciliation. It does not require an apology from, or repentance of the injurer. Personal contact is not always advantageous. Amazingly, forgiveness after the example of our Savior does not even require the cessation of harmful behavior or trust that it will never occur again. Sometimes we just have to turn the other cheek, drop our cloak, walk away from evil, and still forgive.

On the other hand, Jesus requires us to warn a brother who is hurting someone and accept his apology when he stops sinning. Christ told the apostles to accept this brother’s apology at least seven times a day! Overwhelmed, the apostles said, “Lord, increase our faith!” (Luke 17:1-5)

It’s imperative we recognize that our forgiveness of others is intimately connected with God’s forgiveness of us. How great is our Shepherd, who is kind to forgive and delights in extending mercy to His people. (Micah 7:18-19) Forgiveness embodies an understanding of the basic elements of Christianity—love, mercy, and humility. The ability to maintain good relationships is intrinsic to any healthy body of believers. Therefore, to have a stable and thriving church community, we simply must embrace the concept of forgiveness.

Next time I will address the process and power of forgiveness.



Wendy Pack, Virginia
propers@
4seasonswireless.net

As In Adam, So In Christ

1 Cor 15:22, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." KJV

This is such a short statement, yet it holds a vastly important and vital key to the fate of humanity!

In Adam All Die

"By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." (Romans 5:12)

Paul is saying that death spread to all mankind because "all have sinned" in Adam. Paul's logic is that all humanity was "In Adam" when he sinned, and therefore the whole human race was implicated, or participated, in Adam's act of disobedience. The condemnation of death that came to Adam automatically passed on to every human being.

Four times in Romans 5:15-18, Paul states that Adam's sin (not our own personal sins) brought judgment, condemnation, and death to the whole human race. So the context of verse 12 supports the idea that all die because "all have sinned" in Adam.

The logic is that Adam is a type, or pattern, of Christ. What happened to us in Adam is rectified for us in Christ. Therefore, if we insist that verse 12 means that all men die because "all have sinned" as Adam sinned—then we must make the analogy fit by arguing that all men live (or are justified) because all have obeyed as Christ obeyed. Such an argument turns justification by faith into salvation by works, the very opposite of Paul's teaching in Romans. The analogy is that since "all have sinned" in Adam and are therefore condemned to death in him, so all have obeyed in Christ and therefore stand justified to life in Him (verse 18).

How This Applies To You Personally

With the facts Paul has given about the two Adams in Romans 5, what conclusions can we draw concerning our salvation?

• Whether you are deemed a sinner and condemned to death, or whether you are declared righteous and qualify for eternal life, is linked to the history of Adam or Christ. Based on Adam's disobedience you are deemed a sinner. Based on Christ's obedience you are declared justified or righteous.

• If you belong to the humanity produced by Adam (and all humans do), you are made a sinner and are condemned to eternal death. If you choose to renounce your place in Adam and accept your position in the humanity of Jesus Christ, you are declared righteous and qualify for eternal life.

• All mankind by creation is "in Adam." This is the position we inherit by birth into the human race. Hence we are "by nature the children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3). But God has given us a new identity "in Christ." Our position "in Adam" is by birth. Our position "in Christ" is by faith. God has given the entire human race a "free gift." The gift is by grace. But for the gift to be effective, it must be received by faith.

• Adam and Christ belong to opposite camps that cannot be reconciled. Adam is equated with sin and death; Christ with righteousness and life. Consequently, it is impossible to belong to Adam and Christ at the same time. To accept Christ by faith means to renounce one's position in Adam (2 Cor 5:17; 6:14-16). Baptism is a public declaration that we have died to sin (our position in Adam) and have been resurrected into newness of life (our position in Christ) (Rom 6:1-4, 8; 2 Tim 2:11).

• So, the human race may be divided into two groups: 1) the Adamic race, made up of many nations and tribes, and 2) believers who are all one in Christ (Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 10:17; Eph 4:11-13).

We choose to which of the two groups we may belong. We can hold our position in Adam by unbelief, and reap death, the result of his sin. Or, by faith, we can be united to Christ and receive the benefits of His righteousness.

