

SUMMER 2015 // LIPSCOMB NOW:

INTERSECTIONS

OF FAITH & CULTURE

PREPARED

for Christ's Return

A RESOURCE FOR CHURCH LEADERS



Molly Spitznagle, junior, made new friends in Honduras on a Lipscomb spring break mission trip with Hillsboro Church of Christ. Photo by **Carson Ford**.

INTERSECTIONS

OF FAITH & CULTURE

Volume 3 Number 1

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Don't put difficult topics on a shelf

Take a closer look to strengthen faith

Hollywood actress Roma Downey and her husband, producer Mark Burnett, were on campus recently to speak to students at the Gathering about their success in producing faith-based entertainment. The couple produced the Emmy®-nominated miniseries, "The Bible" and "A.D.," based on the Book of Acts.

Like many of you and millions of other viewers, I spent Sunday evenings this spring watching "A.D." Its portrayal of the chaos and terror that followed the resurrection of Jesus made the old story seem somehow less trite and more inspiring. The producers added details of this dramatic and problematic moment to exemplify its intensity, which led me to question whether we have really come to grips with it. Have we fully explored the single-most critical and pivotal event to our faith? After all, if the resurrection is not real, nothing else matters.



Students pose with Mark Burnett, producer of *The Bible* and *A.D.*, at the Gathering.

The Second Coming is another fundamental aspect of our faith that is under studied. We believe the promise, yet rarely think about it in a profound way. With subjects like these, where very little is known and even less can be proven, they are often accepted, then put on a shelf never to be thought of again. A controversial book of the 1990s was *Meeting Jesus for the First Time*. While its content was widely debated, many found the title enticing as it envisioned something so common and asked readers to look at it again.

This magazine is written to encourage deeper study into topics that are assumed. Within this particular issue you will find articles that explore the Second Coming

from various perspectives. It is my hope that you will be blessed by reading them. May they rouse your desire to take a closer look and cultivate a deeper understanding that can be shared and used to strengthen others.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "L. Randolph Lowry".

L. Randolph Lowry
President
Lipscomb University



P.S. If you find this publication helpful, please do two things: email comments and suggestions to jenna.schrader@lipscomb.edu and pass it on to a ministry friend!

Jesus Might Drop By Today...



“Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.” (1 Thessalonians 5: 1-3)

Are you a planner? Do you like to know everything in advance? Do you try to schedule everything—even a pregnancy and delivery? Do you hate surprises and loathe unexpected interruptions to your day?

If so, this issue of *Intersections* magazine is geared to remind you of one of the central truths of the Bible—Jesus is coming soon!

He will arrive at the most unexpected time—and even He doesn't know when that hour will be. Only the Father knows, and He has shared that information (contrary to some opinions) with no one.

At the twinkling of an eye and with the trumpet call of God, one moment this world will give way to a new heaven and new earth. Then Christ will return to take us, and this world we know will come to a close. The resurrection of the dead, judgment and each person's eternal reward will follow.

Once at a devotional a friend added a second verse to, “This is the Day that the Lord Has Made.” Without warning, he started singing, “This is the year that the lord may appear.” It caught me off guard and reminded me that the second coming is imminent.

A good Boy Scout lives with the motto, “Be prepared.” It is a call to watchfulness and to approaching each day mindful of all that could happen. A good Christian also keeps an eye to the sky and “lives prepared” for the possibility that this day could be our last, the world's last—or both.

This issue of *Intersections* magazine is written to remind an often easily complacent church that the end is near and glory awaits.

Maranatha,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Scott Sager". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Scott Sager
Vice President for Church Services

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Best Practices?

Go to www.lipscomb.edu/servingchurches/feedback and tell us what your church is doing. We'll show it to others.

Mary Morris service award honors The Well founder Rob Touchstone

Rob Touchstone ('97, M.Div. '12), director of missional entrepreneurship in Lipscomb's College of Business and adjunct professor in the College of Bible & Ministry, was named the 2015 winner of the Mary Morris Award for Exemplary Service to Society. The award is given annually to a member of the Lipscomb University community who demonstrates a high level of service to the community and the church.

As a graduate student in Earl Lavender's missional living class, Touchstone had a "crazy" idea that tugged at his heart for about four years before he shared it with some friends, who also caught his vision.

His "crazy" business idea became a reality in the form of The Well, a nonprofit coffeehouse with two locations in Nashville, one in Brentwood and one across from Lipscomb, focused on serving quality coffee and giving profits to provide clean water around the world. The coffeehouses also serve as a gathering place for worship and Bible study and a casual, unintimidating environment for significant conversations.

"As we developed this concept, we realized that people around the world were dying because they didn't have access to the most basic necessities of life. But we also recognized local people needing hope, love and community. The Well is our way to love our community world," said Touchstone.

The Mary Morris Award for Exemplary Service to Society is given in memory of Mary Morris, former education professor and founder of the



College of Business Interim Dean Ray Eldridge honors Rob Touchstone, The Well founder.

Center for Character Development at Lipscomb. Mirroring the qualities that Morris displayed in her short life, awardees exhibit a spirit of volunteerism, engage in meaningful civic activities, demonstrate a commitment to Christian missions and are an advocate for Lipscomb University.

In his acceptance speech, Touchstone noted that he personally knew Morris as a teenager in Maryland and was touched by her friendship and commitment to Christian values. "I could never match the service Mary offered the world, but I'm proud to take up the torch," Touchstone said. "I am thankful to God to be allowed the opportunity to do something beyond my wildest dreams."

Earlier this year, Touchstone was appointed director of missional entrepreneurship at the College of Business, where he shares his knowledge with students and works to inspire future generations to pursue their business dreams while also having a positive missional impact on the world. Touchstone said he hopes his "real-world" experience of having a missional business idea and implementing it will be helpful to students as an example that ideas can become reality.

Campus recreation hosts adult sports league for church teams

When it comes to building relationships, sports can be a powerful bonding tool and a fun way to interact with Christians citywide.

With that in mind, Lipscomb University's Office of Campus Recreation has launched its new Adult Sports League, open to teams and individuals over the age of 18 during the summer.

"Sports provides a great way to really get involved and build relationships with not only fellow congregants but also other Christians from other local congregations," said Matthew Abplanalp, director of campus recreation. "Sports provide a great way to stay fit, of course, but among people of faith, it can also provide a renewal of spirit as you enjoy positive time spent with Christian friends."

League play in basketball and tennis began in May. League play in indoor volleyball began in June. Churches interested in participating in the summer 2016 league, or possibly a Christmas 2015 league, can register a team or individuals at www.lipscomb.edu/campusrecreation/adult-league-sports.

Cost for a team is \$400 for summer participation and \$60 for individuals. The campus recreation department provides all the coordination of basketball games on Monday nights and Saturday mornings, volleyball games on Tuesday and Thursday nights and singles and doubles tennis matches, Abplanalp said.

For more information on the Lipscomb Adult Sports League, contact Luke Salmen at luke.salmen@lipscomb.edu or 615.966.1176.

New graduate Bible scholarship honors former president Harold Hazelip

The College of Bible & Ministry recently announced the establishment of the Harold Hazelip Graduate Bible Scholarship.

The scholarship was established in honor of Harold Hazelip, Lipscomb University president from 1986-1997, and is funded by donors who wish to remain anonymous. The donors established the scholarship in recognition of Hazelip's years of service to the university and to encourage future generations to "follow in his footsteps of scholarship, faith, leadership and service."

The purpose of this merit-based scholarship is to promote the training of preachers who will serve in the churches of Christ. It will provide scholarship aid to qualified students enrolled in the college's Hazelip School of Theology's Master of Divinity program.

"Through this endowment, the donors want to hold up Dr. Hazelip's legacy for future generations," said Leonard Allen, dean of the

College of Bible & Ministry. "They greatly admired his preaching which impacted their lives early in their Christian experience. It meant a great deal to them and shaped their life path as strong Christian leaders. He brings a dignity, a passion, an artfulness and an eloquence to preaching that is a great example for others to follow.

"This kind of scholarship is exactly the kind of partnership we need to encourage our students to follow a Christian vocation and to help grow this endeavor. We greatly appreciate the donors for their gift, and it's truly an honor to be able to recognize Harold in this way."

Hazelip said he is honored by this gift and looks forward to the impact it will have on future students.

"I appreciate this gesture of kindness from the donors," said Hazelip. "They have given me so much more than I have ever given them, and it has nothing to do with financial

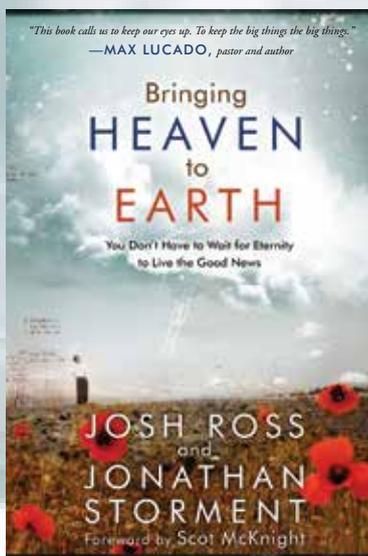
things. I look forward to the good that the Bible faculty at Lipscomb will be able to do in years to come with tools such as this scholarship that is in their hands. I am honored and humbled."

In April 2005, Lipscomb's Graduate Bible Program was named the Hazelip School of Theology in honor of Hazelip as the result of an endowment established by Lois Renick of Bowling Green, Ky., in recognition of "his contributions to Lipscomb as well as to Christian education and preaching."

