



“The Vine”

Growing Together in Christ

Newsletter for New Hope Christian Fellowship

*“I am the
Resurrection
and the
Life...”*



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From Pastor Dennis

He Is Alive!

Something really big happened on that first Easter Sunday morning, completely transforming Jesus' disciples. They went from being cowards hidden in an apartment, into the city streets of Jerusalem preaching that Jesus was Messiah, that he had beaten death! Ten of the eleven remaining disciples were martyred (witness means martyr) because they spread the news that Jesus was alive.

They were not afraid to die because they knew death was not the end! John, the one disciple tradition says was not martyred, had a dream 60-70 years later - "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 behold I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.'" (Revelation 1:17-18)

Jesus is alive! The resurrection was the turning point of all history. Jesus triumphed over Satan, sin and death. We share his victory over Satan, sin and death "...thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 15:57) Because Jesus is alive, everything has changed. Even now we are citizens of heaven. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus...(Ephesians 2:6)

But we have an enemy - Satan the devil. What are some of his schemes? Three spiritual battles that we all face - "three F's on our human report card" - are futility, failure and finality.

Futility - Sometimes we get worn out and ask, "It is all worth it?" Maybe you've worked hard in life and feel you have little or nothing to show for it.

Failure - You blew it. You were wrong. You let everybody down. Your life, your family, your home, your work - it's all a shambles. We all fail.

"...I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades."

Finality - Surveys show that one of the great fears of people is death. We go to incredible extremes to stay alive and keep those we love alive because we're afraid of death.

Jesus addresses each of these. **Futility** - Because Jesus is alive, your life is not futile! When Jesus came back from the dead, he came with a plan and purpose for your life.

Failure - Because Jesus has risen, our failures are not fatal. Jesus died for all our failures. Don't drag those failures around anymore. He wants you to have joy, complete joy, and that happens when you let him take all of those failures.

Finality - Because Jesus is alive, death is not final. I help people transition from this life into the next. I have seen people with joy in their eyes as they went from here to there. Because of the resurrection we know for sure that death is not the end, but a new beginning.

If you are struggling with any of these thoughts, the power of the Resurrection is here today for you. Your life has purpose and significance. Give all your failures to Jesus. And death is the gateway to eternal life. I've got good news for you. The Lord is Risen. Jesus is alive! Hallelujah!

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
misty92536@yahoo.com

New Hope Happenings

Women's Ministry Brunch

NHCF's Women's Ministry was host to a Ladies and Teen Girls Brunch on Saturday, February 23 at The First Church of the Nazarene (PAZ NAZ) in Pasadena.

Guest speaker Dr. Catherine Hart-Weber spoke to 65 women and teens which included friends and guests of New Hope. Some traveled from as far as Long Beach, Victorville, and Big Bear. We were able to enjoy a delicious spread of food and fellowship. Dr. Hart Weber spoke about *Passion and Purpose for a Life That Matters*.

Some of the topics discussed included: God has created us all for a purpose. He has created us for connection, for good works for an 'abundant life' and for impact. (Sharing our life story, journey, and testimony)

We each have a unique purpose; we each have unique 'sealed orders' from God, spiritual gifts, strengths and passions.

What matters most in life? What makes life worth living? -- -Doing Good. Doing gratifying work where you are valued. Loving others and intimate connections.

What is your heart passion? Embrace the 'Passion of Christ'. Pay attention to the small details that you enjoy in your everyday life. Take a 'Heart Passion' assessment

What are you good at? God uses your abilities. What special skills and knowledge do you have? God uses your life experiences. You can use your life story. You can use your educational, spiritual, ministry, challenging or painful experiences to help others.

Additional information and resources can be found at <http://www.hartinstitute.com>



He Must "Take Up His Cross Daily And Follow Me" - Luke 9:23

You do not make your own cross, although unbelief is a master carpenter at cross-making; neither are you permitted to choose your own cross, although self-will wants to be lord and master. But your cross is prepared and

appointed for you by divine love, and you must cheerfully accept it; you are to take up the cross as your chosen badge and burden, and not to stand complaining.

This night Jesus bids you submit your shoulder to His easy yoke. Do not kick at it in petulance, or trample on it in pride, or fall under it in despair, or run away from it in fear, but take it up like a true follower of Jesus. Jesus was a cross-bearer; He leads the way in the path of sorrow. Surely you could not desire a better guide! And if He carried a cross, what nobler burden would you desire? The 'Via Crucis' is the way of safety; fear not to tread its thorny paths. Beloved, the cross is not made of feathers or lined with velvet; it is heavy and galling to disobedient shoulders; but it is not an iron cross, though your fears have painted it with iron colors; it is a wooden cross, and a man can carry it, for the Man of Sorrows tried the load.

