

some of the stuff I think

randy bohlender

some of the stuff i think

dedicated to my family

*Kelsey, my beautiful and wonderful wife who encourages
me to the fullest extent, even when I should put the
computer away and shut off the light*

Jackson, the tender hearted

Grayson, the prophetic voice

Zion, the song bird

Zoe, the representation of our own adoption

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forward

I started blogging in October of 2002. Since then, I've written an estimated 300,000 words. The vast majority of those words were not too profound. They were inane commentary on everyday life.

As the phrase goes, though, once in a while even a blind squirrel finds a nut, and simply the by amount of text that I generated, there were portions that resonated with people. You might call me a human 100 monkeys experiment – you know, put a hundred monkeys in a room with typewriters and eventually they'll type the encyclopedia.

Here are some of the entries that seemed to connect. I hope you enjoy them. I'm making them available for free because it suits my personality and the nature of the internet. If you find them useful and would like to buy me a cup of coffee, paypal is a wonderful thing. ☺

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PS: Remember, this is only SOME of the stuff i think.

You can find the other 242,000 words I cut at rbohlender.blogspot.com and more info about us randyandkelsey.com

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unapologetics

A year ago, when I signed on with the Vineyard, they were gracious enough to let me choose my own title. Granted, the job description was their doing, but they were wide open on what I wanted to call myself. That's how I became the 'director of small things'. It's been fun to have that title. If you're familiar with DNA, you understand. We champion the belief that small things done with great love will change the world.

I still believe that, and will continue to do what I'm doing - coaching church planters, designing outward focused outreach (if you've been around church long enough, you know that phrase isn't redundant), and teaching Alpha and in other venues when I get a chance. It's just that the director of small things moniker has gotten old, so I'm going to try out a new title for a while, while reserving the right to revert to the original title (when you make them up, it's no big thing to do so).

I am now re-titling myself the Director of Unapologetics. You'll notice two changes...one, I've chosen to capitalize the big words. I think that looks nice. Secondly, moving from small things (which I will continue to do) to Unapologetics is in response to what I feel is our overwhelming tendency to apologize, particularly in the postmodern context. We are so freaking afraid of scaring people (or is it that we're afraid of not being cool?) that we apologize all over ourselves for anything the Bible says

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that might be the least bit confusing to a not-yet-believer. We dumb down the context that we share the gospel with them to the point that if they really understood everything that we say we believe, they'd wonder why they were getting the wussy version. They're postmodern, not postmortem.

I went to a Reds game this summer. I didn't grow up watching baseball, so there were things I didn't understand, but you know what...they still played the game correctly, and no one apologized. (PA SPEAKER VOICE: You, in the third row...we apologize for the length of the game...) Fortunately, I sat with a friend who explained things...I still didn't understand it all, but it was fun, and I think if I went regularly, I could explain it to other people. I learned by watching and asking...not by them dumbing the game down to my level. I'm tired of people seemingly apologizing for biblical concepts like sin, repentance, and Jesus' passionate heart for pursuing the losers of the human race. I say more book of Acts and less Oprah.

No more wussy gospel.

That's what I say.

12.20.02

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the impact of kindness

If you've been around our city long, you've seen people handing out cokes, cleaning restrooms and washing windshields to show people the love of God in a practical way.

Periodically, people wonder "does this stuff make an impact on anyone?" Peer into my email box for a moment - these are quotes from email I've gotten in the last week from Burning Man attendees who we served with a bottle of water...

"I always expect any Christians at an event like that to be holding up signs warning me of my doom. I really enjoyed reading your reasons for going, definitely made me think about mine."

"You are a breath of fresh air, sharing genuine spirituality IN the context of the church rather than IN SPITE OF the church."

"I'm curious, have your progressive views ever gotten you into trouble with the church hierarchy, or have you encountered any resistance from within?"

"You probably did more in 10 minutes to change my opinion about Christianity than any other person. I'm not saying I'm converting, but I am sure more friendly to the idea. I think if more people

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had your opinion about faith, the world would be a much better place."

"You conveyed the essence of what I respect about Christianity and made a distinction--the "go and do church" that I'll keep forever."

"You know, I left the church (more like kicked out actually) because it was the antithesis of what you describe yours as being. No one I ever knew there ever harbored or practiced their faith in the way you describe."

"I was one of those "veteran" Burners (7 years) that happened upon your camp in 2002 and was, at first dumbfounded and then wonderfully taken aback by the things I saw in your camp. Just a friendly group of people (who just happened to be Christians) sharing with their neighbors in Black Rock."

"All I can say is that, if all the worlds' Christians were like you then this planet would truly be 'Heaven on Earth'. You guys are beautiful."

I think it's working.

02.05.03

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authenticity

After we had the kids tucked in last night (and under the watchful eye of Grandma...) Kelsey and I snuck out to Chocolate Morel for a late desert with friends. Chocolate Morel is a hoity-toity new restaurant located in luxurious downtown Mason, Ohio (as a local would say, 'directly across from where they tore down the body shop'). Without too much coaxing, I ordered a high-octane coffee and the Havana Banana. I highly recommend it, unless you're diabetic, in which case it may be the last thing you'll ever eat, but you'll die with a ridiculous grin on your face.

We arrived about 8:15 PM and sat and talked for three hours. We may still be there except the restaurant closed. Our cue was when the muzak went away and the room we were in got very, very dark. Thinking back, the three hours passed in what seemed like a thirty minute swirl of laughter, java, serious talk and, of course, the notorious Havana Banana. I came home thinking about authenticity.

The boomers who remain alive as of this writing tell us that authenticity was all about accountability...that if you got into a small group, gave them permission to 'speak into your life' (boomereze for 'tell you you're being a moron'), then you were in an authentic relationship. Accountability was the holy grail of Christian community.

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While I sure won't speak ill of accountability, I think the emphasis was probably a pendulum swing for boomers - most of them lived in anonymity, so to allow people to mess with their business was a radical thought. Maybe I'm in a strange place, but I've got a fair amount of people who have permission to tell me when I've doofed something. I would guess at least 15 people know me well enough to be able to tell me the hard stuff. Some days it feels like a hundred.

For me, the mark of authenticity...when I'm really being authentic... bubbled up last night. It wasn't merely the right to speak truth in love - although that exists within that relationship - but rather it was the trust to dream together.

I'm pretty hard shelled. I can take the truth. What I can't take is having my dreams laughed at. We all spoke things around that table that were deep within...at times, even though we were the only ones in the restaurant, we found ourselves leaning forward and speaking in whispers, as if the walls had ears.

It felt so good to dream audibly...to let the oracles within breath a little. There were times I found myself wondering 'did I say that out loud?'...yet to have said it out loud was incredibly liberating.

To be honest, most of what we dream about seems pretty preposterous to others...but it's in there, and if it's ever going to happen, we have to speak it somewhere, somehow, to someone.

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To me, an authentic relationship is one that I feel confident enough in to dream out loud...and for me, anyway, those relationships are far and few in between. When I find them, I want to spend as much time as I can in the presence of those people.

03.14.03

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choosing when to love

"Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires..."

Over and over in the Song of Solomon, we're admonished to strongly consider the act of opening the door of the heart...the implication being that it can be awakened to a false love and set up for disappointment.

One of my earliest memories is of standing in the kitchen of the farmhouse where I grew up...near the door was a panel of two switches. The right switch turned on the kitchen light, and the left turned on a light affixed to the top of a pole out in the yard. With no streetlamps for miles, we used this light when neighbors came and went after dark. I remember standing there flipping the light off and on in rapid succession, when my dad uttered one of those classic parentisms: "Quit that, son...it's only meant to do that so many times....". Of course, he was the one who thought about this because if the bulb burned out, it was my dad who had to shimmy up the pole and replace it.

I look at people who open their hearts to others and things so easily, and in rapid succession. I read somewhere that letting a light bulb burn is not hard on it - it's the violent action in turning it off and on that causes it to burn out. I feel for people who have given their heart to a hundred pursuits and partners, only to have it switched off when the pursuit grew old or the partner grew unattractive.

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Do not arouse your heart without a certainty that your love will not be wasted - it's only meant to do that so many times. This isn't an admonition from God to not love, but to choose carefully the object of your deepest devotion.

Proverbs 4:24 *Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.*

04.22.0

some of the stuff i think

unboxing God

I'm having a problem with God. He's rarely staying in the box I've built for Him. Regularly, I'm being reminded that He is both here and Out There, where I cannot imagine. I can already tell this post is going to lose some folks; perhaps the therapy's in my writing it vs. your reading it. Bear with me.

This all started at 5:45 AM, three minutes ago by my computer's clock. I was leaning against the side arm of the couch, reading The Book and praying, when I looked out the window to the west and saw the sky turn a blue that Sherwin Williams has not even thought off. It was striking - bold, vibrant and so fleeting that even now as I look, the coming sun has altered it. It was there, now it's gone.

I can't describe the blue any other way than vast. It owned the sky, and then some. I was momentarily overwhelmed with the reminder that, in the cosmic scheme of things, we're spinning pretty fast on a relatively small marble of rock. The fact that it spins at the right speed and angle to the sun to allow for life forms to exist is a thought many scientists don't even want to ponder. It seems too orchestrated to be accidental.

I like vast. Maybe it's from growing up in North Dakota, but I like the overwhelming feeling of realizing just how big everything else is in comparison to us.

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That's why my favorite geographical feature in North America is the Black Rock Desert. Wandering out onto the dry lakebed, all distractions fade away and there's the feeling of being a very small gnat on the rear end of a very large Rhino. Vastness, for me, reminds me of the bigness of God.

Staring for those moments at that blue, I was reminded that somewhere out beyond that blue, wherever that place was, existed a God. The God. For whatever reason, at 5:45 this AM, He was thinking of me as I thought of Him.

I think I caught Him there in the blue for a minute. The fact that He speaks to me in my insignificance overwhelms me with emotion. I'm fine with decreasing if He increases in my life.

06.10.03

some of the stuff i think

your subatomic song

I remember sitting in junior high science class when the teacher dropped the bombshell on us - we were all made of atoms.

The obvious question to follow was "What are atoms made of?" His answer to that was "neutrons and protons, spinning wildly, but not many of them....mostly, space."

It amazed me that most of what made up the desk I sat in, the pencil I wrote with, the lungs I breathed with, was air and motion. Later, I got to thinking how closely that resembled the definition of sound. Air. Motion. We are more sound than feel, more song than solid.

Everyone has a lifesong.

Some sing in discord most of the time. Others sing the blues, reverberating their difficulties louder and louder.

Some people have a natural merry melody, but manage to drag the song into something it's not...a 78 rpm destiny played eternally at 33 1/3.

That in mind tonight, as I sit in the prayer room, the song leader leads the refrain "sing unto the Lord a new song." You were designed, at the subatomic level, as a part of a symphony.

My heart resonates with a song that is uniquely me. To sing our new song is to be rejuvenated our very core -

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for our hearts to reverberate with the thoughts and intents of God. What will my new song be? It will be the song the conductor calls on me to play. I will be what He wills at the specific moment. I will sound at His calling and rest on His cue.

08.23.08

some of the stuff i think

careful where you sit

I've been reading Psalm 1 this morning. It's not a huge chapter - six verses, actually, but wow...talk about some far ranging implications in a few words. It describes the two very distinct directions that a man's life may go, particularly based on a few simple decisions that we make every day.

Ps 1:1 Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers....

It's making me think about where I sit, euphemistically speaking. Where are the places I spend extended times, what do I dedicate energy towards, what is going on in the background when I'm doing nothing?

The passage indicates that this, coupled with the next verse about delighting in the truths of God, dictates my spiritual health. Verse three says that whatever a man sets to do, he will find success, so long as he's followed these two directives - be careful where you sit, and delight in the law of God.

Sometimes I think Jesus is going to return to find the entire church on the couch, eating Cheetoes and watching reruns. I've gotta start thinking about where I sit. The implications are huge.

08.11.03

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plenteous redemption

We hear a lot about the power of the spoken word, both good and bad, but I don't know if I always understand it.

I know I say things that probably hurt people much more deeply than I realize at the time, and I also know how hearing a kind word from someone can touch me. I think there's also an untapped well of potential in the words we say to ourselves.

As part of my normal morning routine, I've been reading aloud from The Book of Common Prayer. I'm not sure where my copy turned up, but about six months ago I found this little red hard backed book on my shelf. I spend about 20 minutes reading from it most mornings, usually in responsive readings or Psalms. I find that saying these things out loud stirs up my faith in an unusual way.

This morning, I was reading Psalm 130 from it. I rarely read from the KJV, but portions of the scripture ring like poetry in the old version, particularly the Psalms.

This particular Psalm closes with "O Israel, trust in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption." Only KJV. Eugene Peterson couldn't have pulled this one off. As daunting as "plenteous redemption" appears in text, it sounds wonderful. Say it. Go ahead. I'll wait.....

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Plenteous redemption.

Plenteous redemption.

Experiment with emphasizing different syllables.

Plenteous redemption.

Plenteous reDEMPTion.

Plenteous redempTION.

Any way you say it, it sure sounds good. The more I say it, the more I enjoy it.

It conjures up the thought of a grace of plenty. Not a stingy, short-on-grace, long-on-punishment God, but one who loves us with plenteous redemption....a pile o' love...a constant cornucopia of kindness. Okay, I'll quit.

May your day be one of plenteous redemption.

12.17.03

some of the stuff i think

on balance

I have balance issues.

More accurately, I have issues surrounding the idea of being balanced, because to me, that term has meant "middle of the road", avoiding extremes and minimizing risk. As an example, I once told someone who described themselves as a political moderate that moderates are people who don't want to have to defend a position. All they have to do is scratch their chin, nod their head and mutter "I see your point...". But I'm not talking about moderation right now, I'm talking about balance, and my understanding of balance is changing.

It all started with watching a PBS special some months ago. The show was a documentary on a circus family that had a high wire act. I have never walked a literal high wire (although I've been in some hairy meetings!) but I have imagined that if I were to do so, I would do my best to keep centered directly over the cable. What I learned on that show, however, was very different.

According to the show, at least in the academic sense, staying on the high wire took a long, flexible pole, often weighted on the ends, and a wire-walker who could embrace the weight of both extremes...even leveraging that weight for his own benefit. It wasn't the emphasis on the cable that kept him standing - it was his dual emphasis

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on the weight at both extremes. Keeping his balance became an exercise in extremism.

With that new understanding, I'm looking for a new kind of balance. This new balance is not just a philosophy...I want to practice the embrace of extremes.

I want a prophetic encounter that reaches to the edges of what I ever could imagine (Frankly, I think God spends time way out beyond that point anyway). I want to balance that with a study of the word that exceeds what I've done in the past, knowing that God wants to give me good things and is willing to show me in His word what it all means.

I want to exhibit extreme trust in God while exerting extreme effort on my part. I want to learn how to pursue Him and rest in Him at the same time.

I want to find balance in grabbing a hold of extremes and feeling the weight of them in my hands - to handle them with confidence, knowing when to lean which way and when to pull back on the bar to allow the weight of what's 'out there' to keep me upright.

I want to walk on the high wire, tuning out the voices to hear the Voice.

01.02.04

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doing all things

There are certain passages of the Bible that, for whatever reason, have been snagged by the vast religious bumper sticker industry and abbreviated into pithy little statements of fact with little or no context. Over time, the bumper interpretation becomes the accepted understanding of the passage, and Bumper Sticker Theology grows in stature, one bumper at a time...

Reading Philippians 4 this morning, I ran across one of those jewels. "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." At the risk of sounding theologically unsound (and fully knowing that I'm quoting The Princess bride), "I don't think that means what you think it means."

For some whacked reason, we've twisted that scripture into a shot of adrenalin to help us achieve our goals. "I can be the best salesperson on the force, I can ace my SAT's, I can run a four minute mile...". We ignore the reality that for the hundred people claiming that promise, only one can be the best salesperson, most don't ace the SAT, and my Volvo has days when it barely does a four minute mile.

So what on earth was Paul thinking? Where was his head when he wrote that? Seems like a cruel trick to me. Especially if you don't read it in context.

Philippians 4:12,13...*I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in*

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need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, where well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Paul is not talking as much about heroic shows of faith as he is endurance. He's been beaten. He's been broken. He's been imprisoned. Yet with resolve, he scrawls "I can do anything."

About five years ago, Kelsey and I faced the most horrific time in our lives. My father had passed away four years earlier - that in itself was awful - but suddenly we lost both of her parents to cancer in one hundred days. They had been the picture of health when her father got ill...we took him into our home and watching him decline rapidly. He lived with us until 3 days before his death at the VA center in Cincinnati.

The weekend of her father's funeral, Kelsey's mother was diagnosed with cancer. She immediately moved into our home and quickly was bedridden. Before long, it was clear that the end was near. We were up all hours of the night caring for her - all the while watching her decline.

It all happened so quickly that we were pretty shell shocked....caring for 2 boys (Zion wasn't born yet), planting a church, and watching her mom die immediately on the heels of her father could have caused us to shut down permanently, but the spirit of God gave us what seems in retrospect to be superhuman physical strength. I remember crawling into bed one night about 2 AM and

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telling my wife through tears "If this doesn't kill us, we're going to be tough as nails."

Take note. We're still standing,

To me, that's what the "I can do all things" verse means. I can endure. I can rise above. I can, through Jesus, carry all that death, hell and the grave throw and me and by His strength, I'll be standing at the end of the day. There are periods in our life when enduring is victory.

I can do all things. Go honk if you love Jesus.

02.11.04

some of the stuff i think

the joy of participation

I spent a little time on the phone last night with an encouraging friend. Yes, those last two words ought to be synonymous, but we've all probably known differently at times in our life.

This morning I'm in Philippians 1...reading this passage for what seems like the first time. Maybe it's in light of the encouragement I got last night, I don't know, but I am just so aware of Paul's affection for the church in Philippi.

The first chapter is a note from a father, telling of his warm feelings for them and giving them a frank assessment of his situation...that he is facing possible death but can see how, in the grand scheme of things, even that could serve the purposes of God. Paul must be dead serious - even Zig Ziglar couldn't sell that idea without believing in it.

Some specific verses that stuck out to me...

Philippians 1:3-5 I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,

The word 'partnership' relates to the Greek work 'koinonia', which, true to Greek form, has a number of facets in meaning. With what little I know of the study of

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Greek (very little!), English seems ridiculously simplistic. One of the facets of koinonia or partnership is a gift jointly contributed, a collection, a contribution, as exhibiting an embodiment and proof of fellowship.

Ever since seeing Renee Roberts' *Gifting It*, I've done a fair amount of reading on the concept of gifts in culture. At Renee's recommendation I read Lewis Hyde's *The Gift*.

While there is no indication in the book that Hyde is a follower of Christ, he does share some fascinating thoughts on giving. He says that tribal people around the world have a very congruent concept of the value of a gift - they never consider it personal capital.

In other words, when a tribal member receives a gift, they never consider using it for their own benefit. In a real sense, the gift he receives is not his. A tribal chief who receives a goat would never add it to his flock...he'd find a widow who needed it or roast it for the entire tribe. The widow, in tribal fashion, would give away a portion of the milk.

The gift belongs to no one, yet the gift belongs to all.

Viewing participation in the gospel - koinonia - as a joint gift stirs in me even deeper thoughts of community. What are you doing today with *The Gift*. What role are you playing in the grand drama of participation in the Gospel of Christ.

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True community means a conductive flow of The Gift
- when we say grace and peace to you, we really do
exchange grace and grant peace.

Enjoy your gifts today as you were meant to. Give
them away. Participate in the fellowship.

02.06.04

some of the stuff i think

you're being followed

Last night, as I did my late night ritual of quickly surfing through all the major news websites (just in case there's been an emergency and the President has not been able to reach me, I guess) I plugged my headphones into my iBook and listened to some internet radio stations. Internet radio is great in that you can almost always find what you want, and often commercial free. Last night I found one of those stations that play '80's music....

There is something within the mind of a person that convinces them that the pinnacle of music culture probably happened in their late teens or early twenties. Perhaps that's when they had money to spend on cd's, I don't know...but everyone looks back fondly on those times. This explains why, even while brushing my teeth this morning, I could not shake myself of the chorus to Van Halen's "Why Can't This Be Love?".