Hazelip became president of Lipscomb University in 1986 after serving 14 years as dean of the Harding Graduate School of Religion in Memphis. During his tenure, David Lipscomb College became Lipscomb University. In addition, the Master of Arts in Religion and Master of Education degrees were added along with the university's first semester-abroad program.

To learn more about the graduate program and Hazelip Scholarship contact Kathy Bickel at 615.966.6053.

INTERSECTIONS *Recommends...*



Bringing Heaven to Earth By Josh Ross and Jonathan Storment

God so loved the world, and He still does. He values His creation too much to destroy it. If you know where to look, you can see that the coming of a new heaven and a new earth already has begun. Life on earth is renewed every time you live out Jesus's prayer that God's ways will be followed on earth. The work of God's Kingdom involves restoring what has been broken. This includes people, unjust systems, relationships, anything that has been separated from God and needs to be healed, reconciled and set right. This is how heaven collides with earth—not following fiery destruction but in the power of restoring to life everything that God created. What you believe about God's plan for humanity and for his creation determines how you will invest your life. God calls all of us to this renewing work. You can help bring heaven to earth, starting today.

"Oh, the difficulty of balance in this walk of faith. We tend to lose it. At least I do. I find myself on the side of the path, entangled in small issues and controversies. This book calls us to keep our eyes up. To keep the big things the big things. The authors offer a much needed and much welcomed reminder."

—Max Lucado, minister and author



Nurture 2015 features John Ortberg, new programs for churches

The 2015 Nurture conference went back to its roots March 9-10 with John Ortberg, the nationally recognized speaker and author who spoke at the first Nurture conference in 2010. The event also served as the debut of the Institute for Christian Spirituality's new 2015 programs for churches and faith leaders.

The annual Nurture conference, attended by more than 200 people from throughout Middle Tennessee this year, features nationally recognized leaders in Christian spirituality in a two-day event. Workshops were conducted by ICS theologians and other local experts in spiritual formation.

This year, Ortberg shared ideas and concepts from his latest book *All the Places to Go...How Do You Know?* at a keynote lecture, a talk at Lipscomb's weekly gathering of the student body and at a special luncheon.

"Endlessly needy souls are made to be drawn to an endlessly giving God," Ortberg told the audience at the Nurture luncheon. "We live in a world where people desperately need their lost souls saved from sin."

Ortberg used concepts drawn from Dallas Willard to diagram the

human spirit and reinforce the importance of loving God with all your heart, mind, body and soul.

The ICS also used the Nurture conference to announce and highlight themes embedded within various new ICS programs for churches and faith leaders. In addition to a slate of five workshops available for congregations, the institute will now offer two retreats designed specifically for enriching and renewing church leaders.

Led by Kris Miller, the newly appointed ICS director and an experienced retreat facilitator, the retreats will focus on preparing leaders to flourish in their ministry and providing healing and renewal for ministers in need.

The ICS workshops provide congregations with the tools to revitalize a sense of mission, manage conflicts, renew hunger for God's Word, better tend the spiritual life of children and introduce new practices that enrich a daily walk with God.

For more information on the Institute for Christian Spirituality and its programs, contact Frank Guertin at 615.966.5352 or frank.guertin@lipscomb.edu or visit ics.lipscomb.edu.

Hazelip School, Missio Alliance partner to expand access



The Hazelip School of Theology has begun a new collaborative partnership with Missio Alliance, a fellowship of churches, denominations, schools and faith-based networks working together to see the church in North America equipped for fuller and more faithful participation in God's mission.

Missio Alliance began as an initiative of Ecclesia, a network of missionally minded churches and leaders who take a primary interest in encouraging and equipping church planters. The Hazelip School's partnership is scheduled to last over the next three years.

As a way to expand Missio's reach in the Southeast, Lipscomb hosted a Conversation Forum on April 22-23, featuring Scot McKnight, noted New Testament scholar and author of several books. More than 100 church leaders and Christians leaders attended the conference, which explored themes discussed in two of McKnight's books, *A Fellowship of Differents* and *Kingdom Conspiracy*.

McKnight and a panel of experts discussed timely questions such as: Should our concern, as the church, be primarily on spiritual matters or on social justice issues? Are social justice issues kingdom work even if the name of Jesus is not involved? Can kingdom work avoid social issues and still be authentically Christian?

McKnight is professor of New Testament at Northern Seminary, in Lombard, Ill. His writings include the award-winning *The Jesus Creed*, *The King Jesus Gospel*, *One Life* and *The Blue Parakeet*, as well as the volumes on Galatians and 1 Peter in the NIV Application Commentary series.

For more information on the Missio Alliance, log on to www.missioalliance.org.

Supporting our church faith. Serving our church families.

Lipscomb's Scholarship for Children of Church of Christ Ministers

We understand the sacrifices of so many within the Church of Christ who every day serve others while serving God's Kingdom through our thousands of congregations.

That's why we're proud to offer the Scholarship for Children of Ministers in the Church of Christ. Through this special undergraduate scholarship, we can specifically support those who serve the church day-to-day—our ministers, youth ministers and missionaries—by serving what is most precious to them... their children.

There are two scholarship levels: \$11,000 per year (limited to the first 15 qualified and admitted students who complete an employment verification form by March 1 each year) and \$5,000 per year (awarded to all other qualified and admitted students). These scholarships can be stacked with other gift aid, not to exceed the cost of full-tuition.

@ To learn more about this scholarship's requirements or for general financial aid information, contact the Financial Aid Office at financialaid@lipscomb.edu or 615.966.1791.



Hell and Mr. Fudge

*Edward Fudge is an American Christian theologian and lawyer, best known for his book **The Fire that Consumes**, in which he argues against traditionalist Christian interpretations of hell. He has been called “one of the foremost scholars on hell” by the Christian Post. He is the subject of the 2012 independent film **Hell and Mr. Fudge**, which tells the story of his yearlong, systematic study of hell and the consequences of his changing beliefs on his personal life.*

Intersections: *Are you saying there is no hell?*

Fudge: Absolutely not! If anything, I am saying that hell might prove to be much hotter than previously thought.

Intersections: *What part of the traditional doctrine of hell do you find so objectionable?*

Fudge: The part that says God will keep anyone alive forever just to watch them burn. Since about the fifth century, most Christians have taught that hell is a place of unending conscious torment, where the condemned can never die, perish or be destroyed. This is especially heinous since the way the Bible most often states the final end of the wicked is to say they will die, perish and be destroyed.

In the late 1970s, I did a year long study of this subject that changed my mind and led me to write *The Fire That Consumes* that helped to stir a rethinking of hell around the world.

Intersections: *Then what are you saying?*

Fudge: According to the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, those who want nothing to do with God will finally get what they want. They will be banished from God’s presence into hell, never to come out again. Because God alone has immortality, to be cut off completely from God is to disconnect from the only source of life. In the end, the unrepentant wicked will die (Romans 6:23), perish (John 3:16) and be destroyed (Matthew 10:28).

Edward Fudge
Attorney of Counsel
Lanier Law Firm
Houston, Texas



We can sum this up by noting that in the Bible, hell is:

- Not “the fire that torments” (traditionalism).
- Not “the fire that purifies” (universalism).
- It is “the fire that consumes” (Deuteronomy 4:24; Hebrews 12:29).

Intersections: *Can you point us to a sampling of statements from the Old and New Testaments that you believe support this view of the final end of the wicked?*

Fudge: The Old Testament contains scores if not hundreds of such statements, using at least 50 Hebrew verbs and at least 76 metaphors or similes. Here is just a selection. These texts are clear and vivid. They cannot be misunderstood if we will only let them mean what they say.

Psalm 2:7-9: “I will tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to me, ‘You are my son, today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage... You shall *break them* with a rod of iron, and *dash them in pieces* like a potter’s vessel.”

Isaiah 11:4: “...and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and *with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked.*”

Malachi 4:1, 3: “For behold, the day comes, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes *shall burn them up*, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will *leave them neither root nor branch.*...”

Matthew 10:28: (Jesus, speaking of God.) “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear Him who can *destroy* both soul and body in hell.”

Romans 6:23: “For the wages of sin is *death*, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

2 Peter 3:5-7: (Flood as example.) “They deliberately ignore this fact, that by the word of God heavens existed long ago, and an earth formed out of water and by means of water, through which the world that then existed was deluged with water and *perished*. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and *destruction* of ungodly men.”

Intersections: *But what about the texts that talk about gnashing of teeth? Isn't that a picture of someone in terrible torment?*

Fudge: Seven times in the Gospels, Jesus speaks of some who will be excluded from the joys of the eternal kingdom into a place where there will be weeping and “gnashing (grinding) of teeth.” Matthew 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; and Luke 13:28. This phrase is used throughout the Bible, and it is always a picture of anger, not of pain. When Stephen is dying, his murderers rush upon him, gnashing at him with their teeth.

Intersections: *Jesus warns of “eternal punishment” in Matthew 25:46, and it is contrasted with “eternal life.”*

Fudge: Thank you for bringing that up. Eternal punishment is punishment that is part of the age to come, the eternal age. The word “punishment” does not tell of what it consists. Paul tells us that when Jesus comes back, he will “punish” the wicked with “eternal destruction” (2 Thessalonians 1:9). Eternal punishment is eternal capital punishment. God will destroy both soul and body in hell (Matthew 10:28) and they will be gone forever.

