

# It's OK to Be Angry

**Anger in itself is not sin. But it can give rise to dangerous emotions that hinder our walk with God.**

☒ Your body temperature rises, and your heart flutters rapidly. Your hands jitter. Your mouth becomes dry. Sweat beads up on your forehead. Are you getting sick? Not necessarily. You may be getting angry.

Anger is something we all experience. No matter how patient a person you are, no matter how closely you walk with God, you will still get angry. Moses, the prophet Jonah and even king David all got angry. You can live in the most perfect house in the most peaceful village and be surrounded by the most caring friends, and you will still get angry.

But did you know it is not a sin to be angry? The Bible says that when the Pharisees tried to trick Jesus, “he looked at them in anger” (Mark 3:5, NIV). Anger cannot be inherently sinful because Jesus got angry but He was also sinless. David expressed this truth when he wrote the admonition, “Be angry, and do not sin” (Ps. 4:4, NKJV).

Even God the Father experiences the emotion of anger. We read of “the anger of the Lord” no fewer than 18 times in the Old Testament. In fact, it seems God was almost always mad about something, and, in fact, Psalm 7:11 tells us He gets angry with the wicked every single day.

Our anger is sometimes justified, just as God's is. When the poor are mistreated, when the pride of racism threatens our progress, when the powerful take advantage of the weak, when politicians sacrifice their consciences on the altar of public opinion, and when the culture bombards our children at every turn with immoral images and behavior, we should be shaken with holy indignation.

But that doesn't mean we get a free pass to be angry whenever we want, however we want, with whomever we feel deserves it. Aristotle said, "Anybody can become angry; that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, and to the right degree, and at the right time, and for the right purpose, and in the right way; that is not within everyone's power, and that is not easy."

He was right. Though anger may not be evil in itself, it is only one letter short of "danger"—so we must learn to manage it.

If you have ever had a friend betray you or a spouse walk out on you or a family member embarrass you in front of people you respect, then you know that managing anger is not easy. But it is possible. We run into trouble not so much when we experience anger but when we run into the evil spawn hiding in the belly of this dangerous emotion.

### **Anger's Unstable Son**

The Merritts have tempers; we can't deny it. If we are not careful, a simple moment of disagreement in our home can quickly escalate into a very intense and heated argument. Having become aware of this, our family has learned to be watchful and avoid falling prey to anger's unstable son, "Temper."

Temper is anger's type-A eldest son. If Temper is in the room, you can bet he is looking for a chance to get in the middle of even the most harmless situations. And you can never let your guard down. Just when you think he is gone for good, he will drop by unannounced and overstay his welcome.

The Bible gives us two good reasons not to lose our tempers. First, it is unwise. King Solomon said, "Short-tempered people do foolish things" (Prov. 14:17, NLT).

We all have experienced the truth of this statement. Giving

our anger full vent often causes us to yell or scream at others, insulting and wounding them. In a moment we can destroy long-lasting relationships.

Second, it may have serious consequences. Proverbs tells us, "A hot-tempered person starts fights" (15:18). When you lose your temper, you can become aggressive and hurt others physically. There are people who are on death row at this very moment because they lost their tempers.

If you struggle with your temper as we do, there's no perfect formula that will prevent you from ever losing control again. But we can tell you what helps us.

Take a breather. One of the actions you can take that is most likely to rescue you in a tense situation is also one of the hardest to do: Walk away. Simply remove yourself from the situation and catch your breath before you address the problem at hand. The more calm you are, the more clearly you will see how to handle it.

Learn to let go. Scripture tells us that it is to our benefit to "overlook a transgression" (Prov. 19:11, NKJV). Receiving the grace to forgive and forget even when you are the one who has been wronged is an invaluable skill that will earn you the respect and friendship of others. It will also save you the trouble of having to repent from giving your temper free reign and hurting someone else.

"I am not responsible for the attitudes of the people who are against me," Les Parrott wrote in an article in *New Man* magazine titled "Taming the Incredible Hulk" (Mar/Apr 2001). "I am only responsible for me."

The way we remember this principle in our family is by reminding one another, "It's not just how you act; it's how you react." Even though we cannot control the actions of those around us, we must strive to always respond in a way that

honors Christ.

Ultimately, temper is a Holy Spirit issue. Remember that if you are a Christian the Holy Spirit is living inside you. He speaks to you, watches over you and empowers you to overcome life's most insurmountable problems.

One of the fruits of His life in you is self-control (see Gal. 5:16-26). When you lose your temper, you take the Holy Spirit out of the equation. You allow your emotions to rule you instead of being ruled by the power of God inside you.

### **Anger's Destructive Daughter**

Have you ever seen kudzu? It is a climbing, vinelike plant native to East Asia that spreads like wildfire and has found a home in the Deep South of the United States, where we live.

It is incredibly aggressive, taking over everything it touches—abandoned fields, roadside trees, telephone poles, entire buildings. If kudzu ever creeps onto your property, you can't rid yourself of it without an atomic bomb.

Anger's destructive daughter, Bitterness, is similar to kudzu. You can tell she's influencing you if you're feeling resentful because someone has wronged you or life hasn't gone your way. Like the tenacious plant, the root of bitterness needs little soil, requires a minimum of cultivation, grows quickly and is very difficult to remove. And if it takes root in your life, don't bother trying to hide it—a bitter root always bears bitter fruit.

It doesn't take a prophet to predict that many of you reading this article are full of bitterness. You may be bitter at a boss who fired you when you thought he was your friend. You may be bitter at a business partner who took advantage of you and your investment. Perhaps you are bitter at a parent who abused you or at God because He allowed a tragedy into your life.

People who are bitter exhibit telltale signs—a hardness in their faces, slumping shoulders, negative conversation. It is miserable to be around people who suffer from this sickness.

Bitterness initiates a response that is the opposite of displays of temper. Whereas temper causes you to give your anger full vent, bitterness grows when you bottle anger up inside you.

Whenever you feel indignant, you are faced with a threefold choice. You can release your indignation in a Christ-honoring way; you can release it in an uncontrolled, sinful way; or you can bottle it up and let it sour and spoil inside you.

Anger is a powerful reaction, but bitterness is equally powerful and even more destructive. As Jerry Bridges put it in his book *The Practice of Godliness*, “Resentment, bitterness, and self-pity build up inside our hearts and eat away at our spiritual lives like a slowly spreading cancer.”

Like acid, bitterness can destroy the vessel where it is being stored. It will depress you and cause you to destroy both yourself and others with complete abandon.

Anger and bitterness both draw their water from the same emotional well—they come from the same bloodline. In one case the emotion can be pure and healthy while in the other case it is polluted and poisonous.

Let me explain. As we have said, anger is sometimes right and justified, but bitterness is always sinful and unjustified. Indeed, the Scriptures allow anger (see Eph. 4:26), while bitterness is universally condemned (Heb. 12:15).