If you would like to study this information more deeply you may contact United Christian Ministries, P.O. Box 1045, Gardendale, Alabama, 35071. Or telephone toll free 1-888-985-9066. Or E-mail UCM3821@AOL.COM. Or check our web site at, www.unitedchristianministries.com.



Ray Wooten
Alabama
UCM3821@AOL.COM

Left to Himself

David L. Antion
California
drdaveca@earthlink.net

In the early spring of 1960, my wife Molly and I went to visit a young divorcee in her 20's. It was mid morning. After repeatedly knocking on the door, we could hear a little child crying. We kept knocking and pushing the doorbell. No answer. But we could still hear the cries of the little child.

We could see a little girl standing in her playpen, holding on to the rails. She was less than a year old. No one was home. She was hungry, thirsty, and needed a diaper change.

We decided to drive around and look for the mother. After about an hour, we returned to the apartment in time to see the mother walking home.

She was embarrassed but invited us in. She confessed that she had gone to a local bar "last night" to meet a "boyfriend." We talked to her about her responsibilities to her little girl whom Molly changed while the mother moved slowly but deliberately around in a small, poorly stocked kitchen to find food. This girl had been left so long in diapers filled with excrement that she had sores on her skin.

This young woman attended church, professed belief in the Bible—God's Word! Yet, she left a child under 1 year old unattended the whole night and well into the next day!

Human nature hasn't changed—headlines today echo the consequence of those whose hearts are hardened.

How Can This Happen?

Many "experts" are busy trying to come up with explanations as to why and how these things can happen in our society. Developmental psychologists suggest that humans who are cruel to animals will eventually be cruel to humans. Proverbs 11:17 show us, "A righteous man cares for his beast, but a wicked man is cruel at heart." (NEB) Some people never learned to have feeling or compassion for their pets or work animals.

Most of us must confess that we have little or no compassion for insects, spiders, roaches, and other "pests." But with mammals such as dogs and cats—pets that form attachments—we do. To be deliberately cruel to that type of animal is a very bad sign.

Some of us would even have a hard time hurting another human, even when that person was trying to hurt us or a loved one.

I have no empathy for a piece of Kleenex. I might crumble it up, tear it up, throw it away. I don't even consider that I might be hurting it. I have no conscience problem regarding that piece of tissue paper. I can walk away leaving it torn and crumpled, lying in a trash can.

But some cruel people look on a fellow human being as you or I look on a piece of paper, a stick, or a clod of dirt. They cannot identify with the suffering of others! Why? Because they have not developed empathy or human attachment! Something went wrong in their childhood development. They did not become emotionally and lovingly attached. They have no empathy (ability to feel into another) or sympathy (ability to feel with another).

How Do Children Learn Empathy?

We first learn to develop attachment from the warm, caring, and nurturing behavior of our parents. Most mothers care for, feed, nurse, love, and cuddle their child. But imagine a child who comes into the world unwanted by a mother who is first of all a pleasure-seeker, or hooked on drugs and alcohol.

Need for Loving Parents

In his "psychosocial stages of development" theory, Erik Erikson postulates that the child's first stage of life is one of "trust vs. mistrust." He says a child must determine whether s/he can trust the world—whether it is a safe place. This trust develops when s/he has nurturing, caring parents who tend to the child's needs. Hungry, s/he cries. A caring parent fulfills the need. Wet, miserable in a dirty diaper, the parent changes the diaper, cares, and nurtures.

Children are very sociable, and need human contact. The nurturing parent picks the child up, holds him, loves him, plays with him, speaks and sings to him. And a child develops "trust."

Continued on page 12



Flea Powder for Itching Ears Dealing with Doctrinal Novelties



Pam Dewey
Michigan
oasis@chartermi.net

For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. (II Timothy 4:3 NIV)

Wind and Waves

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. (Matt.7:24-25 NIV)

What rock is Jesus is speaking about here? In one analogy made by Paul, it is Jesus himself:

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. (I Cor. 3:10-11 NIV)

But in Jesus' parable of the wise man building on the rock, He implies that building on the rock is building on what He has said. And what He has said in the context of this passage isn't unusual speculation about prophecy, complex reasoning about how to construct a Holy Calendar, or admonition on how to pronounce Hebrew words. It is the very simple, basic precepts of the Sermon on the Mount!