Intersections: *What about the word picture of smoke rising forever?*

Fudge: This comes from the destruction of Sodom (Genesis 19:27-28). The next morning, Abram looked out where Sodom

had been and he saw only rising smoke. If we drew that picture today, we would likely draw a mushroom-shaped cloud. Rising smoke is not a symbol for pain and suffering. It is a reminder of a total destruction.

Intersections: *How do you explain the story of the rich man and Lazarus?*

Fudge: First, it is a parable. Second, the context in Luke 16 makes it clear that this parable is not even teaching about final punishment, but about the need to hear and obey God while we have opportunity. Third, the story is not to be taken literally. Fourth, even if it were literally intended, it would not say anything about final punishment in hell, but only punishment in this age in an intermediate state, since the rich man's brothers are living on earth under the teaching of Moses and the prophets. And fifth, even if all the four points above were not true, this story says nothing about how long the rich man's torment will continue. It is no wonder several scholars who defend unending conscious torment tell their readers not to try to use this parable to teach it.

Intersections: *If everlasting torment did not come from the Bible, where did it come from?*

Fudge: It came from pagan Greek philosophy of Socrates and Plato, who taught that every human being has an immortal soul that will live forever and that cannot die. In the second and third centuries, several men trained in Greek philosophy became

Christians and used their philosophy to defend Christianity. Two of these “Apologists” were named Athenagoras and Tertullian. Both men brought with them into the church the pagan notion of immortal souls.

Tertullian read Matthew 10:28, which says God can destroy both soul and body in hell, then he explained that souls are immortal and cannot be destroyed. When Jesus says the wicked will be destroyed, said Tertullian, he really meant they will live forever in conscious torment.

Intersections: *Why does this subject even matter? What will be, will be, regardless—right?*

Fudge: It matters for at least three reasons:

- When we tell people “what God says” on any subject, we need to be sure we say what God really said and not something he never said.
- The traditional hell of unending conscious torment has turned many away from the Gospel and created many atheists in response. If it is not what the Bible teaches, it needs to be discarded, and the sooner the better.
- What we say about hell is a reflection of the character of God. It is a slander on the heavenly Father to say that he will keep millions or billions (or even one person) alive forever and never allow them to die, just to torment them with suffering of body and soul forever. That is not the God we see revealed in Scripture and certainly not in the person of Jesus Christ.



Edward Fudge has written three books on the topic of hell. *The Fire That Consumes* is a scholarly study now in its third edition and has been featured in the *New York Times*; the popular version is titled *Hell—A Final Word*; and the third is titled *Two Views of Hell*, co-authored by Robert Peterson of Covenant Seminary. Full details can be found at www.edwardfudge.com. *Hell and Mr. Fudge*, an award-winning film starring Mackenzie Astin and Keri Lynn Pratt, is now on DVD and available from Amazon.com among other suppliers. See trailer at www.hellandmrfudge.com.

DO NOTHING:

How the Parousia Calls for Passivity

One of my favorite family memories is a trip to Walt Disney World. Even if you haven't been to Disney World, you may know it contains a section called Tomorrowland. Here, Walt Disney invited guests to imagine tomorrow. Stepping into Tomorrowland was intended to be like stepping into the future. The building designs and ride themes painted a portrait of a time far, far away. This space provided the chance to ask this question: What will tomorrow be like?

Disney answered that question in a positive Pollyannaish way. Tomorrowland pictures a fantastic future. It's the "happily-ever-after" that follows the "once-upon-a-time." A few minutes in the future envisioned in the Magic Kingdom and you don't want to return to the present.

The terror of humanity's Tomorrowland

But not everyone pictures the future in that way. Some of literature's most widely read authors offer a darker future:

- Imagine a future when the government gathers teenagers each year and throws them into an arena to fight to the death. That's the Tomorrowland of a trilogy by Suzanne Collins called *The Hunger Games*.
- Or, imagine a future where love is considered a disease and all young people must receive the cure when they turn 18. That's Lauren Oliver's Tomorrowland in her book *Delirium*.

These books and their dismal futures are examples of something called "dystopian literature." A dystopia is a future that is depressing. Dystopian tales often start with an illusion of a perfect society—a utopia. But as the story progresses, we realize that this future is the opposite of a utopia.

Sometimes we imagine a similarly dark future entirely on our own. Apart from the authors', our own anxieties often lead us there. We consider the wars, the diseases, the poverty, the corruption and the conflicts of the present, and we think, "Where is this world headed?" We imagine a trajectory from the present into the future, and it doesn't look very good. When we imagine the future, it's often a fearful future.

The terror of heaven's Tomorrowland

Thankfully, we are not left to authors', academics' or to our own anxieties when it comes to imagining the future. The Bible says many things about tomorrow. Central to the

biblical description of the future is this: it's a future marked by one event—the return of Jesus. When the Bible talks about the future, it almost always talks about one key event: the return of Jesus.

Because the return of Jesus features so prominently in the future that is imagined by Scripture, the biblical future is sometimes called the “parousia”—the Greek word means “coming.” When the Bible paints tomorrow, it's always a picture that shows Jesus coming back.

But when I was growing up, I managed to turn even the biblical tomorrow into something terrifying. In the small church where I came to faith in Jesus, we sang a song about the parousia most Sundays. This Tomorrowland song included this line: “Jesus is coming soon, morning or night or noon, many will meet their doom, trumpets will sound.”

We sang those words so often that I naturally came to associate Jesus' return with doom. In my young Christian mind the biblical future was about as dystopian as any award-winning novel. The returning Jesus would play the role of the new oppressive superpower, and we humans would play the role of the oppressed victims of his wrath. It was hardly a future worth singing about.

Facing the future with hope

Like I once did, many today may wrongly think that the Bible, like popular literature,

portrays a fearful future. It does not. The Bible portrays a hopeful future.

Like dystopian literature, the Bible's future is one in which the old world collapses and a new world rises. But unlike dystopian literature, that new world is not unbelievably worse than the old. It's unimaginably better than the old. Because when Jesus comes back, he's not bringing doom and gloom. He's bringing renewal and restoration:

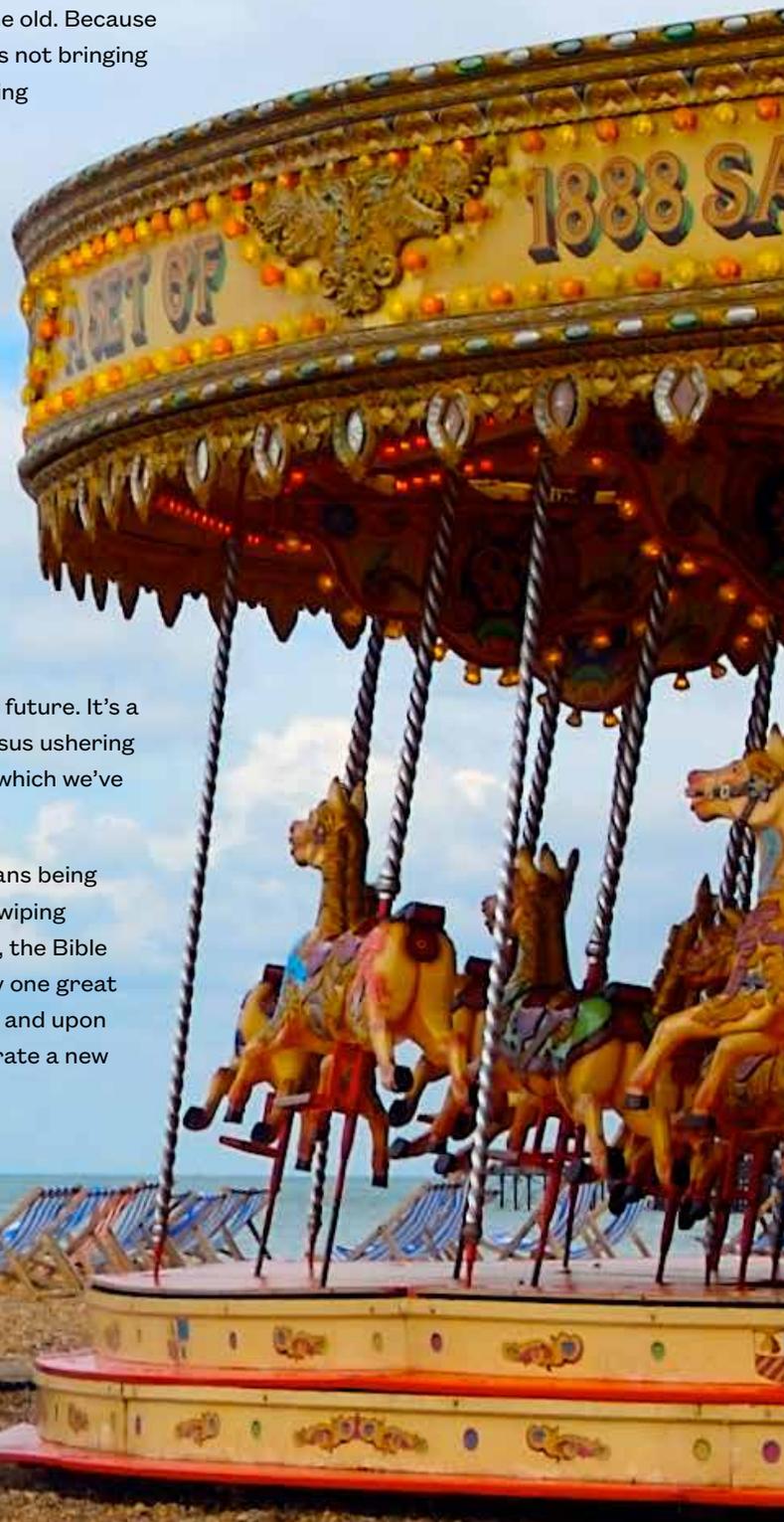
- “But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.” (2 Peter 3:13 ESV).
- “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.” (Rev. 21:1 ESV).

