



“The Vine”

Growing Together in Christ

Newsletter for New Hope Christian Fellowship

Are You A Mature Christian?



Also in This Issue:

Repotting Your Thoughts

*The Calm Of The
Sweet Twilight Of Age*

*Diary From
Honor Academy*

Are You in Pain?

From Pastor Dennis

I Want It My Way

The average American sees 250 ads per day showing us things we need to buy, which has incredible power over us as consumers. We live in an age of "Christian consumerism," especially prominent in our beloved United States. In America almost anyone can start a business or a church, of almost any kind at any time in any location.

This week I met a new ministerial couple in Monrovia. This young couple met in northern California where they were saved by Jesus, coming out of sinful and harmful lifestyles. They came down the coast, visited Monrovia, and felt God was calling them to start a new church in town. They began in their living room and now have about 50 in attendance and are leasing a building. Perhaps God did call them to Monrovia; I have no reason not to believe them. But I also couldn't help but ask myself, "Doesn't Monrovia have enough churches?" If not, when will there be enough? I guess we could ask the same about any community in our country.

When I worked as a volunteer chaplain at Children's Hospital, Los Angeles in 2003, my German-born supervisor asked me one day, "Why are there so many churches in America? In Germany we have only three main ones - Catholic, Lutheran and Methodist." It was a fair question. After a minute, I responded, "I think it may have something to do with our freedom and our wealth. We are blessed with the freedom to worship as we please, and we are blessed with great physical abundance. But most Americans also have a strong spirit of independence, which when taken too far, can cause divisions in family, workplace and church."

We've all seen children display selfishness. The classic example is when a child says, "If you don't do it my way, I'll take my marbles (or my game or my football, etc.) and go home!" Rather than be peacemakers

or reconcilers, as Jesus wants, it's too easy for us adults to cut off our family during a "family feud" or quit our job when we don't get along with our boss or co-workers, or leave our church when a member offends us or a preacher doesn't stir us or when we don't like a church change. Likewise it's too easy for married couples to get a divorce. I like the six-month waiting period required by California state law, but I wish they would also require marital counseling for six months by a licensed marriage counselor or pastor. Instead of "till death do us part," too many couples part after their first major disagreement.

It's a human problem, isn't it? Just moments after Jesus took his twelve disciples aside on his final trip to Jerusalem, and soberly told them of his imminent flogging, crucifixion and resurrection (Matthew 20:17-19), the mother of James and John, with her two sons present and chiming in, asked for seats of honor and authority for them right next to Jesus in his future Kingdom (v. 20-28). This caused a rift with the others, and Jesus told them not to be obsessed with authority and self-importance, See My Way on Page 3



"If you don't do it my way, I'll take my marbles and go home!"

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From Tammy Tkach

Repot Your Thoughts

I'm a big fan of potted plants. They're my favorite decoration, inside and out. I especially like flowering plants, and have them in several places around my house, on the patio and the porch.



Every so often plants need to be repotted. It's easy to know when, as they either become too big, or get root bound and stop growing. My spider plants become root bound every couple of years. When I repot them, I always marvel that the soil is mostly gone and the pots are filled with roots.

Just as a plant can become root bound, we can become bound in our thinking. Our thoughts can get all tangled up like roots in a small pot, smashed and squashed, with no room to go anywhere. When we become root bound, we get into one way of thinking, and then we can't get out of that rut.

We call this being narrow-minded and it can happen in anyone, young or old. You can tell when people's minds are root bound, as they are not open to new ideas, get mad when someone questions their opinions and continue doing things the way they've always done them.

This root-bound mentality keeps people in the past and can also be dangerous. Just as a plant stops growing, so a person can stop growing. But the Bible says not to let this happen. Romans 12:2 says we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Spiritual transformation, as we know, is not an overnight process. It takes place every day in the life of a believer who seeks God and his kingdom. We practice the spiritual disciplines, seeking to become more like Christ, to have his mind and to learn to think as he does.