We each individually need to "build our house upon the Rock" of Jesus Christ and the things He has taught us through the Scriptures. But this concept also applies to the "household of faith," the local congregation. It needs to be built on the Rock too.

There is another Biblical analogy that describes what happens to us individually and to all of us in congregations when we are not grounded on solid rock. We can become ...

... infants, tossed back and forth by the waves,

and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. (Eph 4:14-16 NIV)

There have been winds and waves of doctrine blowing and tossing people around in the Church of God movement for decades. If this hasn't happened yet in your own local congregation, get ready—it surely will in the coming months and years.

As mentioned in the previous installment of this column, just because an idea is unfamiliar to us doesn't mean someone proposing it is a deceitful, scheming heretic. It is those ideas that divide loving brethren that are truly heresies. Some ideas we have not considered before may actually build even more strength into our foundation, by helping us to understand the teachings of Jesus more clearly. But others may be mere wind and waves that will attempt to tear down rather than build up.

There is a lot of enthusiasm for "local evangelism" now in Church of God circles. If your congregation is not equipped to discern the difference between solid building materials and destructive wind and waves, it is not really ready to reach out and attempt to bring new people into the local fellowship.

The next column in this series will begin a checklist of things you can do to make sure you are on the solid Rock, ready for your congregation to grow.

Pam Dewey will be presenting two Evangelism Seminars at a special Days of Unleavened bread gathering in Springfield, Missouri:

Saturday, April 23, 2005: Understanding Spiritual Hunger.

Sunday, April 24, 2005: Finding Common Ground.

Pam's husband George will be delivering the sermon on Saturday.

See the announcements section of this issue for details on times and location.

Announcements

Central Pennsylvania Evangelism Conference: March 26-27

It's not too late to plan to attend the Central PA Evangelism Conference in Harrisburg, PA on March 26-27. Take advantage of this opportunity to learn about the true mission of the Church, focus on becoming healthy congregations, and explore the utilization of the gifts God has given to each of us. Get details and register online at www.cogcentralpa.org/conference or call Brandon Pack at 570-765-1074. There is no cost, and meals will be provided as well, but we need to know you're coming so that we may order enough materials.

Spring Mini-Feast: April 22 - 24

Christian Educational Ministries extends a cordial invitation to everyone who would like to join us for a Mini-Feast April 22 - 24, 2005 at the Seascape Resort Conference Center in Destin, Florida. Ronald L. Dart is scheduled to speak as follows:

- April 22, 7:00p.m.** - Passover Service
- April 23, 2:00p.m.** - Sabbath Service
- April 23, 7:00p.m.** - Night to be Much Observed
- April 24, 2:00p.m.** - First Day of Unleavened Bread

For more information you may call Christian Educational Ministries at (903)509-1139 or if you have questions regarding directions you may call Gary or Shirley George at (850)837-0485.

Springfield, Missouri "Double Sabbath" weekend for Days of Unleavened Bread

The Bible Fellowship Church of God is hosting a Double Sabbath weekend full of spiritual and physical food, education, fellowship, and fun for all ages.

Activities:

Friday, April 22, 7:00 PM: Lord's Supper service.

Location: The La Quinta Inn, 2535 S. Campbell Ave., Springfield, just north of Sunset Street. Reserved rooms are to the left along the main corridor. Bring a wash basin, towel, and Bible for this service.

All activities on Saturday and Sunday will be at the Oasis Inn and Conference Center in Springfield. See details below.

Saturday, April 23 10:30 AM: Evangelism Seminar, Part One: Pam Dewey (Michigan)

12:00 Noon: Catered Lunch Buffet

1:30 PM: Sabbath services: Sermon: George Dewey (Michigan)

4:00 PM: Seminar: Dennis DeJarnette (Missouri)

Evening: Night to be Much Remembered potluck and fellowship

Sunday, April 24 10:30 AM: Evangelism Seminar, Part Two: Pam Dewey

12:00 Noon: Unleavened Bread Services Sermon, Rory Ries (Missouri)

Potluck following Lodging at Oasis Inn and Conference Center, 2550 North Glenstone, Springfield MO 65803. TOLL FREE: 1-888-532-4338
<http://www.springfieldoasis.com>

Ask for the special Bible Fellowship Church of God rates at the Oasis: a regular double room for \$54, a poolside room for \$64. Taxes may be additional.