The parousia is not a fearful future. It's a hopeful future. It's about Jesus ushering in the earth and heaven for which we've long-hoped.

Rather than imagining humans being snuffed out by a volcano or wiping each other out with a bomb, the Bible pictures a future marked by one great event—the return of Jesus, and upon his return Jesus will inaugurate a new

heaven and a new earth. He will restore and re-create earth and heaven so that they become all God originally envisioned them to be.

Continued on page 12.



Waiting and praying

So how then, do we face the future? What do we do now knowing that Jesus is coming back? The Bible calls for two things. We face the future waiting and praying.

John Ortberg writes about two tombstones. One marks the resting place of Mel Blanc. He was the voice behind many of the first popular cartoons like Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck. Blanc's final epitaph, recorded on his tombstone, was this: "That's all, folks." The show is over. The curtain has closed. That's all folks. No encore. No second act.

The other tombstone marked the grave of a friend's grandmother. She was buried in rural Louisiana. Only one word was etched into her tombstone: "Waiting."

These two epitaphs represent two approaches toward the future. When today is hard and tomorrow looks even harder, we may be tempted to think, "That's all folks." What we see in the newspaper headlines is all we're ever going to see. We're going to run this planet and its people into the ground. Things are only going to get worse. There's nothing better to look forward to. That's all folks.

But there is another approach. It's found in that word "waiting." There is something better to anticipate. Things are not just going to get worse. Jesus will return, and when he comes back, there will be a restoration of heaven and earth. All evil will be exterminated. All injustice will cease. All violence will stop. All suffering will end. Rather than saying, "That's all," we say, "Wait, just wait," because when Jesus comes back, all will be made well.

- This was the approach of a man in the Bible named Paul: "Waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the

glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13 ESV).

- The writer of Hebrews states that "Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him." (Hebrews 9:28 ESV).

We wait. We eagerly wait, knowing that the future is bright. Jesus will return. Good will win. And we who follow Jesus will spend an eternity with him and with our loved ones on a new heaven and new earth. We don't despair and say, "That's all." We find comfort in knowing there's much more to come. We wait.

*"Unlike dystopian literature,
that new world is not unbelievably
worse than the old."*

But we not only face this bright future waiting. We also face this future praying. The early Christians used to summarize their hope for the future in one word—"Maranatha." The word meant, "Our Lord, come!" It was a one-word prayer: "Our Lord, come!"

This is, in fact, the final prayer given to us by Scripture. The second to last verse of the Bible contains a version of this word: "Come, Lord Jesus." (Revelation 22:20). We are to be so confident about the future that we pray for that future to happen now. We are to pray for tomorrow to come today. Why? Because we know that the sooner he comes, the sooner healing comes. The sooner the end of cancer comes. The sooner the end of poverty comes. The sooner the end of wars comes.

The Need to Do Nothing

This call to wait and pray reminds us of the value of passivity.

One of the wonderful things about the contemporary Church is its renewed activity. More churches are no longer content to do nothing while people in their communities suffer. More churches are doing something. But in the midst of this renewed value placed on activity, I'm afraid there's a corresponding devaluing of passivity. There is activity we must do to participate with King Jesus in bringing His rule. But there is only so much we can do. There are things only He can do. And so we must pray. We must wait. In light

of the parousia, the Church has been called once again to learn to do nothing. To learn the value of the passive disciplines like waiting and praying.

Several months ago I spoke in a small church in Selmer, Tenn. About 20 people gathered as I spoke. One of those 20 was a widow named Kay who could barely walk and who was usually confined to her home. The only reason she made it that night was her daughter-in-law brought her. After my talk, Kay told me that all she can do is pray. She can't feed the poor. She can't paint homes. She can't travel to foreign countries to teach people about Jesus. So, she prays. She said this with a hint of apology. As if prayer was inferior to what the rest of the church was doing.

But the reality of the return of Jesus calls us back to passive practices just like this. There are things only Jesus can do. So we wait, and we pray. And we do so knowing that when He returns, He will do what we cannot do about tomorrow.

Chris Altrock

Senior Preaching Minister
Highland Church of Christ
Memphis, Tenn.



Stewardship and biscuits

My grandmother makes biscuits. Nana does not have a recipe. She uses shortening, flour and buttermilk, but the how, the how much and the when of those ingredients is a source of constant discussion.

Her children have tried to replicate her biscuits. They can't. Their own biscuits are never exactly like hers. My uncles have stood next to her as she has made her biscuits; they've taken notes; they've even videotaped her making the biscuits, and at every family meal they eat their own biscuits and lament that they are not her biscuits. In their frustration, they too often miss the fact that their grandchildren love the biscuits they've made, whether they taste like Nana's or not.

I think about this a lot, and how it is a lot like faith. I wonder what it says about how faith is passed between generations, and the doubts we all face. I think about how we trust our own determinations of importance and orthodoxy because we fear uncertainly so much. And I marvel at the control we think we can exercise over

the will of God. No matter how hard we try, we will not believe what our parents believe, and our children will not believe what we believe. We know this, and we fear this, due to a misunderstanding of stewardship.

When we call ourselves conservative, what are we conserving? When we speak of being good stewards, of what are we stewards? And what might the Gospels tell us about this? To view stewardship as the effective use of our resources, primarily economic resources, is to ignore the Gospel refrain that we must empty ourselves in order to be filled. It is to ignore, that in the same way Christ was a good steward of life, so we are to be good stewards of all we have, wringing every last drop of justice, love and care out of our lives. It is to ignore that for the Christian there is no financial peace, no world peace, no peace of mind, there is only peace in the love and will of the Father.

True stewardship is to acknowledge that the Crucifixion is our

formative example of stewardship.

Being a good steward is not accruing shrewdly in order to give, it is not insuring that missions and budgets are sustainable and efficiently effective, and it is not saving for the future. These are all idolatrous illusions of control.

Stewardship is being ever present with the inescapable truth that we will all die and being able to hear that news as good news. News that frees us from the burden of things that we cannot control and from the idolatry of believing we can. News that frees us to do good and faithful works because of the value in the work and without regard for the results. Being a good steward is using all we have to do the good work of the Kingdom of God. We are free to acknowledge death, unafraid, knowing the resurrection we confess will come.

I recently started making biscuits. They are not Nana's biscuits, but I know they are good biscuits. We are not called to make our mother's biscuits. Stewardship is not the biscuits or the recipe, but the making of the biscuits. We are stewards of the cross, and the cross is not to be protected or managed or saved. It is to be lived.



Randy Spivey
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A Sermon on the Second Coming

The Truth is Your Friend...

When Dr. Charles Siburt first began his teaching career, I was in his first class. He soon became more than a teacher—a mentor, a resource and a friend. Over the years, I called him for more advice than anyone else except my dad. Yet you had to have thick skin and wear a helmet when you asked Dr. Siburt his opinion, because the truth would come back at you unfiltered, unsweetened and often undeniable.



We gave Dr. Siburt the nickname “Chainsaw Charlie” because of his penchant for giving us the truth when no one else really would. By then, he was losing his vision, but like Fanny J. Crosby he seemed to see spiritual things more clearly than those of us who relied upon our eyes. Charlie later contracted cancer, and we all knew he was in for a rough time. During those years Charlie reminded us of one of his great mantras: “*The truth is your friend.*”

Charlie adamantly believed he was better off knowing the truth, facing it straight on, and using his journey as a means to be a blessing to others. When cancer took his life, we all realized embracing the truth as a friend had served him well.

The Gospel of John tells us that Jesus came “full of grace and truth.” Later we learn Jesus arrived offering a truth “that sets us free.” In Jesus, truth marches hand-in-hand with grace and unlocks the chains that bind us—allowing us to live free. In his letters, Paul challenges believers to “speak truthfully with your neighbor” and to always make sure we “speak the truth in love.” Truth must be our constant companion, but he always brings along his soul mate named “love.”

Yet I fear in the Church of the 21st century that love is showing up in churches apart from truth. Somehow, love is always welcome but truth has been asked to stay away because fear already attends the congregation. Love and truth have gotten a divorce, and tolerance and fear have banished truth from the building. The Church has become a truly “non-prophet” institution where truth is asked to stay away so that tolerance, fear and love (but a clearly diminished love) may dominate church life.

Perhaps like Jack Nicholson in “A Few Good Men,” leaders have decided, “*You don’t want the truth! You can’t handle the truth!*” And churches are left with a diminished form of love that yields to tolerance and fear at every turn. Somewhere along the way, church leaders decided that we must insulate the world from our central message. Instead of embracing a truth that sets men free, we hold hands and sing “kumbaya” while never saying what Scripture actually teaches.

So here is the truth that is your friend:

Jesus Christ is coming back soon to judge the living and the dead. No one knows the final day, but it is near so be prepared. On that day Jesus will judge the hearts and lives of every person. All those Jesus knows will join him in heaven for eternity; everyone else will join the devil and his fallen angels in eternal destruction.

Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians is our earliest writing of the New Testament dating back to AD 51. In it, he speaks to a confused church about Christ’s second coming, death and eternity. Here we read the Gospel’s “good news” about Jesus for the very first time: “They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath” (I Thessalonians 1: 9-10).