Take up your cross, and by the power of the Spirit of God you will soon be so in love with it that like Moses you would not exchange the reproach of Christ for all the treasures of Egypt. Remember that Jesus carried it; remember that it will soon be followed by the crown, and the thought of the coming weight of glory will greatly lighten the present heaviness of trouble.

May the Lord help you bow your spirit in submission to the divine will before you fall asleep tonight, so that waking with tomorrow's sun, you may go forth to the day's cross with the holy and submissive spirit that is fitting for a follower of the Crucified. *Taken from "Morning and Evening," written by C.H. Spurgeon, revised and updated by Alistair Begg. Copyright (c) 2003, Good News Publishers and used by Truth for Life with written permission.*



-Photos & story by Christine Leon

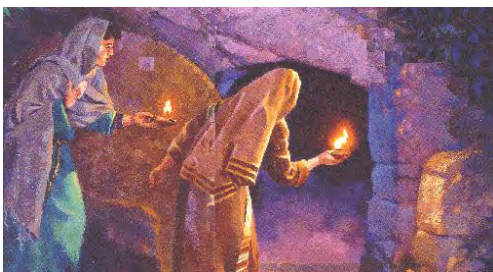
The Resurrection

The Empty Tomb: Reasons to Believe

Jesus Christ's resurrection from a rock sepulcher galvanized the faith of early Christians. The empty tomb and the post-resurrection appearances of the risen Lord were the crowning proof that the Master they loved and served was not just another moral teacher. He was, as he claimed to be, God in the flesh. This conviction energized the early church. "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard," the apostle Peter testified to the Jewish religious authorities, who could not quench the faith of those early believers (Acts 4:20).

We who read the accounts almost 2,000 years later need to remember that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was not, as Paul boldly declared before the elite of his nation, "done in a corner" (Acts 26:26). Just the opposite was true. The disciples testified in the laboratory of public scrutiny and debate. People in their audiences could refute them at every point, if they were not telling the truth.

To first-century Christians, the resurrection of Jesus Christ was the pivotal event in history. Their dramatic encounters with Jesus after his escape from the rock tomb were vivid and unforgettable: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched — this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us" (1 John 1:1-2). John, an apostle and disciple of Jesus Christ, wrote



as an eyewitness to Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead



(John 20:30-31; 21:24-25).

Luke, an educated man who wrote a detailed study of the life and times of Jesus of Nazareth, authenticated the report that went from tiny Judea into the world beyond: "Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account... so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:3-4).

Paul distilled the essence of the new faith he helped spread across the Roman Empire: "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

Full public scrutiny

The apostles faced the test of informed public opinion, a jury of their contemporaries. Some in their audiences already had Jesus' blood on their hands. The execution of one or two more fishermen from Galilee wouldn't make much difference.

Yet the disciples radiated unconquerable confidence. Their words still pulsate with moral fervor and authority. The good news of the resurrection was big news on the streets of Jerusalem. It was hard-hitting. It was effective. It changed lives.

"Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know," Peter trumpeted (Acts 2:22). "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (verse 36).

This bold preaching threw the Jerusalem religious hierarchy completely on the defensive. "You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood," they lamely protested (Acts 5:28).

If the disciples had been perpetrating fraud or deceit, their testimony could have

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Resurrection From Page 4

been easily overthrown. It wasn't. The willingness to risk all for the truth of the resurrection was convincing testimony from fallible human beings men who had earlier deserted Christ and fled (Matthew 26:56). That willingness, and the powerful miracles being done in Christ's name, made the gospel compelling. It rocked Jerusalem.

No wonder Christ's newly regenerated disciples were "highly regarded by the people" (Acts 5:13). And remember something else: Other popular movements had come and gone in first-century Judea. Sensational leaders had arisen before Jesus of Nazareth, people the world at large has forgotten (verses 35-39). One of them, Judas, was also a Galilean, who lived not far from where Jesus was reared.

Around A.D. 6, Judas gathered a following and set himself against the Roman power. His movement failed and he was killed. But no one in the first century claimed that this Judas of Galilee was raised from the dead or that he and his followers had many prolonged talks after a resurrection. Still less did anyone risk life and limb for the Judas movement years afterward. Yet ordinary human beings risked their all for Jesus of Nazareth.