Please RSVP if you and your family would like to be included in the count for the catered lunch buffet on Sabbath. There will be no cost to attendees, although donations to help cover some of the expense will be gratefully accepted.

For more information contact Dennis DeJarnette (417)-239-1402 positivedennis@centurytel.net.

CEM Family Bible Retreat: May 27-30

You will not want to miss the Family Bible Retreat over the Memorial Day weekend at the Bel Arco Resort, Bull Shoals, Arkansas. The event begins Friday evening, May 27 with fellowship and finger foods provided, and ends at noon May 30. Bring your entire family for inspirational sermons, seminars, workshops, YEA classes (ages 3 to 20), fun activities, and adventure on the lake and river. Ronald L. Dart will enlighten, inspire, and delight you with God's Word. Other outstanding speakers will be heard as well. Reasonably priced accommodations at the Bel Arco Resort are limited. Call 866-235-2726 toll free today to reserve your room and tell them you're with CEM. For information on RV parks, camping, other accommodations, and all the above events call 1-888-BIBLE 44 or check out CEM's website at www.cemnetwork.com.



West Virginia Rafting Trip: June 3-5

A River Rafting Trip is planned for the New River Gorge in West Virginia June 3rd thru 5th, 2005. The New River Gorge is one of the most scenic and exciting areas of our country. A private section of a state campground is reserved for Sabbath activities preceding the Sunday excursion. For more info call James Sexton at 1-502-863-3230.

CEM Summer Camp: June 26-July 3

CEM's summer camp will be held this year at Camp Wewoka Woods, near Wewoka, Oklahoma, from June 26 to July 3. A letter will be sent to all who are on our teen mailing list, but if you or a teen you know are not on our list, be sure to call, write, or e-mail to request information about camp to lsw@cemnetwork.com.

The tuition fee remains at only \$250. But we also recognize that not every one can afford to attend camp, so a special camp scholarship fund has been established. Anyone who would like to help sponsor a deserving young person to attend camp can make a contribution to CEM for this fund. This special donation will still be tax deductible, but will be used exclusively for helping a young person come to camp.

Summer camp is open to all teens who will be 13 by the time camp ends and who have not yet turned 19, regardless of their church affiliation, or that of their parents.

Activities include water skiing and tubing, swimming, horseback riding, group initiatives, ultimate frisbee, arts & crafts, volleyball and basketball, as well as dances and the annual camp fun show. Each year we try to add something new, and we plan to continue that this year. We always have our daily cabin Bible studies and group studies, as well as the "huddle" to close the day.

If you know someone you think would enjoy camp, be sure to tell them to call, write or e-mail for an application. Please spread the word, so that all who want to attend will know about summer camp. And, if you are able, please help a deserving young person come to camp by making a donation to CEM's camp scholarship fund.

Camp Outreach: Build Friendships While You Rebuild Homes! June 19-26

"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."
James 1:27.

If you're a single young adult (17+) and have ever wanted to really make a difference, learn more about God, and share the whole experience with peers who

believe as you do, Camp Outreach may be for you. If you're not afraid of hard work during the daytime, and you still have energy for friends in the evening, mark your calendar for June 19-26. Pack your work clothes, your swimsuit, and your Bible. You'll need them all for Camp Outreach's unique blend of community service, fun, and Christian learning!

Join an intimate group of young adults, contractors, and Bible teachers for a memorable week of service to others. Sponsored by Common Ground Christian Ministries (New Testament Evangelism) and the Lexington Church of God, Camp Outreach is set in the beautiful Bluegrass Region of Kentucky.

Your team, consisting of others like you who are committed to God and their fellow man, will work together to renovate homes in serious need of repair that belong to widows and others equally deserving. In the process, you'll learn how to share your faith with those God is calling and develop strong bonds of friendship.