The good news Paul proclaimed was a turning from polytheism to monotheism, from false religion to truth and ultimately to Jesus as the resurrected Lord who saves from the wrath to come. This is the truth that is also our friend—Jesus is the only remedy to save us from eternal wrath that is surely coming upon all who do not know him.

The most elementary teachings of the early Church spoke plainly about the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment: “Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment” (Hebrews 6: 1-2).

This truth has been silenced.

Certainly in the past, truth all too often showed up in our churches without his companion love. Like a bad version of Johnny Cash, we went around singing, “*You’re gonna burn, burn, burn, in that ring of fire, that ring of fire.*” It is precisely because of this unkind version of truth that fear and tolerance showed up to banish truth from the Church and diminish love.

A retired Scottish minister one Sunday afternoon saw the young minister who came to take his place. The old man asked, “Aye laddie, what did ye preach on this morning?” The young minister replied, “I preached on hell!” The older minister then smiled and asked, “Ah, but did ye do it with a tear in your eye?” The old man knew truth speaks best when walking arm in arm with love.

Truth and his soul mate love must be reunited in our churches. If divorced, it’s time for remarriage. A lost world is counting on this truth to set them free.

Scott Sager
Vice President for
Church Services
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Arts and the Apocalypse

Intersections magazine sat down with internationally acclaimed Cuban /American artist Rolando Diaz to discuss his painting of Jesus as the King of Kings. Here are some excerpts from that conversation:

Intersections: *There seems to be a beauty and power behind the arts that allows artistic images often to convey what we struggle to say with words. Why is that?*

Rolando: My reading of Genesis tells me that one day God walked into his design studio. He started with nothing, and out of nothing created the most beautiful works of art imaginable in our earth and solar system. He spoke it all into existence—or maybe like C.S. Lewis’ Aslan, he sang it all into existence. The arts allow us then to take what God designed and work as co-creator with God to make something that speaks of Him.

Intersections: *The book of Revelation is written in apocalyptic “hidden” language. Revelation seems to be more vivid and imaginative than much of the rest of Scripture—and also more mysterious. Is there a sense in which good art is apocalyptic as well?*

Rolando: The arts can make the simple profound, the hidden more revealed and the mysterious more imaginable. But the arts must maintain the sense of mystery and call people to both an encounter and an invitation to ponder further the mysteries of God.

Intersections: *Tell us a little about the apocalyptic piece in this issue of the magazine. How difficult was it to portray Jesus in this manner?*

Rolando: This piece was actually done at Christmas. I was invited to paint live during a service focusing upon the “Three Kings of Christmas.” The evening portrayed the Magi as “The Kings Who Sought Christmas,” and King Herod as “The King Who Fought Christmas” and then Jesus as “The King Who Brought Christmas.” If you check out my website you can see lots of “Mother and Child” paintings, but I wanted this one to be a surprise to the audience and evoke passion and mystery.

So I used the passage from Revelation 1: 12-20 to portray Jesus as the final image we really have of him in the Bible. He is the King of Kings and the resurrected Lord of all the earth—and the power that fills the church.

Revelation 1:12-20

“I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

“When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: ‘Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

“Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.”

Rolando Diaz

Although a studio artist, Diaz has also painted live with celebrities such as Jewel, BJ Thomas, Laura Bush and former president George W. Bush. He has also painted live on the Lipscomb campus with Amy Grant and the Gatlin Brothers, and his collectors live around the world. PBS aired a documentary of his life in the United States, Russia and Canada titled “Recapturing Cuba.” Born in Havana, Cuba, Diaz learned early that there are those who will go through life with little or nothing they can call their own. This thought has led the artist to travel through cities in the U.S. and other countries, including Haiti, one of the poorest countries in the world, recalling and painting those images, and raising funds through his art for the poor. Diaz believes his gifts are from God, to be used for God’s glory.



For more information, visit www.rodiaz.com.

THE TWO WITNESSES OF REVELATION 11

Motivation for Missional Living

Earl Lavender

*Director of Missional Studies
Lipscomb University*



The apocalyptic and symbolic language of Revelation has scared many away from its profoundly encouraging message. At the end of all the difficulties, turmoil, sorrow and death—God will win. Those faithful to His call will share in the great victory. There is great suffering yet to be experienced. However, we should never lose hope—God will win!

Missional living is aligning one's life with the purposes of God. God is a God of mission and is on mission. He invites us to join Him in overcoming evil with good. He is working to reconcile all things to Himself through the blood of the cross of Jesus (Colossians 1:20). To be on mission with God is to be a minister of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). This is the essence of missional living. If you want to see it concretely, simply look at the life of Jesus. We are called to learn from Him how to be faithful witnesses to the glory of God.

Isaiah 43 is a powerful reminder of the purpose God assigns His people. In the courtroom of the world and its false gods, we are called to bear witness to the one true God and only Savior. It is for this reason God allows us to experience the full brunt of brokenness and deep pain. Through suffering and struggles, we demonstrate to the world the redemptive power of walking with God in all experiences of life. Only God can save every

experience, good and bad, and turn it to His glory.

This brings us to the two witnesses of Revelation 11. While scholars disagree on the interpretation of some aspects of this chapter (one of the most difficult in Revelation), most agree that the two witnesses in some way represent the faithful Church. Perhaps it refers to Smyrna and Philadelphia, the two churches not condemned of the seven addressed earlier in the book. More likely it refers to the reliable witness

of the church, two witnesses were required for something to be validated. Initially the work of the two witnesses is amazingly powerful. They are able to produce a protective fire from their mouths and even dictate the behavior of nature itself.

I have to admit, I really like this part of the story. Sign me up! Love that power! But what happens next leaves us shocked and disillusioned. The beast from the Abyss kills them and their bodies rot in the street—unburied. On second thought, “No thank you.” Not gonna sign up for this mission after all. But wait—there’s more! After a period of time, God breathed life into them! Resurrection! God then called them into

His presence to be with Him forever!

Here is the truth. All of us live in the context of a particular life story. It is the narrative we choose for our lives. We would like to think our story is God’s story—but is it? What is the thought that gets you out of bed in the morning? Do you anticipate with great joy the day’s mission of being a faithful witness to God—even if suffering is involved? Or, do you wake up to the calling of the world to work, eat and live for yourself?

But the story of those who give themselves to missional witness doesn't end at physical death. One day, death itself will be conquered. God will breathe life into our mortal bodies and we will be raised incorruptible.

There is no hope in this second choice, no life is found there. The motivation for missional living? God has invited us to participate in powerful witness as long as He needs us and can use us. We are protected for His purposes. God’s protection is promised. Jesus, in His last words in Matthew’s gospel, reminds us He will be with those on mission to the ends of the earth until time is no more. When our witness comes to an end, the beast of death will claim us. Or,

we might lose our lives to some other form of evil—even persecution. Death is always a weapon of the enemy of life.

But the story of those who give themselves to missional witness doesn’t end at physical death. One day, death itself will be conquered. God will breathe life into our mortal bodies and we will be raised incorruptible—the perishable clothed with the imperishable (1 Corinthians 15:50-54). Death will be swallowed up in victory! Therefore, Paul proclaims, “Stand firm—always give yourselves fully to the work of

the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Well stated, brother Paul. There you have it. The motivation for missional living is that nothing is lost if done for the glory of God. All we do in the name of Jesus becomes a treasure that no one can take

away. Suffering will come, death will come, unless the Lord comes first. Let us bear faithful witness to the Kingdom of God, living under His protection and following His will. The beast may well kill us, but in the end—God wins. And those who have placed their faith in Him share in that great victory! “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:55, 56).

What will become of the **EARTH?**

Eschatology. Millennialism. Second advent. Judgment. New heaven and earth.

Nineteenth century Restorationists, from Alexander Campbell to David Lipscomb, spoke and wrote about these subjects. They often disagreed, however.

Alexander Campbell was a postmillennialist. James A. Harding was a premillennialist. Walter Scott changed his mind several times. David Lipscomb was uncertain.

However, they all agreed that the most important aspect of Christ's second coming was the regeneration not only of the soul, but the body and the whole cosmos. They believed God will refine the present cosmos by fire and transform (renew) it into a "new heaven and new earth," just as God will raise our bodies from the grave and transform them into bodies animated by the Holy Spirit fitted for living on the new earth.

They believed, as Alexander Campbell put it, that "the hope of the resurrection to everlasting life" in "the new earth and the new heavens" was essential to the Christian vision of life and hope, central to the gospel of grace itself (Millennial Harbinger, 1865, p. 494).

Many are surprised to learn this

about our forebearers in the faith because they associate a renewed, material earth with fringe groups and strange ideas. But it was the dominant perspective among churches of Christ in the late 19th century, particularly as articulated by David Lipscomb and James A. Harding, co-founders of the Nashville Bible School (now Lipscomb University).

What exactly did they mean by this, and why was it so important to them?

Creation. When God created the cosmos, God came to dwell upon the earth with humanity in the Garden of Eden. This was God's sanctuary, and God enjoyed fellowship with humanity there.

More than that, God shared dominion (rule) with humanity, and, made in God's image, humanity was equipped to reign with God in the universe. Humanity was designed to reign with God forever and ever.

Fall. However, humanity turned the cosmos "over to Satan," and a war began between the Kingdom of God and the "kingdoms of this world, under the leadership of Satan" (Harding, *The Way*, 1903, p. 1041). God, in one sense, "left this world as a dwelling place" (Lipscomb, *Salvation from Sin*, p. 36), and now "Satan dwells upon the earth" to deceive the nations and devour Christians (Harding, *The Way*, 1902, p. 57).