In order to defeat bitterness, you have to go after it. Remember that bitterness is a root that grows underground, and you must find it and dig it up as you would a root, to get rid of it. This can be a difficult process, so it might help to

break it into three easy steps.

**Face it.** You will never conquer bitterness unless the problem is acknowledged. Ever wonder why we read so much about confession in Scripture? It's because the only way a disease can ever be healed and removed is by first acknowledging its presence.

**Replace it.** With the help of the Holy Spirit bitterness must be replaced with forgiveness. The balm of forgiveness is the only medicine that will heal the sore of bitterness. Nothing else—revenge, spite or retaliation—will do it.

**Erase it.** That is what forgiveness allows you to do—move on as you replace bitterness with the love, mercy and forgiveness that you have received from God. Remember that no matter how badly or unfairly you have been treated by someone, that person is no more guilty than you are of sending Jesus to the cross.

Yet as He was dying, Jesus was able to pray the ultimate prayer of forgiveness, “‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do’” (Luke 23:34).

According to legend, when Leonardo da Vinci was painting *The Last Supper*, he had an intense argument with a fellow painter that he never resolved. Fuming and bitter, da Vinci came up with a devious plan to get his enemy back.

He decided to paint the man's face as the face of Judas Iscariot so it would be captured for all time. When people came to look at his work in progress, they immediately knew who “Judas” was, and da Vinci got great pleasure out of portraying this man as a villain.

Continuing his work, he came to the face he had saved for the very end: the face of Jesus. But da Vinci drew a mental blank. He could not paint a thing.

Finally, he realized that the trouble was he had painted the face of his enemy as the face of Judas Iscariot. His bitterness was keeping him from seeing the face of Christ. Da Vinci went back to the image of Judas and painted a nebulous, unknown face over his enemy's. Then he went to the painter and asked for forgiveness before returning to finish one of the world's greatest portraits.

True or not, this story points out an important reality: It is up to the individual afflicted with it to bring about an end to bitterness. Hebrews 12:14 tells us to "pursue peace with all people." The word "pursue" means "to go after in an aggressive fashion."

As Christians, we are to take the initiative to bring about peace. You must be the one to mend the broken fences, rebuild the bridges and restore the relationships that have been destroyed by bitterness.

### **Free to Worship**

Did you know that resolving your anger is an important precursor to worship? Jesus told His disciples: "'If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come offer your gift'" (Matt. 5:23-24). He implies that reconciliation is so important that you should drop what you are doing even if you are in church and go get right with others.

Are you tired of dressing the wounds of your temper and tasting the sour reflux of bitterness? Decide right now not to let other people determine how you are going to act. Instead, let the Holy Spirit take control of your life and consecrate the emotion of anger for His glory. With the power of God, you can defeat anger's evil offspring.

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## COOL YOUR ANGER

Is it hard for you to stop your anger from heating up? Go to [anger.charismamag.com](http://anger.charismamag.com) for Scriptures that will help you control it.

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# The Stigma of Jesus' Virgin Birth

The discussion I had with the late Yasser Arafat during my first visit with him in Ramallah in 2002 was almost entirely theological. I stressed that **Jesus Christ** is the Son of God and that He died on the cross for our sins. Arafat reached for his Quran to show me something he thought would impress me. Pointing to a certain passage (as if I could read Arabic), he said, "Did you know that the only woman mentioned in the Quran is the **Virgin Mary**?"

"Well, how interesting, Rais [Arabic for president]," I replied, "it sounds as if the Quran is *proving* that Jesus had

no earthly father and therefore must be the Son of God.”

Do *you* believe that **Jesus of Nazareth** was born of a virgin and had no earthly father? Muslims do. In fact, one of the most successful evangelistic approaches when talking to Muslims is to focus on the virgin birth of **Jesus**. They are committed to the Quran, which teaches this truth.

And yet Muslims say they do not believe Jesus is the Son of God. Noting the contradiction in their beliefs, you can lovingly point out to them that if Jesus had no earthly father, it can mean only one thing—that God Himself is His father, and Jesus is therefore God’s Son.

The **virgin birth** of Jesus is one of the clearest teachings in the New Testament. The accounts in Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 1:26-38 are unambiguous and leave no doubt that Jesus of Nazareth had no earthly father but was born of Mary, who had never known a man.

Why is this fact significant? Primarily because it is in the Bible. But there are other reasons for exploring the truth of the **virgin birth**.

First, it shows the stigma, or offense, Christians must bear in upholding this truth. The word *stigma* is a Greek word. It refers to a mark or tattoo on the body, often used on a runaway slave in the ancient world so he would be easily identified. Paul used the word to show he was unashamed of being a slave of Jesus: “I bear in my body the marks [*stigmata*] of the Lord Jesus” (Gal. 6:17, NKJV).

The stigma of the **virgin birth** is made clear in the New Testament. Consider what an offense it was for Joseph to accept Mary after she disclosed to him that she was pregnant. It was a horrible moment for him—and for her.

Why should he believe her when she assured him that she had been faithful to him, knowing he had never slept with her?

They were engaged, but “before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 1:18). Joseph’s immediate reaction was to break their engagement quietly.

To have remained engaged would have demanded that he bear a stigma of incalculable proportions. Being pregnant out of wedlock is no big deal today. But in Joseph and Mary’s day, having sex before marriage was possibly the worst thing a couple could do. Everyone would assume this is what Joseph and Mary had done. The couple knew they hadn’t, but who would believe them? And why should Joseph believe Mary?

This is the reason God graciously stepped in on Mary’s behalf. “An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit’” (Matt.1:20). That was news to Joseph, but it made sense in the light of what Mary had claimed. It meant she had certainly not been unfaithful to him.

But it also meant that he had a major decision to make—namely, whether to leave her entirely and let her bear the stigma of being a single parent, or to stay with her and be seen for the rest of his life as the man who got Mary pregnant out wedlock. If he stayed with her, they would bear the offense together. They alone would know the truth and would be able to comfort each other in this sublime knowledge—that it was a miracle of God.

Could they tell anyone? No. For one thing, nobody would believe them. But also they would not tell because they had to be willing to suffer for the glory of God.

This unseemly situation meant the loss of their reputations, a stigma for which they suffered the rest of their lives. They would never outgrow it.

As a matter of fact, more than 30 years later, people were still talking about it. As long as Jesus was performing

miracles and feeding thousands with the loaves and fishes, the people appeared to be willing to overlook the rumor that He had been born an illegitimate child.

But the moment Jesus said things such as, “‘I am the bread which came down from heaven,’” they resorted to the gossip of the day: “‘Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?’” (John 6:41-42). This comment shows that the followers of Jesus probably suspected Jesus was illegitimate but let their suspicions surface only when His message became a stigma too.

In any case, Joseph made the hardest decision of his life. When he woke up from the dream, he “did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son” (Matt.1:24-25). Joseph determined to live with his decision and became the unsung hero of the Christmas story.

