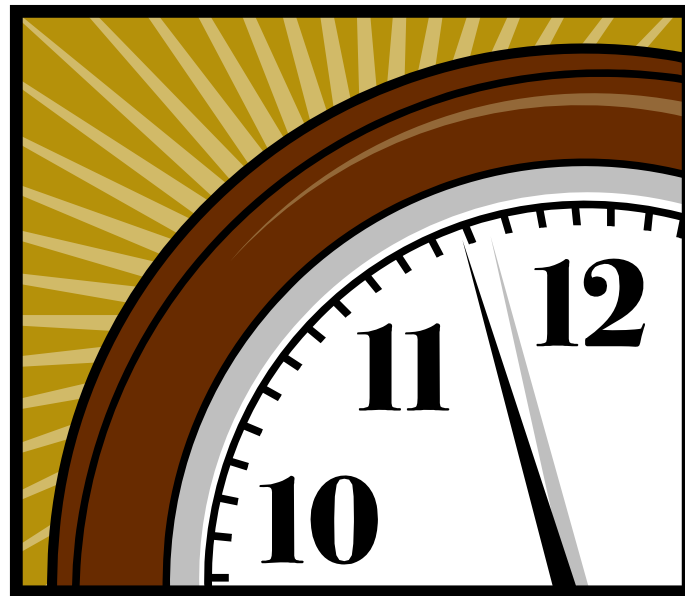




“The Vine”

Growing Together in Christ

Newsletter for New Hope Christian Fellowship



Do You Know the Hour?

Also:

Thoughts on Highway 101

Don't Always Believe the Hype

A Living Hope

From Pastor Dennis

"I Am Coming Soon"

Five years ago from January through May, 2003, I spent 400 hours as a volunteer chaplain at Children's Hospital, Los Angeles. Hospital chaplains minister to those who are sick, injured or dying; they offer spiritual care. It was my goal to learn how to give hope to those in despair.

At 7 a.m. I would be in the pre-surgery area and offer to pray for families whose children were about to go into critical surgeries. During that semester I learned many things about myself, about the importance of a person's faith and about the value of hope.

"Hope is for the soul what breathing is for the living organism. Where hope is lacking, the soul dries up and withers." (Gabriel Marcel)

"Many prisoners in the concentration camps of WWII died not from violence, disease or hunger, but from giving up hope." (Victor Frankl)

"The sense of hope is: there is a way out. The sense of hopelessness is: there is no way out, no exit." (William Lynch)

Excerpts from the book, *Hope in Pastoral Care and Counseling* by Andrew Lester, Westminster John Knox Press, 1995: "Crises result from either real or perceived threats to the future dimension of our life's stories. When hopelessness overwhelms a person, something has happened to his future images."

"Hopelessness views the future as closed and assumes change is impossible."

"Hope is essentially a shared experience with others. Community becomes the context in which we learn to hope, so Christian community at its best produces hope. The church provides a surrogate family that accepts the hopeless into an intimate fellowship and cares for them in ways that awaken hope. The church is a community of believers that is both experiencing and expecting God's kingdom."

*We chose
our
mission to
be a
family of
hope for
all people.*

In my experience as a hospital chaplain, I came to see that I personally could not create hope for people, but I could lead them into the presence of "the God of hope" (Romans 15:13). I could introduce them to Jesus, who is our "living hope."

Five years ago we prayerfully selected our congregational name, New Hope Christian Fellowship. We knew that one of a person's greatest needs is hope. Hope is attractive, healing and transforming. We chose our mission to be a family of hope for all people.

Our New Hope theme for 2008 is A Living Hope and our theme scripture is 1 Peter 1:3-4 - Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade — kept in heaven for you...

Jesus offers hope and salvation for all people; he gives hope to the hopeless. Let us join him in his mission. - *By Dennis Pelley*

The Vine *Growing Together in Christ*



STAFF BOX

John Siston	Editor
Mary Terry	Associate Editor
Dennis Pelley	Pastoral Advisor
You!	Contributions

Send articles or other contributions to
John Siston: john@travelgallery.com
or Mary Terry: 1508 W. Huntington Dr.
Alhambra, CA 91801 (626) 308-2961
mistyt92536@yahoo.com

Life's Lessons

A Thought From Hell on Highway 101

Around midnight, one hot summer Saturday night, my Aunt Lou Desser opened the purple curtains that divided our bedroom. She shook me and said, "Wake up Willie Ray, Fletcher wants you to get your bike and ride to Lem Massey's house to see if he made it home all right." I knew they had been drinking and driving. Lem Massey's house was about four miles away on Route 2, the main gravel road that connects with highway 101. I dressed and pushed my bike from my room through the purple curtains that lead into my aunt's room, and started out of the front porch door. My aunt stopped me. "Come here." She called. "Now listen to me. When you see the car in the yard, you turn right around and come back home." "You hear me boy?" she said. "Yes ma'am." I answered. "Now listen, don't go inside the fence, he's got some bad dogs and they will eat you up. You understand me?" she asked. "Yes ma'am." I said.