Messianic Age. Beginning with Israel, but later revealed in the presence of Jesus the Messiah, God sought to restore dominion over the cosmos through a kingdom people whose lives reflected the glory and character of God. God drew near to Israel by dwelling in the temple, then came to dwell in the flesh and now dwells in Christians by the Spirit. God's restorationist and redemptive mission are presently advanced through the Church in the power of the Spirit. God battles the forces of Satan through the Church.

New Creation. God's mission is to fully dwell again upon the earth just as in Eden and restore the full reign of God in the cosmos. On that final day, when the heavenly Jerusalem descends to the new earth (Revelation 21:1-4), "God will take up his abode himself with his great family upon this new, this renovated and purified earth" (Harding, *Christian Leader & the Way*, 190, 1042). Then the meek will inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5), and all children of Abraham—through faith in the Messiah—will inherit the cosmos (Romans 4:13).

The creation—both humanity and the cosmos (heaven and earth)—is lost, then contested, and ultimately won and purified. On that day, Lipscomb writes, "earth itself shall become heaven" (*Gospel Advocate*, 1903, 328). The creation will again become God's home. This is the story that shapes the mission of the Church for both Lipscomb and Harding.

God's good creation, then, is regained and renewed. It is not annihilated or eternally lost. The creation, including the children of Abraham, is redeemed.

While there was much diversity on many questions regarding the "last days" among our Restorationist forebearers, they agreed on one thing: God will not give up on the cosmos—God will renew it and come again to dwell within it.

And this calls us to do battle with the forces of Satan for the sake of restoring God's Kingdom to the earth, which includes both a reconciled humanity and a purified, renewed earth. We are called to practice both reconciliation and sustainability. Christians are both peacemakers and environmentalists.

John Mark Hicks
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A quill pen is shown in a dark, square-shaped inkwell. The quill is dark with some reddish-brown tips. The background is a warm, orange-to-yellow gradient. The title 'An email from Screwtape' is written in a large, black, cursive font across the top of the image.

An email from Screwtape

With apologies to, and the highest respect for,

C. S. Lewis and his masterful *The Screwtape Letters*, this email from hell imagines another message from one of the senior bureaucrats down below to a member of the latest generation of junior tempters.

From: screwtape@gehenna.org

To: wwood2@gmail.com

RE: Diabolical Eschatology

My dear grandnephew Wormwood II,

Welcome to hell's newest freshman class of junior tempters! Here I go again—I hope you will welcome a bit of counsel from your old granduncle. (I trust I need not remind you how badly things went for your namesake, Wormwood Sr., when he disregarded my wisdom some time back.)

As you see, I have of late caved in and resorted to the use of email. Actually, I'm finding myself increasingly intrigued and energized by the delicious possibilities

afforded us by these new technologies. What a marvelous new medium of mischief the Internet has turned out to be for our side—no nonsense unblogged, no spurious rumor uncirculated, no nasty thought untweeted!

Anyway, I wanted to favor you today with some malevolent musings on the subject of the future and how to approach it in your care and feeding of (and on) humans—ha! The future, my boy, is a touchy topic down below—a chilling prospect, an awful destiny—but can in the short term be exploited to our advantage. Humans’ fear of the future is always a reliable boogeyman, you see. Remember the great Y2K scare? Our Ministry of Fearmongering had a heyday convincing people that their markets would crash, their computers melt, their nuclear power plants would go boom—in short, that all their creature comforts would be disturbed! Such fun!

Still, our best efforts don’t compare to some of the Enemy’s own prophets of doom: those confident religious readers of the apocalyptic tea leaves. Sure, their end-time forecasts manage to pack the pews for a time, but the human disappointment that inevitably follows is priceless. I’ve always found their prediction predilection a curious thing. Don’t they read their Bibles? (Our Father below certainly does.) Didn’t He Whom We Prefer Not To Name state clearly that only their Father above knew when the end would come? He cleverly discouraged that kind of futuristic speculation because He presumably knew how it diverted His followers’ attention from what He so loftily preached as the more important “kingdom” matters at hand—charity, justice, service to one’s neighbor—that kind of nonsense.

And, of course, that is one of our greatest fears: that humans will turn their best attention to the real needs and priorities

“Calvary was our Waterloo, you see. We thought we had broken His will and claimed His life, but He would simply not stay dead. And since then the handwriting on the wall has been indelibly writ: we lose, they win.”

of today. How did the Carpenter put it? “Don’t get preoccupied by your worries about tomorrow, but give your fullest attention to what God is doing right now.” Something like that; I think it’s in Matthew. So then, you must keep your human patients ever anxious about the unknowable uncertainties of the future, uneasy about everything they cannot control. Fretfulness is good. You know humans—the more they fret, the less they pray.

It occurs to me that I have more than adequately covered this ground before, in my bestseller *The Screwtape Letters* (Vol. 1); I would refer you to Letter 15 from myself to your late but tasty progenitor, in which I said, “The humans live in time, but our Enemy destines them to eternity.” So let us consider for a moment, albeit with fear and trembling, the matter of eternity.

Regretfully I must tell you, our best intel from Slubgob, the esteemed principal of your Tempters’ Training College, assures us that there will indeed be a second coming. The parousia, they call it; doomsday, we call it. When every knee—ours included, I fear—will bow to Him. Calvary was our Waterloo, you see. We thought we had broken His will and claimed His life, but He would simply not stay dead. And since then the handwriting on the wall has been indelibly writ: we lose, they win. As one of their preachers so lucidly (and smugly) put it, “We do not know what will come. But we know who will come. And if the last hour

belongs to us, we do not need to fear the next minute.”*

The future? The future is bleak. But then, bleakness is our element, our spiritual ethos, so we might as well derive what masochistic pleasure we may from it while we can. And we still have our pride—the great sin and the birthplace of all sin—do we not? So, my young tempter, until that last trump sounds, let us reassert our grim determination to go out kicking and screaming! There is still spectacular wickedness yet to inspire—wars to ignite, prejudices to arouse, hopes to ruin, families to destroy, love to extinguish. Your job is to stay the course, steering humankind toward that broad way that leadeth to destruction, sticking to your guns. You know, the old reliables such as greed, violence, bigotry, sectarianism, gluttony and of course, pride—until He comes.

Your affectionate, but no less formidable, and ever voracious Granduncle,

Screwtape

Sent from my iPad

*Helmut Thielicke, *The Silence of God*, p. 24.

Ken Durham
Batsell Barrett Baxter
Chair of Preaching
Lipscomb University



Behold, I stand at the door and knock

A close-up photograph of a hand in a dark suit sleeve with a light blue striped shirt cuff, reaching for a silver door knocker on a white door. The knocker is ornate, with a central ring and a decorative top. The background is a plain white door with a subtle panel design.

When I was a boy my church ran a large bus ministry. Every Saturday of my life as a teenager, from about the age of 12 until I went off to college, I knocked on doors trying to recruit children to ride our church bus and setting up Bible studies. It wasn't easy to knock on a door in my neighborhood, only to see some thug who had tried to beat me up the day before—and invite him to ride the ill-named *Joybus*.

But my church called me to it, and I did it. I think I can safely say that by the time I graduated high school I had knocked on every single door in my hometown of Smyrna, Tenn.

In fact, I was so conditioned to knock on doors that even when I went to college, I began knocking on the doors of Henderson, Tenn., every Saturday trying to set up Bible studies. I stirred enough controversy by door knocking that I was once summoned to meet with the university president because locals had apparently complained about me. I was shocked that he even knew of me, but he offered me words of kindness.

For two summers between years of undergraduate study I worked as a church intern for a congregation in Readyville, Tenn. My job was to walk the old Highway 70 South and its side streets in eastern Rutherford County. Knocking on doors.

The irony of my young life is that I am a total introvert, and there is absolutely nothing I hate more than door knocking. Honestly, I think I considered it a sort of self-inflicted penance—perhaps even chastisement—that helped me bring my will under God's control.

So, why would I risk losing your attention by discussing this, the most despised of disciplines—door knocking?

Because being raised by people who disciplined me in the most humbling form of evangelism—door knocking—stripped me of a lot of religious pretense and convicted me of the fundamentals of the Gospel. Raised in the uncultured world of door knocking has always made the tamer activities of the church seem boring to me, even irrelevant. Facing endless numbers of strangers on their turf with the claims of my faith forced me to decide, once and for all, what I believed about the Gospel. I want to affirm three basic truths of that Gospel.

First, I want to affirm that the Scriptures clearly teach that without Christ our world is *lost*.

Since the rise of the attractional church model in the 1980s and '90s and with the new tolerance of postmodernism, many of us have stopped calling people lost. It just sounds judgmental and arrogant to refer to people as lost. But there is still power in the term “lost.” It conveys disappointment (“she lost the game”), frustration (“I lost my wallet”), even terror (“our child is lost”). And the term is, of course, one Jesus is comfortable using (e.g., Matthew 10:6, Luke 15:32; 19:9).

That’s because Jesus really does see unbelievers as lost—not in an arrogant or hateful way, but in the way that a shepherd would think of a sheep who has wandered off. Jesus loves the lost; He has compassion on the lost; He seeks the lost. But He does this because He knows they actually *are* lost.

In the worldview of Jesus, people are either with Him or against Him. “He who is not with Me is against Me,” (Luke 11:23). In His worldview, those who do not have faith in Him will die in their sins (John 8:24). Those who disobey the Father will hear Jesus say “away from Me, evildoers” (Matthew 7:23). And it is Jesus who speaks of *hell* more than any other New Testament figure.