History not dogma

The late F.F. Bruce, evangelical author, notes: "The Christian gospel is not primarily a code of ethics or a metaphysical system; it is first and foremost good news, and as such it was proclaimed by its earliest preachers.... This good news is intimately bound up with the historical order, for it tells how for the world's redemption God entered into history, the eternal came into time, the kingdom of heaven invaded the realm of earth, in the great events of the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus the Christ" (The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?, pages 7-8).

The disciples were convicted by the empty tomb. They believed in the power of the resurrection. Their testimony was believable because they believed. How about us? Do we believe?

We should. The same Jesus Christ who walked the dusty trails of Galilee is alive today, alive and glorified. He intervenes for those of us who turn to him in faith and belief, just as he did for Peter, Andrew, James and John. The empty tomb could not hold him, and the evil powers of this world — natural and supernatural could not stamp out the truth of his resurrection.

To experience this transforming power for ourselves, to "know Christ and the power of his resurrection" (Philippians 3:10), we will also have to believe in the empty tomb and in the power of the resurrection. Belief and the work of the Holy Spirit will lead us to repent. Repentance is toward God, an inner act of contrition for being sinful, broken human beings. We are all sinners; we have all broken God's great moral and spiritual law. God provides for our need for forgiveness and helps us deal with our guilt through the atoning death of Jesus Christ.

Following repentance, believers

demonstrate their faith in God through the ceremony of baptism. The New Testament teaches that water baptism is an outward symbol of faith (Acts 10:45-48). Believers who come to Christ in faith receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit lives in us, renewing our minds and

sanctifying us until we are completed as new creations in Jesus Christ at the resurrection of the dead (Ephesians 4:23; 2 Corinthians 5:17).

We are not asked to make a commitment to Christ without evidence. The empty tomb stands as stark evidence that our Lord and Savior is risen from the dead.

Peter, preeminent preacher of the empty tomb, said it best: "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you" (Acts 3:19-20).

The decision is yours. Will you believe?
 - Excerpted from *He Is Risen! A booklet About Jesus Christ* Copyright 1995 Worldwide Church of God. Illustration by Ken Tunell
<http://www.wcg.org/>



From Tammy Tkach

Do You Have the Key?

For most of my life, I believed Jesus was my Savior, but I was convinced obedience to the laws of the Old Testament was also necessary for salvation. I had no idea this is called "Christ plus." I heard the term, and discovered I practiced it, all on the same day!



I also thought this was a modern problem. But I came across something called the Colossian Heresy. It's not mentioned by name, but the commentaries all talk about it. It seems some people in Colosse were teaching a different gospel, one that more or less openly intimated Jesus wasn't enough. So Christ plus is nothing new. It existed back in Paul's day too.

The commentaries say no one really knows what the Colossian Heresy was, but they do agree it "attacked the total adequacy and the unique supremacy of Christ" (*The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and the Thessalonians*, William Barclay). Paul covers several points to refute these Gnostic teachings, including Christ's role in creation, his total divinity and total humanity, warnings about angel worship, empty philosophies and legalistic teachings.

Some of the books I've read and websites I've visited give me a feeling this Christ plus agenda is still alive and well in the 21st century. Everyone seems to have some special knowledge or a key to whatever you need, either for salvation or spiritual fulfillment. If you follow their advice or seven keys or physical or spiritual regimen, you're in like Flynn.

But do we need special knowledge to attain salvation? Do we need secret keys to unlock the doors of heaven? Yes, we do, but both are found in one word: Jesus. (The doors of heaven aren't locked, but some would have you believe this.) Paul said he was chosen by God "to present to you [the Colossians] the word of God in its fullness" (Colossians 1:25, NIV throughout), and "to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this

mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).



The answer to the mystery of God is as simple as that, and needs no embellishment or special knowledge. Jesus himself said he is the Way, the Truth and the Life. He offered no secret handshake or password. He put no conditions on life in him, he simply said come to me and I will give you rest (Matt. 11:28). He said all we have to do is ask and he will give us living water (John 4:10). In an amazing display of grace, when the thief on the cross asked to be remembered when Jesus came into his kingdom, Jesus assured the man he would be with him in paradise (Luke 23:42-43).

Paul's words of warning are as relevant today as they were almost 2,000 years ago. "I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments" (Colossians 2:4). "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ" (2:8).