In what seems to be a radical shift of thought...my study in the Psalms has me in Psalm 23 this morning. This is probably the most quoted Psalm of all time...it was read at every cowboy funeral in every western ever made.

As they shoveled dirt onto the body of Bart the Cattle Rustler, someone would suddenly get religion, produce a little Gideon Bible, and read "The Lord is my shepherd...I shall not want...", as if that some how absolved them of

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the fact that only moments ago, they plugged Bart in the back with a Colt .45.

The closing of that chapter strikes me this morning....surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life...as I read that I wondered "Do they follow me?" Is there a wake of goodness that follows wherever I go? I seem to leave a path of destruction and misunderstanding. A little further investigation shows that word "follow" to be better translated as "doggedly pursue...chase after...".

That changes things. I...you...everyone on the planet...we're pursued by love. Through our experiences and social mishaps, over our own objections and under our defenses, Love Personified doggedly pursues. Offering every opportunity to receive Love, we often keep it at arms' distance...partially out of fear, partially out of lack of willingness to surrender wholly to another - even when that Other is Love.

If anyone sees Eddie Van Halen, tell him that this is why this must be love.

03.31.04

some of the stuff i think

light as right

Okay, go ahead and read this, but understand I'm still forming these thoughts (and as Mike Bickle says in meetings at times, "I reserve the right to repudiate this in five minutes!")

I'm wondering if we haven't missed the boat in framing the battle of the ages as one of good and evil. Don't freak. I have an Apple sticker on my Volvo, but I haven't become a pipe smoking liberal. I believe it is a battle between those two - I believe that ultimate Good and ultimate Evil have been ultimate enemies since before the beginning of time when the enemy gathered his 1/3 of the troops and headed south...I'm just wondering if there's another way to discuss it.

What got me started on this train of thought was hearing people, once cornered by the reality of something they did being outside the bounds of what was supposed to have been none, justify their actions by insisting that, at least in their special circumstances, they were right.

For example: a child is caught writing on the side of the van with a Sharpie (no, this did not happen at our house). When caught, he can tell by his father's reaction that he would have done better to NOT have done this, but he usually can cook up a reason why it was justified. "But Daddy, Jody Mae wrote on her daddy's van!" The point that the father is displeased seems irrelevant to the child

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because, at least in these circumstances, they feel they were right.

The obvious danger here is that most of us can convince ourselves that we're right in nearly any circumstance. We had special circumstances. We were justified in doing what we did. If everyone knew all the information, they'd know we were right.

Of course, we're not always right....but we're always willing to lean on our special circumstances as license to do wrong. Our version of "Right" often means we've found a way to explain doing wrong.

I'm flipping through Psalms this morning, doing a word search/study on 'right'. I'm finding a lot of verses like this one:

Psalm 19:8 The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

It's helping me to gauge my own actions - and to interpret the hand of God in my life - when I start from a grid of Him being right in all cases. He may be difficult to understand sometimes, but He's right. I may not agree, but He's right. At the end of the day, He's always right and I'm deciding whether I will be right with him.

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kingdom in reverse

Allow me to paraphrase the Sermon on the Mount.
"Shake well. Stir up. Turn upside-down if need be."

Judging by the Sermon on the Mount, those words must have been said, because the first seven lines in that monologue are enough to cause trouble wherever they're practiced.

In the time it takes for most preachers to get halfway into their witty introduction, Jesus manages to extoll the virtues of a poor spirit, declare the mournful comforted, flip roles between the meek and the mighty, announce that those who crave the knowledge of God will get their fill, insist that the way to receive mercy is to show it, affirm innocence, honor those who pursue peace, and reveal that the millions who would be persecuted on his behalf in coming centuries would become owners in Heaven.

It all reminds me of a thought that haunted me most of last summer...the Kingdom runs entirely backwards and upside down to what we think is normal. The meek make gains. The poor receive. The hungry are fed. It's as if it's run on principles entirely opposite of those by which we normally operate. Hmmm.

I want to operate in that opposite spirit today. It seems that's where all action is.

03.09.04

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showing up

It happens about four mornings a week...about 5:50 AM, as I leave our subdivision for my eight minute commute to the House of Prayer and drive up the hill out of the subdivision, a white Caddy pulls in front of me. Granted, I don't need to do a full bore, both-feet-on-the-brake-pedal stop, but I do need to slow down. Then, I follow the big white Caddy up the hill. The driver's path takes them along my path, so I follow. Slowly. V e r y slowly.

The driver appears to be somewhat in anticipation of something jumping out in front of the car, although at the speed that we're traveling, they could hit a deer and the deer would walk away unscathed - even amused.

While my path is short, the Caddy's path is shorter. After less than a minute of driving, they turn into the parking lot of a Catholic church where others are gathering to go in to 6 AM Mass. While our traditions have their obvious differences, my heart was warmed this morning at the faithfulness of this person...here we both are, awake, showered and dressed, going to take our place on the wall.

Just thinking about that as I drove in this morning, I have become convinced that most able bodied people would be successful beyond their wildest dreams if they were just faithful. it seems like a missing ingredient with so

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many...the value of being where you're supposed to be, and being there with your full senses. It's too easy to slide through life at 70%, especially if you're one of those few whose 70% is better than most of us at 100%.

The words for today: Show up. Amaze the world.

03.03.04

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worry or not

I've been doing a little study on the concept of worry in scripture. I won't go into what got me started...suffice it to say that I have a friend who worries too much about things. Yea. That's the ticket. A friend.

Anyway, all through the Gospels, Jesus plays the same card in response to worry: Don't. Additionally, He gives encouragement as to why we shouldn't worry...that our needs are always provided, that he loves us a father, etc. As often as it arises, one sort of gathers that he might be growing weary about the question, particularly when the worry is attached to so many temporal things.

I ran across a fairly chilling passage in Luke, and was struck that in the midst of the worst, we're still instructed not to worry about our perceived lack of concern on His part.

Luke 21:12-19

"But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends,

some of the stuff i think

and they will put some of you to death. All men will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish. By standing firm you will gain life.

There's something to this not worrying...there's a freedom in relying so intently on the provision of God, whether for finances, relationships, or strength.

It all comes down to this: Do you want to be free?

I say yes.

03.01.04

some of the stuff i think

content v. delivery

I'm having thoughts that run very counter to my training and personal experience. After 36 years of hearing sermons about "making a difference" and preaching them back to the same people, I'm beginning to question of our definition of "making a difference" is the highest calling after all. What if we were called not to world impact but to some sort of transcendent identification?

Don't panic. I'm not about to swap my Levi's for sackcloth or otherwise emulate the desert fathers in the fullest sense. I'm just reading these dangerous pieces of writing...pieces that involve other people like myself who probably never intended on wasting their lives.

Ezekiel had quite a rude intro into ministry. Living among the exiles on the banks of the Kebar River, he had a full-blown vision that would chart the course of his life.

The first part is an incredible otherly-world encounter that Spielberg's Dreamworks could neither dream nor make work.

The second part - chapter 2 and the early part of 3 - takes a decidedly un-visionary-like turn...a call to a message that will be rejected....a call to a man who, in embracing it, knows he's setting himself up for a life-long struggle.

some of the stuff i think

Ezekiel 2:7-10 You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen, for they are rebellious. But you, son of man, listen to what I say to you. Do not rebel like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you."

Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe.

I will confess a certain affinity for effective communication. I like to speak or write and know that people are getting it.

I'm not so sure what my reaction would be if God called me and said "Your main concern is not that they get it...your main concern is that you preach it."

God was so intent with this point regarding Ezekiel that, a few verses later, he went on to tell him that He was going to make Ezekiel's head like the "hardest stone, harder than flint...". How would it feel to know that God was giving you the gift of hardheadedness, because He fully understood what the days ahead would hold?

I'm pondering, this morning...have I made effective communication my ultimate goal? Or have I lifted my eyes from that goal (which in all honesty, can be as much about stroking the ego of the communicator than anything else) for a second and focused on the message that He would have me speak...live or die?

some of the stuff i think

Ezekiel 3:1,2 And he said to me, "Son of Man, eat what is before you. Eat this scroll, then go back and speak to the house of Israel. So I opened my mouth and he gave me the scroll to eat."

The message. It's really what's for dinner.

04.12.04

some of the stuff i think

good to be here

Pardon me while I wax philosophic this morning. I've got a lot on the brain - albeit of a broad range in the quality department, but a lot none the less. I've been reading a few passages and thinking of the essence of man. The question is not "what makes a person tick?" but "Why do they tick at all?"

More often than not, we justify or explain our existence by what we produce: "I am entitled to my .35 acre on earth and the oxygen I consume based on what I make/say/think/do." As of 6:27 AM, I think that's a little whacked.

The universality of the question is astounding - why do I exist? Even while breaking their backs eeking out a physical existence, people are yearning for a hard-wired connection to transcendence. Whether it comes out of the brokenness of defeat or the shallowness of success, everyone ponders, "What was I made for?"

Men conduct all sorts of spiritual experiments trying to sort this out. The painters paint, the poets write, the wheelers deal and the preachers preach - all to varying degrees of satisfaction, but essentially no degree of success. In nearly every case, the essence of their concocted reply is this: I exist because I do.

All fond feelings for participation aside, if it is true that we exist because we do, then our existence hinges

some of the stuff i think

our ability to continue to do so. So long as we paint, write, deal or preach, we live. The first moment that we have no inspiration, POOF, we are no more.

What a dreadful existence - to have to produce (or attempt to do so) every moment we're alive. It would put us all in this great existential sweat shop, chiseling out transcendence by going about our busy-ness. We all become busy-ness man, believing that busy-ness is good. It strikes me as the mantra of the worker bee, puttering out and fro to build the sweet comb at any cost, because if that comb is no longer built, we will no longer be. They are all living on borrowed time, trying to pay off some strange high interest comb loan.

Existence - essential validity - cannot spring from a value of contribution or even participation, because that leaves no room for the existence of those who, by physical handicap or philosophical shallowness, live as spectators. Being by doing is a young man's game, ill equipped to deal with those who cannot or do not do.

Being must hinge...no, be built on....something more universal, more kind, more profound, more available to the marginalized. All must hold being, or those who presume to will dominate those who presume not to. If being is at our core, then it pre-existed. We did not 'do' it, but rather we were overcome by it when we appeared on the scene.

Revelation 4:11

some of the stuff i think

You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things and by your will they were all created and have their being.

Being is not something we do, but rather something done to us. Our passive souls spring into existence at the word of the King of the Universe. As the poets of Athens had said, "In Him we live, and move, and have our being."

More thoughts later. For now, try this: When your co-worker says "good morning", reply "it's good to be here"....and understand for a second what that means.

05.12.04

some of the stuff i think

owning something

Ownership versus possession

I've been contemplating the nuances of those two words most of the day. We talk a lot about 'owning' intangibles - vision, purpose, destiny and the like. It's all good - people have to have a sense that they are a part of the greater scope of things in a movement.

The snag is when healthy ownership turns the subtle corner to possession.

Ownership says "I am responsible".

Possession says "this is mine."

The difference is huge, particularly as newcomers began to buy into the vision. Many can be owners, but only a few - perhaps only one - can possess a movement. When many embrace ownership, things move forward. When they try and possess it, it grinds to a halt.

A small troop of committed, openhanded owners will outdistance a tightfisted army striving for their own personal possession.

06.11.04

some of the stuff i think

a call for media moguls

I want my forty minutes back.

I just spent forty minutes looking at a few Christian media sites.

Wait.

Allow me to rephrase that.

I just wasted forty minutes looking at some Christian media sites. To say I spent it would infer that I somehow received something of value in return. I wasted it - smoked it - threw it out the window.

And what did I get?

I got jack.

In the old days (in the media, the old days means 18 months ago, but in this case it goes back even further...), Christian media was admittedly bad. It was hokey. It was all comb-overs and double-knit suits - great faces for radio, talking to one another. It was a kinder, gentler Larry King...who, if he were kind and gentle, would not be worth watching at all. Get the picture?

The saving grace of the old Christian media was that it acknowledged it's own hokiness. The unspoken thought was "hey, we're doing the best we can with inferior equipment, no budget and arguably no talent."

some of the stuff i think

The New Christian Media is different. It's hip. It's got punch. Panache. Mouse and digital video. It's part MTV, part NIV, mostly DOA. It speaks our generation's language while saying nothing in the process. Here's the biggest problem I see - our current Christian culture is so dramatically awash with cynicism that is not capable of serving any purpose. It's cynical about the old days of Christian media, it's cynical about the faith of our fathers, and it's even cynical about itself.

Nowhere in those pages of cynicism is there room for the power or glory of God, the beauty or mystery of the church, or even a sort of suggestion on how to fix what's wrong. It has become the digital extension of our culture of dissatisfaction. Unable to create from a clear place of the heart, it is hell-bent on expending as much energy as possible towards detaching itself from religion, ironically becoming parasitically religious in it's own right. Feel free to selah on that one for a while.

Of course, in this very rant, I am coming dangerously close to becoming that which angers me. So, in the interest of progress out of this hole, here's what I'm looking for: Young voices - under 30 years of age - who will rise up and write, draw, paint, design, direct or produce quality material that reflects what is right with God loving people, that speaks with a prophetic edge about things to come, and points people to real answers rather than strikes a classic postmodern clueless pose.

It has become hip for our generation to say 'we don't know - who are we to judge?' It is also the spiritual and

some of the stuff i think

intellectual low road. It is imperative that others rise up to say "We do know. We have heard. And this we believe to be true..." It is easily the most relevant message of our day. For God's sake, someone say something.

09.21.04

some of the stuff i think

post-turkey day reflections

Every year at this time, I think of our first Thanksgiving together.

Kelsey and I were married in July of 1989 (she was 12), and at that fall, we were houseparents at a boys home in Williston, North Dakota. We found ourselves at a Thanksgiving Service there at an Assemblies of God Church.

The pastor opened the mic for anyone who wanted to share what they were thankful for, and the first family to the front was one that I knew had been out of work for six months. He had recently found a job and they were on the road back to financial stability, but they had lived half the year in a very difficult position.

At this point, I was just a few months into thinking about how to pay for things - I had literally never lived on my own or thought much about how the food arrived at the table. I went straight from High School and living with my parents to living in a college dorm to marriage, and it was only when we got married that I began to understand what it meant to make ends meet.

Here stood a man who had carried those pressures in an extraordinary way for six months. His family never missed church. He looked for work diligently....and yet nothing had broken open for them until just recently. He stood there and thanked God for all the lessons learned

some of the stuff i think

during this time of difficulty, for growing closer to his wife, and for the help from the community of faith around him. He showed me joy in difficulty - thankfulness in all things. He cried. We cried. And we all were thankful.

Yesterday was a great Thanksgiving day.

After loading up the boys to go downtown with a group of others to feed the homeless, we spent the afternoon at the house with sundry and assorted friends, feasting on turkey and all the trimings. Kelsey, Diane, Cheryl, John, and Costco outdid themselves.

It made me want to fully enter into the spirit of the day and wander out into the backyard blasting musket balls at venison and shouting pilgrimy things like "I beseech thee!" and "Thine fancy hatband showeth you to be a liberal!" Instead, I ate....played Scrabble with Jackson....and was very, very thankful.

11.26.04

some of the stuff i think

a conversion of sorts

I, Randy Bohlender, am now a liberal.

That seems funny to write...and probably just as funny to read. Liberal is something I've never thought of myself as. I have all the wrong opinions, vote for all the wrong candidates, and since the Volvo died, I don't even drive a liberal's car.

Granted, I use a Mac, but that doesn't make me liberal...just smart.

Here's what shifted for me. I was reading in Isaiah this afternoon and ran across this jewel: *But the noble man makes noble plans, and by noble deeds he stands* (Isaiah 32:8).

The Holman Christian Standard Bible phrases it this way: But a noble person plans noble things; he stands up for noble causes.

One commentary translates the word 'noble' as 'liberal', and goes on to say "One that is truly liberal, and deserves the honour of being called so, makes it his business to do good to every body according as his sphere is. He devises liberal things. Charity must be directed by wisdom, and liberal things done prudently and with device, that the good intention of them may be answered, that it may not be charity misplaced. The liberal man, when he has done all the liberal things that are in his

some of the stuff i think

own power, devises liberal things for others to do according to their power, and puts them upon doing them." I have decided that based on that, I am liberal, or at least want to be.

I want to be liberal regarding the poor.

I want them to live in such abundance that they receive the joy of generosity. It is the condescension and humanistic pity of those that claim to be their keepers that keeps the poor in a welfare state. I want them to have much...so much that they don't need, and have enough to give away.

I want to be liberal regarding the unborn.

I insist they have the same chance at life that I have. Yes, I believe in clean air and pure water - but I believe it even for those who haven't made the very short trip down the birth canal. I believe their cause is noble.

I want to be liberal in my relationship with God.

I want to experience Him fully, and be experienced by Him. I want Him to know me as much as I want to know Him...and then I want you to have the same experience - not because I'm superior to you, but because it IS the experience a lifetime is given for.

So there you have it. I'm a liberal at heart. Maybe you are too. Man, I've gotta get some bumper stickers.

some of the stuff i think

to be the dad

It's 6:07 on Christmas morning, and it is very, very good to be the Dad. Here are few thoughts that are uniquely Dadish at this point:

They don't know that I can hear them.

Jackson and Grayson have bivouacked in Jackson's room until they think that it's ok to wake us up and open presents. I hear them talking quietly, playing with a metal puzzle they found in their Christmas stocking last night (we open those Christmas eve) and wishing that Zion would wake up and settle this dilemma once and for all.

They don't know that we were up way late last night.

It took the boys forever to go to sleep....I chalk it up to one part excitement, two parts overdose on Christmas cookies, but they were wonderfully polite and cute about it. Kels and I were up later than we needed to be, picking up the living room and kitchen and just enjoying being in one another's presence. She is more beautiful, more gracious and more wonderful than she was the first Christmas we spent together back in 1988.

The don't know that Jesus was right.

It is better to give than to receive. We've known this as fact for a long time, but we're learning it as experience.

some of the stuff i think

To give away - without waiting for excessive resources that would make the giving pointless - is a way of life we want to display. Christmas morning with our boys is that on a micro level; we want to live it out on a macro level with those God brings our way.

The don't know what's under the tree.

There's a good pile there, including the one thing they have consistently asked about since, oh...July. Since deciding that we're moving, each time it's been mentioned, it's been predicated with "I know we're not going to get this, but...". Nevertheless, out there in a big box, behind the recliner, is a basketball goal, pole and base.

Most of all, they couldn't possible know how good it is to be the dad.

12.25.04

some of the stuff i think

something to prove

I had breakfast with E.W. Kenyon this morning. I know, I know...quite the feat, what with him being quite dead for some time now. Let me clarify – I had breakfast with him. He didn't have breakfast with me.

I've been reading one of his irritating little books. I'm four or five days into it and have reached page twenty seven...and I'm a fast reader. My problem with Kenyon is he makes me mad. I'm not quite sure how he looked decades into the future to point out my every little fault, but he did, and these twenty seven pages have poked and prodded me like little I've read or heard in years. I keep going back to reread portions, hoping Kenyon has changed his mind. So far, no luck.

The particularly irritating portion of today's irritating reading of this irritating book says this:

“Men may not understand you. They may think you are unwise. But you live this love life. You are taking Jesus' place, acting as Jesus would act. You are the one that loves as Jesus loved, and you are not deluding yourself now; for in John 8:12, Jesus said “I am the light of the world. He that followeth me (or practices what I teach)...shall have the light of live. You are going to prove to the world that you have the light.”

It's that last little sentence that really tweaks me. I like to live as if I have nothing to prove – I have little

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genuine regard for people's approval. In some cases, it's a blessing, because I have less difficulty charting my own course than I might if I were concerned about the thoughts of others. However, just as often as it's a blessing...it's a curse. In acting as if I have nothing to prove, I've shown my arrogance more often than not.

I claim to be a child of God, although if you were to follow me around, you might have a difficult time detecting it.

Obviously, I have everything to prove.

To live in the light is to be under the microscope...and that's the way it should be. Viewed with anything other than close scrutiny, we all cut corners.