### **An Untold Mystery**

There is another reason the virgin birth of Jesus is relevant; it shows the importance of being able to keep God’s secrets. Consider this comment by Luke: “But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19). There is reason to believe that Mary never told the miracle of Jesus’ birth until years after He had died and ascended to heaven. At that point she apparently broke her silence and told Luke what had happened.

In the very first chapter of his Gospel, Luke records the occasion when the angel Gabriel came to Mary unexpectedly and said, “‘Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you’” (Luke 1:28). Mary was puzzled by the angel’s greeting, but the angel said to her, “‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus’” (v. 31).

Mary questioned the angel: “‘How can this be, since I do not know a man?’ [The NIV translates the last part of Mary’s question, “since I am a virgin?”] And the angel answered and said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God’” (vv. 34-35).

Imagine having an experience with God like this and keeping quiet about it for many years! Yes, she did stay during her pregnancy with her cousin Elizabeth, who discerned Mary’s condition by the Holy Spirit (see Luke 1:39-45). But there is no indication that anybody else knew, not even the disciples of Jesus.

Mary must have been tempted to reveal this extraordinary secret a thousand times, but she didn’t. Why? First, she would have been doing so largely to clear her own name. She chose instead to bear the stigma. Second, it might have been like casting a pearl before swine (see Matt. 7:6). The enemies of Jesus would not have believed her, and the news could have been counterproductive. So Mary did not tell it until she revealed it to Luke before she died.

There’s a good possibility that the followers of Jesus were willing to follow Him *not* knowing what Mary knew and very possibly assuming that Jesus really was an illegitimate child, as implied in John 6:42. What would have been their thinking in following Jesus if indeed they believed He was born out of wedlock?

Peter could answer: “‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God’” (John 6:68-69). And yet it must have been a sweet consolation to their souls to have the word spread among the church many years later that Mary was in fact a virgin when Jesus was born, showing that He was truly the Son of God.

The virgin birth of Jesus reveals our helplessness in the face of God's commands and our need for His power to fulfill them. When Gabriel appeared to Mary and told her what God wanted, she had a significant question: "How can I have a child since I am a virgin?" (see Luke 1:34).

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you," the angel replied, and added, "For with God nothing will be impossible" (vv. 35,37).

### **An Essential Truth**

The virgin birth lays the foundation for the most essential truth of all—that Jesus was and is the *God-man*; He was *man* as though He were not God, and *God* as though He were not man. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the *only begotten* of the Father" the apostle John tells us (John 1:1,14, emphasis added).

Only God could have performed the miracle of His Son's conception. He caused the Word to enter the womb of Mary and become a seed. At that moment, the Word became flesh. Even as an embryo, He was fully human as well as fully God. The God-man lived in Mary's womb for nine months and then was born.

God chose a virgin from the tribe of Judah living in Nazareth to be the mother of our Lord. She had the genealogical credentials to qualify, being in the line of David. God chose a virgin to prove that only He could have been Jesus' father.

The virgin birth of Jesus further demonstrates that salvation is ultimately the work of God. It was His idea alone and was brought about solely by His initiative. God had promised that the seed of the woman would ultimately destroy the serpent's head (see Gen. 3:15).

The virgin birth of Christ shows that salvation can never come

through human effort; it must be by the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. In His perfect timing "God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Gal. 4:4-5). The purpose of Jesus' coming was for Him to save His people from their sins (see Matt. 1:21). He was born to die.

If God had made Jesus a complete human being in heaven and then sent Him to earth without any human parent, it would have been impossible for Him to be human as we are. If, on the other hand, God had brought Jesus into the world with two human parents, both a father and a mother, it would have been impossible for Him to be fully God.

Besides the supernatural component of God's sending His Son to earth, there was a natural one that was essential for Jesus to be born: Mary had to agree to God's plan! She *might* have said "No," or perhaps, "Let me think about it." I fancy that all heaven waited with baited breath for Mary's consent.

That consent came immediately. "'Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word,'" was her reply to the angel (Luke 1:38). *In that moment* the eternal Word left His glory with the Father and the Spirit and became flesh, to be the God-man forever and ever. It was the greatest moment in heaven and earth since creation.

Do you believe in the virgin birth? Will you accept the stigma of being a follower of Jesus, especially in this day of pluralism when His words, "'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me'" (John 14:6) are a tremendous offense?

Will you bear this stigma? Joseph did. Mary did. Let us follow in their steps and be willing to let our vindication come long after we are gone, in order to prove to the world that Jesus, born of a woman, was indeed the Son of God.

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## **IS CHRISTMAS BAD?**

Tired of people bashing “Christ’s-mass”? Go to [christmas.charismamag.com](http://christmas.charismamag.com) to find out the rich meanings behind the symbols of the season.

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# **Why Are So Many Christians Quitting Church?**

**Over the last decade many Christians have given up on church—often because leaders failed them. Is there any chance those leaving through the back door will return?**

Like many charismatic Christians, Bob\* (not his real name) has given up on church—at least for now. The first congregation he attended closed after two years when the pastor was caught stealing money from a church account. When Bob joined a second church he was pressured by leaders to attend two membership classes a week in order to be a part. When he balked at the demands, he was told he was “rebellious.”

Bob left that church wounded and disillusioned. He avoided his Christian friends for a few months, wondering if he even belonged in a community of faith. Finally he joined a casual

Bible study that meets at a coffee shop once a month. Today, that monthly meeting is his only connection with Christians—but he considers it his “church” for now.

Bob’s story is certainly not unique.

All across the United States today, believers who once attended church regularly are in the dropout category. Some quit because they were wounded by leaders or disappointed by pastoral failure. Others became bored with irrelevant church programs or petty squabbles. Others simply felt relationally disconnected, even though they sat beside the same people week after week.

In an increasingly secular culture, pastors are facing the reality that the social pressures of respectability or family influence that may have once filled church pews no longer hold sway. Additionally, committed believers are asking whether their Sunday morning ritual of sitting in a pew, singing songs and listening to a sermon is what it means to obey the Scriptures’ command to *be the church*.

From graphic sermons about sex and contests to win a Hummer to cafés and skate parks, marketing techniques and programs are the methods some churches have resorted to as the way to counteract this trend, targeting the unchurched or de-churched in an attempt to regain their participation. But could this effort actually intensify the problem?

The seeker-sensitive and church-growth movements of the 1970s through the 1990s made churches aware of nonessential layers of tradition that turn off outsiders, and they helped pastors become savvy in how they communicate the gospel to seekers. But an unintended consequence was that church became not an essential means of discipleship and accountability for the family of God, but an optional consumer product that could be shaped to appeal to specific audiences.

And for many—particularly the young—this option is just as

easily ignored. A 2007 study by LifeWay Research revealed that 70 percent of young adults ages 23 to 30 stopped attending church regularly for at least a year between ages 18 and 22.