Our thinking cannot be in the box when it comes to spiritual growth. We must be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit. After all, we don't know everything, and if we think we do, look out!

The best place to go to keep our minds open and flexible is the Bible, because it is

the living Word of God. We've probably all experienced reading a part of Scripture and thinking we understand it, then reading it again and getting something new from it. The Holy Spirit teaches us through the Scriptures. It's a mistake to think we know all we can know from a scripture just because we read it once a few years ago.

We can also benefit from other Christians. Early theologians such as Athanasius to contemporary ones such as Dallas Willard are some of the "great cloud of witnesses" mentioned in Hebrews 12. Of course, whenever we read anything other than the Bible, we need to make sure the teaching squares with Scripture.

Let's keep reading and learning and not let ourselves get root bound in our thinking. Rather, as Ephesians 3:17 says, let's give our roots room to grow deep into the soil of God's love and strong in his grace.

- By Tammy Tkach



My Way From Page 2

but to live in service to God and people.

In my thirty-plus years of being a minister, I seldom see people leave their church for good reasons. Often I will ask an exiting member, "Who will now serve those you have been serving in our church?" I have never received a satisfactory answer. Their minds are not on service or people, but on "What's in it for me?" Burger King, McDonald's or Starbucks are out to "Do it your way." A better question for Christians to ask is "What does Jesus, my King want of me?"

- By Dennis Pelley

Bible Humor

Q. What kind of man was Boaz before he married Ruth? A. *Ruthless*

Q. What do they call pastors in Germany? A. *German Shepherds*

Q. Which servant of God was the most flagrant lawbreaker in the Bible? A. *Moses. He broke all 10 commandments at once.*



Reflections

Pain Anyone?

Which of us can bear and suffer pain, yet delight and glory in it? Paul, the apostle, said he did when he experienced the thorn in his flesh, whatever kind of Satan's device it may have been.



Suffice it to say, we all bear and suffer pain, being as human as Paul. But what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12:9 is just amazing. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities. Why? That the power of Christ may rest upon me. He also said in verse 10 that he "takes pleasure in infirmities for Christ's" sake and again says, "for when I am weak, then I am strong." WOW!

Can we as Christians address ourselves to such trying circumstances? Can we endure the pain we suffer in the flesh while waiting for the new age to come? This is a challenging thought, isn't it? For we hurt. The flesh hurts and we cry out in pain to God because it hurts. Even if we try to glory in our pain as Paul certainly did, it just doesn't seem to go away. And like Paul, we must go through it.

And so we pray as Paul did, perhaps even more than three times to God to take our pain away. But it seems to linger on, as Paul's did.

So here we are, suffering Christians in such predicaments of pain and sorrow - what shall we do? We praise God for His comforting words of truth and in faith believing. We search the Scriptures and find Revelation 21:4 and read of His great love for us, "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." Our pain and suffering gone forever. Then we praise God and thank him for His loving faithfulness. For His words are true and His grace is truly sufficient for us it was for Paul. And He tells us He will never leave or forsake us - ever. What great promises! Believe and trust God and as Paul journeyed through his sufferings, he knew before us the

same suffering and pain we now know and experience today.

In our pain and suffering, will we be as faithful to our Lord and Savior as He is to us as we see the Day approaching? Believe and trust God, our heavenly Father, creator of heaven and earth. He proclaims that we are more than conquerors in Jesus Christ.

Yes pain hurts, but not forever.

"Thank God for His indescribable riches and consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" - Romans 8:18. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose" - Romans 8:28. I see Jesus helping me finish this paper. He says, "These words are true. I am Jesus and I love you." *By Pete Spiroff*

Devotional:

At Evening Time There Shall Be Light.