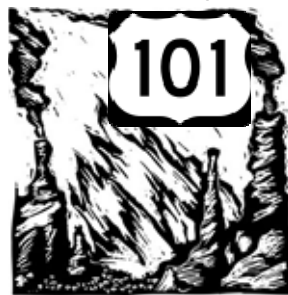
Fletcher was in the bed lying against the wall snoring. He knew I shouldn't be out at night. It was a joke for some people to drive around and pick up boys like me and scare us before throwing us into the Pee Dee River just for weekend fun. The thing is I can't swim.

I pushed my bike off the front porch and down the rock steps towards the road. I decided to take a short cut. I pushed my bike down a walking path that slanted down by the China Berry tree, passing the chicken coop, and up the hill through the tall grass of cowlick weeds that stick to your clothes like ticks on a dog's ear. After passing the barn and cotton field across the Southern Pacific railroad tracks that ran into an old saw mill road, I finally made it to Route 2, the old gravel road that runs into highway 101.

I jumped on my bike and started peddling past several mail boxes at the top of the hill. It curved down the hill and up again, crossing the same railroad tracks. I



slammed on my brakes and came to a squeaking halt. In the middle of the road was a "haint" a black ghost which was standing in front of the graveyard by the Baptist church. I looked up at the moon. It was half as bright as the sun. The moon was bright enough to pick cotton at night. I had to go or face Fletcher when I got back home, I got to go now! I started to pedal as hard and as fast as I could. I could hear the bike tires vibrating against the gravel road. The light from the moon shown against the grey, white and black tombstones reflecting in my eyeballs. "Go away haint. I'm coming through." I passed it like a black cat running for his life! I was pleasantly surprised that it was only the moon



reflecting a shadow of a cedar tree growing along the side of the road, near the graveyard. I kept riding hard. I shuddered at the thought of passing another graveyard at the Methodist church. The sounds of frogs and crickets in the rain ditch beside the road was like loud background music. I was going at top speed to pass the Methodist church. I passed the church and graveyard as quick as a lightning bug blinks its tail. I was only a few minutes away from the home of Lem Massey, who drives a stick shift car with only his left arm. The dogs were fiercely barking at the wire fence. Lem was safe at home. It was time for me to return home. At that moment a thought hit me in the head and I smiled. The more I entertained the thought, the longer I smiled. What a great thought! I thought. My buddy lives on highway 101 and I'm so close to his house I could go to his house and sneak under his bedroom window and let out a yell from hell and scare him half to death. It was so funny I could hear myself laughing at him.

I rode down a little ways and turned left on highway 101. I was almost to my buddy's house when a car came to a squeaking stop beside me. "Hey boy." A man called. "Yes sir" I answered. "Do you know See Highway on Page 4

Highway from Page 3

where we can borrow a pick and shovel?" Yes sir, at my buddies' house." I replied.

"You see, we were traveling through this little town."

I said, "Wadesboro?"

He said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." "We seemed to have run over a man."

I heard someone in the back seat yell "Get this leg off of me."

They looked like gangsters in the movies, all of them had hats on and their coat collars pulled up. They were white men, two in the front seat and two in the back seat.

The man who was talking to me on the passenger side asked "Where is a graveyard?"

"You just passed two."

He asked, "A white graveyard?"

"You just passed one about a mile back on highway 101. I'll show you," I said. I started to move away.



COOLCLIPS.COM

"Wait a minute you know too much." He said. Then he stuck a gun in my face. It looked like a 45 pistol. Several shots were fired at close range. I fell backwards into a deep water draining ditch. As the car

sped away, I thought I heard them laughing.

For a minute I thought I was dead. I was in shock. I wiggled, clawed and climbed up the grassy embankment in the middle of highway 101. Another car was coming and I wet my pants when I saw it. I tried to get up but my legs were stiff like lead and like a snake I wiggled and crawled to the other side of the cornfield. Just in a nick of time as the car sped by my feet. Fear locked up my brain. My mind shut down, I wanted to scream. "Please somebody help me." But I couldn't talk or yell.

