



“The Vine”

Growing Together in Christ

Newsletter for New Hope Christian Fellowship



An Offer You Can't Refuse?

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Plus:

Can You Describe God?

Is there Joy in Being a Christian?

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Saved from Harm!

From Pastor Dennis

It's Too Easy!

Eleven years ago shortly after the dramatic change in our church doctrines, one elderly woman, whom both Lorraine and I loved dearly, told me, "It's too easy! I just can't believe it's that easy!" Soon after she left our church and moved to one of the groups that split from us, which kept her old familiar beliefs in place.

"During a British conference on comparative religions some years ago, experts from around the world debated what, if any belief was unique to the Christian faith. They began eliminating possibilities. Incarnation, resurrection? The debate went on for some time until C.S. Lewis wandered into the room. 'What's the fuss about?' he asked. When his colleagues told him, Lewis responded, 'Oh, that's easy. It's grace.' The notion of God's love coming to us free of charge, no strings attached, seems to go against every instinct of humanity. Every other religion offers a way to earn approval. Only Christianity dares to make God's love unconditional." (What's So Amazing About Grace? by Philip Yancey, Zondervan Publishing, c. 1997.)

The amazing thing about grace is that it's absolutely and totally free. Karl Barth defines God as "the one who loves." Jesus spent his life teaching and living and giving grace. Grace is not fair, not logical, not of this earth. It's from heaven, from God, and only the spiritually minded can understand it. But everyone needs it; everyone wants it. Two thousand years ago Jesus founded the Church, which he envisioned to be a community of grace givers; a family of brothers and sisters giving grace to each another and going out to fill the world with grace.

Grace is free only because the giver himself has borne the cost. And he did it for love. Jesus died for us because he loved us - John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. God "so loved" the world; he so loves you and me. When our daughters were

little, I would ask them, "do you know how much I love you?" Then I would spread my arms out as wide as I could, yell out "Sooooooo much" and give each of them a big bear hug.

I'm sad when I hear long-time members express doubt and fear about their salvation. What they are doubting is God's love. They are questioning grace. What they are saying in essence is: "I love God, but I'm not sure that he loves me enough to save me.

Understanding human doubt, Paul prayed this for the church: Ephesians 3:18-19 - And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love really is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is so great you will never fully understand it. Then you will be filled with the fullness of life and power that comes from God. (NLT)

Once we understand how much God loves us, we will experience a "fullness of life and power;" a confidence and assurance we've never had before, that will transform our lives and ministry. He really does love you. Believe it. Jesus said it's true and it's easy. Come to him and receive life (John 5:40).

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The Vine *Growing Together in Christ*



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The Joy Of Christian Living

(For Our Unbelieving Friends)

Some unbelievers think that being a Christian is missing out on the joy of living. The worldly and materialistic ones believe that there are a lot of enjoyable things in life that



a Christian is not supposed to be indulging in, which he would not hesitate to be doing were he not a Christian. Living a life of self-denial and deprivation, add the hedonists, is thwarting our freedom to be happy in this world

where, after all, we live only once.

While it is true that a Christian does not normally indulge in sensual pleasures and other worldly activities, it does not mean that he is unhappy about it. If he finds that living a carefree happy-go-lucky existence is empty and unchallenging, and he decides to live a simple quiet life of purpose and commitment, that is his choice.

If the constant acquisition of wealth and material possessions does not appeal to him, and he is more obsessed in learning and studying and in the endless acquisition of knowledge, that is his prerogative in life.

If he goes for morality and character, or finds fulfillment and satisfaction in spiritual pursuits and, in so doing, refrains from indulging in worldly pleasures that he considers are a hindrance to accomplishing his goals in life that is what makes him happy, right?

So, to each his own way of finding happiness in this world. For those who are still seeking: you would do well to try living the Christian life to see if it is really the drab and unexciting life pleasure-loving people claim it to be. If you only realize what good things await those who come into the fold of Christianity, you would not hesitate to join your believing friends in their faith.

For one thing, you get to have the broadest view of the beauty of God's creation and enjoy it to the fullest without the destructive effects and evil consequences of enjoying to the fullest the pleasures of a temporal sensual existence.

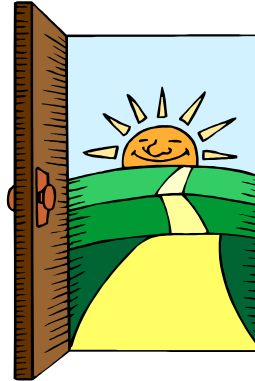
You get to have wisdom and understanding revealed to you which is higher and above all knowledge and information that you derive from secular schools and universities.

You get to have better relationship with others and enjoy lasting friendship with them. You get to avoid a lot of heartaches caused by broken relations due to the greed, selfishness, and the unforgiving attitude of worldly people.

When in need, you get to have extraordinary help from above which no man can give: the inner strength not to break down under tragedies and misfortunes; the courage and determination to keep going in spite of sorrows and difficulties; the unflinching trust and confidence that things will turn out all right in the long-run.