02.10.05

some of the stuff i think

an agnostic's thoughts

If there is a god....

To be truthful, that's not exactly what she wrote. Her precise words were "If there is a god, or some form of higher power....". but when I read it, I knew exactly what she meant.

For all of her artsy, adopted bohemian ways, she was – at least at her core – a Midwestern girl with Midwestern sensibility and a rudimentary understanding of how things worked based in the knowledge that corn did not just grow in rows naturally. Someone had to put it there. The question – regarding the corn rows or the interplanetary balance of gravity and inertia – remained the same. Who?

"If there is a god, or some form of higher power...."

It might seem like innocuous wondering, but in reality, herein lay her dilemma. If there was a higher power, then He was real, no matter if you called Him God of the Universe or the Universe itself.

In the past, He'd gone so far as to refer to himself as obliquely as "I Am". Surely a God that vague would not be offended at a newbie getting His name wrong. She was not overly worried about getting His name right. She was tremendously concerned with getting her stuff right.

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“If there is a god, or some form of higher power....”

She then went on to hypothesize how this or that would be different based on that initial variable – the existence of all she had doubted for so long. Surely, based on her precise calculations, on her experiences, on her fears and doubts and storm filled relationships, He didn't exist, or if He existed, surely He didn't care.

But what if He did. What if He did exist? If He existed....*surely He cared.*

Those who cared before had been far and few in between. They were there, to be sure – bright spots on a dark timeline - but they weren't always there. What was always there was the nagging pain. Who was always there were the stone throwers, ridiculers, nay-sayers and tongue-waggers. They varied in degree of intensity, but they never really went away.

“If there is a god, or some form of higher power....”

She knew she wasn't the first to ask, nor was it the first time she'd asked. If He's real, He must be asked it a million times a day. If He's not real, the questions probably collect in the dead question file somewhere in the great beyond, she mused, filed between “Tree falls in uninhabited forest” and the chicken or the egg conundrum. Everyone has asked it at some point....but she'd met a few over the years who claimed to have gotten a response. It made her wonder.

“If there really is a god...”.

It's a fascinating question – one at least as intriguing in the asking as the answering. For most people, the answer is a relief. With the answer comes finality. If He is as they say He is, then all sorts of behavior and attitudes and hurts are open for review. If He isn't – isn't how they say He is, or isn't at all – then none of our behaviors, attitudes or hurts are open for review...but neither are anyone else's. Their selfish actions are as valid as her inner pain, and who's to say they're wrong? Her? On what authority? His? For the broken and disenfranchised, the answer to the question begs to be yes.

Authority is beckoned from the difficult portions of our lives. If there is no Authority, then there is no justice, and all that is done to us is fair. She knew enough to know this could not be how life was meant to be lived – every man or woman for him or herself, to the victors go the spoils, and let the losers in life be happy in their place, because all was fair in love and war and there wasn't much else to think about.

She could not accept this unilateral coexistence of hurters and hurting. There must be some right somewhere – if not in a man's laws, than surly on his heart. Surely those who had persecuted her over the years knew in their innermost being that it was wrong. After all, whether immediately or after the fact, she had become very good at recognizing the wrongs she so easily generated for others if she was not careful, and she did not think it okay in her life either.

some of the stuff i think

Life and living cried out for justice, so it must exist. Didn't the transcendence of the desire give it a credence all it's own? No one doubted thirst or hunger – surely justice ranks near those in the list of things longed for. Life had to be more than equal choices. It had to be choices and consequences...and, of course, that would require Someone to handle the administration of it all.

She reflected on her pain-givers over a chipped coffee mug. No, their selfishness, as natural as it came, wasn't not to be equated with the pain it caused her....with the blood it had drawn from the surface of her soul. They had caused it, and she lived with the effects. "If there is a God...." Surely He had something loud and emphatic to say about all this.

If there really is a God, then there really is an authority.

This ought to be the most comforting or most frightening thought a human mind could conjure. There really is a higher power.

Someone for them to answer to. Someone to make it all right, regardless of who screwed it all up. Someone to avenge his elect.

She wondered for a moment if the election was over or not. She was pondering a write-in campaign for herself.

She'd doubted Him for a long time - perhaps never really believed at all – but the last few trips around the

some of the stuff i think

sun, her rueful doubt had set like concrete in the forms of her experiences.

To believe would be much harder than doubting, because doubting had become second nature. By this time, she had built up serious equity in her doubt.

To let it go would surely be to suffer loss in her accounts labeled 'reason' and 'radical self reliance'. At the same time, she knew that keeping those accounts as full as she did was never all that satisfying for her.

It was as if her natural longing was outpacing her natural mind.

So she said it. She said it in jest, in a perky little electronic missive, but she said it nevertheless...and like most of the rest of us, she didn't fully realize the weight of her words. It was the question that poked a hole in the levee of all she thought she thought...the one that held all she wondered at bay.

Maybe she wasn't all that self-sufficient.

Maybe those around her were not sufficient at all.

Maybe she asked if He was real because secretly, behind the dark glasses and bright persona, she was praying that He would hear her questions and come racing forward to defend both of them against the onslaught of her doubts.

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To begin a statement with “*if there is...*” is tantamount to hoping it’s true...because short of hoping it’s true, there’s very little reason to say it at all.

If there is a God, anyway.

I think she’s stumbled onto the original prayer.

6.15.05

some of the stuff i think

break in reported; one dead

The breaking in of God is spoken of a lot in the circles I run in (pun intended...). It refers to those times of supernatural visitation - a tangible sense of the presence of God. We believe that in those times, when the metaphysical and spiritual veils are torn, that everything changes and we enter into a glorious otherworld where good is easy and evil is impossible.

I think we're whacked.

To clarify, I am totally contending for the breaking in of God. I believe in it and feel like I've even seen glimpses of it, though never a full-face view. I also believe it's coming. I just think we underestimate our potential to do wrong when right is directly in front of us.

Think about the book of Acts. I hear a lot about people wanting Acts Christianity, and I agree with them - the authenticity, the simplicity, the power of God manifesting itself in unimaginable ways - but we forget that even within that incredible time, church members not unlike ourselves struggled with their own character. In the face of a great outpouring of God, you can still manage to be a cheat and a liar.

Acts 5 / the message

But a man named Ananias - his wife, Sapphira, conniving in this with him - sold a piece of land, secretly kept part of the price for himself, and then

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brought the rest to the apostles and made an offering of it.

Peter said, "Ananias, how did Satan get you to lie to the Holy Spirit and secretly keep back part of the price of the field? Before you sold it, it was all yours, and after you sold it, the money was yours to do with as you wished. So what got into you to pull a trick like this? You didn't lie to men but to God."

Ananias, when he heard those words, fell down dead. That put the fear of God into everyone who heard of it. The younger men went right to work and wrapped him up, then carried him out and buried him.

Not more than three hours later, his wife, knowing nothing of what had happened, came in. Peter said, "Tell me, were you given this price for your field?"

"Yes," she said, "that price."

Peter responded, "What's going on here that you connived to conspire against the Spirit of the Master? The men who buried your husband are at the door, and you're next."

No sooner were the words out of his mouth than she also fell down, dead. When the young men returned they found her body. They carried her out and buried her beside her husband. By this time the whole church and, in fact, everyone who heard of

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these things had a healthy respect for God. They knew God was not to be trifled with.

Here's the take-away. We can contend for God's presence, and it does change things...but amazingly enough, it doesn't change our character.

Three chapters before this marks the Day of Pentecost. Peter preaches and 3000 people come to know Jesus.

Two chapters before, we see the healing of a man who had been crippled from birth.

The chapter before, Peter and John preach boldly before the Sanhedrin and some how are released rather than persecuted further.

This is not a humdrum church week - this is major interaction with the Holy One on a daily basis. The God factor is high. Unfortunately, the character factor didn't match it, and lack of character trumps revival.

We can ask God to come, but we can develop our character today. At least then when He does come, we don't pull an Ananias.

6.20.05

some of the stuff i think

theology: a musical

My early attempts at math were innocuous enough.

- Two plus two.
- Ninety degree angle.
- 3.14
- Numerator over denominator.

This last one was to be indelibly marked on my brain by a teacher who reminded us that we lived in North Dakota.

Numerator Denominator.

North Dakota.

Numerator Denominator.

Nearly thirty years later I remember it vividly and wonder how the kids from South Carolina ever figured out Numerator Denominator. Perhaps their statehood served them in other math tricks, I guess.

To begin with, math was entirely practical. It helped one discover how many cupcakes Sally could give each of her two friends if her mother made a pan of six. It served to show us how much candy a boy could buy if he had a dollar and seventy two cents and candy bars were thirty five cents each.

Later, math became more elusive, Just when we thought we had numbers mastered, they introduced X. X was the mathematical equivalent of the Bermuda Triangle.

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Answers entered X and were never seen again, at least on the worksheet in front of you. X had a thousand faces. It was Elvis. Young X. Army X. Fat X.

Forget Elvis – X was Sybil. X=MPS. I never quite knew which X I were dealing with, and knowing it was destined to change, I was never motivated to figure it out.

Interestingly enough, I didn't start out to be a mathematician. I started out to be a musician and artist. At three I was singing in the pew next to my mother. Song #241 in the red-backed hymnal. Short little songs the song leader called choruses. The monthly birthday song for those who had celebrated a birthday in that month. We sang'm all.

When the good part of the service (the music) was finished and the boring part (the preaching) began, I'd do a quick 180, kneel on the floor and place my coloring book on the seat of the oak pew. Music, then art.

During the preaching, I gave life to purple horses wearing red saddles and led by children with green complexions. Let the other poor sops listen to the ranting fellow in the pulpit. I was in church. I had things to create. When the preaching was finished, my mother would tap my back. I'd spin around and stand up for the closing song. No matter how long the preacher preached, at least we ended on an up note.

On a good Sunday, I walked out with four or five new pieces of art – visual representations of what was within. The rest of the congregation had a list of three keys to a

successful life written on the back of their church bulletin. Often these keys wouldn't fit a single lock in their heart, but they had dutifully written them down, presumably for a friend.

Somewhere along the line, that all changed., As demotivated as I was to keep up with the many faces of X, I had to admit I was born into a mathematical world. Logic said that if there were questions in life, there were answers. Answers were there to be figured out in a concrete manner.

By twenty, I was sure I could master the problems of life, probably before lunchtime, if I just figured out the right equation. Poverty was answered by a sufficient minimum wage. Family squabbles could be addressed with correct apportioning of time – family unity through simple division. Once I fixed the world's problems using my math skills, I moved on to my own.

Apparently I'd never heard the airline attendant encourage me to place my own mask over my mouth before helping those around me.

What I discovered in solving my own problems was that they were not quite so simple as everyone else's. While I could divide and conquer for so many others, when faced with my own issues of insecurity, the numbers just didn't add up. I couldn't figure out who I was with pen and pencil. I couldn't cipher meaning out of loneliness or simplify the fractions that my heart split into when disappointments came. As handy as hard numbers were, they were useless in areas what were important to me.

some of the stuff i think

What I needed for my internal struggles was less in the way of numbers and more in the way of crayons. Certain difficulties were too complex to be placed in columns like numerical soldiers. Some of what I felt needed a spectrum, not a slide rule.

Bible college was a time of fast discovery. I learned new words and their meanings. Words like propitiation and immutability. Numbers didn't work too well in this environment either. The things I felt in my heart towards the things they were teaching me came back to me at night in full motion, vivid color dreams...yet in an academic world that lived in fear of heresy, we were told that theological conundrums had one true answer. One. No fractions, no decimals, and most certainly no color or backbeat, just 1.0. Don't' ask any more questions.

At the risk of being labeled heretical (and thereby thwarting my fast track to pasturing a mega church, as if I hadn't already thwarted that myself a few times), I'm needing a theology with a little more room for color and sound. I've never been able to deduce the right things to say at a funeral, yet I've found them somewhere deep in my heart. When doing weddings, I've tried to add line upon line, precept upon precept, until the bride and groom understood the solemn occasion as simply as one plus one. In the end, all he wants to do is kiss the girl.

Likewise, when discovering God's path for myself, I've found the realm of song to be more beneficial than the realm of 1's and 0's. In reading scripture, I've found more than one passage that meant different things to me at

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different times. The mathematical theologians told me that I had to settle on one interpretation when my heart cried out for three.

Take for a moment Psalm 40. I've been pondering verses 6 – 10 for a couple of days.

Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, "Here I am, I have come—it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart." I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly; I do not seal my lips, as you know, O LORD. I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly.

Reading this through the other day, I was blown away to think that thousands of years ago, God saw fit to cue David to write a passage about me. I felt every nuance of that paragraph was about what God was doing in my heart...that somewhere in the library of heaven, my name was scrawled in a book, and God had checked that book out. I felt called to proclaim righteousness in the great assembly. I felt compelled to speak of His faithfulness of salvation. I vowed to never conceal what God had done for me and share the love with others. You can imagine my reaction when I read the commentaries that indicated – at least according to mathematical theology – that I was whacked in the head.

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Not only did they consider me whacked, they were pretty much split in their own opinions, leading one to believe that half of them were whacked as well.

Some commentaries insisted this passage although written by David's hand, was written from Christ's perspective....and I can certainly read it that way.

Others say that it was about David himself. I can buy that too.

Oddly enough, none of the commentaries list my name as one of the possible subjects. By omission, they seem to argue that it could be about either Christ or David, but it is most certainly not about Randy Bohlender.

Here's where mathematical theology bites, in my opinion. I don't see the fulfillment of this passage as an equation; I see it as a musical chord.

I grew up on chords. My father had an unusual affliction that made it impossible for him to drive long distances in the car without singing. He could control it for ten miles or so, but any drive longer than that and he would break into song. Often my mother would join him, albeit in a quieter voice. I would chime in from the back seat and after a verse or so we'd settle into a tight three part harmony. There, on the back roads of North Dakota, "What a Day That Will Be" never sounded so righteous as when sung in a long, red 1977 Ford LTD Coupe.

Pondering the "Jesus, David or Me?" conundrum that I was faced with by Psalm 40 and mathematical theology, I

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began to think about the concept of a chord. In a chord, with several tones melding into one glorious sound, which note was right? Certainly there was a melody note – a primary note that the chord was built around, but were not the other two notes important for the chord to be intact?

Could it be that rather than randomly rejecting two of the three interpretations, I should be embracing all three? An even wilder thought came to me: What if, in the symphony of eternity, I was made to be a note in this chord? What if, here and now, I was getting a nod from the conductor? Could it be that failing to play my note would make this chord to be less than as written?

There must be room in our thinking for an artistic theology. Call it creative if you like – or heretical if you must. All I know is that the hard and fast answers I've been forced to calculate often leave me wondering more than knowing.

Go ahead and exegete your passages, decipher your Greek, parse your participles and preach your sermons. I'm going to turn around in the pew and color.

Tap me when it's time to sing.

06.26.05

some of the stuff i think

the panhistoricity of jesus

This morning I settled on John 1:1-5 while the prophetic singers layered a melody and lyrics around the same passage. Good stuff.

I've always loved the Gospel of John. It's my favorite of the four Gospels.

I'm not so sure how they'd feel about me having a favorite - it sort of feels like Apostolic Star Search (an idea I'm almost reluctant to blog, because surely high level executives at the major Christian media outlets read this blog daily and I promise you someone will produce the show...).

Anyway, John cuts to the chase. Twenty one chapters of clipped, Dragnet style scripture. "Just the theology, ma'am." His opening rolls like poetry.

...In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

John boils it down and pulls this out of the pot: Jesus existed at creation. He existed pre-creation. He was an active partner in the process. Later, the writer of Hebrew's

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tips his hat to the idea in describing Jesus as "through whom He made the universe." This is not a new idea. In Genesis 1, God says "Let us make man in our image...". Either Jesus is there or God is dealing with some serious MPS.

Humanism would call Jesus a good teacher, a man above other man, but surely nothing more than a man. Most of postmodernism (which in the vast majority of cases is humanism with incense and candles) would lop their favorite quotes of Him next to those of Buddha and Bud Melman. John draws a line and says "Nope. This man - as you perceive Him - is much more than the box you'd cram Him into.

Jesus is creator. Jesus is redeemer. He is then, now, later, and off the time line in both directions. Jesus is panhistoric.

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turn this ship around

I am convinced that a vast majority of western churches are anchored in the past when they should be anchored in the future. Whether conservative and traditional or contemporary and spontaneous, they usually are what they are because of something they used to be.

Churches honor and replay deep traditions of 'the way we've always done it' or throw them aside with the idea "we're never going to do THAT...".

Either way, the church becomes history-centric. It is defined - or redefined - by what was rather than what will be. I have met some of the most creative, exciting, well-meaning young pastors who - despite their insistence that they are doing something new - are simply operating out of reactionary slavery to what we grew up with.

This is reflected especially in how we think about revival and renewal. Both words conjure up the revisiting of a point in history. "If only we had meetings like those of the healing revivals...like those of the XYZ movement"fill in your own point of reference.

Sometimes we forget that those movements, while being powerful, also contained elements that we would never want to revisit. You want early 1900's Pentecostalism? Great. Are you going to take the racism that came along with it? You want first century

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Christianity? Good luck explaining the immorality of some of the churches. In reality,

I'm convinced that what we call revival and renewal - and in our terms give nod to the past - are really imperfect glimpses of the perfection of the kingdom. They are snippets of the life to come, not the life gone by. It goes to figure that if God breaks into our time and space, He'd come from the point on the timeline of what He is preparing to do, not where He's been. God visits from the future, not the past.

Our friend Kevin Rains has a great name for his blog - The Kedge / anchoring forward. There is a nautical practice of launching an anchor out in the direction that you want to go and holding on for dear life - even pulling the rope, moving closer to that goal despite the ravages of the sea. That's the kind of faith I want - a faith anchored forward and straining in anticipation.

If a church body can learn to anchor forward - put it's hope in what will be rather than reacting to what was - it accomplishes some cool things.

Anchoring forward speaks to destiny and breeds anticipation. If God really has a plan for His people, then surely He yearns to reveal it....and we can be among those He shares it with.

It honors the past without bowing to it. I am grateful for the grand traditions of the church, but I'm not ready to give the historical church a free pass. History must be examined and reflected accurately.

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It structures a world view that really is global and timeless. We are horribly narrow minded in our view of church. If all the books you're reading have to do with how to get your church past the 200 barrier (or 500 barrier, or 1000 barrier...there's a book for you out there!), then my guess is your view of the church is pretty geographically small and narrow in time as well. Anchoring forward has a sense of the great believing rivers of history merging into one massive waterway. It's not about your little whirlpool.

It levels the playing field. Anchoring forward allows for the use of experience, but beyond a certain point, we're all on new ground. None of us have gone this way before. Young or old, we're at the same place in what God is doing now.

If you're still with me (I think a vast majority are probably gone by now and we can talk amongst ourselves), a church like this has a few unique characteristics.

A prophetic voice.

At some point, someone's got to say "I believe this is what God is saying....". The church's massive failure following Sept 11, 2001 simply reinforces how history-centered we are. Most churches looked back to WW2 models on how to comfort people. Very few looked forward with a sense of what God might be saying through all of it.

A guileless people

some of the stuff i think

Face it - do church facing forward and the ball is going to hit you in the face once in a while. In those times, it's good to be with people with an extraordinary measure of grace.

A spiritual mobility

I'm not talking about theological wishy washyness, but a sense of nomadicy among the people. We are going somewhere together....it may be tiring and a little hectic, but thank God we're moving....

So, my guess is the fifty million people in church on Sunday AM were, for the most part, facing backwards. Turn around folks. The road is the other way.

06.26.05

some of the stuff i think

being the truth

I'm not sure how we got on their mailing list, but we returned to Kansas City to find a stack of Parents Magazine back issues waiting for us. Not having a lot of free reading time, they have been used as coasters the last day or two. I am beginning to think it is their higher purpose.

This morning, I had a few minutes while hoarking down a bagel so I paged through a copy. First of all, it's difficult to comprehend parenting from a perspective that doesn't make space for God. As adorable as they are, children are the preeminent teachers of the doctrine of original sin. Likewise, it's tough to parent without exploring the idea of grace...for the child and the parent.