Their reasons for leaving ranged from wanting to “take a break from church” (27 percent) and going to college (25 percent) to “religious, ethical or political beliefs” and—perhaps most telling—“I was only going to church to please others” (17 percent). Among the reasons there is no mention that these young people left because the programs weren’t meeting their needs or the message wasn’t being communicated in a relevant way. If this were the problem, it could easily be solved with some simple programmatic shifts in the way we do church.

In fact, the situation is much more serious. As LifeWay President Ed Stetzer laments in his analysis of the study, “Parents and churches are not passing on a robust Christian faith and an accompanying commitment to the church.” In other words, declining church attendance is a symptom of a deeper problem: Many churches are not venues of active and effective discipleship. And this epidemic has driven some church leaders to abandon the system altogether.

### **‘Detoxing’ From Church**

James Bradshaw served as an ordained United Methodist minister for 22 years until June 30, 2009, when he voluntarily surrendered his credentials and resigned his position as pastor of First United Methodist Church in Sanford, Florida. No, this was not another pastoral scandal. Bradshaw felt called to leave the church to pursue a more “authentic understanding of the kingdom of God.”

“The organized church today has been infiltrated over the centuries by religious things that have watered down the gospel,” he explains. “It started in A.D. 300 with Constantine. The church sold its birthright when the apostles and prophets said to the king, ‘You govern, and we’ll do the

spiritual stuff.’”

Since his departure, Bradshaw says he’s been “detoxing” from organized church and has connected with an apostolic network in Atlanta that shares his views. Although he admits to being tempted to start a nondenominational church, he notes, “It would have been the same thing all over again—the house of Saul.”

Instead, he envisions himself tent making in the secular workplace so that he can pursue relational discipleship among a smaller group of people in hopes of raising up “spiritual sons”—sons he believes are much less likely to be dropouts from the body of Christ.

For Frank Viola, stories like Bradshaw’s are an indication that a “second reformation” is already happening. The co-author with George Barna of *Pagan Christianity*, Viola has long been a controversialist in evangelical circles and a popular speaker in the house-church movement. Although he admits that some are leaving the church because of a shallow or nominal commitment to Christ, Viola argues that many more are doing so for all the right reasons.

“Of the 1 million adults who leave the traditional church every year in the United States, a large number of them are joining simpler forms of church, such as house churches and organic churches,” he notes. “God is moving once again, and He’s bringing His people back to His original intention for church life.”

The numbers on these “simpler forms” are notoriously fuzzy. A 2009 Barna Group study attempted to pin down the movement’s size with specific questions on house-church involvement and discovered that 3 percent to 6 percent of adults claim to be involved in home-based fellowships “not associated in any way with a local, congregational type of church.”

These would be considered the classic house churches that

gather in homes, coffee shops and pubs, have a minimalistic view of leadership and structure and—sometimes—a negative attitude toward the institutional church. But, in addition to the “not associated” there are an increasing number of simple church groups that are affiliated in some way with traditional congregations—even if their members never walk through the doors.

Dan Lacich is pastor of distributed sites for Northland, a Church Distributed, a megachurch with multiple sites in the Orlando, Florida, area. Northland Senior Pastor Joel Hunter said he felt called in 2008 to plant 1 million churches, which led to the congregation of 12,000 partnering with the house-church movement to accomplish this goal.

“We knew these 1 million churches would not be traditional churches,” Lacich explains. “It would have to be a first-century model in which people self-organize the church.”

To that end, Northland created high-tech resources for home fellowships and partnered with Global Media Outreach, an online evangelism tool affiliated with Campus Crusade for Christ, to disciple people who come to faith through the church’s Web ministry.

“Our goal is to figure out how we can help someone be the church, even if they never walk through the doors of a traditional church,” Lacich says, describing a new interactive Web platform that the church is creating.

“We hope they never find out who we are, and the Web site we’re putting together to make this happen has no connection with us.”

Although Northland has an extensive community of online worshipers, Lacich stresses that the church’s intention is not to accomplish its vision of 1 million churches by simply replicating miniature franchises of the megachurch. And the church will not collect offerings or dues from the house

gatherings that use its resources or stream its services.

Lacich admits the open-handed approach comes with its own problems.

“What if someone does something wrong in one of these churches?” he asks. “The incorrect assumption is that we have it under control and don’t have troubles in a large church.

“There will always be the chance that someone will do something that’s heretical. Just like the first-century church, we have to trust that the Holy Spirit is in this thing.”

Any conversation about house churches naturally gravitates toward the issues of heresy, but from a historical perspective, the assumption that smaller churches are more vulnerable to heresy is problematic.

When one observes the theological corruption that led to the Protestant Reformation or the current schisms in denominations over the ordination of practicing homosexuals, it could be argued that large, top-heavy church institutions are worse breeding grounds for false doctrine than small groups of believers seeking accountability and spiritual growth together.

“I get asked about heresy more than almost anything else when I am teaching about organic church,” says Neil Cole, a church planter and author of *Church 3.0: Upgrades for the Future of the Church*. “But the best solution to heresy in the church is not to have better-trained leaders in the pulpits but better-trained people in the pews.”

Cole left his role on staff at a megachurch in the Grace Brethren Church in 1998 and launched Church Multiplication Associates (CMA). The organization has trained nearly 22,000 church planters from all denominations to start churches as small as two or three people that are called Life

## Transformation Groups.

Although Cole argues that because of human weakness no church will ever be able to completely avoid heresy, he says intensive discipleship models such as CMA's create settings in which new believers learn Bible study methods that will help them discern truth from error.

"Perhaps we have misread what is the real threat of false doctrine that infiltrates the church in the West," he notes. "Sometimes we can espouse the right words and live by the wrong ideas. Having correct statements of faith in your creed is not all there is to being orthodox."

Cole's statement touches on the root issue of "church dropouts." At its core the trend of church dropouts is only a crisis if those "dropping out" are moving away from authentic biblical Christianity—which may be cultivated outside the institutional church but not outside the body of Christ in its many local expressions.

Of greater concern are those who don't drop out but remain in the pews as passive consumers of a religious product that never transforms their lives, convinced that the Sunday ritual somehow earns them favor with God and satisfies His radical call to discipleship.

### **The Historic View**

No one is sure where the "simple church" model will take us. But at a time when moral absolutes are being reconfigured in our culture, it would be beneficial to consult with early church fathers on this subject.

The third-century bishop of Carthage, Cyprian, is known for his declaration, "Outside the church there is no salvation." Whether he was referring to those who left the church or those who had never been a part of it, he compared their plight to

that of the poor souls who didn't make it on the ark before the flood.

This may sound like a blunt and condemning statement in the ears of a postmodern Christian who attends church if, where and when he or she chooses, and who believes one's relationship with God is an entirely personal matter. The problem is, Cyprian had the Bible on his side.