You get to experience the peace of mind that the world cannot know. How the wealthy and influential in this world would love to exchange what they have to possess this peace of mind that money cannot buy.

You get to know the love of someone whom you will only know when you become a believer - a love so pure; ever giving; ever forgiving; ever so tender - a never-ending love so faithful and true that you will be amazed such love can exist in this cruel world.



And you will get to know of a life more than you have now - something far beyond your wildest dreams and imagination - something you can only surmise until you become a believer.

Now, who says Christian living is not joyful living? - *By Divina A. Castillo*

What A Child Hears

Walking along the sidewalk in front of his church, our minister heard the intoning of a prayer that nearly made his collar wilt. Apparently, his 5-year-old son & his playmates found a dead robin. Feeling that proper burial should be performed, they had secured a small box and cotton batting, then dug a hole and made ready for the disposal of the deceased.

The minister's son was chosen to say the appropriate prayers and with sonorous dignity intoned his version of what he thought his father always said: "Glory be unto the Faaaather, and unto the Sonnn, and into the hole he goooses."

New Hope Happenings



Leons Avoid Serious Injury After Being Hit by Hit & Run Car Thieves

It was on a Monday, May 22nd about 3:10 p.m. and I had just picked up our daughter Diana and her classmate Mia from school. We were stopped at a signal light on Wilson Ave at Del Mar Blvd. As I waited for the light to turn green, a speeding car turned the corner on my right. Two teenage boys were going east on Del Mar turning onto Wilson where we were stopped. A police car was following the stolen car. The stolen car hit our van hard at my driver door and the sliding door on my side. It bounced off and clipped two other parked cars on the other side of the street, and landed on the grass lawn. The driver was caught after a short foot pursuit and his passenger was caught at his residence two hours after he fled the scene.

The paramedics checked me out but I was not hurt except for a slight chemical burn on my left arm due the side air bag deployment. The girls were not injured and handled it very well. I was the one shook up and crying.

The van is heavily damaged and will be in the body shop for about a month. God has provided a friend's car for me to drive. Our insurance company is paying for the very expensive repairs.

I know God protected us from a more serious situation and we praise him for protecting us from harm. I am grateful that the girls and I were spared injury.

Brothers & Sisters, I am writing this story to share with you our experience of being in a car accident. You are part of our family and I was asked by *the Vine* to share this with you.

- Christine Leon



Why Go To SEP?

Have you ever wished you could take a break from life? Maybe you can't stand having your little brother or sister annoy you any longer or you're fed up with listening to your parents' endless reprimands. Maybe your family is in shambles, grades aren't so good, or you just don't feel loved at all. Maybe you've strayed so far from God you fear he'll never listen to you again or maybe you're just looking to have a little fun this summer.

No matter what your situation is, I'm sure that SEP will, at the very least, give some insight into these problems if not change your life completely. Being a camper of 4 or 5 years (I've lost count), believe me when I say that miracles still happen. I've seen so many lives changed and so many people touched up in that mountain haven we call SEP. This is perhaps one of the best places for teens to reunite with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, or even come to know him for the first time.



And I know, since it is a church hosted camp, the first thing you think of is a bunch of old people singing hymns in a giant sanctuary, but at SEP, you could be fooled into thinking you're at a rock

concert. And hey, if you're looking for a good time, there's plenty of activities made for that: canoeing, basketball, archery, swimming, volleyball, rifle shooting, and for the ladies, even dancing.

Most importantly, it is a place to be accepted. Even if you're skeptical about this whole God and Jesus thing, I can assure that you'll find friends in the campers and staff there. So whether you're looking for Jesus or just some summer fun, not only will SEP give you a break from life; you may learn how to live it better. - David Leon



American Gnostics: Da Vinci and That Old-Time Religion

Despite "bombing with most critics," The Da Vinci Code is doing well at the box office. In its first weekend in theaters it made \$77 million in the United States and \$224 million worldwide. But, for the New York Times, the real story isn't about the movie; it's about the audience. And, for once, I agree with the Times, for the film exposes what the Da Vinci craze is all about.

As the article puts it, the movie encapsulates "an era in which many Christian believers have assimilated a whole lot of new and unorthodox ideas... [into] their faith, while still seeing it as Christianity."

One such "believer" quoted in the article called himself a "Gnostic Christian." He said, "I don't need someone to interpret God for me..." For him, church was not for instruction, much less being told how to live his life. Instead, it was for "[communing] with others."

This attitude is not just the result of reading or seeing The Da Vinci Code. Rather, as George Barna told the Times, for millions of Americans "The Da Vinci Code essentially reinforced what they [already] believed." Barna calls that belief system "pick and choose theology." Another way of putting it, of course, is "Gnosticism."

In one form or another, Gnosticism has been tormenting Christianity since the late first century. The letter to the Colossians and the Epistles of John were written, in part, to combat an early form of these beliefs.

I said "beliefs" because there are various forms of Gnosticism. The one that church fathers like Irenaeus wrote against "portrayed Christ as a heavenly being who came down to earth to awaken them from their spiritual slumber by disclosing their own divine inner nature." These Gnostics despised their physical natures, which led some of them to embrace wanton promiscuity. After all, if your body is not a temple, you can't dishonor it.