Let it be said clearly again, as Jesus says with no ambiguity: apart from Jesus there is no access to God (John 14:6). Without Christ, this world is lost. So, Jesus’ sole mission is to “seek and save that which is lost” (Luke 19:10). As extreme as door knocking is, it led me to an uncompromising conviction that people who do not follow Jesus are lost.

Second, I am convicted that the Good News of Jesus is the only way to find salvation. Call me narrow minded on this one—but I still measure everything our churches do by whether or not they preach the Gospel. I’m still the guy who cannot give a person a cup of water without wanting to tell them about the Living Water of Jesus Christ.

I recently returned from a trip to India where I visited a number of works sponsored by Gospel for Asia. The organization was started more than 30 years ago by K.P. Yohannan, a “Thomas” Christian who was door knocking in India while I was door knocking in Tennessee. His churches have grown from a couple hundred members to more than 2.5 million people. He has 18,000 missionaries, and literally hundreds more in training schools. Every single day, Gospel for Asia plants 15 more churches (yes, you read that right).

So, what about orphans and widows? Well, by focusing on preaching the Gospel and planting churches, Gospel for Asia has created a revolution in world missions that also serves the poor in the most amazing ways: their orphanages and children’s programs serve more than 70,000 children. Plant the Gospel, and you’ll save their lives, too. But try to save their lives without planting the Gospel, and you’ll lose both.

Third, I am convicted that I have the personal responsibility of proclaiming this Good News to lost people. I’m with the

I’m with the Apostle Paul: ‘How terrible for me if I do not preach the Good News!’

Apostle Paul: “How terrible for me if I do not preach the Good News!”

Door knocking made evangelism personal for me. Door knocking was something I couldn’t hire out; it was something that I could not wait for others to do. It also taught me how to defend my faith every single time I knocked on someone’s door. I had to be ready to answer a thousand questions—everything from my beliefs in karma to why my fellowship is so, as we theologians said, “peculiar.”

I’ve never forgotten the urgency of my mission. No one else can take away the responsibility that God has given me to tell others about Jesus. No church. No school. No ministry. No evangelist. Nobody can take my job. Nothing can take my place.

Early in life my church convinced me to knock on doors. This weekly discipline convinced me that the time is short, and it clarified the Gospel for me. This world is lost. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the only way to be saved, and I am responsible for proclaiming that Gospel. It really is that simple.



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Armageddon:

A mark of *war* and *disaster*

The Christian world is a bit obsessed with the one place in the Bible that speaks of Armageddon. The word “Armageddon” is made up of two Hebrew words: “Har” and “Megiddo.” Megiddo is a “tel”—a mound sitting on the mouth of the Ara pass connecting the Via Maris to the King’s Highway on the other side of the Jordan River.

This ancient highway, the Via Maris, runs from Egypt along the Mediterranean coast, and through important cities such as Al-Arish, Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Jaffa, Caesarea and Acco (Ptolemais). The Via Maris turns east in three places: the Taanach road, the Ara pass (Megiddo pass) and the Crocodile River, just south of Mount Carmel.

Megiddo is the fortress guarding the entrance to the Jezreel Valley at the end of the Ara pass. This was the main entrance to the Jezreel Valley and also the main path connecting the road from Egypt to Asia (Assyria and Babylon). The importance of Megiddo is that it controlled the traffic on the highway and opened up into a vast, flat valley with limited access, which made it a perfect battlefield for horse drawn chariots. The fact that it was just about halfway between the Mesopotamian Empires and Egypt added to its importance.

The only text in the New Testament that mentions Megiddo is Revelation 16:13-16: “And I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three

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The Biblical city of Megiddo.

unclean spirits, as it were frogs; for they are spirits of demons, working signs, which go forth unto the kings of the whole world, to gather them together unto the war of the great day of God, the Almighty. (Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watches and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.) And they gathered them together into the place which is called in Hebrew Har-magedon.”

From the context and the setting, it is clear that this text is contingent on Zechariah 12:11: “In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddo.” It is important for us to understand this reference in Zechariah to the “mourning of Hadadrimmon.”

In Revelation 16:16 we have the Mount of Megiddo, which is connected with crying and mourning in the great day the Lord. The importance here is the “great day of the Lord”
הארונהו לודגה ז' ה' מו.

Why this text, like most of the book of Revelation, is not to be taken literally

Revelation from Chapter 4 through the end of the book is Jewish apocalyptic literature, which uses highly symbolic and even cryptic language. The whole idea of this literature is that it is like the parables, a text that is not to be understood by everyone. It has hidden meaning, and the language is symbolic with many cryptic implications that the average person in ancient times and today should not be able to simply understand.

The text in Revelation 16 associates whatever is to happen in Har Megiddo with the great day of God. “The day of the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:2), is a theme in the prophetic literature of the Old Testament. In the New Testament it is associated with the coming of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:13–17; 2 Thessalonians 2:1).

We must look into the Old Testament to understand what the Apostle Paul is referring to, and this is especially true in relationship to the text of Zechariah 12:10ff. We have here a clearly messianic text—the

recognition of Yeshua as the Messiah and as the only begotten Son of God as well as the repentance of Israel and the mourning. In the beginning of Chapter 12 of Zechariah, we have the cataclysmic war against Israel and against Jerusalem. This war speaks of a great coalition of the nations against Jerusalem on the day of the Lord. God intervenes and Israel looks upon God. He sees “the only begotten Son” and repents and mourns.

The great day of the Lord

Just a few texts as examples:

Isaiah 2:11: “The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the Lord of hosts shall come upon everything proud and lofty, upon everything lifted up—and it shall be brought low. . .”

Isaiah 2:17: “The loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be brought low; the Lord alone will be exalted in that day. . .”

Isaiah 10:20: “And it shall come to pass in that day that the remnant of Israel, and such as have escaped of the house of Jacob, will never again depend on him who defeated them, but will depend on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth.”

Isaiah 22:5: “For it is a day of trouble and treading down and perplexity by the Lord God of hosts in the Valley of Vision—breaking down the walls and of crying to the mountain.”

Isaiah 25:9: “And it will be said in that day: ‘Behold, this is our God; We have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the Lord. We have waited for Him. We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.’”

Isaiah 27:1: “In that day the Lord with His severe sword, great and strong, will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan that twisted serpent; and He will slay the reptile that is in the sea.”

Isaiah 28:5: “In that day the Lord of hosts will be for a crown of glory and a diadem of

beauty to the remnant of His people. . .”

A major principle of interpretation of prophecy

All prophecies of doom don’t have to be fulfilled. The prophet prophesied doom and gloom in order to get the people of his time and his generation to change and repent. If they repent and turn to God, the doom and gloom is lifted up and becomes the joy of the Lord. The best example of this is the case of Jonah and the city of Nineveh. The prophet spoke, “In 40 days Nineveh will fall.” The people of Nineveh repented, the city did not fall and the prophet was worried for his reputation.

The same is true for the prophecy of doom in the New Testament, especially in the book of Revelation.

We see that Revelation 16:15 directly ties the context to the return of the Lord, and we have almost a quotation from Matthew 24:27 (see also verse 42) and the context is the day of the Lord and the return of the Messiah: “For as the lightning cometh forth from the east and is seen even unto the west; so shall be the coming of the Son of Man.”

Joel 3:2, is in the same context as Zechariah 12:11, the nations are again coming to the land of Israel to fight against Israel and God executes judgement upon the nations.

The Conclusion:

There is nothing for the disciples of Yeshua to fear from the prophecies of doom and gloom in the book of Revelation and in the prophecies of the Bible. The children of God are always protected and winners even in the worst of all scenarios.

What we have to worry about is whether or not we are really in the will of God and really walking in God and not following the spirit of this perverse generation. We are called to be above the culture of the day. Our allegiance is not to this world and its glitter and tinsel, but to the solid rock on whom we stand, Yeshua the Messiah, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords who is coming back in glory.

Apocalyptic Education

In popular parlance, the term “apocalyptic” often implies some interpretive apparatus for deciphering end-time scenarios. Either that or the term carries some connotation of an imminent catastrophe. In fact, “apocalypse” describes an unveiling, a revelation of what has been hidden. Most weeks I experience something apocalyptic—something revelatory—when attending classes in the Lipscomb Initiative For Education program.

Since January 2007, a few dozen women incarcerated at the Tennessee Prison for Women have joined the Lipscomb LIFE community. They enroll in traditional courses from the university’s curriculum (e.g., math, foreign language, philosophy, science) that take place inside the women’s prison in west Nashville. Traditional (or “outside”) Lipscomb students frequently enroll in the courses along with their “inside” peers. Although class sessions meet behind rolls of razor wire, and some of the students wear state-issued uniforms, everyone in the class is a degree-seeking Lipscomb student.

Nine years ago, the plan was to provide inside students with a slate of courses over six semesters, enabling

them to earn up to 18 hours on a Lipscomb transcript. However, the initial cohort of 15 inside students quickly demonstrated both their remarkable aptitude for, and their enduring interest in, higher education. Thus, they revealed how irresponsible it would be for us to walk away from our students after two years. Although we might have started with the idea that we were working for these students, soon we discovered that we were in community with them, which seemed somehow reminiscent of the story of the Incarnation.

With the support of Lipscomb University and a grant from Tennessee’s Office of Criminal Justice Programs, in January 2009 the LIFE program continued with its first cohort, while also adding a second cohort of 15. Lipscomb also crafted an Associate of Arts degree, specifically for the inside students. Today, the LIFE program celebrates a community of more than 50 students studying at both TPW and the Riverbend Maximum Security Institution—a men’s prison also in west Nashville.