The New Testament does not envision the possibility of authentic spiritual life outside the body of Christ. Whether it's in the "I am the vine" passages of John 15 or the exhortation to not "forsake the assembling of ourselves together" (Heb. 10:25, NKJV), Scripture is clear in its teaching that Christian faith is meant to be lived out in community.

In addition to the positive instructions to participate as an active member of the body of Christ, Jesus' words on church discipline reveal the serious side of life outside the church. Although it may not carry much weight today, for early Christians, the threat of excommunication was a dire warning that put their very souls in danger.

Jesus says this much when He lays out the earthly—and eternal—consequences for the unrepentant sinner who is put out of fellowship: "'And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven' " (Matt. 18:17-18).

Later, Paul fleshes out Jesus' principles on church discipline when he instructs the church at Corinth to expel the immoral member in their midst. Paul notes that by doing this the church is turning the unrepentant sinner over to Satan so that, though he may be physically destroyed, his soul might be

saved (see 1 Cor. 5:5).

Like Cyprian, Jesus, Paul and the writer of Hebrews are not suggesting that salvation comes through participation in church activities. They are saying that fellowship with the body of Christ reveals and strengthens the union believers already have with Christ Himself—the two are inseparable.

In this season of uncertainty about what a genuine church looks like, it is essential that we hold on to the historic, biblical concept of the family of God and our membership in it. Although it is crucial for us to reject old, tired models of church that don't inspire vibrant faith, we must be careful that we aren't attempting to tear down what God intends to build.

After all, it was Jesus who said in Matthew 16:18: “‘On this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.’ ” In the end, regardless of the opinions of men, the church will stand.

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# Finding Your Place in God's Family

It's often difficult to find a healthy church—much less become a healthy part of one. Here's why you should make the effort.

☒ Nearly 10 years ago, while taking care of my aunt's bed and breakfast in Alaska, I met an unforgettable woman named Lynne. As we chatted over freshly baked scones and coffee, I asked her what she did in her free time.

She was a shepherdess.

Intrigued by her response, I began peppering her with all kinds of questions about her flock and quickly began drawing rich spiritual parallels between her descriptions and biblical teachings regarding sheep. I promised myself that one day I'd study this scriptural theme more in-depth.

Last spring, I decided to track Lynne down. Thanks to some help from Google, I located her, reintroduced myself, and garnered an invitation to spend a few days with her and her flock. Our time together became the foundation of *Scouting the Divine: My Search for God in Wine, Wool, and Wild Honey*.

I went on to spend time with a beekeeper in Colorado, a farmer in Nebraska and a vintner in California. Along the way, I opened the Scriptures, asking each person how he read various passages, not as a theologian, but in light of what he did every day.

Their answers illuminated passages of the Bible in a whole new way and deepened my relationship with God. I learned so much! One of the most treasured lessons I took away from my time with the shepherdess was just how much I need to be part of a community of believers.

People grow in their relationships with God in a myriad of ways. For me, reading the Bible, praying and connecting to God through spiritual disciplines reignites my faith and renews my hope in the one who was, is, and forever will be. Though church\* definitely played a role in my spiritual formation—especially during my early years—my desire to attend a local church waned over time.

My reticence was exacerbated by the transient nature of my life, which included five major moves during the last 10 years. With each new city, finding a church became increasingly difficult. Like dating, searching for a place to worship can be awkward and uncomfortable—especially if you lose your sense of humor.

Even after settling into a home church, I often struggled with the gap between what the church is and what it could be. I wondered why some churches are more concerned with style than substance and marketing than making disciples. I firmly believe that small groups are good, but more often than not I've found myself in gatherings that lack depth, real connection or a willingness to put faith into action.

As a result, my own desire to attend church decreased until I began to wonder, *Why do I go at all?* I tried to console myself with the fact that even Jesus went to church. Technically it was the temple, and He didn't always like what He saw when He got there, but nevertheless, He went.

### **The Gathering of Believers**

Standing in a muddy Oregon field with her flock, Lynne unknowingly reminded me of some of the most basic reasons why the gathering together of believers is essential. As I watched the woolly creatures graze, she explained that sheep are defenseless. They don't have sharp teeth or pointed hooves. Without protective features, their only defense is to flock together. That's why whenever a predator is nearby, a flock

will gather closely.

“What happens to a sheep that wanders off on its own?” I asked.

Lynne explained that those that leave the flock are the ones that get picked off by predators, become infected by parasites or overindulge in grass until they become ill. It’s only within a flock—under the watchful eye of a good shepherd—that the sheep are protected and enjoy a healthy life.

I couldn’t help but see the parallels between a flock and the church. From its foundation, Christianity has never been about isolation. In Genesis, we read the simple but profound observation that it is “not good” for man to be alone. This is the first time in Scripture that something is labeled “not good,” and it has to do with the relationship between a man and a woman. Yet I wonder if the statement reflects a basic life principle: We need one another.

Throughout the Old Testament, spiritual leaders are consistently given encouragement in the form of friends, followers and wingmen. Moses and Aaron, David and Jonathan, Elijah and Elisha, Naomi and Ruth—just to name a few. Jesus’ first act in ministry is to call 12 followers who will form a band of spiritual brothers. When the church is birthed in Acts, the Spirit descends on people who are gathered together.

What do these people do after the tongues of fire (see Acts 2:3) fade? They keep gathering together. They teach the story of God. They sing. They share meals. They pray. They spend time together. Because of their common love for God, who is described as the Good Shepherd, they can’t help but form a close-knit community (see Acts 2:42).

Reflecting on these passages, I’m always intrigued by how little Scripture tells us about what the believers actually do when they’re together. Sure, there’s music, encouraging, teaching and eating, but what about the format? The length?

The location? The order? The time of day? The specific elements of the gathering seem far less important than *actually* gathering.

Unlike the sheep in Lynne's upper field, something far beyond safety happens when followers of Jesus come together. Throughout the New Testament, we are reminded of the things God works in and through us as we live in community.

Colossians 3:1-17 challenges us individually and corporately to live out our days in a way that is pleasing to God. As the people of God, holy and wholly loved, we are to clothe ourselves with gentleness and patience, forgiving others (and ourselves) at every turn, overflowing with love and thankfulness. The apostle Paul writes, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God" (vv. 15-17, NIV).

In the company of fellow believers, our own sinful nature, petty grievances and selfish desires are exposed, not so that we become divided and bitter, but so that we may be set free, redeemed and transformed into all God has called and created us to be. The church becomes the formative foundation where we learn to live out the ministry of reconciliation (see 2 Cor. 5:18).

The church has never been about what we can *get out* of it as much as what we can *give through* it. As members of the body, we have the opportunity to grow together and learn how to function properly with our unique gifts, talents and callings. Along the way, we garner strength for our own faith journeys and may even find that the gathering of Christians—the church—and this adventure of following Jesus is not only fun but also contagious! Our love and unity become an invitation for the world to know Christ (see John 17:21).