I ran into one feature that left my speechless...a one page layout pointing out how parents say one thing and do another. It spoke of the tendency for parents to tell kids to share while the parent was hogging the remote control. It referred to managing your child's anger while blowing up at your spouse. Example after example was offered...but absolutely no resolve to the issue. I literally searched the magazine thinking "surely this is continued on page whatever...". Nope. No answers, just the assumption that all parents are essentially highly developed liars.

Contrast that with my reading this morning in John 3. Verse 21 says... *"But whoever lives by the truth comes*

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into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God." (NIV).

The New American Standard says "*But he who practices the truth comes to the Light...'*

I think I like the New King James best - "*But he who does the truth.*"

Truth is more than an abstract concept to be pursued...it is a reality to be exemplified. It is a deed to be done. When you live lives congruent with what you espouse, you do the truth.

Please ignore the coasters at the Casa de la Bohlender. They are headed to the curb on Friday.

09.20.05

some of the stuff i think

refathering

I've been reading that passage in John where Nicodemus creeps near the campfire of Jesus to ask a few clarifying questions. You've got to wonder what he must have been thinking...."This Rabbi seems to be a good guy. Perhaps we're just not communicating. Maybe if I can grab a few minutes with him I can help him hone his message..." He pays Jesus a few compliments, trying to grease the skids of communication...that seems to work well with the other Rabbis. Silly Rabbi. Tricks are for kids...

The first thing out of Jesus' mouth should have clued Nicodemus in - this was going to get harder, not easier.

I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.

I've been rolling that phrase around for the past hour. Born again. Has anything Jesus said stirred up as much disdain? Jimmy Carter took a lot of flak for being our born again president (when his real problem was that he was our misguided, micromanaging president). We've all heard believers being described as Bible thumping born againers....as opposed to those nice mainline folks who knew God and knew their place at the same time.

I dug into those words born again and found something interesting - and perhaps the reason for the disdain.

some of the stuff i think

The word *born* carries a unique meaning in the Greek language. We think of physical birth, but the Greek language carries a connotation of fatherhood. You are born of your father. It shares a root with the word father. The same root in born again surfaces in 1 Corinthians 4:15, '...I became your father through the gospel'.

Our idea of being born - limited to the act of birth - puts the onus on us when it comes to rebirth. There's truth in that - partial truth. The other part of being born again is to be refathered.

What would it mean for you to be refathered?

What would a chance at a new father mean for you? What sort of shortcomings in your own dad could be made up by refathering by God? Don't fail to consider all of the ramifications - adoption is a wonderful thing, but to be refathered means there's a new sheriff in town. A perfect dad won't stand for some of the things your old pushover pop would. He's going to hold you accountable...but he's going to love you perfectly.

Spend some time today embracing your new father. Listening to His dreams for you. Submitting to His discipline. Surrendering to His leadership. Relishing your new role as an adopted son or daughter.

09.14.05

when to build a whip

I spent some time in John 2 this evening and found myself grinning at Jesus. We have simplified him so, primarily to make our Vacation Bible School songs rhyme and our stories to end in fifteen minutes...but this is one complex man. I've always had an impression of him seeing the money changers in the temple and temporarily loosing it, yelling, upending the tables, etc. To me, if it were a crime, he could have pleaded temporary insanity...except that the whole thing was calculated.

John 2:15 tips us off. "So he made a whip out of cords....". He didn't go postal – he took a few minutes and prepared a tool to make the maximum impression. I can imagine the disciples asking him "What are you doing with those cords?!?"

"You'll see, Simon Peter. Here. Hold my keys for a second...." Scripture says that it was much later when the disciples put two and two together, remembering the scripture from Psalm 69:9 that promised "Zeal for my house will consume me."

My theory is that Jesus did this as an object lesson, knowing they'd connect the dots later – much later. He knew exactly what he was doing and took his sweet time in doing it.

Once it was over, the enraged religious leaders demanded a sign to prove his authority. Jesus – the one

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that all the great thinkers of the world tell us is such a good teacher, answered in the most cryptic way possible. “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it again.”

Of course, they misunderstood. He knew they would. But he also knew that his disciples would ‘get it’, albeit much later, when he rose from the dead after three days.

This great teacher – this complex man – was continually seeding the minds of his followers with a seeds of understanding that wouldn’t fully bloom until months and even years later. Even when he was confusing most people, he was teaching them. While most of us will do anything to be understood hear and now, He invested his effort in maximum impact toward the purpose of launching a revolution in the spirit of man. He was willing to be misunderstood now if it meant being respected and honored later. He personified – even deified – delayed gratification.

This is not an ordinary man. I must know him better.

09.12.05

leaving the sword at home

The olive trees cast strange shadows among them. More than one disciple glanced around, wondering what they were doing out here.

Jesus had been acting strangely the past few days, praying lengthy prayers that referred to His no longer being among them. The disciples had been to this grove of trees before - they often met here - but the darkness and Jesus' increasingly cryptic behavior made this time different.

Peter was not one to be taken by surprise. He knew the political pressures were mounting and that among the Sanhedrin; there was no shortage of those who would want harm to come to them.

When he gathered his things to go to the olive grove, he hesitated for a moment...Should he, or shouldn't he? Deciding that preparation better than being caught unprepared, he strapped a sword on his side and flipped his flowing cloak over its leather wrapped handle. If everything went as planned, he would not need it and no one would ever know he brought it.

Things did not go as planned.

There were torches...A crowd...Men on horseback and others on foot. In the confusion surrounding the invasion of their prayer meeting, it was obvious that the

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men had come to do harm. Peter made a move towards plan B.

John 18:10,11 Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his ear. (The servant's name was Malchus). Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"

In a moment, Peter was exposed. He had a contingency plan. If Jesus couldn't watch out for them, then he would take matters into his own hands. The sting to his ego was not unlike the sting he'd just caused Malchus.

In moments, Jesus healed Malchus. In time, he healed Peter too...But not until Peter had wandered even further away in spirit, denying the Lord three times.

In retrospect, Peter regretted bringing the sword along. He hated that he felt he always needed a contingency plan. He ached for the ability to just trust Jesus in the face of danger.

If you're holding on to a contingency plan...an idea tucked under your cloak in case the soldiers invade your prayer meeting, put your sword away this morning. Despite all circumstantial evidence, He has a plan and is entirely in control.

I

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explaining the arrows in your back

The Jesus that most of the world believes in - a mild mannered 'good man' somewhere between Gandhi and Gilligan - is not the Jesus you find in the Gospels. He had this penchant for stirring things up. He tipped tables over. He had a way of poking religiosity in the eye with a sharp stick. Read the Gospels and you come away with a better understanding of the reason they were constantly trying to kill Him. He was messing with their way of life.

All that said, there are other characters in the Gospels who become targets and you have to go "HUH?!?!".

Example: Lazarus.

This is the guy who, after having been dead four days, is issued a Divine Recall. He hops out of the tomb, his sisters unwrap the strips of cloth that bound him for burial, and he goes back to his life, following Jesus, making a living, paying the mortgage, etc.

I wonder if he had any idea what being resurrected would cost him?

John 12:9,10 Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well....

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I can almost hear the Pharisees. (insert Monty Python voice here) "Lazarus? Lazarus Nope! Not quite dead yet!".

Why did they come after Lazarus? One would think they would shrug their shoulders and just decide he was the luckiest guy on the planet. Live and let live a little longer. Instead, they plot to kill him. What did they have to gain? He did no miracles. We have no record of him preaching. He was a mild mannered guy who lived with his sisters. But he had a story. Scripture goes on to say that many people were going over to Jesus based on the story of Lazarus' resurrection. His very experience in God was delivering damage to the kingdom of darkness. By walking and talking, he was taking ground in the spirit.

Anyone with a redemptive story in God is a target. The Dark One comes after them with a vengeance, knowing that if they can destroy the redemptive story, they can discredit the Redeemer. He knows that at the end of the day, the overcomers will have done so by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony.

If you're under attack and wondering why...it just might be because of the potential you hold to tell your story and offer hope for others to change. Tell your story.. It drives the enemy crazy.

10.31.05

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now and forever

In reading John this morning, I began to wonder what it must have been like for Jesus to have operated within the confines of time. Imagine how he must have felt speaking to the disciples and releasing the very oracles of God that had been true since far beyond the spectrum of human existence in both directions. What he said, he prophesied into the future...at the same time laying the truth on what we would call the past. He who always was, saying things that always were, to people who think that reality exists only in the now.

For instance, in John 10, He tells the parable of the sheep fold - with Himself playing a myriad of characters ("I am the shepherd. I am the gate.") I always imagine Peter and James talking later - "I can't remember now, is He the shepherd or the gate? And who's the hinge?. In that setting, describing His love for the human race, He speaks what was always true yet at this point incomprehensible to his followers:

John 10:16 *"I have other sheep , which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd.*

"Other sheep?" John no doubt wondered. Judas rolled his eyes. He was already getting fed up. Luke rubbed his goatee and nodded, pretending to understand. In their hearts, they had no clue what he was talking about. Other sheep not of this fold? Aliens? What?

some of the stuff i think

He was speaking of you and I - Gentiles who, even then - long before Peter's vision - were close to the heart of God and a part of His grand plan for the world. Even then...He had other sheep on His mind and heart. How strange it must have been for Him to speak what had always been true and have it received as if He just thought of it that moment.

We are guilty of the sin of superimposing the grid of time upon the grand story of Jesus. In making it about the now and then, we lose the mystery of it being about now and forever. For forever He has loved us. Forever He has known us. Even if we're just meeting Him now.

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Cashcatology

Jesus is not coming back to make everything ok.

Be all right, be all right, everything's going to be all right.

Ask unbelievers what happens at the end of time and they give you a blank stare. Too consumed with trying to figure out what's happening right now, they haven't given much thought to any sort of end of the age. Ask a lot of believers the same question and they come back with a large degree of confidence, but nothing much more concrete...their view of the end involves strange lion and sheep displays at some zoo, a large number of clouds and more harp music than anyone cares to hear. (Why the harp? Any chance angelic beings play Stratocasters?) Their unconvincing view of the end is one of Jesus returning to make everything ok. Calm. Peaceful. Restful. The entire universe takes a shot of transcendent morphine and we're happy, happy, happy all the day. Sing the 1st, 2nd and 4th verses and so on.

This is lame.

I've been pouring over eschatology notes and scripture itself, and I'm coming to the understanding that Jesus is not coming back to make everything ok as I have been quick to assume. Don't be alarmed - I'm not turning amillennialist...He most definitely is coming back, but not as some sort of opium with a strange copacetic side effect on

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the human race. He is coming back to make all things right...and the nature of making things right involves dealing with things (and people) who are wrong. As glorious as His return will be for those in right covenant with Him, it will be terrible for those who are not.

Christian music of our day has the end of the age pictured as a time when every poor orphan in India who we helped feed will approach us to say "Thank you...for giving to the Lord...", because we're convinced that even Heaven is somehow about us. This morning, I've got more faith in the lyrics of Johnny Cash's "The Man Comes Around."

*There's a Man going around taking names
and He decides who to free and who to blame
everybody won't be treated quite the same
there will be a golden ladder reaching down
When the Man comes around
The hairs on your arm will stand up
at the terror in each sip and each sup
will you partake of that last offered cup
or disappear into the potter's ground
When the Man comes around*

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The second line...everybody won't be treated just the same...grates against our western sensibilities and feelings of fairness. In reality, we're not driven by fairness; we're driven by unwillingness to accept that any will 'disappear into the potter's ground'. Surely He'll figure out a way to subvert His own word...to somehow overlook sin when He's paid such a high price that we might live righteously...won't He? In a word: No. He's coming back and He will make things right.

In that day, will you stand unoffended? Or will God being God more than you can accept?

10.17.05

some of the stuff i think

Pinky is the Brain

I've been reading A.W. Pink's *The Attributes of God* this morning. Crammed full of scripture and deep thoughts, I sat reflecting and thinking "Wow - I read a lot further than I expected". Based on the amount of head tilt I was encountering, I figured I'd read twenty pages or so...so I checked.

Four. Four pages. And not really even four complete pages, when considering a chapter heading. More like 3.875 pages. Part of me wishes this book was longer and part of me knows that if it was I'd never finish it because I'd get lost between the covers (the good lost).

In the book, he talks about the vastness and solitariness of God. He references Job 26 and how it describes the scope of God's activity....He spreads out the northern skies over empty spaces...by His power He churned up the sea...by his breath the skies became fair... and then drops the bomb of verse 14:

"And these are but the outer fringe of His works; how faint the wisper of Him! Who then can understand the thunder of His power?"

Yikers. For all we see - weather patterns both pleasant and destructive, the laws of physics, the vastness of creation (including ourselves) - it's just the edge. We think of ourselves as the jewel of all creation...and all we have are a few bare threads of reality hinting at the

some of the stuff i think

tapestry just beyond our grasp. We're peeking at the margins of a book and thinking we personally know the Author. We are a fringe movement....we barely touch His fringe and yet we're undone by what we do see and know.

What's He really like? What's out there? We have a clue, but certainly no more than that...and yet it's enough to turn our lives upside down if we live it out with integrity.

10.11.05

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help a brother out

After this, Jesus went around in Galilee, purposely staying away from Judea because the Jews were there waiting to take his life. But when the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near, Jesus brothers said to him "You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world." For even his own brothers did not believe him.

Therefore, Jesus told them, "The right time for me has not yet come; for you any time is right."

Jesus' relationship with his brothers had to be one of the more awkward connections he had. Once you suspect your brother is divine, it sort of changes things. For instance...you get into a fight over who used the hair gel and blurt out "Who made you God?!?".

Awkward moment.

John 7 touches one of those moments. Brotherly comments that appear at first to be encouraging quickly turn and bite.

"No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world." C'mon, Jesus. You're the one walking on

some of the stuff i think

water. You pulled the wine trick at the wedding. If you're running for office, it's time to appear on Nightline."

The passage goes on to disclose that his own brothers didn't believe him.

Jesus does one of the most brave, difficult things for anyone trapped in human flesh. He does nothing. He refuses to seize position or platform. Goaded to mount the stage for all to see, he refuses. It is the beginning of a lifestyle of delayed gratification - refusing to trade short term fame for long term impact. Even though it might have been a good time to launch a larger public ministry - perhaps even do a mass mailing - he resisted, even going so far as to point out that they had nothing to lose by going public, while He had everything.

"The right time for me has not come. For you, any time is right."

They had nothing to lose. He had everything to gain by waiting. It's the difference between living for the moment and living for the mission. Jesus knew what they did not - that for people without a purpose in life, one day is like any other...but for people of destiny, each day holds a purpose of it's own.

What, specifically, is your today for?

10.11.05

some of the stuff i think

fast. faster. fasting.

Kelsey and I began a ten day fast this morning. We don't jump into these things lightly...usually they are birthed in bewildered conversations where we find ourselves having both been sensing the same thing. This happened to us over the weekend.

For me, it started with a poorly attended garage sale.

We were cleaning out a few things and dumping a few treasures on our unsuspecting neighbors, but there weren't many takers. In the midst of the lack of a crowd, a woman drove up and got out. She was white, in her late 30's and had three children in tow. She was quiet but pleasant and her children were very well mannered. As she looked through our used homeschool book selection, I noted her expensive shoes and handbag. Her glasses gave her a studious look. I remember thinking she seemed very well educated.

Did I mention she was wearing a burqa? Oh yea. That too. Classy shoes, an expensive purse, and a burqa. Without making hasty generalizations, it was safe to assume that she was not born into a muslim family. Somewhere along the line she had converted to Islam. Her two older children were very white, the younger looked to be of middle eastern descent. Here, standing in my driveway, was a human being with a fascinating story...one of a radical change in world view. What

some of the stuff i think

initiated the change? How much of the conversion was related to the marriage? What was her 'before' life like? What was her 'now' like?

I was so struck by the story behind this woman that I found it hard to think about anything else. I began to pray that God would give me a clear word for her - a piece of truth that would strike her heart. Something that would speak to the whatever within her that thought it had found it's answer in Allah. This is the part of the story where it would be great to relate a replaying of the woman at the well story, where I get some dramatic download of information and, upon hearing it, she is gloriously converted and runs off to tell her friends.

That's not quite how it happened. In fact, that's not at all how it happened. In reality, she quietly bought a few books, loaded her children in her minivan and drove off, dressy shoes, expensive handbag, studious glasses, burqa and all. There I stood, conduit for the glorious God of all creation...and I had nothing to say to her.

This is not the reality I signed up for.

Here's the deal...for all of our talk of kindness and relational evangelism and winning people's hearts, it wouldn't have worked in this encounter. This woman was, according to my vast experience in judging people in split seconds ala Malcolm Gladwell, pretty content with her life. Her kids were beautiful. Her van was shiny. Although I'm no judge of burqa quality, it appeared more Ann Taylor than Walmart. Nothing short of an encounter with God's

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power is going to affect her. Or her husband. Or the 5-8 million other muslims in the US.

So...in light of what was needed, what did I do? I made change for a twenty. I had nothing to say to her...no word of knowledge, no paradigm shaking comment. Nothing but fifteen dollars and four or five textbooks. I was given a chance to swing for the bleachers, I didn't even bother to try to bunt. Whoosh! went the ball. Crack! went the catcher's glove. The Pitcher sort of shook his head. I'm going back to the dugout.

So. I'm fasting. I have faith in the message. I believe in the power. I'm not so confident in myself as a conduit of either. I'm more than willing forego the food of the flesh if I can have an encounter that would make this sort of situation turn out differently next time.

10.03.05

some of the stuff i think

verdant

It's been a weird couple of days. I've noticed the people around me getting gradually more irritating. Not specific ones - but all of them, in unison, as if orchestrated to do so. Nevertheless, I plodded on. Then I started getting grouchy. It's understandable, of course, with all these people acting the way they do...but it was wearing on me.

At various intervals over the years I have gone through what I have called a funk. Unless you were a part of our family, you probably wouldn't have noticed. I kept up appearances (or convinced myself that I thought I did) and did my job. It has happened a half dozen times, perhaps more. Depression is too strong of a word - besides, that happens to other people - but definitely a cyclical pattern of less than my best of times. Last night I admitted to Kelsey and myself that I felt I was a few feet down that slippery slope...maybe a few trips down the glacier have given me the insight to see it happening.

There is a world of difference between identifying a weak area and actually fortifying that area against attack. This morning, I found myself reliving a conversation I'd had recently in which I felt that I hadn't been respected. Suddenly the Lord broke in with a question: "Is this person fairly characterized by how you are perceiving their thoughts of you right now?"

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I had to admit that, no, this person could not be fairly characterized by my admittedly flawed perceptions of one event. In fact, what the court calls the preponderance of evidence would weigh heavily on the other side - that this person is supportive of me in the worst of times. They have blessed me time and again, yet I was looking past that to see what I thought I saw. The Lord said "Step back. Live in the blessing."

My struggle is internal, not external. The ubiquitous *they* are not the problem. It is me and how I see things. It is how I feel God feels about me. I found my self reading Song of Solomon, that love song of all the ages, this morning. In language that makes he-men like myself highly uncomfortable to be blogging about, the song records the intimacy of a bride with her lover - the tenderness we are offered in loving Christ.

Chapter 1, verse 16 uses a funny little phrase - referring to the bed of consummation as verdant. Some versions say green. The word has a double meaning - carpeted like a forest, or inexperienced.

I'm going with the second meaning.

God, I'm new at this. I'm not good at loving you or knowing how to be loved. But my heart's cry is to learn.

11.29.05

some of the stuff i think

world's biggest sing along

Romans 8:22 *For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.*

This morning, I ran across this story on CNN.

CNN.com - Iceberg 'sings under pressure' - Nov 24, 2005: "BERLIN, Germany (Reuters) -- Scientists monitoring earth movements in Antarctica believe they have found a singing iceberg. Sound waves from the iceberg had a frequency of around 0.5 hertz, too low to be heard by humans, but by playing them at higher speed the iceberg sounded like a swarm of bees or an orchestra warming up, the scientists said."