Regardless of your level of experience, you will learn new skills under the leadership of award-winning builders, contractors, and church member, Jim Sexton. Each day, you will also delve into Biblical principles, and share exciting, exhilarating, and exhausting experiences with friends old and new.

Space is limited, so apply right away! To request an application to Camp Outreach, email jswenson@ntevanglism.org or send your request to:

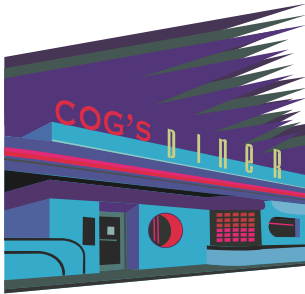
Jennifer Swenson
Common Ground Christian Ministries
PO Box 158, Plainfield, IN 46168

Organic Oven Unleavened Bread

Just in time for the Days of Unleavened Bread: The most wholesome bread you can purchase, as well as delicious! Shipped directly to you from Toronto, Canada. We offer flatbread made with organic Kamut flour, olive oil, water, and sea salt. Our flatbread is made without yeast, sugar, egg, or milk ingredients. And it is soft, making it usable for sandwich wrap, thin pizza crust, tortilla, or just for dipping with your favorite sauce. It can be toasted and served like matzos but tastes much better and is softer and healthier. Comes in a pack of 5 for \$3. We can ship via UPS. Church groups may order 20 to 30 packs for about \$25. We ship all over the US and Canada.

Also available: unleavened cookies and desserts, gluten/sugar and or dairy free.

For more information contact Organic Oven: 1-866-No GLUTN (664-5886).



Ever eaten there? It is quite a chain of restaurants! In fact, some say it is the only place in town to eat.

But eating there is quite an experience. First, it is not uncommon for your

waiter to greet you warmly—and then tell you about the time the health department tried to shut down the restaurant, about every case of food poisoning that has happened in the last decade, and about all the bad chefs that have cooked there over the years.

Yet then he will run down all the other restaurants in town.

Anyone would understand why people would never want to go back to an establishment like COG's Restaurant. The level of dysfunction would drive away—and keep away—people.

COG's is obviously fictional. But are our Church of God congregations any better? What happens to people when they first visit our congregations? What

kind of talk do they overhear before or after services?

Those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it. But those who live in the past are repeating it—over and over and over!

Rehearsing hurt from the past does not make it go away. Dwelling on what brethren, ministers, or organizations have done to us will not bring resolution. How, then, do we finally “get over it?”

Focus on the mission for which we are called. Matthew 28:18-20 places the task of making new disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them squarely in the hands of church members in every congregation.

If we are not focused outwardly on this mission, we will focus inwardly on our hurts and pain from the past. Focusing on any other mission will not heal us—but making new disciples will!

A mission-focused congregation is a great place to visit, and a great place to come back to time and time again.



Guy Swenson
Indiana

www.ntevangelism.org

...Left to Himself

Continued from page 8

The opposite is true when needs are not met. A child feels abandoned in a world where no one comes to help and care. He learns that he cannot trust someone to come and fill his needs. Thus he develops “mistrust.” The wisdom of Scripture was centuries ahead of its time when we read in Proverbs 29:15: “The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a mother is disgraced by a neglected child.” (NRSV)

A child is born with 100 billion brain cells. The major task is for these brain cells to be organized appropriately. Attention from others is the primary way to help the child organize these cells. Today, we know that if the brain of a child is not stimulated by a parent, actual cognitive problems can happen. To put it bluntly, it can contribute to retardation in a child's intellect. The first two years of a child's life are crucial to his intellectual development.

I have two great-granddaughters, ages 4 and 2.

Even the two-year-old, when she does something that could have hurt us and we act hurt, immediately notices the pained expression on our faces and says, “Sorry,” then kisses and hugs us. Even before two years of age she was able to recognize facial expressions of pain and to express sympathy.

Both are read stories of animals, and they feel care and sympathy toward them. They love their dolls. Many illustrated stories can evoke sympathy and compassion for the plight of humans or animals. These are important in developing sympathy and empathy.

Empathy and sympathy are vitally needed in our children. If you are interested in more information about children, please write and get you name on the mailing list for Guardian Ministries, P.O. Box 50734, Pasadena, CA, 91115.