I have a hard time arguing with those who say the church is

broken, messed up, inefficient, dysfunctional. They're right. But despite all these weaknesses, God has chosen to put His name on it. He has chosen the church as His bride. She may have frizzy hair, smeared makeup and holes in her dress, but in the end she is still the bride of Christ. Knowing that makes me want to love her, defend her and serve her.

### **Among the Flock**

As we walked among the fields, Lynne explained that rivalries exist among the sheep. Ewes who have just given birth tend to be a possessive bunch. Rams are often at odds with each other—sometimes even dueling each other to death if they are outside the presence of the shepherd.

Watching the flock interact reminded me that sometimes it's tough to stick together in a confined area. The sheep behind you will race you to the greenest grass. The sheep in front of you may have gas (or worse).

Within a flock, sheep slow each other down, step on each other's hooves and trip each other. Being in a flock has never been easy for sheep, but it's how they were designed to live and flourish.

In the same way, being in a church isn't easy for many people—including me. The church, by nature, is inherently flawed. But it's in this place that I encounter God in unexpected ways. Not only do I experience acceptance, forgiveness, grace, love and compassion from fellow believers, but also I am given the opportunity to extend them to others.

Within the church, I'm beginning to appreciate many of the intangibles that emerge in the process of living everyday life together—learning to work through ups and downs, disagreements and tensions, innovations and failures. As we pursue God through life's potpourri of tragedies and triumphs, we learn to love more deeply and find ourselves becoming a little bit more like Jesus.

The church reminds me of just how much I need people in my life who are different from me. I cannot count the number of times someone has shared with me his testimony about the way God is working in his life and has pushed the boundaries of my understanding and knowledge of God. Or the times someone has challenged my beliefs and encouraged me to dig deeper into knowing what I believe and why I believe it.

The church is one of the central places where the poor have their needs met by the rich and the rich discover how they desperately need the poor. I remember sitting by a slightly tone-deaf single mom who was singing songs of victory with all her might when everything in her life shouted defeat. The sight of her gave my own faith texture and strength.

In church I rediscover that I am not alone on this Christian journey. I'm reminded that I have only a snapshot of the larger story of what God is doing in this generation and the grander story of what He has been doing throughout history.

By adding my voice to the familiar chorus of "Amazing Grace," reciting from the Common Book of Prayer, celebrating the sacraments, or listening to the wisdom of John Wesley and those who have gone before, I partake in the beautiful story God has been unfolding since the beginning of time. And I am reminded that God has not failed us yet—nor will He.

While I taste portions of these truths in my personal time with Christ and the Scriptures, the flavor is never as wondrous as when I experience them in the presence of fellow believers. For these reasons and many more, I recognize that whether or not I like it, I need the church. I can't be all I've been created to be on my own.

I'll see you on Sunday.

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and the author of *Scouting the Divine: My Search for God in Wine, Wool, and Wild Honey* (Zondervan).

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\* *Church is loaded with meaning for many people. For the purpose of this article, I want to clarify that the church has never been a building. I would like to sidestep the discussion of denomination, size or liturgy and focus on the church as the organic yet intentional gathering of believers in whatever form that may take.*

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## The Buzz

### [SPOTLIGHT]

#### **Days of Fire and Glory**

*By Julia Duin, Crossland Press, hardcover, 346 pages, \$24.95.*

✖ Few books are deserving of the label “masterpiece,” but this one qualifies. Twenty years in the making, *Days of Fire and Glory* is worth the wait. Religion writer Julia Duin has crafted an eminently readable account of Houston’s Episcopal Church of the Redeemer and other leading charismatic congregations that propelled the wave of the 1960s and 1970s. However, be prepared to ride a roller coaster of emotions—reading this book is like waiting for a train wreck you know will happen. First come thrills with the way the book validates the reality of the spiritual explosion that planted communities worldwide, led to miraculous healings and swept millions into God’s kingdom. Yet sadness follows as Duin reveals the horrendous sin and abuses that occurred among key leaders and many of their followers. She writes from an

insider's perspective, as a key participant in several charismatic communities. One can easily envision this book becoming required reading at colleges and seminaries for the instructive way in which it examines the rewards and potential pitfalls of Spirit-filled living. –Ken Walker

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## **[BOOKS]**

### **Fear Fighters**

*By Jentezen Franklin, Charisma House, hardcover, 224 pages, \$21.99.*

☒ “Do you worry too much?” is the question posed on the cover of Jentezen Franklin’s new book, *Fear Fighters*. Inside the cover Franklin discusses every basic fear known to mankind and the scriptural truths needed to fight them. Just revealing the commonality of fear seems to diffuse it. These basic fears are shared by most people at some time or another and include worries about health, finances, family members’ well-being, relationships and death. Many are unfounded, based on events that are statistically rare, such as airplane crashes. But Franklin reassures readers that even in the face of situations that are a possibility, or when the worst happens, God is with them and provides promises in the Word for them to stand on.

This book does not come across as academic; rather, some of the illustrations will make the reader feel as if he is sitting in church, listening to a hometown preacher’s folksy and sometimes quirky style. This author’s transparency makes the reader feel as if he’s talked to someone just like himself who has had fears, faced them and is now able to pass on what he’s learned for the benefit of others. –Deborah L. Delk

## **Loved**

*By Rebecca St. James, FaithWords, softcover, 256 pages, \$16.99.*

✘ Singer Rebecca St. James offers a collection of stories about women, prodigal daughters, who hit rock bottom. Some suffered from eating disorders, emotional problems and feelings of unworthiness; others struggled with drugs and promiscuity; and some simply rejected God. But all of them eventually understood and embraced the truth that nothing they had done could make God love them any less. St. James writes: "This is a message of hope that our generation needs to hear. No matter where you've been and what you've done ... you are loved." These testimonies demonstrate God's ever-flowing, never-ending grace, mercy and love. They serve as reminders that He is always poised with open arms waiting for us to return to His embrace. These stories prove that love never fails, never quits, never ends. *—Leigh DeVore*

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## **[MUSIC]**

### **Glory in the Highest**

*By Chris Tomlin, sixstepsrecords.*

✘ Worship leader Chris Tomlin creates a true worship experience with his first Christmas record. *Glory in the Highest* features many favorite holiday tunes such as "Angels We Have Heard on High," "O Come All Ye Faithful" and "Hark the

Herald Angels Sing.” Special guests Matt Redman, Audrey Assad and Christy Nockels join Tomlin on this festive album. Tomlin added a new refrain to “Joy to the World,” giving it a new message without changing its classic sound. “Winter Snow” is a sure to be a favorite with Assad’s breezy voice, the beautiful lyrics and easy melody. Tomlin gathered friends and family to record this in a studio that was a former church. The crowd interaction gives *Glory in the Highest* an invigorating yet intimate feel. Tomlin has created an album that will have listeners celebrating the season, but even more importantly focusing on the gift of Jesus. –Leigh DeVore