I can clarify something for the scientists. This song is not a swarm of bees. This song is not a solo. This song is one small part of a symphony that will erupt into a glorious crescendo at the wave of a Conductor's wand. The song - loud since the beginning of time but only recently heard by man - is the prophetic yearning of creation, the subtle vibration of taut strings of hope. And together, we sing...

Isaiah 49:13 *Sing, O heavens! Be joyful, O earth! And break out in singing, O mountains! For the Lord has comforted His people, And will have mercy on His afflicted.*

11.25.05

some of the stuff i think

baggage check

1 Corinthians serves as a great snapshot into the personality of the apostle Paul. He's loving...with an edge. The edge is the inverse of the one he carried as a younger man. The blade that persecuted Christians became the blade that held them to the standard. When he found wrongdoing in the church, he couldn't leave well enough alone. With the same intensity that he persecuted the followers of Christ, he now protected their integrity.

I'm thinking a lot of our wide-gate churches and the difficulty in walking some of this out. Let me say that the gate to church used to be incredibly narrow and, in fact, mislocated. We used to invite people in through a gate of ridiculous legalism. When they didn't answer the call, we took it as persecution. Somewhere along the line we widened the gate considerably. We decided that we were in no position to judge, so come one, come all. And they came.

Now they're here. They're in the church...and that's good. Unfortunately, they were not asked to declare what was in their bags as they passed through security and some of them are walking around with suitcase bombs of sin. Periodically one of the bags blows up and we have to close an entire concourse.

Paul takes this on in a direct way - chapter five of 1 Corinthians actually talks about the procedure for turning

some of the stuff i think

someone out of the church due to unrepentant sin in their life. He points out that we've taken the "who am I to judge" mentality that we should have for the lost and transferred it to one another - we're guilty of gross negligent enablement. 1 Corinthians 5:12,13: What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. Expel the wicked man from among you.

The difficulty for us is to walk in grace to the unbeliever and integrity towards the church. There is a standard for those within. To ignore that is to invite disaster on the church and the individual. The same Jesus who described His yoke as easy and His burden as light made a very real point that the way to God is a narrow way and that few would find it.

For the sake of the church - and your brother - don't turn a blind eye to misdoings. The stakes are too high for all of us.

11.23.05

salvation is like groundhog's day

I've been in the first chapter of 1 Corinthians this morning and found myself laughing at Paul's back and forth narrative with the church at Corinth:

The good news: You lack no spiritual gift because you've been enriched in every way - in all your speaking and in all your knowledge.

The bad news: Despite your spiritual giftings, you still have a propensity to divide into factions over the smallest details.

The very good news: ...the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.

That whole idea of being saved strikes me as a great comfort. Salvation, from God's perspective, is a complete and total act. To ask Him if it's finished is a little awkward, what with Him being beyond the scope of time and all that. To the rest of us, though...living dot to dot on the timeline, it's not quite so cut and dried.

I committed my life to following Christ when I was eight years old. I was saved. I'm convinced of it. I'm also being saved every day. Why? Because I need it. It's very comforting, actually, because thirty years later, I am still flailing miserably in the shallow end of the pool, struggling

some of the stuff i think

for a breath and valiantly fighting off most attempts at rescue.

My inner Armenian tells me it was done once and for all, by my own volition, thirty years ago. I could blow it...and probably will by noon. My inner Calvinist tells me that He pursues me daily, rescuing me time after time in spite of my best efforts to the contrary.

The dichotomy of that is puzzling, but Paul has a word for that too..."the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."

God is actively at work at stripping away our identity until we realize that smart or not, rich or poor, we're still all going down for the third time. Grab the rope. Just grab the stinking rope and hold on for dear Life.

Coming to know Jesus is a process. So is learning to walk with Him daily. Hope you get saved today. And again tomorrow.

11.16.05

some of the stuff i think

indescribable

I've been pondering something from Revelation 1 for the past two days, where John is at the very beginning of an encounter with someone he can only describe as 'like'. "Like a son of man"... "hair white like wool...eyes like blazing fire...". He goes on, only able to utter feeble comparisons, because Reality is beyond description.

John the Apostle was sentenced to exile, living out his days in seclusion because "of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus" (Rev 1:9). While wandering the island, he hears a Voice. Again, we're reminded of his inability to accurately describe what he's sensing, but he calls it a Voice and attributes several sentences to that voice, so whatever form it takes, he's really hearing something.

In verse 12, he makes an offhanded comment that has escaped my eyes for years. "I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me." He didn't turn to see the face of the one speaking to him. He turned to see the Voice.

It makes me wonder what John's experience is here. You see faces. You hear voices. What is taking place that he turns to see a voice? The closest example I can think of is standing downstream of Niagra Falls and feeling the vibration before you hear or see the falls themselves...and something tells me that example is one John would have

some of the stuff i think

rolled his eyes at. No, you'd have to have heard it to have seen it....you'd have to have heard it to believe it.

Where is that crossover place where you are so overwhelmed that your senses began to bleed together and you see what you hear what you smell what you feel? Is there a reality in which all those things are one? Have we dumbed down our senses by exposing our hearts and minds to stimuli so minute that only one sense is needed to interpret it? Did you see that on TV last night? Did you hear that new cd? We think we've been overwhelmed by the depth of an artistic expression while in reality, we've positioned our hearts to expect stimuli so narrow that we can percieve as only one medium. I can imagine angels wondering "Why do they listen to music they can only hear?" Something tells me they're almost entirely ambivilant about what we watch on the tube.

I want an encounter with God that is so real that I can't subdivide it into my senses. I want his radical embrace, not a casual brushing by his shoulder while I reach for another hamburger. I'm sensing this morning that, for the most part, we're not ready to see Who We Have Not Heard. Look for The Voice today.

11.08.05

some of the stuff i think

reflecting

This is the perfect December morning. Cool but not cold. No wind to speak of. And a sky crafted by Swarovski.

As I backed out of the driveway, I looked to the west and saw the brightest full moon I've ever seen in my life. It looked for a moment as if it were snagged in the branches of our front yard oak tree.

Involuntarily - but not unwillingly - I blurted out the base prayer of men's hearts. "Oh. Jesus."

In the nanosecond it took for me to see the moon and respond to it, I had thought of the physics of a reflection of the sun....that the light from the moon was piercing and beautiful, yet not really from the moon at all.

The moon is not a source of light at all - it is simply a reflection - and if the reflection was that bright, then how bright must the source of the light be.

Before the rear tires hit the street, I was thinking of the reflection of love I'd seen in other's lives. My wife. Friends. Leaders I've served.

Sometimes, it's funny how quickly you can process things. By the time I got to the stop sign fifty feet away, I was questioning my own reflection. Was it as crisp as those I'd thought of?

some of the stuff i think

Is there a clear sightline from the heart of God to my heart, and then to the hearts of others.

Next time you get a glance at the moon, consider a reflection of the perfect love of God in your life and whisper "Oh. Jesus."

12.15.05

some of the stuff i think

the end is near

There is this interesting phenomenon that surrounds my morning routine. Certain things happen with expected regularity. The alarm clock. The location of the towel. The pouring of the coffee. The starting of the car. All of these can be expected, and I'm sure you have a routine of your own...but there is something else - something not in my control - that occurs so often that I can't help but hear the whisper of God in it.

I can't tell you exactly how often, but often enough that I take note of it...I open my Bible to Psalm 39. Maybe it's that the binding is slightly cracked there, I don't know. All I know is that with some consistency, my eyes fall to Psalm 39, verse 4.

Show me, O Lord, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life.

This happens a lot. Enough that I highlighted the verse, and I'm not a highlighter. Enough that I ponder the verse even when the Bible doesn't fall open to reveal it. Often enough that in rare moments, I think I get it.

I have an acquaintance who travels and speaks at a lot of large stadium events. A few years ago, he was scheduled to speak to thousands of teens in Los Angeles. This was one of those huge events with fifteen big name Christian rock bands and a half dozen professional

some of the stuff i think

athletes. As usual, the final speaker - my friend - was to come out and tell his story to these thousands of kids.

His story is a compelling one. It involves his mother intending on aborting him and changing her mind in the eleventh hour. It involves the selfless love of his mother's teacher. It is a story of God breaking in.

Event organizers told him "There will be a clock at the front of the stage - pay close attention to it." The last band finished and he bound on stage, ready to tell his thirty minute story and tell those in attendance that God had a plan for them. As he started into his story, he glanced down at the clock. It said "10:00". He thought this was odd, because he knew it wasn't that late.

The next time he looked at the clock, it read "09:48". Uh oh. That wasn't a clock. It was a timer. And it was counting down. He began to tell his story faster. He began avoiding the frivolous details.

"8:15" He skipped the cute parts. He went straight to the meat of it.

"06:12" He was talking even faster now, hoping that he could get his life message conveyed before the clock when zero.

"04:35". This was not fair. He thought he had all the time in the world. This was not a part of the plan.

"02:19." He hated those glowing red digits. He hated all they stood for. He had so much to say.

some of the stuff i think

"00:54" Aaaaah! This is crazy...talking, talking.

"00:12" One more point.

"00:01" A last second appeal to the crowd. Lights come down. Music comes up. He walks off. He has more to say and no more time to say it.

When I read that verse in Psalms, I think of that story. How would I live today - what would I say - if I really understood that the clock was a timer...that the number of my days is one less than yesterday and hundreds less than last Christmas. What would I say, and to who? Am I waisting my time talking about frivolous details when the timer races towards zero?

The clock's ticking. Get to it.

12.12.05

bob the builder is delusional

There's this interesting little twist in the story of humanity, recorded in Genesis 11. God had earlier commanded humanity to spread out across the globe and populate it. Thousands of years later, it's no shock that man had another plan.

Genesis 11:4 They said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."

Men are by nature builders. Created artisans by Artisan, the tools may be hammer and nails or pen and paper, but men create. Hammer. Saw. Build.

They do it for different reasons. Certainly the first building took place to keep one's family out of the rain. How that evolved into the American Dream Mortgage Payment I'm not sure, but we have what we have, essentially based on that "keep out of the rain" instinct.

Likewise, some build for altruistic reasons - hospitals, churches, Little League diamonds in the middle of cornfields. They build the field because they heard the Voice. It's not uncommon for altruism to slip into self-promotion though. Witness the number of hospitals with wings named after specific people.

some of the stuff i think

In this passage, men admit they're building to make a name for themselves. One legend has the workers putting their name on every brick...putting themselves into this in a real way, all the while building a case against themselves for the day they stand before the Judge in the trial of their lives.

In addition to building to make a name for themselves, they're building to thwart God's plan. Theory was that if they build high enough, far enough, long enough, God couldn't (or wouldn't) send them to the far regions. I'll save you renting the movie. It didn't work. A few verses later, He confuses their language, they abandon the job site and do what He told them to do anyway, now with the additional disadvantage of it being much more difficult to stop and ask for directions at a gas station because no one spoke English anymore.

All that to ask - what are you building for? Do you really think that when you've got your little empire nearly complete, God will throw in the towel, quit asking what He's asked you for ten years, and let you go about your business?

Wow. That's gutsy. Have fun on the job site.

12.06.05

some of the stuff i think

a personal mulligan

There is a nuanced difference between vacant and blank...not so much in the strictest, Merriam-Webster sense, but out around the edges, out where ideas fray into feelings. Out where the sentences start with "if" and "why", a lot of words that would seemt to be synonyms separate into a verbal fuzz.

That place - where we're not reacting so much out of fact as faulty intuition - is a bad place to make any sort of judgment call. Not because things aren't as bad as they seem, because sometimes they really are, but because sometimes we're not as bad as we seem. Sometimes, our impossible is God's 'what if'.

Today, I feel vacant. Empty. Too weak to generate buzz and too rigid to resonate it from others. I am thirsty, feeble and barren.

God sees me as blank. Fresh. A clean slate. A chalkboard to write on. A walking, talking do-over.

He and I are staring at the same thing this morning with wildly different perspectives. I like His better than mine. I think I'll go with it.

01.31.06

some of the stuff i think

if it's true

One of the best parts of a 24/7 prayer room is that once in a while, you walk in and realize that you've just burst in on a moment in God. Granted, that moment's been at least seven years in the making, as this perpetual solemn assembly has been going since 1999, but there's still a sense of immediacy. It cries out "Here. Now."

I walked in a few minutes late for the 6 AM meeting to hear the musicians doing a spontaneous song. The singers were flitting around with a lyric that declared, "Yesterday is over. It's gone. It's finished." Like most lyrics, it loses a little punch when making the transfer from auditory to visual, but still...the truth of that statement is powerful.

If it's true...

I cannot make yesterday's mistakes ever again.

I may have to deal with consequences of yesterday's mistakes, but I can learn from them and am not forced to walk that path or dig that grave any more. Onward. To other mistakes, in all likelihood. But not the same ones.

If it's true...

I am a day closer to destiny.

I am more of what I am becoming than I was the day before. I guess this could cut both ways, depending on

some of the stuff i think

what I perceived that I was becoming...but I'm standing in faith that I'm becoming something that pleases God, and I'm 24 hours closer.

If it's true...

I am not disqualified.

Actually, "I am not disqualified" was the next lyric in the song.

To be standing in the morning is to have won yesterday's battle. It's interesting - victory goes to the contender. If you're contending today, you won yesterday's battle.

Yesterday is over. It's gone. It's finished. I pray it's true in your life today.

01.30.06

some of the stuff i think

who waits for who

I hate to wait. My family will tell you this. While I'm not so bad as to go sit in the car and honk the horn, I have been known to fume around the house until we're all out the door and safely strapped into the travel unit. With this as my backdrop, this morning, I'm reading Isaiah 26 and all sorts of thoughts about waiting on God are stirring within me.

Isaiah 26:8 Yes, Lord, walking in the way of your laws, we wait for you; your name and renown are the desire of our hearts.

Back when we lived in Cincinnati, our kids were a part of this sadistic car pool to school. It wasn't the people that were sadistic; it was the ungodly time we had to leave in the morning to get the kids to school. One morning, I drove home from the drop off point with Chris Tomlin pounding in the cd player: "You are the Lord, The famous one, famous one, Great is Your name in all the earth..."

I distinctly remember thinking "I totally believe this...but where is it? Where is the renown of the Lord on display?" I grew frustrated as this song triggered the tension we all live in - faith for more, but with less evidence than we'd like. ...we wait for you; your name and renown are the desire of our hearts.

This morning's time in Isaiah's got me to wondering: How strange is it to wait for someone to whom time is not

some of the stuff i think

a constraint? If God is everywhere, all the time, where is He here and now? And for heaven's sake, why doesn't He step up and say something. In the pondering of this, I landed on a few things...

Are we waiting for Him, or are we waiting for us?

In other words, how will I be different in the day of His renown? Could it be that I'm not who I'm supposed to be by the time He fully reveals Himself to the people of the earth? Isaiah's passage continues with a few disconcerting words - particularly if you already have a strong idea of what an outpouring of God looks like.

Isaiah 26:9 My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you. When your judgments come upon the earth, the people of the world learn righteousness.

Could it be that we all think we're waiting on a great revival when His delay centers around the fact that when He returns, He's coming to judge righteousness? Maybe our preconceptions are half-right...that a great revival is on it's way, but it comes in the midst of the judgments of God. How brazen of us to think that when God reveals His renown, we'll be sitting in box seats with popcorn and a slurpee.

The whole idea of judgment makes us highly uncomfortable. Even angry. Even as some of you read this, your blood pressure is rising. If you were sitting here right now, bug eyed across the table, I'd tell you that you cannot believe in Warm and Fuzzy Jesus without

some of the stuff i think

embracing the Judge Jesus. What sort of bastion of Goodness would forever hold His wrath from those who determine to do evil? If God is engaged in the world, He must be fully God engaged.

Think again about His silence. Given that He's the most intentional being in the universe, surely there is a reason behind it. If He truly is silent, perhaps we're not ready to hear what He has to say...or that we would be offended by it. Perhaps His silence is His statement. Perhaps He's really screaming and we are deaf to His voice...or perhaps He already has spoken and we're waiting on another word.

Habakkuk 3:2 Oh Lord, we have heard of your deeds. I stand in awe of your deeds, O Lord. Renew them in our day, in our time, make them known; in wrath, remember mercy.

01.04.06

some of the stuff i think

can anybody tell time

If I were trying to build a congregation, I would avoid Matthew 5 at all costs. In fact, I think I'd provide Bibles to the congregation that omitted it all together. It's just to counter-intuitive to the way we think, to the way we live, and to the way we preach.

I came of ministry-age in a time when the way to grow your crowd was to figure out what they wanted to be told and find a way to tell them, mixing in a little Jesus language and perhaps appealing to their legitimate, God-given desire to make an impact by offering them a volunteer position that would serve to keep the machine running. Our battlecry was "make us relevant", which we entireley assumed meant "make us cool".

Recently, I read a chapter form a book by Peter Tsukihira. He was relaying the story of living in Israel during the first Gulf War. His family lived with the daily fear of being hit by Scud Missles fired from Iraq. They had taped off a room with plastic sheets and each had a gas mask. They knew where they were in relation to their gas mask at any given time. It struck me how relevant that mask was to their lives...and yet no one in their right mind would have described it as cool.

Having mistaken relevance for good music and coffee-drinking think-tank sessions, we have jacked-up our definition of relevant to the point where it's not remotely

some of the stuff i think

biblical. What we're doing now is only relevant in the best of times. Scripture, history and common sense beg us to realize that the best of times change on a dime.

Back to pesky Matthew 5.

Matthew 5:4 "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." Having seen this passage applied only to families at the graveside, I think we're missing something. What if it's time for all of us to mourn? Could it be that it's time for that?

We love the Ecclesiastes quote about it being a time to dance. Children of the 80's cheered when Kevin Bacon told us that.

But what about the rest of that passage?

Ecc 3:4 A time to weep, And a time to laugh; A time to mourn, And a time to dance...

Maybe it is time to mourn. Maybe it is time to fast. Even if it's not time yet, it will be soon. We might want to go into this with a little practice.

02.28.06

some of the stuff i think

the gap(s)

When we were in our early twenties, Kelsey and I bought our first house. I've blogged about it before, but in case you don't remember....does the word ramshackle stir up any recollection? To be fair, it was a cute little house, but it needed work, and what we knew about those sorts of projects could have fit on a half page, fourteen point font, double spaced. We drove by it a few months ago and I was tempted to go to the door and apologize to the current owner for the mangled job on the hardwood in the dining room.

The house had some issues that we just couldn't do much about - particularly, assorted gaps. Gaps around the windows. Gaps at the bottom, top and sides of most doors. The way things had settled, there wasn't a right angle to be found...just lots of space between where things should have been and where they ended up.

I'm reading the prophet, Isaiah this morning. He records the word of the Lord in this way in chapter 42, verses 8 & 9:

"I am the Lord, that is My name; And My glory I will not give to another, Nor My praise to carved images. Behold, the former things have come to pass, And new things I declare; Before they spring forth I tell you of them."

As I read the passage this morning, it occurred to me how blurry the borders are between recorded history and

some of the stuff i think

His prophetic word. God mixes language of the old passing away and new things being declared as if He were in full control...and for good reason. He is constantly moving back and forth between relaying things that have happened and things that will - and they're all the same to Him.

I'm disturbed by the gaps in my life this morning. The space between what He's spoken over me and the way things are right now. Sometimes being stuck in time can be a peculiar form of torture. You know what you've heard and you see what you see - and they're not exactly lined up straight and true. Through the gap between calling and walk blows a wind so cold that it can bring all activity to a halt if you don't keep the fire stoked.

Gotta stoke the fire. And I've gotta close those gaps.

02.22.06

some of the stuff i think

care v. concern

It's more and more obvious to me that the most counterculture thing we could manage to do is live a Godly life.

1 Peter 5 preaches a radical message of preferring one another while signing up for delayed compensation. In a world that tells us that fortune favors the bold, God tells us that eternity favors the meek.

1 Peter 5:6,7 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.

The word 'cares' is the Greek word 'melo'...and is translated most other places as 'concerned' and in at least one place as 'worry'.

The idea of God worrying about us stretches my theology a little bit, but His being concerned seems decidedly more active than just 'caring'. I care about the price of oil. I am concerned about the welfare of my children.