Zechariah 14:7

We often look forward with anxiety to the time of old age, forgetting that at evening time it shall be light. To many saints, old age is the choicest season in their lives. A warmer breeze fans the sailor's face as he nears the shore of immortality; fewer waves ruffle his sea; quiet reigns, deep, still and solemn. From the altar of age the flashes of the fire of youth are gone, but the deepening flame of sincere feeling remains.



The pilgrims have reached the Promised Land, the happy country, whose days are as the days of heaven upon earth. Angels visit it, celestial gales blow over it, flowers of paradise grow in it, and the air is filled with heavenly music. Some live here for years, and others arrive only a few hours before their departure, but it is an Eden on earth. We may begin to long for the time when we can recline in its shady groves and be satisfied **See Light on Page 7**

Diary

Teen Mania

Hello to all my family and all my friends! I hope that you are all well, and that the Lord is awesome in your midst!

For all of you who don't know me, my name is Nicholas Glaros, and I'm 18 years old. I've been blessed to be a part of WCG/New Hope Christian Fellowship for my entire life. And through your generous donations I have been given the awesome opportunity to come to Teen Mania's Honor Academy. I can't tell you enough how thankful I am for your continuing support in prayer and finance.

For those of you who haven't heard about Teen Mania, it was founded by Ron Luce, who is also the president of TM. Its vision can be captured by its mission statement:

"Our heartbeat is to provoke a young generation to passionately pursue Jesus Christ and to take His life-giving message to the ends of the earth!"

Teen Mania also puts on the shows called "Acquire the Fire", and through "Global Expeditions" they have

taken over 50,000 students to over 50 different countries to share the Good News of Jesus Christ.

I say "they" have, but through my stay at the Honor Academy, I have actually been sending students across the nations to help reach the lost through my ministry placement. But I'll just start at the beginning of my time here.

Upon arrival at the Honor Academy (HA), I immediately started "Gauntlet Week". During Gauntlet Week, I started corporate exercise, waking up at 4:30 each morning. On top of that we had to try to stay awake through hours and hours of sessions expanding on

foundations and principles of the Bible. It was in Gauntlet Week that God began to speak new desires into my heart, and give me a small glimpse of the things He was going to teach and lead me through.

In the next week, I was given my ministry placement. Like I said before, I help send students to different countries to spread the gospel. I was placed on the Global Expeditions (GE) Call Center. Calling young missionaries, missionary's parents, and youth pastors seemed like a daunting task that I couldn't do, but the Lord was able to stretch me through the process, and now I can see that God placed me exactly where He wanted me.

I was also given an amazing opportunity since I was a part of the GE Call Center. I was able to go on a mission trip to Austin, TX and be a part of showing the lost, hope; true hope that can only be found in Jesus Christ. I learned a lot through personal street evangelism, talking with the homeless, and helping out at the local Salvation Army. And I can say that God ministered to me as much as, if not more than I might have ministered to others.

Throughout the next couple of weeks I learned so much through my ministry placement and through the classes here. We started having classes with the men's group called Trailer Club; learning about commitment and how to conduct ourselves as true men of God. And in my regular classes I began to learn about different things like our covenant with God, how to face adversity, and eternal accountability.

We are also placed in cores at the HA. My core is made up of eleven men, plus our core advisor. Our core advisor was an intern last year, and has been teaching us so much about the love that God has for us, and how to be upstanding

See Teen Mania on Page 6



"Our heartbeat is to provoke a young generation to passionately pursue Jesus Christ and to take His life-giving message to the ends of the earth!"



Teen Mania From Page 5

men of God. We also have a sister core who we get together with to bond and have a good time. We all end up learning and growing from each other.

This fall we had our first symposium titled, "Fall Foundation Symposium". It was taught by a man named Kenny Price. It really underlined the scripture in Luke 9:23, "Then He said to them all, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.'" He taught us how we have to deny and destroy our flesh and all its desire to do evil, so that we may live by the spirit.