Then I remembered something I really loved with all my heart. "My bike! My red, white, and blue bike!" I got up and ran across highway 101. I pulled my bike from the gully where I was shot at. My bike was very special to me because all of my friends had their bikes years before I had mine. I love my bike. I pushed my bike across the highway to the other side and

into the cornfield. As well as I knew the area I got lost. I was trapped in a cornfield and I couldn't get out. Row after row I pushed my bike. In the early morning I found an opening at the end of a corn row that led me into a cotton patch. Only then could I see fields and houses on both sides of highway 101.

I pushed my bike through the cotton fields to my buddies' house. I knocked on the door of my buddy's house and his grandfather answered the door. I told him my story. He told me he would walk me home. I said, "No sir" I got my bike. I knew the old farm would take me back home. I got on my bike and headed up the hill crossing the railroad tracks, passing the Baptist church and graveyard again. I was riding hard and scared.

When I got home, my Indian looking red headed Aunt Lou Desser was waiting up for me. The kerosene lamp was still burning. I told her my story of taking a short cut to my buddy's house. My aunt said in a loud voice, "They should have killed you. You're hard headed and you never listen." "You listen to your thoughts from hell rather than listen to me." "Go to bed boy with your foolish thinking."

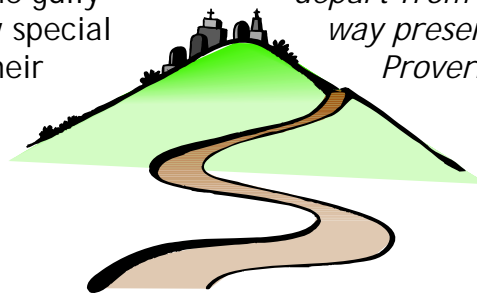


My aunt was strict and mean. I guess I had it coming. What I had intended for my best friend was done to me. My aunt was like a mother to me and she was angry with me for disobeying her because I didn't do exactly what she told me to do. I was afraid to tell her I was sorry.

I pushed my red, white and blue bike through the purple curtains and parked it at the foot of my old iron bed. I straightened out the wooden slats under my wheat straw mattress and dressed for bed. I was hurting all over. I climbed on to the bed mattress and pulled the covers up over my head and cried.

Because of my rebellion I almost took a shortcut to hell on highway 101. - *By Willie Edwards* "The highway of the upright [is] to depart from evil: he that keepeth his way preserveth his soul." - *KJV*

Proverbs 16:17





The Real Test

'Tis the season - for political hype in North America. Our elections are upon us and they provide a large amount of grist for the hype mill. It seems to start earlier every election year, with parties promoting and exaggerating the virtues of their favored ones.

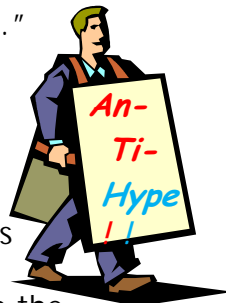
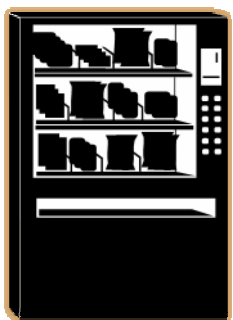
Hype isn't reserved for politics. Everything seems to be hyped these days. The word hype means to greatly exaggerate publicity to excite public interest, and it can be deceptive or dishonest. We encounter it in advertising every day, making it difficult to separate the chaff from the wheat. I enjoy watching programs that test the claims of new products to see if they live up to their hype. Sometimes they do, but often they don't.

You've heard the saying, "If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is." This is good to keep in mind when shopping or voting, as well as the old maxim, "Buyer beware."

Hype has crept into Christianity too, but so has antihype. All things things Jesus tend to be either commercialized or played down to the point of becoming meaningless. To a lot of people, Jesus' love and goodness have become mere platitudes spoken by religious types, with no meaning or power in real life.

To them Jesus seems too good to be true. When something is too good to be true the reality doesn't live up to the promises. We bought an ice cream maker that looked easy and fun to use but didn't live up to its promises. We didn't find out until we put it to the test. A lot of folks approach putting Jesus to the test the same way we did our ice cream machine, as a product that should deliver the expected result. When it doesn't, they dump it.

But Jesus is not a gadget and he's not a cosmic vending machine. We can't put in the right prayer coin, push a button and get what



we want. The hype around us and our vending-machine mentality cloud our thinking about how to relate to him and how he relates to us. He's a thinking, reasoning, sentient (to borrow from Star Trek) being. We know people don't behave according to our expectations, so why would we put God in that box?