And don't fall for the gimmicks and keys some try to convince us are necessary to be a Christian or necessary even for salvation. To paraphrase the song, "all you need is Christ" - *By Tammy Tkach*

Grandmother From Page 7

motorcycle together. She always hosted the family meal at her house every holiday. She volunteered for a number of different causes. She loved to read the newspaper. Most of all, she loved to laugh - at stories and humorous everyday incidents. When she was about 108, her eyesight and hearing faded. Sadly, her mind faded gradually too. She lived to be 113-years-old; she was one of the oldest people in the United States at the time.

At age 102, Grandma Pier sold her house. Grandma sent me the key to her door at 315 Dale Street. She wanted the key to remind me of her and to remind me of all the wonderful times we had spent together at her house. - *By Clark Miller*



Writers Among Us

My 113-Year-Old Grandmother

My Grandma Pier lived at 315 Dale Street from 1920 until 1982. I will never forget that large, two-story house in Elkhart, Indiana. So many wonderful memories are tied to that house.



1880 - 1994

Wilhelmina Pier was born in 1880 near South Bend, Indiana. She was the youngest of ten children. Her parents had emigrated from Germany. About 1857, her father started a farm and a saw mill. He supplied lumber for the railroad and for the Studebaker covered wagons. Grandma said that life on the farm was very hard. However, she enjoyed dances, other social events, and visits from friends and relatives. She wrote a lot of letters and read a lot of books. When Grandma was younger, she roomed with her grandmother who was born in 1793!

In 1908, my grandmother eloped with a family friend, Harvey Pier, a brakeman on the New York Central Railroad. They were happily married for 49 years. Grandpa Pier worked on the Twentieth Century Limited, which ran between Chicago and New York City. He used to bring her flowers that the famous celebrities left behind on his train.

Grandma was 66-years-old when I was born. Growing up, I split my time between Grandma's house and my parents' house. Whenever I stayed overnight at her house, I had my own room. The room was pitch black and quiet at night. When I was younger, I used to be scared of that room. Grandma put a small cross on the other side of the room where I could see it. The cross glowed in the dark and comforted me. Grandma also taught me a prayer in German that her mother had taught her. The prayer goes like this in English: Fear (revere) God, dear child, God sees and knows everything. Amen. That prayer has always stuck with me.

Grandma was the best babysitter I ever had. She used to make me popcorn and

oatmeal raisin cookies. We played Chinese checkers a lot. We looked at old family photographs. We took the train to Chicago and walked around the "Windy city." We talked about so many different things. She always welcomed me anytime I came to her house. Grandma led an interesting life in her younger days. She saw 12 U.S. Presidents in person. She sang in a group for President Theodore Roosevelt. She marched in the Women's Suffrage parades in 1917-1919.

She and Grandpa used to ride on a
See Grandmother on Page 6

Me? Write for the Vine?

Who? Me?? Oh yes, you! Wouldn't you like to encourage and edify the church, your brothers and sisters in Christ, by simply writing a short article about Christian life? You can do it. Look at it this way: you're here for the Sunday sermons, you read and study your Bible, God's Holy Word. Why not take a subject from your study that you are passionate about and turn that subject into an article for all of us to contemplate? Use your own words and pray for God's inspiration.

You may be surprised. What you end up writing may be just what the church needs to read about. After all, the "True Vine" (John 15:1-8) brings us, the branches, into his learning, love and transformation, doesn't He? He wants to use us to teach and encourage one another. If one person were to offer praise to God after reading your article, wouldn't that make it all worthwhile?

In Philippians 2:3-5, Paul writes to the church: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus..."

Perhaps God is calling you to share your thoughts with your church family. If you hear this message from him, just do it! Your article will be a blessing to your church and may encourage others to write an article or share a poem or story too. - *By Peter Spiroff*



Rethinking Church

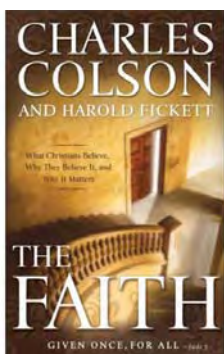
Where Are You?

Willow Creek Community Church, one of America's biggest and most prominent churches, recently released a short book called *Reveal: Where Are You?* The book contains the results of a comprehensive study that Willow Creek conducted among their own members and among members of other churches that use their model. Pastor Bill Hybels has said that the results of that study are "earth-shaking," "ground-breaking."

In a nutshell, the survey results showed that heavy involvement in the church programs and activities of Willow Creek did not necessarily translate to spiritual growth and maturity. Findings like these have caused the church leaders to stand up and admit, "We made a mistake."

I have to tell you, that is historic. Can you remember the last time a church leader said anything like that? I can't, and I am very proud of Bill Hybels. He and his leaders deserve a Christian profile in courage award, and I will nominate him.