This entire time, we were still having corporate exercises at 4:30 am every weekday. They were training us, and keeping us in shape for the most intense LTE (Life Transforming Event) we will ever participate in this year. It's called ESOAL (Emotionally Stretching Opportunity Of a Lifetime) and it's also the only optional life-transforming event of the year. It's designed to basically train us to deny the wants of our flesh, learn mental and physical discipline, and learn how to stand up to adversity of all kinds.

It was definitely the hardest thing I've ever done. It was 87 straight hours of mud, sweat, tears, pain, and marching. The goal was to reach BAR (Burial and Resurrection), burial of your flesh, and resurrection of your spirit. Whenever you reached that point, and couldn't go on anymore, you could "Ring Out", by ringing a bell. We started the LTE

with about 650 participants, and ended with about 250. And after 87 hours I was finally finished and able to take a shower and try to get my dirt-stained skin clean, and

eat good food. Normal food tasted so much better after that experience!

God taught and showed me many things about Himself, myself, and the body of Christ.



His beatings and crucifixion were made so real to me. His love for me was fully shown to me.



And He taught me to put aside and destroy the wants of my flesh. I wanted so badly to simply ring the bell and go have a shower, a warm bed, and some real food. But through the encouragement of the people He placed around

me, I was able to rely on Him for sustenance and strength to push through to the end. In the same way, in the church, which is the body of Christ, we need to learn to encourage others to stay strong in the faith. God has put us in other people's lives to help lift them up when they're down, when they are weak, when they are in need.

God also showed me how He can work powerfully through the weak. There were some men and women around me that I never

would have thought would make it through, but they turned their weaknesses over to God, and He led them through. Another thing that He taught me was how to take the attention off myself and turn it to Him. It made the whole experience easier whenever I prayed for those around me. When I prayed for the strength of others, and helped others

through hard times, I noticed God in turn giving me strength, and helping me through hard times.

All in all, I've learned so much at the HA already, and I can't wait to see what more God has planned. Again, I thank you all for your prayers and support. Through your generosity I am being equipped to fight for a change in our generation -- A change in our culture and mindset. And I am able to help send missionaries to the nations to help fulfill the Great Commission; the last command that Jesus left for us.

I pray that God will continue to bless you all!

"So humble yourselves before God. Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you. Draw close to God, and God will draw close to you." - James 4:7-8

- By Nicholas Glaros



Infants From Page 8



Mature Christians are made one by one through the influence of other Christians already mature.

Additionally, mature Christians become mature by suffering, facing

challenges that can arouse fear and a sense of inadequacy. Mature Christians learn to wrestle with questions that defy simple answers. They learn to say strategic and tactical "no's" when others are indulging themselves by saying "yes." Oh, and mature Christians wrestle against the devil, you could say, and sometimes even lose. But they learn to get up again. Could I add, while I'm on a roll, that mature Christians are experts at repenting and humility.

Again, they learn this stuff under the tutelage of one who has gone before them and is willing to open his/her life so that it becomes a textbook on Christ's work in us.

But we have a rising (I daresay, a life-threatening) problem in the modern church. Older people—above 50, let's say—don't want to be tutors or mentors. Too busy, too distracted, too secretive, too afraid. So a younger generation of spiritual infants is really struggling because an older generation doesn't want to tell its stories, doesn't want to get involved. They prefer Christian cruises, Christian golf tournaments, and more Bible studies where information can be piled upon information.

Forgive my generalizations, my edgy sarcasm. But I'm prompted to let some my thoughts hang out because I'm meeting too many infant Christians who tell me that they're looking for fathers and mothers in the faith to help them grow up. And they're not finding them. And many churches aren't cultivating them.

Result: we could lose a large part of a new generation of Christians who couldn't get past spiritual infancy and went somewhere else. - *By Gordon MacDonald, "This article first appeared in October 1st, 2007 issue of Christianity Today. Used by permission of Christianity Today International, Carol Stream, IL 60188."*

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/leaders/newsletter/2007/cln71001.html>

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Light From Page 4

with hope until the time of fruition comes.