Rest easy, today, knowing God is concerned for you and, if you are striving to live in alignment with what He is doing, He is actively working toward your ultimate good.

02.07.06

some of the stuff i think

faxed prayers = not good

There was a little presidential prayer breakfast action the other day in DC. All the usual cast of characters showed up, including an unusual character, Bono. I've found all sorts of links to Bono's speech all over the usual blogs because, after all, we are dying to find a cool Christian and we think at times he might be the guy.

Likewise, our devoutly Christian president was there and made some very nice remarks that were faxed to him on the drive over (nothing personal, I'm just pretty sure that this is how these things work).

I haven't read Bush's remarks yet. I watched Bono's video clip. It was masterful, as he wove Isaiah and talk of the Spirit with the need for aid worldwide and alluded to the glorious idea of unity among religions. Among other things, he said "I presume the reason for this gathering is that all of us here—Muslims, Jews, Christians—all are searching our souls for how to better serve our family, our community, our nation, our God.

Bono, friend, incredible lyricist, phenomenal vocalist, charismatic front man....you are out of your ever lovin' mind. And Bushie, you're not far behind him.

King Abdullah of Jordan opened with talking about commonalities between the Torah, the Gospels and the Koran and invited everyone to pray for the middle east.

some of the stuff i think

He suggested they pray..."That not one more generation will grow up knowing conflict and injustice, nor suffer from poverty or oppression...That not one more family will lose a loved one to war and bitterness, and that, together, Muslim, Jew and Christian, we can create a new future for the Holy Land: a future of peace."

King Abdullah, President Bush, Bono....if any of you genuinely think that Judaism, Christianity and Islam are going to come to terms on the Middle East, then none of you have read any of those books. And King Abdullah, any prayers based out of the Koran are going to be at extreme odds with the prayers based in the other books.. You might be careful what you...er, pray for.

02.05.06

some of the stuff i think

why your small group stinks

As I kid, I spent hours hanging out in my dad's shop. Barely large enough to hold a pickup truck and a potbellied stove, Dad had stuffed that little tar-paper covered building with enough tools to make a NASCAR crew chief envious.

Dad didn't do a lot of woodwork - primarily, he worked with metal. I distinctly remember him being able to take a piece of angle iron and hold it to the grinder, sparks flying off of his coveralls, until you could shave with the edge of the metal.

This morning, I read Proverbs 27...and I came across the oft-quoted passage in verse 17. *As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.*

For a long time, we've thought of this in the context of friendship. It's a favorite passage of small group gurus. We need each other. We're better together.

It's funny, but there was nothing Dr. Phillish about my dad working on the grinder. It was violent. It was loud. The metal screamed and occasionally set fire to things around it. It was not the cozy sing along we've made it into be.

What if the iron sharpening you today is really your chief irritation? What if the person you're trying to pray the devil out of really has a Spirit of God inside and is rubbing

some of the stuff i think

you the wrong way...grinding the rough edges off of you so you are useful?

Iron sharpens iron. But it's not rarely an aesthetic or emotional delight.

Get used to it.

It's the mercy of God that it's happening now and not later, when you're in the public eye and your rough edges are displayed for all the world.

04.27.06

some of the stuff i think

getting great

In regard to the beatitudes of Matthew 5, Jesus said "...whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

Yesterday, Mike taught on the concept of greatness - how we all aspire to it (whether openly or secretly) and how we're all called to it in the kingdom of God, particularly in the age to come. I spent part of the day thinking about the tangents that this pursuit takes us down - even though the desire itself is given by God.

God uses the term 'great' in relation to meekness, and positions greatness in such a way that it's achievable for all of us, yet still a stretch no matter what our skill set. We're called to greatness.

I think it stems from our confusing greatness with better than.

When we look at what we label as great, we often are comparing it to lesser examples around it. Great becomes another word for biggest, best and first.

He's a great pastor (his church is bigger than the others).

He's a great dad (his kids made the honor roll).

She's a great teacher (I didn't fall asleep in her class).

some of the stuff i think

By using this hamfisted approach to greatness, we're only great until someone greater comes along...social king of the hill with a little of Darwin's survival of the fittest (or greatest) thrown in. Please tell me that's not our calling.

If we're called to greatness, it's got to be achievable. For all of us. It would seem that the measure of greatness is held against what we could become in the spirit rather than what others have become. By that measuring stick, we could all achieve greatness.

Of course, it would be easier for most to continue trying to knock down the guy at the top.

Try to have yourself a great day.

05.29.06

some of the stuff i think

seals both ways

I've been in Rev. 5 for better than a week and am struck by the following: That this Lamb, His wool still stained with His own blood, carries the authority and weightiness to open the seals and release the final plan of God for the planet.

These seals are no little deal.

They have been written about, debated, and depicted in mural fashion on the side of custom vans. We have a few clues about what they are, but we understand very well the nature of them - and they are awesome, fearsome, wonderful and horrible in one fell swoop. Postmoderns who think they invented both/and thinking need to read their Bibles.

It's unfathomable that a Lamb - a slain one, no less - releases the plan of God and executes these judgments on the earth. I've said it before - our biggest problem is not injustice on the earth, but rather that God is just. The fact that this is initiated by a Lamb stands as one of the more counterintuitive thoughts in history.

This Lamb straddles the gap between transcendence and immediacy, firmly standing in both realities.

To paraphrase the dictionary in relation to the Lamb, He transcends others, surpassing them in beauty and glory, reigning supreme beyond the range of our

some of the stuff i think

perception. He is wholly other than, yet entirely immediate in that there is no intervening agent between the Lamb of God and the people of the earth.

He is at once Out There and right here.

05.25.06

some of the stuff i think

weeping for resolve

"...I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside."

I've been rolling that idea around the ol' noggin since the 6am meeting....John, caught up in a vision of reality with doors in the sky and six winged creatures who bombard heaven with cries of "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty" and twenty four mysterious elders who lay their crowns before the throne. There are a million things to look at and comment on - I'm convinced the book of Revelation only scratches the surface of what he saw - yet the emotion that surfaces is one of utter despair.

Weeping. Sobbing. A feeling of hopelessness. Why? Because in that scroll was contained the key to banishing evil from the universe. In that scroll was justice. A period on the convoluted sentence that is life. In that sentence there was resolve to the universe.

All of creation quietly weeps for what is in that scroll. It can be as common as a first grader's 'NOT FAIR!' or the sound of small arms fire from a revolutionary, but the weeping continues. Sometimes the weeping escalates to wailing. Sometimes the roar is deafening...but it's always about the opening of the scroll.

The glory of that whole chapter - indeed, the entire cannon of scripture - lies in the fact that there is One worthy to open it. One deserving, with authority, ability and

some of the stuff i think

initiative to open the scroll. The planet is not left with an unresolved tension. This will be settled, once and for all.

The Lamb, looking as if it's been slain, is going to be handed this scroll. Against a backdrop of a new song and the smell of incense, He'll began to break off the seals.

When He's done, many will never weep again. Others will never stop.

05.17.06

sometimes, stinks to be us

I'm reading Ephesians 5 this morning, and ruminating on the sobering opening words from the Apostle Paul.

After spending two verses warming us to the idea of our being a fragrant offering to God, he lays out just what's on his mind - the very real potential of our lives being a stench before Him. He speaks directly against immorality, whether realized or inferred, as having the damaging power to keep us from our inheritance in the kingdom of God.

I've noticed that our personal standards regarding things of immorality (as defined in this chapter - including things like foolish talk and coarse joking) suffer from a gravity-like drawing downwards.

Left to themselves, unbolstered standards drop. In fact, I think that over time, if the standard we hold ourselves to doesn't forcibly rise, it drops by default.

If you are closer to God than you were five years ago, what are you not watching, not doing, not saying now that you might have then. There are probably those reading this who will find that to be ridiculous and are able to pull all sorts of grace verses out of their hat, but it's hard to get around Ephesians 5.

God's serious about this. In anticipation of this sort of protest, it goes so far as to say "Let no one deceive you

some of the stuff i think

with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient...".

The people who are encouraging you to lighten up, to let the standards slip, or to take one quick foray to the dark side are not helping you. Maybe it's time to create some distance between the two of you. In order to finish the race well, standards should rise over time, not slide.

06.12.06

some of the stuff i think

decaf jesus

A few years ago, I had an assistant who brought a pot of coffee to a meeting. Unable to decide if she should bring decaf or regular, she brought a pot of half decaf, half regular. As I remember right, no one drank any of it. Why? Because decaf and regular coffee drinkers are looking for an entirely different experience.

Me? I drink regular. All the time. I abhor decaf. Decaf coffee, as Paul Shaffer and the World's Most Dangerous Band used to sing, is "useless warm brown water." Decaf merely appeals for our desire for a real cup of coffee without causing us any sort of internal stirring.

There is, within the present culture, a very real effort to decaffeinate Jesus...to give people the ambiance of an encounter with God without actually having to encounter Him... to appeal for their desire for God, to assuage their inner cry for a walk with the Holy, without succumbing to the affect it would certainly have on their heart. Jesus in a brown thrift store mug, more as a hand warmer than an actual drink. A prop to carry around, but never to partake of.

Please, do not decaffienate the Jesus experience.

Luke 24:32 And they said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?"

some of the stuff i think

Regular Jesus will do something to your heart. You can't be around him – you can't know him – without it touching you to the core. You cannot drink from His cup and walk away unaffected.

There is a segment of the church who would portray a Jesus who is a buddy...your homeboy who is your best friend but never your lover, and who will never cause your heart to burn within you because to endure that holy burning of the heart means adjust your life.

Throw that Jesus back and get the real one.

06.08.06

mud in the compass

I'm on a Daniel kick again. I've been enthralled with this book since 2000. Once you get beyond expecting your best life now, it's a great handbook for life in the days to come.

This morning, I'm in Daniel 8. I'm struck by the phrase in verse 8 that describes something that will happen at the end of the age. Daniel is describing a vision he was given - a prophetic picture of what was to come.

Daniel 8:12 *"...it (the AntiChrist) prospered in everything it did, and truth was thrown to the ground."*

What does it mean for truth to be thrown to the ground? It's not defeated, because you really can't defeat an idea, much less defeat truth. Truth is not beaten down...it's discarded. At the end of the age, people will toss aside truth like so much trash to be dealt with. It's dropped, like the core of an apple, and expected to rot away.

This isn't referring to issues like abortion or gay marriage, although those sorts of issues are certainly reflective of the discarding of truth. It's about putting aside an ideal - rejecting a wholehearted understanding that somethings are innately right. To trash truth is to reject all absolutes. Truth? That was an old fashioned idea. We did away with it years ago.

some of the stuff i think

Continuing on the path, once having tossed truth aside, leaves the traveler without a compass. The woods get deep, water scarce, and light altogether disappears. All more tragic, society fails to realize the danger it's wandered into. Former generations used truth as a measuring stick and therefore stood a chance at wandering back onto the path. Having tossed that value aside, lost takes a whole new meaning, nuanced with ignorance and fear.

Later in the chapter, the AntiChrist plays all his cards.

Daniel 8:25 "He will cause deceit to prosper and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, he will destroy many and take his stand against the Prince of princes..."

Why do they feel secure in the midst of global conflict? They walked away from truth years ago. To fall into confusion when you have no concrete measurement for anything is an easy thing. Watch the issues of our nation hang twisting in the wind for lack of truth in the land.

Confusion follows quickly once you throw your compass in the mud.

07.28.06

some of the stuff i think

nice to be invited

In my heart this morning, there exists a strange double-helix of regret and destiny, and the bitter taste of the former makes the latter all the more sweet.

Having blown it, I still sense an opportunity of God before me. I realize that the opportunity really wasn't born of my own doing. It was Him extending a hand down, not me climbing up on my own achievements.

Psalm 65 says...Praise awaits you, O God, in Zion; to you our vows will be fulfilled O you who hear our prayer, to you all men will come. When we were overwhelmed by sins, you forgave our transgressions. Blessed are those you choose to live in your courts! We are filled with the good things of your house, of your holy temple.

This morning, I rejoice in the invitation to live in his courts. I was made to do this.

I was fashioned from dirt to exist in the realm of the Holy One. That is a bigger deal than my failure. It is my destiny.

07.17.06

let's think about this together

I am once again convinced that the English language, a language in which 'cool' and 'hot' can mean exactly the same thing, does major disservice to scripture.

A day or so ago, I ran across this oft-quoted passage in Isaiah 1:18 "Come, now let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow...."

To read that verse, you'd think we were being invited into some conference chamber. The judge's robe hangs open to reveal his khaki slacks and blue dress shirt. The court clerk brings us coffee in fine china and a plate of Girl Scout Thin Mints.

The judge moves from behind his desk to take a seat in a leather wingback chair separated from yours by a small table that holds pictures of his grandkids in wooden frames. He takes a sip of his coffee and a bite of a Thin Mint, letting the moment hang in awkward silence. Then, just as you're about to break out in a cold sweat, he leans over, touches you on your arm and says in a warm tone, "*Come, let us reason together....*".

The inference - at least in English - is this: Surely we can work out our differences. Undoubtedly we're both reasonable people. Let's not continue this farce of a trial. Let's settle our matters like gentlemen, in wingback chairs, over coffee and Girl Scout cookies.

some of the stuff i think

OK, snap out of it. That is not even remotely what that passage describes.

That word - reason - is from the Hebrew word *Yakach*...and it has none of the nuance of compromise that is inferred in English. The literal translation is to prove, decide, judge, rebuke, reprove, correct, be right.

In other words, He isn't coming for a compromise. There will be no *voir dire*. He's serving as jury, judge & executioner. He will be right when the gavel hits the hardwood. He is not asking you for new information. You are not in the room to debate. You are in the judge's chambers to hear his decision. He has done the reasoning for both of us.

The follow up verses are not some grand compromise, but rather the judge of the highest court laying out the way it's going to be:

Isaiah 1:19 "If you are willing and obedient, you will eat of the best from the land, but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword." For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

In a moment, you are ushered back out of His chambers.

You can still smell the leather of the chairs.

You still have Thin Mint smeared on your thumb and index finger.

some of the stuff i think

You never got a chance to make your case. In a moment of brutal self-awareness, you realize that you didn't have much of a case anyway. Nevertheless, the judge looks you in the the eye and asks "How then do you plea?"

All eternity waits for your answer.

07.12.06

some of the stuff i think

call it like He sees it

I left the house this morning as the clock on the stove blinked 5:01, heading out for what has become a several-time-a-week ritual that I am calling the Morning Walk. It involves a couple of short podcasts, a cup of coffee, and about a mile of suburban Kansas City sidewalk.

Around 5:10am, coffee still steaming, Garrison Keillor dropped one of those 'this date in history' things in my ears that pretty much shut down the iPod for the rest of the hike.

It turns out that on this day in 1863, Abraham Lincoln announced the Emancipation Proclamation. He'd been mulling it over for quite some time, and on September 17, 1862, when the Union soldiers stopped the Confederates at Antietam, it gave him the courage to finish writing and start talking. While he didn't issue the actual order until January 1, today is the day that he came above ground with his insistence that the slaves, were, in fact, free men who deserved the same rights and protections the constitution gave slave owners.

This morning, as I walked up the sidewalk, it struck me that while this was entirely true on September 22, 1863, we're still working out the details on September 22, 2006. Whether or not Lincoln knew it would take this long or not is not the issue. He knew truth and he spoke it, even if making it happen was out of his hands.

some of the stuff i think

Lincoln wasn't just issuing a governmental decree - he was prophesying. He was speaking an unseen reality, knowing that his speaking it was integral to it going from ethereal truth to terra firma reality.

Lincoln had no idea how the Civil War would land when he issued the proclamation. It was his hope that slaves, bolstered by his decree, would rise up and overthrow the evil system that kept them bound, although he had no guarantees (and ironically, many in his own camp feared this reality). It was his conviction that slavery was wrong, and even though the Emancipation Proclamation was the farthest thing from a conciliatory move, he knew it was necessary if the Union was ever to end the war.

There is an element of Godly leadership that demands prophesying - speaking the truth of God, even when all earthly indicators point the other direction.

I don't know what you're leading - a business, a church, a family- but my guess is there are at least a few earthly indicators that point to the negative side. Perhaps several. Perhaps all of them (been there...). Let me encourage you - prophesy what is true, even if it's not seen. Even if it's not likely. Even if those around you scream for your head on a platter (that happens to truth-speakers on occasion) - prophesy. Call it like He sees it. Whole. Healed. Victorious.

09.22.06

some of the stuff i think

splitting time

I didn't get far into Galatians this morning. I got snagged on a verse. Not even a whole verse - a verselette? Just a phrase squirrelled away in the first few verses.

Galatians 1:3-5 Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Something about that phrase "...that He might deliver us from this present evil age" grabbed me. How did Paul think about the day he lived in? What were his thoughts about his time frame - his window on the timeline?

Our human hearts have a funny relationship with our time. We're apprehensive about time forward. We're nostalgic about time past. Time now? We call it precious. Short. To be treasured.

It's all true, of course, but Paul's tapping into something here - it's also inherently evil. The age we live in is flawed at the core. Something is wrong with the now. The universe, at it's present angle, speed and trajectory, is operating incorrectly. The creator and creation are estranged. Our times are evil.

some of the stuff i think

On the other side of the globe, in a country where they're too poor to keep the lights on, Kim Jong-il claims he has discovered how to split the atom. Global leaders worry and entire people groups cower in fear: What kind of a world will we have when a madman has the power to tear apart the basic building block of the physical world?

I wonder what kind of a world we will have when the God of all things exercises His own power to tear apart the basic measuring stick of our lives...time.

Kim Jong-il's atomic maybe was nothing compared to the reaction to come, when the Creator breaks in on the one variable that man has not even dreamed of deconstructing. We have gone to great lengths to affect our environment - earth, sea and sky. We have built stations in the sky and torn atoms to bits in underground bunkers, yet God is coming to split time...to tear the now from the then.

Hold very loosely to the now. Some time better is coming. You don't want to a death grip on the day that falls to the left of the axe when He chooses to deliver us from this present evil age.

10.24.06

some of the stuff i think

if it's true

Early morning finds me perched on the end of the couch, a cup of Starbucks Verona on the end table, laptop in it's place and Zoe in hers.

'Hers', for the moment, is this little ovoid sleeping platform / bouncy thing that, when the switch is activated, jiggles like an eternal 2.5 level earthquake. Babies find this comforting; I find it interesting that there is no adult equivalent.

We got up at 4am, which I know sounds like death to some, but was just fine with me. She is back asleep now and I'm just enjoying the quiet.

I've been thinking a lot about life in the last few days. Adding one to the family probably lends itself to a little introspection anyway, but I think this thought progression has been God-prompted rather than circumstantial. Being responsible for six people now makes me think a little more about intentionality and efficiency. I am reevaluating a lot of things and asking is that the best way?

Some of the things I'm considering are purely temporal...like what happens when we all decide to go somewhere together. As it is, we can all fit in the S.S. Family Truckster, providing we don't do something crazy like try to bring the stroller.

Or a backpack.

some of the stuff i think

Or a grilled cheese sandwich.

There is technically seating for seven, but two of the seven would need to have their legs removed to ride in the rearmost seat for very long.

Not everything in my head relates to simple logistics though. I'm thinking a lot about my own life. About impact. About what the wisest course of action would be, and how to train myself to identify that course straightaway, rather than taking a long time to land on it.

At 39 years old, it's very easy to fall into the trap of ambition under the guise of a desire to make a difference. It's wholly possible to gallantly ride off to slay dragons while secretly trying to make a name for ones self.

This morning, here in the dark with the hum of the baby bouncer melding in with the classical music on my iPod, I'm realizing that I could bolt off toward the horizon on foot and do pretty well, or I could take the time to hone the arrows in my quiver and have four times the impact in twenty years. If I can find the humility to prefer my children over myself, within two decades (earlier, really) I would see dividends that would far surpass anything I might accomplish in my own strength.

Here in the dark, I am acutely aware that I am stewarding potential. I am coaching greatness, whether or not I know much of it first hand. I feel a heart connect to the idea of tempering my life, controlling my schedule and trimming my own ambitions so that one day, my legacy

some of the stuff i think

would be waging war on four fronts rather than one. To me, this feels like wisdom.