Bill Hybels understands the problem that the Church is in today. It is into therapy, but it needs to teach doctrine and grow people in the faith. That is why, by the way, I have written a new book to be released in



February titled *The Faith Given Once, for All*, a book Hybels has enthusiastically endorsed.

We have discovered the same thing here at Prison Fellowship—that we cannot just lead

inmates to Christ and then not see their lives transformed. So, we have looked hard at what we are doing and whether we are really making disciples—are we transforming people? We, too, have confessed that we could be doing a lot better. And so, we have revised

our vision statement and made fundamental changes in the way we work.

I think the lesson that the Willow Creek leaders have learned, and the courage they are showing, constitute a challenge and a warning for all Christians. We cannot let ourselves get caught up in a "just-get-'em-in-the-doors" mentality, no matter how attractive and effective it looks. It can too easily lead to the watering-down of the

Gospel, to a "feel-good" faith, and to believers having little impact in society. As the authors of the book, Willow Creek staffers Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, put it in their introduction: "The health of your church is not just about the numbers. It's about the movement of people toward Christ, toward deep love for God and genuine love for others."

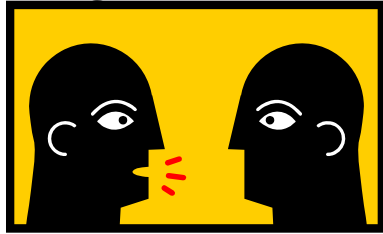
Bill Hybels's example should challenge us all, especially pastors and those in positions of leadership, to take a long, hard look at what we are doing and ask whether it is really changing lives. We all need to improve.

Christians today are just like the culture. We need to be transformed and then turn around and transform the world around us. During the Reformation, the reformers had a phrase for this spirit. It was called *semper reformandi*, or always reforming. The more we continue to understand that we have not arrived, and the more willing we are to adopt the humble approach that we and our churches are in need of continual reformation, the more our churches and lives will come to reflect the God we preach.

I am cheering Willow Creek on. Think what could happen if, instead of tickling ears, all the churches gave the people real meat. Then there might be hope for America after all, as serious disciples are equipped to defend their faith and take their places in our communities. *Charles Colson Breakpoint* <http://www.breakpoint.org/listingarticle.asp?ID=1435> December 5, 2007; Also see <http://www.revealnow.com/storyPage.asp?pageID=6> for more information on *Reveal Now*.



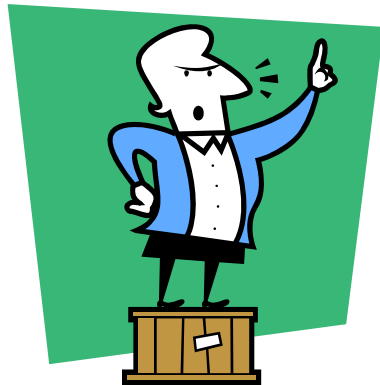
Evangelism



What Evangelism Isn't

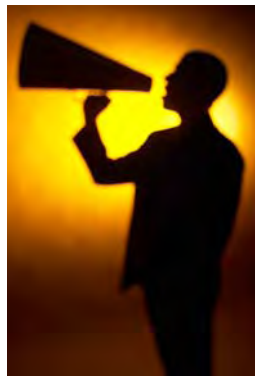
We need to stop mistaking other Christian activities for the spreading of the gospel.

I remember as a little child hugging my father's leg at a gas station only to realize it wasn't his leg I was hugging. I was embarrassed! It was a case of mistaken identity.



In the matter of evangelism, I'm

concerned about a number of things that people take to be evangelism that aren't. And this case of mistaken identity can have consequences more serious than mere embarrassment. Let me mention five things mistaken for evangelism. *To continue reading this article please go to:*



<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/decemberweb-only/101-12.0.html>

Stop Pulling Punches

I fear many of us become timid about proclaiming truth because we fear it will halt a supposed seeker's spiritual journey. We think that avoiding sensitive subjects, like sin, might keep the door to evangelism open. Not so. Truth comes as a package, and we must take the good with the 'bad.'



While I must always strive to communicate in a gracious and thoughtful manner, I should be less cautious about sharing the gospel. Those

determined to resist it will do so no matter how gently we present it; those eager to accept will forgive any mistakes. No one needs us to pull punches. A truly thirsty man will gratefully drink from an imperfect cup.



- From I Still Believe, by Kurt Bruner Copyright 2005, Zondervan Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI.