The setting sun seems larger than when it is high in the sky, and a splendor of glory tinges all the clouds that surround its going down. Pain does not break the calm of the sweet twilight of age, for strength is made perfect in weakness and endures it all patiently. Ripe fruits of choice experience are gathered as the rare food of life's evening, and the soul prepares itself for rest.

The Lord's people will also enjoy light in the hour of death. Unbelief bemoans the evening shadows, the darkening night, the end of existence. But no, cries faith, the night is almost over and the true day is at hand. Light has come, the light of immortality, the light of the Father's countenance. Gather your feet up in the bed; see the waiting throng of angels ready to bear you away. Farewell, loved one, you are gone. You wave your hand; now it is light! The pearly gates are open; the golden streets shine in the jasper light. We cover our eyes, but you behold the unseen; adieu, dear friend, you have light at evening time that we have not yet.

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Leader's Insight:

So Many Christian Infants

Why are we so good at leading people to faith and so bad at prodding them to maturity?

I have been musing on the words of Martin Thornton: "A walloping great congregation," he wrote, "is fine and fun, but what most communities really need is a couple of saints. The tragedy is that they may well be there in embryo, waiting to be discovered, waiting for sound training, waiting to be emancipated from the cult of the mediocre."

"Saints," he says. Mature Christians: people who are "grown-up" in their faith, to whom one assigns descriptors such as holy, Christ-like, Godly, or men or women of God.

Now mature, in my book does not mean the "churchly," those who have mastered the vocabulary and the litany of church life, who come alive only when the church doors open. Rather, I have in mind those who walk through all the corridors of the larger life—the market place, the home and community, the playing fields—and do it in such a way that, sooner or later, it is concluded that Jesus' fingerprints are all over them.

I have concluded that our branch of the Christian movement (sometimes called Evangelical) is pretty good at wooing people across the line into faith in Jesus. And we're also not bad at helping new-believers become acquainted with the rudiments of a life of faith: devotional exercise, church involvement, and basic Bible information—something you could call Christian infancy.

But what our tradition lacks of late—my opinion anyway—is knowing how to prod and poke people past the "infancy" and into Christian maturity.

A definition of a mature Christian is lacking. Best to say that you know a mature Christian when you see one. They're in the New Testament. Barnabas is one. Aquila and Priscilla are others. Onesiphorous impresses me. And so is the mother of Rufus of whom Paul said, "she



has been a mother to me." That's a short list.

The marks of maturity? Self-sustaining in spiritual devotions. Wise in human relationships. Humble and serving. Comfortable and functional in the everyday world where people of faith can be in short supply. Substantial in conversation; prudent in acquisition; respectful in conflict; faithful in commitments.

Take a few minutes and ask how many people you know who would fit such a description. How many? Apparently, Paul pondered the question when he thought about Corinthian Christians and said, "I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ."

As usual, I'm long on questions and short on answers. Right now I'm wondering—assuming that Martin Thornton is right—if we church people have forgotten how to raise saints. And if the question is worthy, then what's been going wrong? Bad preaching? Shallow books? Too much emphasis on a problem-solving, self-help kind of faith?

Maybe the answer is deeper or more profound than that. Perhaps it has to do with the penchant in churches (the last forty years or so) to package everything into programs. You need programs to make large churches go: kind of like the automakers need an assembly line that stamps out fenders as fast as possible.

I suspect you can do evangelism programmatically. And you can do infant-level discipleship in programs. Just put the information in little booklets and get groups going. It can be done.

But mature Christians do not grow through programs or through the mesmerizing delivery of a talented speaker (woe is me) or worship band. Would-be saints are mentored: one-on-one or, better yet, one-on-small group (three to twelve was Jesus' best guess). The mentoring takes place in the streets and living-places of life, not church classrooms or food courts. And it's not necessarily done in Bible studies or the like.

See Infants on Page 7