Go ahead, Don Quixotes, go chasing your windmills. I intend to concentrate on the arrows in my quiver. Wisdom will reveal herself soon enough.

10.17.06

some of the stuff i think

sometimes your mad at hell

Friday afternoon, our community will host another memorial service. I say another because we have had three in what seems like eight weeks, although it may have been a little longer. Seems like eight days, to tell you the truth.

One of the services was for a 70 year old who had enjoyed a life full of God and love.

Another was for a young man in his prime, struck down by disease.

This third is a double whammy...twin girls who fought for life from the very womb. With each successive memorial service, I have grown more frustrated with the enemy and more firmly resolved that there is a Kingdom coming.

I know all the old adages. Death is a part of life. It is appointed unto man once to die. This death is only physical; it's not the true end.

None of it resonates with my heart right now...proof that not all things true are comforting, even if they're meant to be. I know this is all 'part of the curse....'...but it's not the part that I like. Let me tell you my favorite part of that passage.

some of the stuff i think

So the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this...I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

Your day is coming, Satan.

You'll pay for this. For sickness and disease and the lack that we live in. You'll pay for Charli & Ali. Your head will be crushed once and for all. We will see Justice rise up, on this side or on the other.

We will not be denied for eternity.

11.19.06

some of the stuff i think

evangelical atheists

There's a fascinating article in the latest WIRED magazine entitled "The New Atheism".

At the risk of oversimplifying, the article is about a fervant new 'crusade against religion' (WIRED's phrase). It outlines the works and thoughts of several scientists/authors who are taking the belief of atheism to the next level - evangelism.

The new atheists, taking an aggressive stance at ridiculing religion and even agnosticism, are led by those like Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett. You may remember me mentioning Dennett who utilized his lecture time at the TED conference to take a few whacks at Rick Warren, who spoke immediately prior.

The New Atheists are those who are longer content to sit back and 'not believe', but want to push the buttons of agnostics and liberal Christians, forcing them to intellectual honesty and the congruency of speaking what they really believe - that God is a fabrication. It speaks of leveraging outrage at fundamental Islam and it's terrorist activities into a similar outrage against Christianity and other organized religions. By the end of the article, you've got a whole new appreciation for the possibility of an apocalyptic un-religion.

I've only read the article through once, and rather quickly, but I look forward to digging into it further. My

some of the stuff i think

initial reaction is that the movement may actually help us. For all its intellectual bravado, atheism is not unlike eating a bag of cheese puffs. Once you get down to the crumbs, you're not sure you really ate anything at all. It somehow leaves you with a bad taste in your mouth and still hungry....

I say let atheism be tested as a way to console the human heart. Allow the masses to test drive it for real - not flirt with it by proposing belief in a supreme being while refusing to bend a knee. While it may appeal to everyone's' inner anarchist, it does nothing to answer the questions of life or provide a way forward to one's spirit. It turns the souls of men into echo chambers.

At the end of the day, or one's life, there are few true atheists. Even the incredulous want to believe. Atheism may live and lecture well, but it dies poorly.

some of the stuff i think

the destined doofus dichotomy

"Aren't you going to answer them? What about all these charges they are bringing against you?" But Jesus said nothing, much to Pilate's surprise. Mark 15:4,5

The ability to stand in the face of accusation and not respond is one that I'll admit that I am not able to do yet. I am not entirely capable of refraining from spinning everyday stories to accentuate my own abilities and virtues, omitting my own screw ups and pointing out the flaws of others....how can I hope to emulate this ability to remain close-mouthed while being accused, particularly when being accused falsely?

I am too concerned with protecting my own virtue. Perhaps protecting my own pride might be a more accurate phrase.

I'm trying to focus on two things I believe will help me next time I get called on the carpet, guilty or innocent...

Realize when righteousness is being attacked.

Once prejudices are put aside - being attacked for being too short, too tall, too light, too dark, etc - people are essentially attacked for one of two things: Being righteous or being unrighteous. It could be that we are accused for being unrighteous - having wronged someone or dishonoring a spiritual principle. In that case, the accusation is our friend that corrects us. I don't want to get

some of the stuff i think

into the habit of fighting back when being legitimately called out for my own wrongs. I want to take the opportunity to correct them.

Likewise, sometimes, like Jesus, we are attacked for righteousness. When it is righteousness that has our accusers up in arms, we're in good company. Jesus said that those who (joined him in being) persecuted for righteousness sake would have full run of the kingdom of God. It could be that those who are persecuting you in this life are doing you a huge favor for the next.

Remember that no one on earth sees you in your true calling.

Many of us walk with an acute sense of our eternal destiny. God has given us a very true glimpse of who He has called us to be. In the Spirit, we know we are a prophet, priest and king. Unfortunately, to the rest of the world, we're still a dorky annoyance. Eternal destiny does not transform us into the greatest thing on this side of the end of the age.

We can be fully destined and fully doofus in one fell swoop.

The high wire of walking out the Sermon on the Mount is suspended by the tension that exists between who we are and who we are becoming.

No one - not even your momma - sees what is on the other end of that high wire, so understand when they complain about how close you are to the first tower,

some of the stuff i think

hanging on white knuckled with your knees wrapped
around the cable.

I'm coming to the opinion that reality for me is better
defined by my response to accusation than the accusation
itself...that who I am is better determined by my need to
lash out or my willingness to endure than it is by my
excellent legal defense.

11.13.06

some of the stuff i think

turn to page 824

Some time ago, a small Bible was abandon in my office. I'm not sure where it came from, and in fact, it may have joined my collection of books several offices ago, but having searched it completely for a name and finding none, I have declared it my own according to the spirit of adoption.

It is burgundy leather and just about the right size to slip into my pocket. The binding is a little loose but the whole thing feels like a well worn wallet and I just love it.

Except for page 824.

OK, I even love page 824, but that's the portion that I find most disconcerting right now. 824 might be Habbakuk or Philemon or even the maps in your Bible, but in my little adopted tome it is Matthew 5 - the sermon on the mount.

The first twelve verses of this chapter have haunted me, particularly in the last eight days. I have scoured it for loopholes or excemptions and found none available. It would appear that humility, mercy, and a hunger for righteousness are the signposts on a progressive walk with God, and any path without those markers just loops around back to the picnic shelter we call life as usual.

I'm tired of looping around on that path to find the same empty picnic table, covered with squirrel poop and the initials of those who have circled around before me.

some of the stuff i think

I'm tired of staring at "Billy loves Suzy" carved into the wood, knowing that had Billy loved righteousness he might not be on his way back to the bend again in the next fifteen minutes with Lila or whoever. Billy needs to read page 824 and move on.

Me too.

I dreamed last night of a large house. No, a huge house...so big that it actually encompassed what I thought were two houses. It sat on a lot up a steep hillside behind our house, in an area we used to live in. The owner of the house was getting ready to sell it, and I had the first chance to look at it. As we walked through, I marvelled at the size and the two huge garages. In the dream, I told Kelsey "Let's buy it." That's highly uncharacteristic of me, but I was ready to sell our house and buy this one on the spot.

This morning while shaving, I got to thinking about how odd it was that I was willing to jup on the chance to buy it, but also what a phenomenal house it was...in that moment, I heard an inner voice say "you can have it if you want it, but you'll have to come up higher to get it."

I'm learning what that means, and I'm also well aware that the big house isn't riches or fame, but something far more valuable. It's up there. I want to go after it.

12.04.06

some of the stuff i think

fine tuning

Proverbs 1:20-23 is a warning against rejecting wisdom. It goes so far as to say that Wisdom calls out aloud in the streets, raising her voice against the din of noise that is everyday life. In other words, Wisdom is out there. It's not silent. It's screaming.

And we regularly miss it.

I read verse 23 specifically in a hushed voice...from God to His people, in a sober, you need to know this tone.

"If you had responded to my rebuke, I would have poured out my heart to you and made my thoughts known to you..."

Here's the deal: I don't want to find myself at the end of my days having missed the voice of God, particularly if He was calling out in the streets as I wandered through life. Think about it - the Voice is there. What's stopping us from responding?

I think a large part of it is too much ambient noise. How busy - or distracted - are we that the Voice of God calling in the street is barely heard over all of the other voices...and I don't even think it has as much to do with the volume of the other voices as it does the sound they omit.

some of the stuff i think

If we were honest, we'd have to admit that much of the sound we tune into is not in resonance with the Voice of Wisdom. Rather, we seem to be drawn to the dissonant voices...the voices omitting wavelengths that actually counter the Voice of Wisdom in our lives.

You can only hear and process so much. Do you want to hear the Voice so badly that you're willing to shut out some of the dissonance?

Many will say "I listen to a fair amount of dissonant voices right now, and I manage to hear Him pretty well." And perhaps you do hear Him pretty well, better than most, better than me....but could you hear Him better? And are you really measuring your ability to hear and respond to Him based on the success or failure of those around you? That does make it easier....all you need to do is surround yourself with semi-failures and you feel pretty good about your ability to hear.

"If you had responded to my rebuke...." says the Lord. Not "if you had figured it out...if you had only known....." or "if I had only spoken up..." but "I made it clear, and you weren't listening."

That's a hard thing to live with. It's a horrible thing to die with.

01.30.07

90 acre grilled cheese sandwiches

Growing up on a wheat farm, my childhood was peppered with opportunities to run large equipment, wreck things, and generally cause chaos at a level that a normal childhood would not have allowed for.

In my early teens, I remember being sent out to cultivate a large field near our house. It was a half mile from one end to the other and had a slight hill in the center; enough that you couldn't see one end from the other. I was told to circumnavigate the field once, then chart a course kitty corner, splitting it into two huge chunks the shape of restaurant cut grilled cheese sandwiches (at least that's how I thought about it...).

I completed the lap fine...just me, a huge four wheel drive tractor, a big cultivator churning up dirt clods, and 58 CKY* on the radio. Then, I took off from one corner to the other. Driving. Driving. Steering. Driving more. Making corrections. When I finally got to the other end, my dad was there waiting. He looked mortified. I couldn't hear him over the motor noise, but he pointed behind me, where my course that was supposed to be arrow straight looked as if it had been plotted by a drunk. I had zig zagged 20 feet either side of the imaginary grilled cheese sandwich cut line.

It was then he taught me to ignore what was immediately before me and set my eyes on a silo some 2

some of the stuff i think

miles away. Keeping that distant goal in perspective, I could keep straight and true....so when I ran across this verse this morning, it hit home.

Prov 17:24 A discerning man keeps wisdom in view, but a fool's eyes wander to the ends of the earth.

Wisdom may be distant from you today, but it's the best guide you'll have. Keep your eyes on it. Focus on the Giver of wisdom. Ignore the perils of shortsightedness.

May your 90 acre grilled cheese sandwiches all be plowed true.

02.20.07

some of the stuff i think

the trouble causing anointing

Let me say that if you're one of those folks who have had a "Life Verse", *good for you*.

I'm glad.

I don't care if you saw it written in the sky in Constantine fashion or found it on a bumper sticker in a gift shop in Pigeon Forge. If there's a verse that you have hung your life on, that's awesome.

Somewhere along the line, I never got one. I'm not sure if they were passed out in Sunday School and I'd missed it or what the heck happened. I have some passages that are incredibly dear to my heart, but I've never been able to isolate a life verse. I have my secret suspicions that those verse designations weren't even there in the original text. No joke.

Anyway, thanks to today's reading of 1 Kings 18, I am able to announce the launching of my Life Verse. At least, my Life Verse of the day.

1 Kings 18:17 *"Is that you, you troubler of Israel?"*

I know, it's not quite as epic as some, and it has no poetic ring to it, but I like it. I like the fact that Elijah was a man known by the establishment as a troublemaker. It feels like most of what I've seen the church do is be an

some of the stuff i think

irritation to the establishment rather than cause real trouble.

I want God to use me to create real havoc in the spirit realm - to dislodge demons and worry spirits. I want an unrighteous society to wonder 'what is the church going to do next?' I want to cause serious trouble for good.

Maybe I can get Kelsey to cross-stitch me a pillow or something with my Life Verse of the Day.

05.31.07

some of the stuff i think

love is the final word

All is quiet in the house again this morning as I find myself back in Zoe's room with my Bible and moleskine.

It's funny - some times I'll spend time with the Lord without that crazy little journal...it'll be a very real God-connect, but an hour later it's as if it were ancient history. Something about scribbling down fragments of an encounter moves it from the mythical realm to the concrete.

Our reading schedule had us re-reading Song of Solomon 8:7,6 & Daniel 9, along with Malachi 4 this morning. The Song of Solomon passage stood out because of it's powerful words on the strength of love. Verse 6 says...

Place me like a seal over your heart, for love is as strong as death....

Love is as strong as death.

What an interesting thought. We think of death as so radically permanent - getting the last word, so to speak - that it's hard to think of anything of equal strength. Of course, death does come. It's come to most humans who've ever lived on the planet - the slim exception being those alive right now, and unless the Lord returns in our lifetime, it's coming for us. So how does this work with love being of comparable strength?

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I think the answer lies not in idea of some cosmic arm wrestling match between death and love, but rather in the fact that one will endure while the other fades away. The great cosmic competition is not an arm wrestling match...it's a marathon. Death, for all it's strength, is not a marathon runner. It's a sprinter. It makes a big show and ends up standing in it's lane, double over and gasping for breath as love runs on.

"...Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror, then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part, then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."

I'm putting all my money on the long distance runner.

05/27/07

some of the stuff i think

alone with my 7,000 friends

James 5:17 Elijah was a man just like us.

Sure. Just like us. Stopped rain. Called down fire. I do all these things, most days before 10am. I'm surprised people don't mistake me for Elijah all the time.

OK, seriously, I do none of these things. I'd love to, but I don't. I flipped back to 1 Kings to read over the story of Elijah again to see if there were any similarities that I could find to hang some hope on.

It turns out I am like Elijah...but in a way neither of us are crazy about. In chapter 18, he runs into Obadiah, who works for Ahab as some sort of undercover charismatic prayer crazy. Obadiah tells Elijah that even as Ahab has been killing the prophets, he (Obadiah) has pulled an Oscar Schindler and hidden a hundred of them in a cave somewhere.

Ten verses later, Elijah is calling out the prophets of Baal in the great Burning Man chapter...and as he does it, he says "I am the only one of the Lord's prophets left...". Wait a minute....he knew that wasn't true. Even as he is operating under the power of God for real, he overstates his role. Whaaat?

Of course, the prophets of Baal fail, Elijah calls down fire (and it comes) and then he calls a rain storm (and it comes). Suddenly his life is threatened by Jezebel and

some of the stuff i think

Elijah makes like the Bandit to go hide. He enters into a time of horrible despair and begins to believe his own overstatement. He says in 1 Kings 19:10 "I'm the only one left....". Remember, this isn't remotely true.

God reminds him "No, I have 7,000 others just like you, Elijah - they're hidden away but they are there, and you are not alone."

How embarrassing must that have been? To believe your own boasts - even in a moment of victory - always comes back to haunt you.

Maybe Elijah was a man just like me.

05.24.07

some of the stuff i think

perpetual adoption

We were up late one night last week.

And early.

And most parts in between.

Miss Zoe, for some inexplicable reason, was not sleeping. We tried the 'hold her while standing in the hall bathroom with the water running' trick. I also tried the 'sing to her in the kitchen' trick and the 'lay her on my stomach' trick. She was not falling for any of it.

She seemed to find the most peace with me holding her upright (and big eyed) against myself as I paced the distance from the kitchen to the hallway. We made many laps that way...Zoe squirming while I rubbed the sleep from my eyes. I remember thinking "someone left the oven on..." before realized that the 3:50 it was blinking meant AM rather than Fahrenheit.

On about the thirtieth lap, fully aware that my alarm was going to go off in an hour and I'd hardly slept a wink, I grabbed my iPod and jammed my earbuds in my ears. As I walked back and forth, Zoe heard the sounds of my shuffling feet and her brother snoring down the hall. Meanwhile, I heard The Fray pounding in my ears.

There's a song on their recent cd titled 'How to save a life'. The experts on the internet indicate that it was

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written in response to a mentoring situation that did not go well for a member of the band. That night, on the brink of exhaustion, while holding my dear daughter close to me, one lyric took a whole deeper meaning.

I would have stayed up with you all night / If I'd known how to save a life

I stopped dead in my tracks. That's it. That's exactly what I'm doing. I am in a perpetual state of adopting this baby girl, of making her mine, of loving her to maturity, of speaking life into her.

Raising the money for the adoption agency was an act of intercession. Scooping her up from that plexiglass bassinet in the hospital was prayer with our arms. Placing her in our home as one of our own was an extension of the kingdom of light.

Now, here I am, knocking on 4 AM, and walking the floor in prayer. No, walking the floor...as prayer. Whispering life. Walking out redemption. This is what Jesus looks like. This is what I'm showing her. This is my continual act of prayer before God on her behalf.

We make intercession for our children every day. Sometimes, it's on our knees. Other times, it's with our hands or time. All of it counts in shaping them into the children of God who will walk in His plan for their lives.

In the natural, Zoe's birth had a story written for it. Born into a nest of bad decisions and wrong ideas, her

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course was charted by society and by likelihood. When we connected with her, Jesus radically rewrote her destiny.

Standing there on the hardwood next to the entrance to the hallway, Zoe and I had a little prayer meeting. I thanked God for the honor of staying up all night, if it meant I could save a life.

It is no sacrifice to walk the floor in the middle of the night to changing the destiny of a generation.

As I whispered amen and wiped the tears from my eyes, I noticed she had snuggled into the crook of my elbow and closed her eyes. She was fast asleep.

05.08.07

some of the stuff i think

choose carefully

We talk a fair amount about lifestyle here at IHOP. The fasted lifestyle. A Sermon on the Mount lifestyle. Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous...well, maybe not so much that last one.

I am politicking for a more limited term, because this one is feeling unobtainable to me.

The word lifestyle conjures up epic thoughts - as if a lifestyle is a vast and intricate web of thoughts, deeds, attitudes, advantages and disadvantages. In my mind, a lifestyle is so pervasive that it's hard to escape. I think that's where I get jacked up. Our lifestyle has little to do with our DNA and much to do with management of our most primeval urges.

One of my more unlikely friends once told me "Lifestyles are chosen from the vast vending machine of experiences."

In addition to being one of the greatest one line quotes of all time (I've used it a number of times in teaching and it never fails to elicit a low "hmmmmmm" from even the most staid crowd), it's dead on true in that our lifestyle is not an atmosphere we were born into, but rather the choices we make moment by moment.

some of the stuff i think

In other words, our lifestyle is more directly impacted by what we did in the last 10 minutes than what we've done in the last five years.

Given the immense impact of today's vending machine experiences that we could choose from, I'm wondering if the word lifestyle is misleading.

Perhaps daystyle is more accurate.

Every day we stand at the plastic window and stare at what we could choose... Humility hangs there next to anger. Purity is displayed beside bitterness. Meekness competes with jealousy for our attention.

Some of the packaged goods are dusty. You can tell they're rarely chosen and have hung in the machine a long, long time. Other choices look newer, more immediate - as if the machine gets restocked with them every day because they are chosen by so many.

We drop our coins and hesitantly press M1, praying the selection we hoped for falls out the slot at the bottom. Of course, the machine works flawlessly. It always does. We always get exactly what we choose.

That's it.

Today, I want to live a Sermon on the Mount Day Style. I want to deliver the day to God, fully lived and fully submitted to Him.

some of the stuff i think

Tomorrow, I get to choose all over again. Make it or break it, I find myself back at the glass, pressing my choice once more.

06.27.07

some of the stuff i think

truth on the inside

For the past week, I have been beaten about the head and shoulders by the words of Psalm 51. It started as I got into my truck early one morning. I was justifiably irked at something. Like you, when I am irked, it is always justifiable. To me. Anyway, about 5:45am, I climbed into the Montero and as I did, I heard a verse.

Now, for my charismatophobic readers, allow me to explain. I did not physically hear something...although that would have been cool.