Does it matter? Does relocating classes to a prison make any difference? Students often say it best. An inside student from TPW explains:

With each class I take through Lipscomb, my confidence and self-worth grow. While I am still somewhat uncomfortable interacting with others, this program allows me to integrate a little at a time. With each paper I write, I find that I have far more to say than I ever dreamed possible. Because of the LIFE program, I am gaining knowledge and insight. More importantly I am finding my voice and learning how to use it. This is a wonderful feeling—knowing that I have a voice. Greater still is that people are willing to listen. I want to use this voice to show that what others meant for evil, God will use for His good. I want to use this voice to reach out to others who have been abused as I have and to help them triumph over their situation.

Explaining why a traditional student would travel from a comfortable suburban campus to take courses with a non-traditional colleague at TPW, an outside student writes:

The LIFE Program is an equalizer, where fellow students are other than convicted criminals. In prison ministry, visitors attempt to bring encouragement, news of the outside world and hope, but it is often, unintentionally, coupled with pity, resentment and misunderstanding. Through the forum of a classroom, however, students are engaged with each other to produce innovative ideas and open their minds to new possibilities. The professors and their assignments are levelers, which initiate a teamwork mindset and a collaborative community. The woman sitting next to you becomes a peer, no longer shackled by her past.



Given our culture, we might presume that the most “faithful” are those making the biggest splash. Consequently, our good intentions may entice us to exert control and impose our program so that we can prove our righteousness and our relevance. It is hard to concede, however, that our quest to transform others by our system, our wisdom or our activism may not be our calling. Away from the seduction of social influence and public praise, maybe it is more faithful simply to be present and realize community with those our society marginalizes—in this case, the incarcerated. This is an apocalyptic act.

To see who and what is hidden requires relocation: repositioning from the center to the margins, from power over to partnership with, from distance to proximity. This kind of apocalypse is central to the biblical story, to which we hope the LIFE program is faithful.

The LIFE program may, or may not, impact society by fixing a broken justice system. We may, or may not, break the cycle of recidivism. With those red letters of Christ from Matthew 25 as our guide, the goal is presence—being with women incarcerated at the TPW and with men at Riverbend. Here we might witness God’s apocalypse, God’s revelation that through Christ, God makes all things, and all people, new.

Perhaps in this way we might reclaim the scandal of our apocalyptic story. Insofar as we are the thief on the cross next to Jesus, may we, like the thief, take the risk of discovering community with a fellow criminal being executed on Good Friday.

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The second coming has *everything to do with* youth ministry...*really!*

What do you say when a teen asks about the second coming of Christ? Is it a topic that we avoid? Perhaps when we are backed into a corner and forced to talk about it we struggle and let Hollywood's imagery suffice? Perhaps we feel that teens do not care about the second coming because they have their entire lives in front of them, why should they be bothered with an event that may not even happen until they're 80 years old, or not in their lifetime? The way we frame the conversation of the second coming of Christ either draws teens into the story of God or possibly turns them away.

Adolescents are perhaps the most theologically savvy beings on the face of the earth. Good youth ministry recognizes this. Traditionally, many churches have taught teenagers on the second coming of Christ with the primary goal of changing their behavior. Teens are not to have premarital sex, not drink alcohol, not lie, not cheat and not steal. So we teach on Jesus' return by scaring the hell into them. We talk about Judgment Day complete with fire and brimstone imagery. I have even known youth ministries to actually bring space heaters into the classroom when teaching about Judgment Day and hell just to further illustrate their points. And then we wonder why teens still take part in such behaviors. Didn't they listen?

However, I believe that the second coming of Christ can be linked to issues teens already care about, and it has everything to do with the way we do youth ministry.

This is where adolescent's theological savvy comes into play. Andrew Root, from Luther Seminary, defines young people as "insatiable hermeneutical animals" who are terribly aware of the struggle between possibility and nothingness. He says, "Adolescents interpret everything, both because the very human journey is still new and because meaning they give to their experiences will be the material to construct their very selves" (Unpacking Scripture in Youth Ministry). Root is warning us of the fact that our teens interpret everything we are teaching, telling and showing them in our churches and youth ministries. Hint at injustice and a teen will cry "foul" faster than a speeding bullet. Try to be the least bit inauthentic and a student will write you off and not give you another chance. Try to give them a list of rules and regulations to follow so that they can stand firm on Judgment Day and teens quite possibly will not listen.

Why?

Kara Powell and her Sticky Faith team at Fuller Seminary found that many students have adopted the "gospel of sin management." If a student is going to church, they take on a persona that suits their context most conveniently. They act the right way and say the right things on a Sunday morning. However, if that same student is headed out to a party the next night, they will toss that persona into a corner. Powell writes, "Our kids can stuff the Gospel into a corner for many reasons, one of which is that they have somehow picked up that living as a Christian means following a list of what they

should and shouldn't do" (Sticky Faith Youth Worker Edition). Unfortunately for many of our teens, they have heard the Gospel boiled down to a list of do's and don'ts and this has not challenged or inspired them enough to really get on board with this kind of faith. When we try to change an adolescent's behavior through a list of rules and regulations we are simply engaging in behavior modification practices similar to that which SeaWorld uses on Shamu, and anyone who has seen the documentary *Blackfish* knows how well those methods work. Christian faith based on behavior modification does not serve our students well and only forces them deeper into a gospel of sin management.

The savvy, insatiable, hermeneutical adolescent needs a much larger story to live in than a laundry list of rules and regulations. They want to live into the possibility of the "what ifs" of faith not of the nothingness of oppressive rules. They want to participate in the turning of swords into plowshares that Scripture talks about. They want to experience the "what if" of justice and reconciliation. They want a bigger purpose than simply checking a box that they haven't had premarital sex or gotten drunk over the weekend. Our responsibility as a church is to share this larger vision to live for life

Youth ministry ought to be calling our students to live in the now/not yet reality of the Kingdom of God. We should be calling teens to live a life that participates in the Kingdom of God now by bringing hope and living hope in their communities, teams and schools. When a teen is compassionate with a classmate, as they already are, we can teach them to interpret their actions as sharing the grace of Christ and this is their participation in the Kingdom of God. Actions are not a check box in the naughty/nice list

that helps out on Judgment Day. When giving their time to volunteer with Habitat for Humanity, we can teach them they do so to participate in the action of Christ in their world now. This is the larger purpose that adolescents want and need. This is what excites them and emboldens them to live good news in their world today.

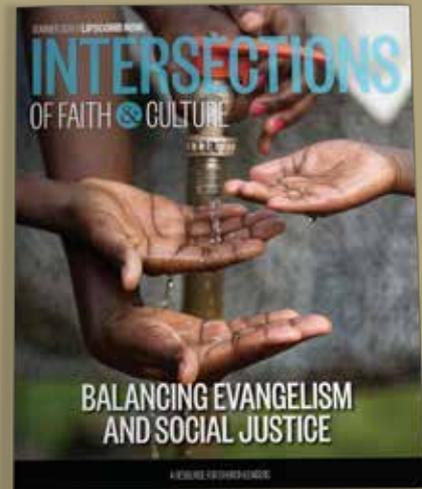
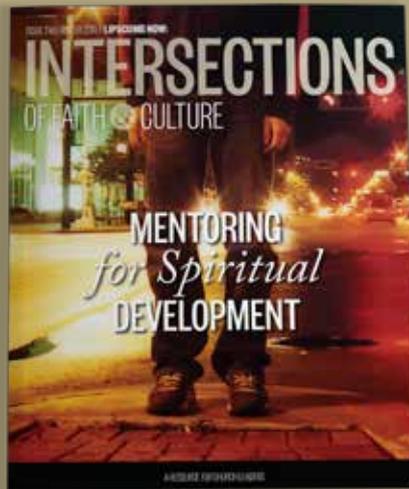
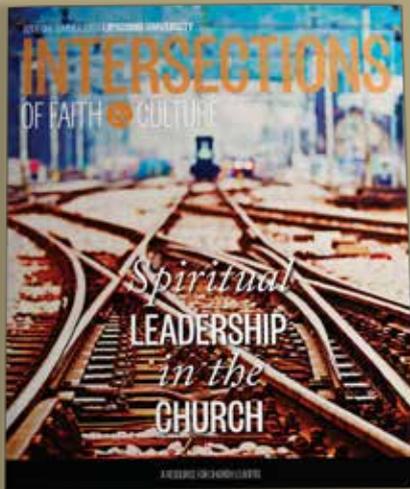
We also give our students the longer view of the Kingdom of God when teaching them about the not yet reality of the Kingdom of God. When a student's heart is broken by the injustice they see in their world or the brokenness in their school, they are encouraged that the second coming of Christ is about righting wrongs. The second coming is about turning the swords of cyberbully texts into plowshares of love for one another. The angst they endure through adolescence will be forgotten when our relationship with Christ is fully restored and reconciled. They live in the Kingdom now because they know the glimmers of love and grace they experience now will be fully realized later, but they also know that now matters as well.

At first glance to the youth worker, the second coming of Christ may present itself as an irrelevant event that will happen sometime in the distant future. However, we must realize that the second coming is a tremendously relevant framing story that reshapes our reality and that vividly serves our adolescents well if we teach and live out the realities of it in our youth ministries. May we live out the now/not yet Kingdom of God with and for our students.

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*“Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep,
but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the
twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.
For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised
imperishable, and we will be changed.”*

I COR. 15: 51-52