Just as we shouldn't believe everything we read or hear about politicians or gadgets, so we shouldn't believe the antihype about Jesus. He's Creator and Lord of the universe and is better than all our expectations. But we must come to him with humility and surrender, not a what-can-he-do-for-me attitude.

The best way to get past the antihype surrounding Jesus is to get to know him. In Jesus' prayer in John 17:3, he said eternal life is to know God and Jesus Christ, whom he sent. Paul knew nothing was more important than knowing Jesus (Philippians 3). If any hype or antihype is interfering with how you see Jesus or relate to him, push past it and put him to the real test—get to know him.

- By Tammy Tkach

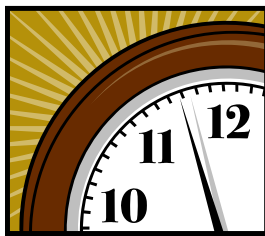


Hour from Page 6

For those who question their salvation, the best evidence is not the memory of having raised a hand or prayed a prayer. Nor is it having been baptized or christened. The true test of the authentic work of God in one's life is growth in Christ-like character, increased love for God and other people, and the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-25; James 2:18). A memorable conversion experience may serve as an important referent to God's saving work in one's life. But the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in making a person more like Jesus is the clearest indicator that one has been made a new creation in Christ. - By Erik Thoennes
Erik Thoennes is associate professor of theology at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/december/29.56.html>

Hour of Decision

"How can I know I'm a Christian if I can't remember when I first responded to the gospel?"



My favorite question to ask Christians is how they came to trust in Christ. The answers I've heard testify to the diverse experiences God uses to bring people into a relationship with himself. Most commonly, people say they trusted him as a child at camp or at Sunday school or while praying with a parent. They often follow with something like, "But my faith really became my own when I was a junior in high school."

How are we to understand this variety of experiences and the apparent two-stage process many seem to undergo in arriving at saving faith?

The term saved is popularly used to refer to regeneration and justification. But when the Bible uses the word salvation in a spiritual sense, it describes the broad range of God's activity in rescuing people from sin and restoring them to a right relationship with himself. Salvation in the Bible thus has past, present, and future tenses. A believer has been saved from the guilt of sin (justification, see Eph. 2:8), is being saved from the power of sin (sanctification, see 1 Cor. 1:18), and will be saved from the judgment and presence of sin (glorification, see Acts 15:11).

While the subjective experience of being saved may look very different from person to person, the objective state of being saved is definite and absolute. From God's perspective, there is a definitive point in time when those who have trusted in Christ pass from death into life (1 John 3:14).

Whether or not one can remember the moment of spiritual rebirth, it is a miracle that initiates a number of new realities. Through the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, the spiritually dead person is made alive in Christ (Titus 3:5). The convert's filthy rags of self-righteousness have been traded for the perfect righteousness of Christ (Phil. 3:8-9). He or she can cease striving to be justified, resting instead in the finished work of Christ (Phil. 2:8-9). As Paul writes,

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). The believer has "crossed over from death to life" (John 5:24), which means the person can "have confidence on the day of judgment" (1 John 4:17).

Much of American Protestantism has been influenced by revivalism, which places great emphasis on "making a decision for Christ" in a public, definitive way. These "moments of decision" often become the crucial evidence that one is saved. Other Protestant traditions, less influenced by revivalism (including some Reformed and Lutheran churches), may be content to leave the conversion experience unclearly identified, putting the focus on identification with the church. Both of these traditions have benefits, as well as potential problems.

The decision approach rightly emphasizes the need for a personal commitment to Jesus Christ and the idea that regeneration takes place at a specific time. The potential downside is that this view can lead to a simplistic, human-centered understanding of being saved, where one depends too heavily on the specific act of trusting Christ as the primary evidence of conversion. As a result, one can doubt the "decision" was real, leading to numerous journeys down the aisle (just in case). Also, one can depend on the walk down the aisle alone, even in the absence of spiritual fruit.

On the other hand, Reformed traditions appreciate the sovereignty of God and the role of the church in the salvation process. Yet they can leave conversion so vague that the need for personal trust in Christ and a changed life is neglected.

We must allow for the varied experiences God uses to bring people to himself. As C. H. Spurgeon said, "The Spirit calls men to Jesus in diverse ways. Some are drawn so gently that they scarcely know when the drawing began, and others are so suddenly affected that their conversion stands out with noonday clearness." See Hour on Page 5