## **Worship and Adore**

*By various artists, Integrity Music.*

✘ *Worship and Adore: A Christmas Offering* can help bring clarity to a season filled with busyness and sometimes even worry. Ten leading artists and worship leaders collaborate on this CD. The entire ensemble—Kari Jobe, Glenn Packiam, Christy Johnson, Lincoln Brewster, Kathryn Scott, Vicky Beeching, Joel Augé, Don Poythress, Paul Baloche, Jared Anderson—opens with “Offering.” This song of adoration and worship was written by Baloche and sets the perfect tone not only for the album but also for the Christmas season. On “Adore Him,” Jobe beautifully sings the story of the Magi finding and worshipping the infant Christ. The verses blend perfectly with the familiar chorus of “Come Let Us Adore Him.” Brewster picks up the pace with the energetic praise of “Glory to God.” “He Is Wonderful,” “The Beautiful Body and Blood” and “He Made a Way in a Manger” express why Jesus was born: to bring salvation; to die. *Worship and Adore* will help listeners reflect on the true meaning of Christmas, and therefore truly celebrate the season. –Leigh DeVore

## **Beauty Will Rise**

*By Steven Curtis Chapman, Sparrow Records.*

☒ On his hit song “Cinderella,” Steven Curtis Chapman sings about a dad dancing with his daughter through the various stages of life, from prom to marriage. After he wrote it, one of his own daughters, 5-year-old Maria, tragically died. This loss resulted in *Beauty Will Rise*, the singer-songwriter’s most personal release to date. With 12 songs that could best be described as modern-day psalms and laments, *Beauty Will Rise* takes listeners on Chapman’s own journey of grieving with hope. “February 20th” talks about the day his daughter accepted Jesus as her Savior, while “Just Have to Wait” finds the singer thinking about reuniting with his little girl in heaven. “Heaven Is the Face,” the first radio single, has already caused listeners to tear up. Indeed, the entire CD might require tissues at hand, as these sad-yet-hopeful songs connect straight to the hearts of all of those grieving the loss of a loved one. —Mark Weber

## **Hope Rising**

*By Fee, INO Records.*

☒ Fee is a worship band from North Point Community Church in Alpharetta, Ga. Known for their 2007 release, *We Shine*, and the hit song “All Because of Jesus,” Fee have played several Christian conferences in recent times. With anthemic songs, the kind that could get a crowd of thousands pumping their fists in the air and shouting the lyrics, Fee builds their repertoire of original worship tunes with their sophomore release, *Hope Rising*. From the radio single “Glory to God Forever” to the upbeat “Your Love Is Better Than Life,” Fee’s songs are meant to be sung at the top of your lungs while driving in the car, or with your friends at church—or ideally at a giant outdoor music festival. Fans of U2 and Newsboys will love Fee. —Mark Weber

## [Christmas Fiction]



### **The Christmas Secret**

*By Donna VanLiere, St. Martin's Press, hardcover, 304 pages, \$14.95.*

Christine, a single mother, had no idea that a good deed would change her life. Christine saves an elderly woman's life and the woman's boss, Marshall Wilson, wants to thank Christine. When Marshall can't locate her, he gives his grandson, Jason, the job of finding her. Begrudgingly, Jason takes on the task. But soon his and Christine's lives intertwine in interesting ways.



### **The Christmas Lamp**

*By Lori Copeland, Zondervan, hardcover, 144 pages, \$14.99.*

Christmas celebrations might not be the same in Nativity, Mo., where consultant Jake Brisco plans to eliminate festive activities due to budget constraints. Resident Roni Elliot understands but isn't willing to simply do away with time-honored holiday traditions. The two clash, but as they get to know each other, they realize what is truly important.



### **The Unfinished Gift**

*By Dan Walsh, Revell, hardcover, 256 pages, \$14.99.*

The simplest gifts mean the most. Ian and Patrick Collins are grandfather and grandson struggling to cope with loss. Young Patrick wants only three things for Christmas: the Army to find his dad; to leave his granddad's house; the wooden soldier in Ian's attic. A boy's prayers, some letters and an unfinished carved soldier help bring forgiveness and reconciliation to a family desperately in need of both.

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## **Feedback December 2009**

### **LAST DAYS FEVER**

Instead of looking at a dichotomy in the views of the end times, perhaps we should see this as two sides of the same coin ("Last Days Fever" by Troy Anderson, October). Yes, the Bible does indicate there will be a catching up of some kind. But it also says, "Behold, darkness will cover the earth and gross darkness the people, but the Lord will arise upon you and His glory will be seen on you" (Is. 60:2). The Jews missed Jesus' first coming because they failed to see both sides of the "coin." The church must not fail to see both sides now.

*–Barbara Lodge  
via e-mail*

Your articles on the return of our Lord Jesus were both comprehensive and informative. However, one current widespread understanding of the rapture could have been better articulated. There are many in the body of Christ today who can no longer accept dispensationalism, which divides restored Israel from the body of Christ in these last days. Consequently, they believe the words of our Lord Jesus in Matthew 24:1-35 about the time of His coming as relevant for the church. C. Peter Wagner struck this chord in his “Case for Dominion,” but, unfortunately, his postmillennialism is an unpalatable additive. The early church fathers clearly believed Matthew 24:29-31 in their understanding of the time of the rapture, and they also were very clearly premillennial.

*–Rev. Charles P. Schmitt  
Silver Spring, Maryland*

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## **APOCALYPSE NOW?**

I agree with J. Lee Grady’s column “Apocalypse Now?” (October 2009), suggesting that one should not be misled by (false) claims about the Antichrist, as well as Christ’s second coming, and be so caught up in end-times teachings that one forgets about the Great Commission. It is sad to see how deceptive conspiracy and other false claims have entered various churches and believers’ minds and misled people and distracted them from a balanced, pure, simple gospel that keeps the good news of Jesus Christ the central focus.

*–Ernst Lutz  
Rockville, Maryland*

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## ROBERTS LIARDON

I'm pleased that Roberts Liardon once again is continuing in the race that has been set before him (*Charisma News Online*, September 29). Liardon has been a huge asset to the kingdom of God. He has touched and changed thousands of lives for the positive through his ministry.

–Sharun Gregor  
via e-mail

When I read the headline for the article “Evangelist Roberts Liardon Leads London Bible College” I thought, *Oh, I haven't heard anything on this man for several years*. Because it has apparently been eight years since the embarrassment, I was hoping this story would be a “good news” one of a minister who actually stepped down and let God restore him in the proper time. As I read the article my hopes were not fulfilled. It appears that the man may not have truly submitted to church discipline. I pray that he is fully restored and that he can walk in great humility and honor Christ's name in word and deed for the remainder of his life.

–Dane Gressett  
via e-mail

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## SCRIPTURE NOT ENOUGH?