We can see elements of that kind of Gnosticism in today's so-called "spirituality," especially among New Agers. But there is another variety of Gnosticism that's even more connected to what people told the Times.



In his book "The American Religion", Yale's Harold Bloom described what he regarded as the Gnostic tendencies of American popular religion. According to Bloom, some parts of American Christianity have stressed "a Gnostic knowing of Jesus through direct acquaintance." Since this experience of "Jesus" is direct, there is no need for an institution like the Church.

This experience-centered religion, untethered to church or sound instruction, fits in well with our self-centered culture, a world in which everything—including God—exists to glorify the imperial self. And the Da Vinci myth is the ultimate conceit, telling us that we ourselves have the key to life, that we are god—which is, of course, the temptation the serpent offered Eve in the Garden.

The verdict is now in, so you can explain to your neighbors what is behind all of this Da Vinci hype, besides Dan Brown making himself a fortune. It's a seductive lie, as old as humanity itself. - *By Charles Colson June 8, 2006 Copyright (c) 2006 Prison Fellowship*

My Attempt to Describe God

An "assignment" for a recent Bible Study was to Describe God. Candace did such an admirable job we are sharing it with you.

God is the Stupendously Beautiful Matrix*; the Eternal, Being, mighty enough to bring into existence the vast expanse of the entire universe, both physical and spiritual and gracious enough to suffer and die for us. For His own pleasure he's creating in us being that are fashioned in His image, who will have chosen to love Him through belief in Christ, and incredibly will then share existence with Him forever enjoying His companionship and the wonderment of all that eternity holds.

He's everywhere where there exists anything; And where there existed nothing, He was there also. God is full of power, as evidenced by His creation; wisdom, evidenced by His plan of Salvation; and love, evidenced by His Grace to us.

God invites each soul the awesome privilege, through belief in His Son, Jesus, to sit on His lap and actually call Him daddy. - *By Candace Gunzelman* - See what you're missing on Thursday nights! Hope to see you there. * Matrix meaning that which gives origin or form to a thing.

Book Review



Why Men Hate Going to Church

How did a faith founded by a man and his twelve male disciples become so popular with women, but anathema to

men? That is one question asked early on in David Murrow's *Why Men Hate Going to Church*. His book is an attempt to answer that question & offer solutions to this problem which is at the heart of church decline.

According to Murrow, surveys indicate that 13 million more women attend church every week than men. Roughly 61% of church pews are filled with women and 39% are men. Twenty to twenty-five percent of America's married, churchgoing women regularly attend without their husbands.

Part of the reason Murrow suggests is that the culture of today's churches is largely designed "to meet the needs and expectations of a largely female audience." From its teaching style, its ministries, & the way people are expected to behave, church is "sweet, sentimental, nurturing and nice." Characteristics he maintains that drive men away.

He makes a good point particularly poignant to our denomination: Too much masculine or feminine spirit leads to spiritual abuse. "A church with too much masculine spirit succumbs to legalism. It's all about performance—what you do for God." However, on the other side of the pendulum, too much feminine spirit leads to a different kind of abuse that doesn't make the headlines as legalism does. It's what he calls 'Velvet Coffin Christianity' defined as: "show up on Sunday, participate in comforting rituals, listen to a pabulum sermon of familiar truths, then go home and forget about your faith." Hardly a spiritual growth environment.

Ironically the book is for laywomen. Murrow believes women must play a key role if men are to return to church. (The book gives steps on how.) By desiring, and encouraging a more challenging, man-friendly church environment women can help bring men back to church. An accomplishment that men & women in the congregation will all benefit from. Once they come the church might be in for quite an exciting ride. - *By John Siston*

Excerpts from: *Why Men Hate Going to Church*

*Entire personality types are largely missing from the church. These types show up frequently in the Bible but are no-shows in today's congregations.

**Men regard churchgoing like a prostate exam; it's something that can save their lives, but it's so unpleasant and invasive, they put it off...
So men avoid church and suffer for it.*

*Few churches model men's values: risk & reward, accomplishment, heroic sacrifice, action & adventure.

**Unless Christianity reengages men,
its influence will continue to wane.*

*We need 'dangerous men' in church. Jesus attracted dangerous men. These social outcasts were his biggest fans. It's a sure sign of church health when dangerous men start showing up on Sunday. But they won't stay unless we stop condemning them and learn to speak their language of risk.

**Today's church does not mesmerize men;
it repels them.*

* Must we compromise the gospel in order to attract men? Certainly not. Jesus had no problem attracting men. Fisherman dropped nets full of fish to follow him, but today's church can't convince men to drop the remote controls for a couple hours a week.

**Without men shouldering their share of the
ministry load, women are feeling trapped,
overworked, and under appreciated.*

*Challenge is men's love language.

**Men don't follow programs they follow men.*

The military, sports teams, and even street gangs have no problem attracting enthusiastic men. These organizations feel right to men. Church does not.