No, I felt something. I heard it on the inside, in a way that is more real and deeper impacting than anything that's ever come out of my iPod. I heard/felt/sensed/knew this was for me at this moment in time:

Create in me a pure heart, Oh God, and renew a right spirit in me.

Now, understand that while I generally attend the 6am prayer meeting, I am not tremendously spiritual at that hour. Were it not for the miracle of coffee, these things could not happen. I turned the phrase over in my head as I drove to the prayer room but kind of forgot about it.

Not long into the meeting, I took a phone call. It was directly related to what I was frustrated about, and as the conversation continued, I found my blood pressure inching

some of the stuff i think

upward. Finally I told the friend "Hey, this verse is what I heard this morning....can we break this conversation off for right now because I want to continue it in a right spirit and to do that, I have to go get one." Of course, because they're a true friend, they agreed that it was best.

I turned the phone off and reengaged with the Lord. Later, when it came time to finish the conversation, all went smoother because my heart was right.

I got to thinking about all that...on one hand, I was glad that I took the time out at realigned my heart before I went too far. I was grateful for a friend willing to give me a little space. I was also glad I was able to land in a place where I wanted to do the right thing with a right spirit.

I was just bugged because it came so unnaturally.

Since then, I've been reading the Psalm over and over again...seeing the difference between being able to eventually land on the right heart response vs. carrying the right response in our hearts before the time of testing arrives. In other words, I have reasonable faith in my ability to find wisdom when I need it.

I just want to have it within me before I think I need it.

Verse six says "*Surely you desire truth in my innermost parts....you teach me wisdom in the inmost place*".

My Study Bible tells me that the meaning of this phrase is uncertain...but I have a hunch...it's like having

some of the stuff i think

wisdom written into your personal OS instead of having to search for that flash drive to boot it up when you need it.

I want wisdom and a right spirit, Lord...independent of my circumstances, so that I don't need to make these gut calls on the fly and hope I land on the righteous side of the fence.

07.19.07

some of the stuff i think

ending well

A few years ago, I sat in a dingy office talking to a friend who'd given himself to causes that, while gaining him notoriety and more friends than he could count, had not gained him much financially. He was now in his late fifties, and although he appeared warm on the surface, not far below lie a very real anger and fear of what his latter days would look like. He was far from God and far from contentment.

In discussing his failing health, tears welled up in his eyes for a moment as he admitted his deepest fear through clenched teeth: "I don't want to die penniless in the gutter."

Social convention prohibited me from saying the first thing that came to mind, although in retrospect, perhaps I should have ignored the rules and blurted it out. The thought I had was "What's the difference?"

Reading in Psalm 49 yesterday brought that whole encounter to mind. I'm not sure what we're looking for in death, but it seems money has little to do with the experience. Those that have it, while perhaps a bit more comfortable in their final moments, don't really fare any better than those that don't. Dead is quite dead, and one cannot file an extension. Even the IRS is more understanding than the grave.

some of the stuff i think

Psalm 49 ends with this - *People who boast of their wealth don't understand; they will die, just like animals.* (New Living Translation).

The beauty of this is that you don't have to die like the animals, and it hinges not on your pocketbook but your heart's understanding of what is real, Who is True, and how you were carrying your heart when it came time to meet the True One.

I'm not afraid of dying penniless in the gutter - nor am I fixated on dying in a hospice bed surrounded by my friends and flowers. I'm determined that when my time comes, I'll have understanding and will be living in alignment with it.

08.17.07

avoiding unintentional landings

I guess it's excusable to take your time getting through Psalm 119. It goes on for 176 verses, probably written by King David during an all nighter as he sat hunched over a pot of coffee. What's worrisome is that I've been stuck on the same few verses in Psalm 119 for several days. At this rate, I will spend the next decade in Psalm 19. Worse things have been done for decades, I guess.

I've been in verses 25-32, but the specific one I'm hung on this morning is verse 30. *I have chosen to be faithful; I have determined to live by your regulations.*

Some choices are once and for all. You make the choice, you can't undo it and reaffirming it means nothing anyway...like the choice to get a tattoo. Or amputate. Either one is a one-time decision that you'll never deny or reverse.

The choice for faithfulness or the determination to live by God's regulations isn't like that. If I chose it yesterday, it's mine to choose again today. If I choose it this morning, I'll be choosing it again before noon. The choice is made and remade with a hundred course corrections during the day.

Those little detail-choices - the choice to speak ill of someone, the decision to believe a lie when we know the

some of the stuff i think

truth - those are the choices that, given time to mature, bring disaster.

I've been following the search for Steve Fossett. I've always kept up with him because he is such a bigger-than-life character. In 2001, when Jackson was just 8, he and I tracked Fossett's failed attempt to circumnavigate the globe via balloon. We had a chart on the wall of my office in the Wood Trail house and we'd log onto the internet (remember logging on?!? dial tone, du-du-du...du-du-du-du..... awwwwwwwww sheeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee krrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr!!!) and get the latest news, then mark it on our chart until he ditched in Brazil.

Even now, searchers are scouring the Nevada desert, unsure of where to look because he didn't file a flight plan. Of course, everyone hopes that he's safe, but doubts are beginning to surface as they consider the terrain and wildly fluctuating temperatures.

Here's the irony...if he suffered what pilots like to call 'an unintentional landing', it was probably not due to gross neglect.

Fossett has flown all over the world in all sorts of aircraft. He didn't live this long by being careless. If Fossett crashed to the desert floor, it was probably because of a number of small oversights - misreading a gauge, a stronger wind than anticipated, a misfire in an engine - simple little lapses in judgment or circumstance that multiplied until the cumulative effect overpowered the safety systems in place.

some of the stuff i think

It is entirely possible to do all the big things right and
crash having muffed the details.

09.06.07

some of the stuff i think

so, you're up for promotion...

Jesus' brothers must have been a handful. Brothers generally are...but add the factor of having a brother who thinks He's God's gift to the world (because He is) and it was bound to get tense at times.

In John 7, his brothers take a poke at him, encouraging him to go on some sort of World Miracle Tour, maybe even get some air time on late night TV, because (verse 4) *"No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world!"*.

The Bible goes on to clarify that they were not being zealous supporters, but that they didn't believe Him to begin with. This was not brotherly encouragement.

Jesus, in all His wisdom, levels his gaze and tells them *"The right time for me has not yet come; for you, any time is right."*

The text makes it appear as if he goes right on talking, but in the Movie in my Head version, there's a pause there.

"For you...any time is right."

His point is clear. There is a blind opportunism held by people who think that the time is now no matter what the question is. They get themselves to the front of the

some of the stuff i think

line, they get their cards in the hands of the right people, they self promote because they fully believe the lie that says if it's to be, it's up to me.

Gang, if it's up to you, you're sunk. When Jesus said "For you, any time is right..." he was not encouraging them to go for it. He was pointing out that for someone who is relying fully on their own faculties, then you'd better take any chance you get...but as One who was relying on more - on the will of the Father, for instance - timing was everything.

God help us keep the view that promotion comes from the Lord.

10.24.07

some of the stuff i think

dreaming, big

I've been thinking a lot lately about the American Dream. I've been musing about it for months. It struck me as funny to see that others were too. Burning Man just announced 'The American Dream' is their theme for 2008.

In his 1931 book "The Epic of America", James Truslow Adams first coined the term.

"...But there has been also the American dream, that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement."

Better. Richer. Fuller. I'm not so sure we've obtained Adams' version of The Dream. Fuller? If measuring waistlines, sure. Richer? Most of us, yes. Better? Not necessarily. At least not when you're measuring by God's standards of better.

Perhaps Adams could have more accurately have termed it "more comfortable..." . Bigger houses, larger cars, 1.5 children (because that last half child is so uncomfortable...) Of course, it's arguable that people in a coma are comfortable....but you can't convince me that they're better off and I don't know too many who'd trade spots with them.

some of the stuff i think

Maybe there's a better better...an uncomfortable better that stretches your flesh but insures that your heart is alive.

Adams was not the only one who had a dream.

Neither was MLK II.

God has a dream - and if you read it in context, it's a dream for people living in a foreign land. It's a dream about how to exist in a culture when everything is strange and even offensive. It's a dream of God's plan for the hearts who love him.

Jeremiah 29:11-13 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

I'm banking on God's dream for me. Whatever comes along in the balance is gravy - but I'm going to lay hold of the bigger dream.

10.12.07

some of the stuff i think

all i want and gravy

The warmth of the room melds with the resonance of the cello playing this morning. Within a few minutes, sound and skin temperature become one feeling. I'm not doing it justice, I know...but there are times when one's senses draw from different sources to manifest one sensation.

Call it what you want. Being 'in the moment' sounds a little metaphysical, but it's what I feel in this place this morning. This is what it feels like when I drop by in the evenings for a moment - that I'd really like to just sit down and be here rather than run back out in the cold.

I'm reminded of being interviewed on camera for a curriculum that was being produced on my last day on staff at VCC. During the course of the discussion, the interviewer asked what I was going to do next (after leaving VCC). I was surprised at the emotion that rose in my voice when I told him that having proven that I knew how to do things, I wanted to learn how to be something.(1) What I didn't have language for, but am now beginning to understand, is that I wanted to learn what it means to be before God.

Don't lump this in with general thoughts about how great IHOP is. I smile at those who talk of the glory of IHOP. At 6am on Thanksgiving Day, that mystique is almost completely gone. All that is in the room is God and some people who want Him. No glory cloud, no empty wheel chairs...although we'd be up for either. My guess is

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if one of those two showed up, the place would fill pretty quickly.

In moments like these, I am acutely aware of something that might otherwise be thought of as a given: I really want to be here.

It's not always been like this. In our four years in the prayer room, I've not always wanted to be here...and to be completely honest, even now the want wavers at times. Thankfully, these days, it wavers for a moment rather than month. My wanting to be here carries me when finances, juggled roles and the mild stigma of doing something that only a narrow, narrow percentage of my friends understand conspires to run me out of town. I want to be here more than I want money, clarity or even the understanding of others.

Anyway, I'm thinking about the nature of wanting, and the surprise I find in my own heart at my want to be here.

A want is a funny thing. You can't demand that it happen. You can do things by force of will, but you can't force your will to do much of anything. Desire has a mind of it's own. You can manifest it, but you can't make it. You can't demand yourself into wanting to be or do something any more than you can make a calculating decision to fall madly in love.

I'm thankful for wanting to be here this morning. Thankful that, even for a moment, I identify with David, the

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shepherd poet king, who wrote "...earth has nothing I
desire but you."

Everything else is Thanksgiving gravy.

11.22.07

some of the stuff i think

the kind buddhist

This morning started out like most Saturday mornings at the Bohlender house. Pancakes. Strong coffee. Children.

I was flipping pancakes while watching last night's newscast on iTunes (if you don't watch the news until the next morning, it's still news to you...), when I heard a teaser for an upcoming story: "One man pays for the drink for the person behind him at the Starbucks drive through, and sets in motion a ripple of kindness that lasts all day - more from Florida in a minute."

Kelsey and I laughed thinking our friend, Steve - the kindness guru - was probably causing trouble in Tampa. We eagerly stopped our pancake flipping when the story came on. Turns out it wasn't in Tampa, and it wasn't Steve.

Just like the teaser said, some guy driving through the line payed for the coffee of the person behind him. We have done stuff like this for years under the banner of Kindness Outreach - showing people God loved them in a practical way. I have preached it, taught it, modeled and extolled the virtues of it - that simple, intentional acts of kindness open peoples' hearts to change.

The newscaster interviewed the guy. It's not Steve. It's not a church planter. It's a Buddhist guy - Arthur Rosenfeld - who, in this original story, insists that it wasn't

some of the stuff i think

a random act of kindness he was doing either - it was a change of consciousness.

I see.

Gang, I love using kindness to open the door to a God encounter with people....but more than ever, I am aware of the fact that kindness in itself is not as profound as we wish it were. In fact, genuine kindness is espoused by most religious systems of the world. While it can be used as a conversation starter, short of a demonstration of power, we are simply lumped in with the kind Buddhist, the kind Krishna, the kind Mitt Romney next door.

That is disconcerting.

Lest you expect otherwise, my shadow is not raising the dead. I am not seeing daily miracles or giving powerful words to people in the line at Target....but neither am I simply settling for my expressed good intentions to fulfill people's deepest needs either.

God make us kind...and God give us power.

12.16.07

some of the stuff i think

so, you're up for promotion...

Thoughts on what it means to be prophetic run like water - some shallow, some deep, and generally all directions.

That said, I'm hesitant to add my cup to that which is already spilled by others, except that I sensed a phrase from the Lord this morning that echoed in my spirit like a cannon.

"Sensed a phrase" may seem like an odd description, but saying "heard" throws up all sorts of red flags in some peoples' literal minds. Heard. Sensed. Felt. Call it what you want - I only have a rudimentary understanding of what it means, but I know where it came from. I sensed the phrase: *"All prophecy is a violent act."*

I'm not given to violence. In grade school, when you're one of the smaller 2 or 3 kids in your class, you don't go down that road very often. I'm given to sweeping, conciliatory statements that let me keep my lunch money to eat another day.

Living a prophetic life messes with my conciliatory nature...because the intention of a prophetic word in regards to the kingdom of darkness is to invade, take over and set up government.

It's truth encountering a lie, really....and all the chaos that ensues when that happens. It's been likened to

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shining a light into a dark room, but it's never that simple. There are people in that dark room, and some of them close to the prophetic word cast shadows behind them - pockets of darkness, even if only in shades of grey...yet light doesn't compromise. It shines.

Almost nothing about being a prayer missionary is easy. It's rewarding. It's pleasurable, even, but not easy. It's misunderstood and financially challenging. I sometimes feel at odds with everything from the economy to the law of gravity. Once in a while I tell myself that I'll figure this out eventually and it will get easier. I probably tell myself other lies too.

Know this (he said, preaching to himself....): It won't get easier. It's the nature of representing an invasion force. Even though destiny is on your side, the enemy fails to read the memo or believe the battle plan. You fight him on the beaches, you fight him on the landing grounds, you fight him in the fields and in the streets, you fight him in the hills, and you never surrender.(1)

Such is the nature of a prophetic life.

01.29.08

(1) This is a paraphrase of a speech by Winston Churchill as he described the coming battle with Nazi Germany. You can feel the weight of D Day in these words, even though he spoke them four years and two days before the invasion. Check out his incredibly conclusion. "and even if, which I do not for a moment believe, this Island or a large part of it were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, would carry on the struggle, until, in God's good time, the New World, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old."

some of the stuff i think

stuff I learned

I don't second guess much.

I don't think of myself as overconfident....although I'll admit that I often think everyone else is just a little nuttier than I am.

I'm just of the mind that once a decision has been made, even if the whole situation goes pear shaped (to quote my British friends), it's a waste of energy to go the "if only I had..." route.

Perspective is everything, and the bigger the failure, the more distance you need to look at your failure objectively and learn from it. I think I'm finally in the phase of learning from our church plant's failure six years ago.

Here are a few ways I'm thinking about all that.

We didn't fail at church planting. We learned how to pray.

Kelsey is the one who gave me language for this one. Prior to planting, I didn't know much about pouring my guts out before God. I didn't really get there until it was obvious that I was not Rick Warren, and if I was, that Rick Warren was failing miserably in our corner of Cincinnati. In that season, we started this goofy little prayer meeting on Saturday nights. That meeting was life to Kelsey and I in a way that our best Sunday morning never was. When that

some of the stuff i think

season passed, we found out we had become intercessors. I'm not planting at this point in my life, but I'm still a prayer guy.

My leadership was not as bad as I thought.

Five years ago, I felt like I had DORK tattooed across the back of my head. With a little perspective, I'm seeing that I wouldn't have done a lot differently - especially the decisions that were made in crisis mode. It seems like the harder the decisions, the more likely I was to have made the right call.

My preaching was not as good as I thought.

I used to think some people came to hear me preach. That might have been true, but it was kind of like how someone might pack a lunch to go have a picnic if they were sure they were going to see a train wreck. I discovered some of my notes the other day and thought "what the heck? Those poor people...". It wasn't all bad....but some of it was really bad. At the same time, there were some great raw ideas. I discovered a message that I'd forgotten about - one where I declared us to be a beta church. In other words, like beta software, we were quirky, but we were doing things that hadn't been done before (at least by us). Regrettably, I then launched into a 12 minute explanation of what an early adopter was. Great idea, bizarre execution.

I launched too quickly.

some of the stuff i think

I was still of the mind that church was Sunday morning, and the sooner I could get to Sunday morning the happier I was. Add that to the fact that I was not (still am not) a great small group leader. We hadn't reached critical mass and it took the whole congregation to operate the church, leaving no one in the actual service (an exaggeration, but not by much....). I should have forced myself to be a better small group leader rather than tried to force my small group to be a better full service church.

I was blessed with an amazing advisory board.

God gave us three young couples who loved Jesus and us. They were remarkably kind to us in every season. Years later, I have a wave of emotion when I think of any of them.

I was in a radical season of reformation myself.

The 3 1/2 years that we went from launch to splash down were remarkably reformative for me. (Spell Check says I made that word up, but I like it.....). I was 30 or 31 starting out - seven years of ministry under my hat, in a wineskin that should have been hung out to dry long before. In that God spoke incredibly clearly to me about doing things differently. My guess is that I was changing internally so quickly that it was hard for people to track with me.

I'm done saying never.

When it was all finished, I said never again. I was probably too young and wounded to speak at that point. I

some of the stuff i think

have no real plans, but I don't say 'never again' anymore. God's too big, too complex, and too exciting for that. Plus, I think I've learned a few things....

01.23.08

some of the stuff i think

king of the nuance

Sometimes I think we oversimplify, particularly when we get to the teachings of Jesus. I know it's in vogue to talk of simple church, simple faith and simple Jesus, but sometimes He comes off in those discussions more like simple simon.

In addition to King of the Universe, He was king of the nuance. He chose His words carefully. In the moment, no one missed the poignancy of His asking Peter "Do you love (agape) me" as Peter protested "You know I love (phileo) you." It might come off a little flat in English, but in the original language, they all knew that He knew exactly what He was asking.

No, Jesus didn't throw words around. He plucked them from the vocabulary tree and put them in order.

In light of this, I've always thought we've glossed over the whole "ask, seek, knock" thing for Matthew 7 as if Jesus were repeating Himself, finding multiple ways to express one thought like some old Pentecostal radio preacher.

Not so much.

I've been reading a little on this passage this morning, and it looks to me like He's encouraging us to take a variety of approaches when going after something.

To ask is to beg, call for, crave or desire.

some of the stuff i think

To seek points to thinking, meditation, using reasoning or ingenuity.

To knock means...well, to knock.

It seems that He's laying out a comprehensive plan of pursuit - one involving our emotions, our intellect, and even our willingness to nudge a door here or there to see what happens. And it's not just the activity of pursuing that differs, it's what happens next.

Things are *given* to us. We *find* things. Doors *open*.

In nearly five years as missionaries, we've had all three of these things happen in response to our asking or seeking or knocking. Rarely, though, have we synchronized our efforts to make sure we're pursuing in all three ways at once.

To be frank, we're going after a few things in our life right now - things we need. I want to make sure we're using all three approaches that Jesus mentioned, because I want to be able to receive, discover, and walk through any door He has for us.

05.14.08

some of the stuff i think

shhhhhhhh.....

I am increasingly convicted of my lack of ability or willingness to be still before God.

I read Psalm 37 this morning, or rather, I intended to. I didn't get past verse 7. It's a great passage (is there a bad one?) that throws out a bunch of what appear to be action words - things we can add to our list of things to do that move God or move us.

"Do not fret....Trust...Delight yourself in the Lord....Commit..."

It's easy to find myself checking off the list. Done that. Done that one. Yeah, got that one two. Then I run headlong into verse 7: *"Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him."* Some versions say *"Be still...."*.

There is tremendous strategy in stillness. It's often marketed as a luxury only accessible by those who have everything already finished or those who have people to finish it for them. In reality, the luxury is a necessity commanded by God. It's intentional.

When we are still, God has room to move. To speak. To invite. What if the Word of the Lord for this hour was "shhhhhhhhhh....."

I'm hearing "shhhhhhhhhh...." a lot right now.

06.30.08

some of the stuff i think