David Shibley commits an all too common error in arguing “Is Jesus Really the Only Way?” (October). “Begging the question” (*petitio principii*) assumes the proposition that one is attempting to prove. He uses nothing but biblical Scripture to

argue the case that Jesus is in fact the only way. Thus no one but a Christian would accept that as valid support for his position. I think we need more scholarly approaches that will in fact stand up to intellectual scrutiny of those who are thinking seekers.

*–Dan Miller  
Antioch, Tennessee*

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## **CELEBRITY CHRISTIANITY**

*In his September 22 online column, Charisma editor J. Lee Grady posed the question to readers, “Is Celebrity Christianity Dead?”*

Please feature effective ministries without glorifying individuals. Keep the focus on glorifying God and try to avoid producing celebrities, which does a disservice to them as well as to the church.

*–Russell Board  
Tokyo, Japan*

As long as we're human, there will be an element of celebrity Christianity. It's far from dead because we frail humans who must have someone on the pedestal enshrine people. I would like stories about pastors who are faithful and doing all they can on their own level. We are inundated with bad news about pastors committing adultery, divorcing their wives, and so on. I think we need some good news about pastors who have served faithfully for years under the radar.

*–Leilani Haywood  
Kansas City, Missouri*

I'm in total agreement to stop the articles on charismatic superstars. This is contrary to the "true gospel" and borders on idolatry. Choose those known or unknown who exhibit true humility and the pure gospel in his or her personal life. The gifts and callings of God are irrevocable (that is, unless the Lord chooses to expose sin), therefore just boasting in giftings as we have seen through the years only puffs people up in pride and leads to an eventual "fall."

*–Jacqueline Ross  
via e-mail*

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***Correction:** Our October article on Islam (p. 30) should have stated that Muhammad was born in A.D. 570.*

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## **Charisma Online December 2009**



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## **How Does God Feel?**

Here's a question: How does God feel most of the time? Is He bored? Worried? Blasé? Happy? Concerned? Detached? Engaged?

Mad, glad or sad? It sounds lighthearted, but it's one of the most important questions of our entire spiritual journey.

How does God feel when He looks at you? I have asked many people this question over the years, and they usually respond in one of two ways: (1) God is mostly mad; (2) God is mostly sad.

And in both cases, they think it's their fault. Many Christians believe very strongly that God is angry and grieved with us. They view Him as distant, angry, sitting on the throne and spending the bulk of His emotional energy being disappointed in mankind.

We picture a weeping God who beats His breast and turns His eyes away from us in shame. But Scripture tells us the very opposite. Our God smiles and rejoices. His emotions fall into a third category: God is mostly *glad*.

Moses, under the prophetic anointing, made a stunning declaration about the Lord's gladness: "The Lord your God will make you abound in all the work of your hand. ... For the Lord will again rejoice over you for good as He rejoiced over your fathers" (Deut. 30:9, NKJV).

In this passage, God is telling Moses that at the end of the age He will break forth with rejoicing over His people. He will reveal Himself to them as the glad God who overflows with delight and enjoyment. Instead of cowering at the feet of an angry God, the body of Christ will bask in the sunshine of His gladness.

This is the day we are living in! If this picture of God seems impossible to you, scan the Word. Passages about God's gladness abound throughout the Bible. For example, Zephaniah 3:17 reveals Him as One who rejoices: "'He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.'"

Imagine that! He will sing and rejoice over His people with gladness. He will quiet our stormy hearts with the revelation of His love. God's songs over His people are not songs of anger but of rejoicing and tender love.

In this passage, God is not just exhorting people to be glad; He is promising to sing songs that *make* us glad. The rest of the book of Zephaniah lays the backdrop for this divine promise. It describes the scenes at the end of the age when everything that can be shaken is being shaken.

In that day, men will literally die of heart attacks because of fear (see Luke 21:26). Fear will be one of the predominant emotions worldwide.

But God promises that He will comfort and quiet His people by releasing songs of His affection and gladness. Intimacy with a glad God will sustain the church in the midst of unprecedented calamity.

I believe the greatest dimension of God's glory is His emotions, and central to His emotional life are His gladness and joy. This is what God communicated to Moses when Moses asked to see His glory. God promised to make known His glory and goodness to him by revealing His compassion (see Ex. 33:18-19).

Notice that when God reveals His glory, He emphasizes the glory of His emotions. As we enter into the reality of His happiness and joy, our hearts discover other emotions that abound in His heart. We begin to experience His desires for us, His beauty and His pleasures. But we cannot skip the foundational step of understanding His gladness.

We will not easily believe that God burns with desire for us or that He is exceedingly beautiful if we do not first believe that He is *glad*. It must be the foundation of our theology: Our God is a God who smiles.

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**Mike Bickle** is the director of the International House of Prayer in Kansas City, Mo., a 24/7 prayer ministry. He is also the chancellor of the International House of Prayer University and the author of several books, including *After God's Own Heart* (Charisma House), from which this column is adapted.

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## December

# December

*"who, being in the form of God,  
did not consider equality with God  
something to be grasped. But He  
emptied Himself,  
taking upon Himself the form of a  
servant,  
and was made in the likeness of men."  
—Philippians 2:6-7, [MEV](#)*

Dec. 1	Rom. 5-8
Dec. 2	Rom. 9-12
Dec. 3	Rom. 13-16
Dec. 4	Eph. 1-4
Dec. 5	Eph. 5-6; Ps. 119:1-80
Dec. 6	Phil. 1-4

Dec. 7	Col. 1-4
Dec. 8	1 Tim. 1-4
Dec. 9	1 Tim. 5-6; Titus 1-3
Dec. 10	2 Tim. 1-4
Dec. 11	Philemon; Heb. 1-4
Dec. 12	Heb. 5-8
Dec. 13	Heb. 9-11
Dec. 14	Heb. 12-13; Jude
Dec. 15	James 1-5
Dec. 16	1 Pet. 1-5
Dec. 17	2 Pet. 1-3; John 1
Dec. 18	John 2-4
Dec. 19	John 5-6
Dec. 20	John 7-8
Dec. 21	John 9-11
Dec. 22	John 12-14
Dec. 23	John 15-18
Dec. 24	John 19-21
Dec. 25	1 John 1-5
Dec. 26	Ps. 117, 119:81-176; 2-3 John

Dec. 27	Rev. 1-4
Dec. 28	Rev. 5-9
Dec. 29	Rev. 10-14
Dec. 30	Rev. 15-18
Dec. 31	Rev. 19-22

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## Israel: More Than a Moment

☒ Israel. The mere mention of the word conjures up a favorite memory for those who've been, and a longing for those who haven't. After being here three days, it's difficult to pinpoint that one "a-ha" moment. It might be because those enlightening moments have been nearly nonstop since stepping off the plane in Tel Aviv.

Our group of seven has stood in the river bed where David picked his stones to slay Goliath, spent time in the Dead Sea, climbed the hills where David hid from Saul, explored the ruins of Masada (Herrod's palaces) and had a special military escort take us to the Jordan River where we baptized each other at the spot where it is believed John baptized Jesus.